

## Research Article

# Ethnic Models of Identity Formation in Children Aged 5 to 18 Years

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## Abstract

The article examines the formation of national and ethnic identity in the process of ontogenesis in children from 5 to 18 years of age from the three main ethnic communities in Bulgaria - Bulgarians, Turks and Roma. Models of national and ethnic identity formation specific to children from each of the three ethnic groups are derived based on tracing children's sequential formation of certain notions/indicators (cognitive and affective/emotional) of national and ethnic identity. In the study of the successive changes in the formation of the notion of national and ethnic identity in the process of ontogenesis, as a theoretical basis was used the concept of the great Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget on the stages of intellectual development. The data in the article are based on two comprehensive case studies conducted in kindergarten and secondary school (with all children attending the kindergarten and the school aged 5 to 18) in a small town with an ethnically mixed population in Bulgaria, where for centuries representatives of the three ethnic communities studied - Bulgarians, Turks and Roma - have lived in close coexistence, which is why the patterns of ethnic and national identity formation derived can be seen as typical for the town.

**Keywords:** national; ethnic; identity; models; formation; ontogenesis; Jean Piaget.

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Psychological Thought, 2025, Vol. 18(2), 489-523, <https://doi.org/10.37708/psyct.v18i2.1100>

Received: 2025-02-02. Accepted: 2025-10-13. Published (VoR): 2025-11-03.

Handling Editor: Stoil Mavrodiev, South-West University "Neofit Rilski", Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria.

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Since the contemporary world is a world of increasingly intense interactions between ethnic, national and cultural communities, the construction and affirmation of one's own identity, both on an individual and collective level, is becoming a value of the highest rank.

In general, in order to understand the concept of identity, it is necessary to take the real social frameworks of existence of individuals and communities as a reference point. Halbwachs' notion of "social framework" (*cadres sociaux*) (Halbwachs, 1997), reflected Halbwachs' fundamental conception of society as a reservoir of resources of meaning for the individual and Goffman's notion of "frames" (Goffman, 1956) as organizing the everyday experience of individuals and groups are the basic theories in this regard. So one can argue that there are "collective identities" that reflect the dependence of identity on the "social frame," i.e., that there are social frames of identity and collective identities such that each individual identity unfolds within these social frames and each person forms ones identity together with others in the group/community to which one belongs. The use of the concept of collective identity expresses the fact that in every individual identity there is a collective origin or, more precisely, contents whose origin is not from the individually perceived and assimilated. This distinction has its roots in the distinction that Durkheim made between individual and collective perceptions. According to Durkheim, "collective perceptions" are a supraindividual phenomenon having their own content and irreducible to the sum of individual perceptions (Durkheim, 1937). They reflect the shared nature of social cognition and express what is called "common sense".

In this sense, collective identity also refers to the shared notion of an experience lived together by a community, a group. Collective identity is a social construct, it is a form of socially created and shared knowledge, the result of both lived experience and the knowledge and patterns of

thinking that are acquired through tradition, education, social communication. Here, the social intervenes in multiple ways: through the specific social context in which groups are situated; through the communication that is established between them; through the frame of perception that culture sets for them; through the codes and values associated with specific group membership. A person learns not only to identify and characterize himself or herself or the other, but also to construct typical constructs according to a system of relevance that corresponds to the unified perspective of the group to which he or she belongs. This is why identity is both inherited and constantly changing. Some values, meanings and traditions are passed down through generations, while others, especially in the modern world of globalization, increased intercultural contacts and communication, undergo profound changes. As Petkova stated today the monocultural context inherited from previous periods is rapidly transforming into a multiethnic and multinational context of cultural pluralism (Petkova, 2005). And the change in the basic paradigm of the cultural context inevitably has an impact on identity.

Identity, as a complex, dynamic and changing category in time, space and the context in which it is considered, is one of the most debated research issues in the social sciences and humanities. Since the mid-twentieth century, forms of identity and processes of identification (ethnic, national, supranational, local, regional, cultural, etc.) have been the subject of analysis as part of theories of ethnicity and nations, studied primarily through the approaches of primordialism (Connor, 1978; Greely, 1974; Halsey, 1978; Shils, 1957; Smith, 1981; Van Berghe, 1981, etc.), instrumentalism (Bell, 1996), social constructivism (Brass, 1991; Brubaker, 1996; Epstein, 1978; Hechter, 1974; Mitchell, 1974; Nagata, 1974; Okamura, 1981; etc.), and ethno-symbolism (Armstrong, 1982; Hutchinson & Smith, 1994; Hutchinson, 1994, Smith, 1991; etc.). This study does not intend to discuss each of them in detail insofar as they have been widely discussed and presented in the literature. In fact, what is emphasized here is that the deployment of the mentioned theoretical approaches to the study of identity reflects the gradual evolution in the understanding of this phenomenon, expressed in its successive relativization and subjectivization.

While initially within the primordialist paradigm (Geertz, 1963; Van Berghe, 1981), identity was seen as a primordial, primary given that served as a constant determinant of relations between communities and peoples (Smith, 1994), the first breakthrough in the canons of primordialism was the theory of Max Weber (Weber, 1985), which took a step towards establishing an



understanding of identity as a subjective construct of the social imagination. The ideas of the instrumentalists (Bell, 1996) continue the trend of affirming the relationality of identity, insofar as identity is seen not as a primordial phenomenon, but as a strategic choice that individuals make, as a tool for protecting group interests.

Constructivists, in turn, reinforce the tendency to conceive of identity as a social construct that performs instrumental functions by allowing individuals to include/exclude themselves in different communities, thus creating a dynamic identity (Armstrong, 1982).

Modernists (Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1983) continue the established trend of viewing identity as a historical product whose existence is historically determined. Since the 1990s, in the context of globalization, when the boundaries between different nations and ethnicities began to become increasingly thin and permeable, and cultural interactions more intense, research interest has turned to defining identity as multiple and hybrid within the concepts of cultural pluralism or multiculturalism (Caglar, 1997; Weinreich, 1998). And increased migratory movements are leading to new phenomena and processes and, consequently, to the development of new theoretical frameworks for their study, such as transnationalism, methodological nationalism and transculturalism (Hepp 2009, Schiller-et al., 2007; Vetovec, 2007).

The formation of supranational identities (Diez-Medrano, 2003; Licata, 2003; Mahony, 2012; Miller, 2012; Ongur, 2010; Pieterse, 2004; Risse & Maier, 2003; Thiel 2011) is one side of the evolving process of identity hybridization. The other side is related to the reverse processes of ethnicisation, multiculturalisation, regionalisation and localisation. It happens that today, when globalization defines a fundamentally new way of forming relations in the world, linked to the elimination of all boundaries, processes of closure are observed at the group level, in which ethnic or regional identification becomes decisive. This phenomenon, which has been called the ethnic paradox of modernity because it accompanies the increasing unification of spiritual and material culture, is also known today as glocalization (Roudometof, 2016). Regardless of how glocalization is to be viewed, the fact is that the revival of ethnic identity and traditions is part of the global context of postmodernity, and that processes of localization and ethnicization are particularly significant today in countries experiencing radical social transformations such as Bulgaria. All of this pushes to the fore the issues of problematizing identity, which is no longer perceived as something once and for all given and immutable, but as something

dynamic and changing, which needs to be constantly asserted, proven and affirmed. These dependencies exist and manifest themselves as general regularity of the contemporary stage of societal development in the era of globality. However, there are significant differences in the way different nations respond to the challenges of postmodernity and implement these common patterns.

**The aim of the study** is the processes of collective identity formation in different ethnic groups in Bulgaria, focusing on the specifics of their development from childhood to adulthood in the three largest ethnic communities in Bulgarian society - the Bulgarian, Turkish and Roma ethnic groups.

**On this basis, the hypothesis of the study is** that there are patterns of collective identity formation specific to each of the three ethnic groups. Which could describe the contemporary state of collective ethnic identity as distinguished by a heterogeneous structure, including different components and layers of group identities, with attention in this case focused on the relation: *national-ethnic identity*.

### Methodological considerations

As a theoretical basis for the study of the processes of identity formation during ontogenic development was chosen the concept of the Jean Piaget - the scientist who was among the greatest and most discussed scientists of the twentieth century.

Piaget theoretical frame was chosen mainly, because it stands out among the existing theories of the development of cognition and intelligence for the originality of its ideas. The formation of consciousness and of the identity are consistently developing cognitive process of accumulation of knowledge (and the corresponding emotions and feelings), which allow ultimately to achieve a conscious self-reference to a certain structured normative-value system, shared by a community to which the individual relates including basic attributes of this community. Piaget's views on the successive stages through which intellectual and cognitive development passes (Piaget, 1967) could in this case serve as a very good theoretical basis.

Second, the intellectual and cognitive development Piaget presented as taking place in the process of socialization of the child and as impossible outside the processes of socialization. He considered the development of the intelligence as a process of interaction with the social environment. According to him, the very structure of the intelligence is derived from this

interaction. Transferred to the field of identity formation, this means that the processes of identity formation are also strongly bound and dependent on the specific social environment in which they take place. But unlike Piaget, and as a development of his ideas, in this study the process of identity formation will be considered not only as dependent on the specific age periods of an individual's development in which the impact of the social environment is realized, but also as dependent on the specific national, ethnic and cultural environment in which a particular ethnos exists. And also, if Piaget was interested in the processes of the formation of the intelligence at the individual level and aimed to formulate dependencies typical for different age periods of children's development, here will be investigated the processes of the formation of collective identities in different ethnic communities, the specificity of these collective identities in different age groups of the respective ethnos and the possibility of deriving on this basis a coherent process of collective identity formation reaches its completeness in adult members of the ethnic groups.

Third, Piaget's idea that the development of intelligence, although dependent on the influences of the external social environment, is not simply the result of these influences, is extremely fruitful. In fact, according to Piaget, intellectual development is a consequence of the interaction of the built internal intellectual structures and the influences of the external social environment. Here the subject not only perceives the influences of the environment, but reflects them according to the degree of intellectual development that has reached. This understanding of intellectual development in fact affirms the subject's activity in the process of the formation of the intelligence and could be productive in the study of the processes of the formation of group identities in different ethnic communities, considering them not only as being formed depending on the conditions and influences of the specific national and ethnic environment, but also as depending on the already existing and established collective memory, values, traditions, symbols, culture of the ethnos, i.e. as depending on the already existing accumulations in the collective identities of ethnoses that determine the refraction of contemporary influences of the environment.

And fourth, Piaget was one of the first scholars to propose a concept of the development of a child's consciousness of belonging to a particular ethnic community, related to the formation of an idea of homeland. Piaget viewed the formation of a consciousness of ethnic identity as the establishment of cognitive patterns associated with the concept of "homeland," and ethnic feelings were, in his view, a kind of response to accumulated knowledge (Piaget & Weil, 1951).

He stated the construction of the notion of "homeland" as the construction of the notion of "one's own", which is closely related to the construction of the notion of other countries, of "foreigners". For him these are two sides to the same process. The successive stages in the formation of ethnic identity include, according to Piaget, both the growth of ethnic awareness and the accumulation of knowledge about one's own and others' groups, and ethnic self-determination, insofar as the growth of ethnic awareness, of knowledge about ethnic differences, is inevitably linked to the awareness of one's similarity to members of one of the ethnic groups and of one's difference from other groups, i.e., to the ability to make a correct ethnic self-determination. However, as a development of Piaget's ideas, we will show here that the formation of a consciousness of ethnic or national identity is not limited to the construction of cognitive models related to the formation of the notion of homeland, it is also necessary to form other indicators that would allow the formation of a comprehensive and complex notion of "we-group" identification and the distinction from "they-groups".

## Method

The derivation of the models of development of collective ethnic and national identity is based on the results and data from a qualitative study conducted through interviews in a small town (the town of Vetovo, Rousse region in Bulgaria) with ethnically mixed population - where representatives of the three ethnic communities under study live in close coexistence.

More specifically, the analysis and the data presented in this article are the results of interviews conducted in the secondary school (grades I to XII) and in the kindergarten in the town of Vetovo. In order to observe the successive stages of ethnic and national identity formation in the process of ontogenesis different age groups were studied. The survey was comprehensive, i.e. all children studying in the school and in the kindergarten were covered.

### Sample

So, a total of  $N = 390$  children aged 5 to 18 were surveyed divided into three school age groups:  $n = 124$  children in grades 1 to 4;  $n = 106$  children in grades 5 to 7; and  $n = 92$  children in grades 8 to 12; as well as  $n = 68$  children between the ages of 5 and 7 attending kindergarten (since questions to determine nationality or ethnicity do not work for children under 5).

The research covered all children studying in the school and kindergarten in Vetovo. This makes it possible to infer typical dependencies and patterns characteristic of the three ethnic groups in the city, and the inferred ethnic models of identity formation can be seen as typical for the city. At the same time, these models are very much indicative of the models of ethnic and national identity formation in Bulgaria as a whole. A small town with an ethnically mixed population, such as Vetovo, where different ethnic communities meet and interact closely, is perhaps the most suitable environment for the study of the models of identification. Following Piaget's approach and the stages of intellectual development that he derived, the studied children were divided into four age categories that cover the main periods in the formation of the intelligence (with their sub-periods or stages) according to Piaget's concept, namely:

1. Kindergarten children aged 5-7 years, insofar as it turned out that for children under the age of 5 years, questions aimed at determining national or ethnic belonging do not work, i.e., under the age of 5 years, children do not yet have an understanding and awareness of ethnic or national belonging. This age group corresponds to the period of *pre-operational intelligence*.
2. Pupils from I to IV grade of secondary school aged 7 to 10 years.
3. Secondary school pupils in grades V to VII, aged 11 to 13. In fact, the second and third age groups cover the period of *concrete-operational intelligence* according to Piaget. The reason for distinguishing them as two separate groups is related, on the one hand, to the specifics of the Bulgarian educational system in secondary education - the first group covers primary education and the second - basic education, and on the other hand, it is in line with Piaget's understanding that the formation of consciousness of ethnic identity is related to the creation of cognitive models resulting from the growth of ethnic awareness and knowledge. It is undeniable that the knowledge that pupils accumulate as a result of acquiring primary or basic education differs significantly, which is why we considered it more appropriate to survey these two age groups of pupils with different instruments (different questionnaires).
4. Students from VIII to XII class of secondary school aged 14 to 18 years. This age group corresponds to the period of *formal-operational or propositional intelligence*.

## Instruments

The questionnaires used to interview the children included several basic blocks of questions, and for each of the groups of children the questions were modified according to the specifics of the age period of intellectual development and were asked in a way that was understandable to the children.

**Block 1 - Self-identification - answering the question "Who am I?"**

**Block 2 - Ethnic perceptions and stereotypes - basic indicators:**

- Main characteristics of own ethnicity
- Main characteristics of the other ethnicity/ethnoses
- Main similarities/differences between ethnoses

**Block 3 - Ethnic-Nation-State Relationships - basic Indicators:**

- Ideas about Bulgaria
- Ideas about the homeland
- Strength of sense of belonging to Bulgaria
- Factors creating a sense of belonging to Bulgaria
- Sense of "one's own" or "foreign" in Bulgaria;
- Knowledge of the Bulgarian national flag
- Knowledge of Bulgarian national borders
- Knowledge of Bulgarian historical past
- Knowledge of prominent historical personalities of Bulgaria
- Knowledge of prominent Bulgarian scientists
- Knowledge of prominent Bulgarian cultural figures
- Knowledge of prominent Bulgarian sportsmen
- Knowledge of the historical past of one's ethnic group
- Knowledge of prominent historical personalities, cultural figures, scientists and sportsmen of one's ethnicity;
- Understanding of patriotism
- Reasons for pride as a citizen of Bulgaria

**Block 4 - Traditions, customs, folklore - basic indicators:**

- Knowledge of national Bulgarian traditions and customs
- Knowledge of traditions and customs of one's own/other ethnic group

- Knowledge of Bulgarian national folklore/folklore of one's own and other ethnic group
- Knowledge of Bulgarian folk songs/tales/proverbs
- Knowledge of songs/tales/proverbs of one's own and the other ethnic group
- Knowledge of traditional Bulgarian national dishes
- Knowledge of traditional dishes of ethnic groups

**Block 5 - Demographic - basic indicators:**

- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Age
- School grade
- Religion.

## Results

**Formation of national and ethnic identity in the age group 5-7 years**

What should be noted first of all is that before the age of 5 children do not at all realize and understand the meaning of neither national nor ethnic identity.

The first signs of the formation of an understanding of national identity are in children of **Bulgarian ethnicity** between the ages of 5 to 7. But this understanding is still very amorphous, diffuse and generalized and is expressed mostly in the perception of Bulgaria as a homeland (all 100% of the children surveyed). The distinction between ethnic and national identity is out of the question, because the understanding of identity is still very general, and the idea of Bulgaria as a homeland is at this stage more a learned phrase than a concrete, conscious idea. In fact, in this period of children's development, national identity, to the extent that it is realized by them at all, has minimal significance for their self-determination. When asked to introduce themselves, all 100% of the surveyed children described themselves by their *name*, *age* and *gender*. But it is at this stage of children's development that the notion of *language* as an indicator of national identity begins to form. It is an interesting fact that when children who have been abroad with their parents then when traveling to another city in Bulgaria, they ask: "*Do they speak our language here or another language?*". This indicates that at this stage of their development, children do not understand the difference between city and country. This reflects, in fact, a phenomenon that Piaget identifies and which he labels "childish egocentrism" - the inability to decentralize, to change perspective and to relate and

coordinate different points of view that are characteristic of the stage of representative intelligence. Here this is presented through the definition of "our language", which means that "our language" is seen as the main, the leading language to which other languages are not equal. But there is something much more important here in terms of the question of national identity, and that is the fact that the formation of the notion of national identity in children starts with *language*, i.e. *the first distinction "our-foreign" children make is through language*. Besides language, other indicators of national identity that children aged 5-7 confirm are: the *Bulgarian flag*, as 90.7% of the children know that it is made up of three colours - white, green and red; the awareness of the *national history and the historical past of the Bulgarian people* - and although the knowledge of the history of Bulgaria at this age is very limited, it is still a fact that 70.5% of the children mention the name of Vasil Levski as one of the national heroes, and 35.6% - mention at least one other name besides him; *national cultural traditions* - in this respect 82.5% of the surveyed children mention at least one traditional holiday that they know, the most frequently mentioned being Baba Marta, Easter, Christmas; *Bulgarian national folklore* - 35.9% of the children mentioned at least one Bulgarian folk tale and 25.6% at least one Bulgarian folk song; knowledge of *traditional Bulgarian national dishes* (78.2% of children mentioned at least two national Bulgarian dishes). However, the *Bulgarian name* is not perceived by children at this age as an identifier of national identity, and they also do not see the name as an indicator of ethnicity.

In children of **Turkish ethnicity**, the age of 5-7 also marks the beginning of the formation of notions of national and ethnic identity, although at this stage of their development these two notions are still very general, blurred and undifferentiated, expressed in the awareness of a limited number of indicators of ethnic or national identity, although the distinction between indicators of ethnic and national identity here has rather instrumental functions in terms of the objectives of the analysis, while the children themselves still do not distinguish at all between ethnic and national identity. Leading for the self-definition of children of Turkish ethnic origin at this stage of their development, like children of Bulgarian ethnicity, are their name, age and gender - 100% of the children describe themselves by their *name* and *age*, and 60% - by their *gender*. However, it should be noted that for children of Turkish ethnicity, the beginning of the formation of a notion of ethnic identity seems to precede the beginning of the formation of a notion of national identity, insofar as the first thing that these children realize as distinguishing them from other children is the language they speak at home - 65% of the children indicate

that they "speak a different language at home". Thus, *language* once again becomes the first indicator that starts the formation of a notion of identity, but if for children of Bulgarian ethnicity, it starts the formation of a notion of national identity, for children of Turkish ethnicity it starts the formation of a notion of ethnic identity, because through the language they can identify their difference from other children. As far as the notion of national identity is concerned, it is generally expressed in the understanding that Bulgaria is the *homeland*. But the idea of homeland, as in the case of children of Bulgarian ethnicity, is a rather generalized idea, basically reduced to the understanding of "the place where I was born" or "the place where I live". The idea of Bulgaria as a homeland was confirmed by 45% of the surveyed children. During this period of their development, the children of Turkish ethnicity also formed some more specific indicators of national identity, such as: the *Bulgarian flag*, which 88% of the children know; *national cultural traditions* - 85% of the surveyed children mentioned at least one traditional holiday that they know, the most frequently mentioned being *Bairam*, *Ramadan*, *Easter*, *Christmas Eve*; and *traditional Bulgarian national dishes*, mentioned by 55% of the surveyed children. The mixing of Christian and Muslim holidays and customs and the holidays and customs celebrated by the Bulgarian and Turkish ethnic groups respectively is indicative of the understanding of national culture and traditions as unifying the culture, traditions and customs of different ethnic communities. Thus, although the children themselves theoretically do not distinguish between the national and the ethnic, in practice they interpret the national as including the ethnic. Of course, the stage of the formation of the structures of the intelligence, connected with the prevalence of the children's egocentrism, is important here, but important is also the surrounding social environment in which these children grow up and in which they observe every day the celebration of both the one and the other holidays, which turns these holidays for them into expressions of the common Bulgarian. But anyway, the fact is that already at this stage of the age development of children of Turkish ethnicity the beginning of giving equal importance to national and ethnic identity and of considering ethnic traditions, customs and culture as part of national traditions, customs and culture, or more generally, of the ethnic as part of the national, has been set.

Unlike the children of Bulgarian and Turkish ethnicity, in which the beginning of the formation of the notion of national and ethnic identity is set in the age period of 5-7 years, in children of **Roma ethnicity**, this process is delayed in time. Children of Roma ethnicity aged 5-7 generally have not yet formed an idea of either national or ethnic identity. A major role in this has the fact

that children from the Roma ethnic group at this age do not speak Bulgarian, which is a result of upbringing in the family, and it is also important that many children from the Roma ethnic group do not go to kindergarten at all, or attend kindergarten irregularly. When asked to identify themselves, they only give their name (42.6% of children). They do not know the Bulgarian flag, they cannot indicate which is their homeland, they cannot name a single traditional national cultural holiday or custom, nor a holiday or custom specific to their ethnicity. At the same time, they do not feel different from other children, they play together with children from the Bulgarian and Turkish ethnic groups and find a way to communicate with them and understand each other, even though they speak different languages. This is the result of in general good relations between the ethnic groups in the city. But in any case, specific indicators of national or ethnic identity among children of the Roma ethnic group aged 5–7 cannot be derived.

### **Formation of national and ethnic identity in the age group 7-10 years (Grade I-IV)**

During this stage, the children of **Bulgarian ethnicity** continue to form a notion of national identity, as it increasingly loses its character of a generalized perception and is becoming more and more filled with concrete content. In this period of their development, all interviewed children (100%) define Bulgaria as their homeland, and their homeland as the country in which they were born. The *Bulgarian language* continues to be one of the main indicators of national identity, and its importance grows even more as children at school become increasingly aware of the importance of language as a unifying and at the same time differentiating factor, and in this sense as a community-forming factor.

*"I have a friend at school. He doesn't speak Bulgarian, he speaks Turkish...He doesn't speak Bulgarian because he's not Bulgarian, he's Turkish. But Turks are Bulgarians too"* (boy, 9 years old, from Vetovo).

*"Gypsies are Bulgarians too, even though they don't speak Bulgarian"* (boy, 7 years old, from Vetovo).

These two examples show how the Bulgarian language is being transformed from an indicator of national identity into an indicator of ethnic identity as well, insofar as it serves as a means of distinguishing children from other ethnic groups. They also show that language in general (Bulgarian, Turkish, Roma) is a major indicator of ethnic identity, as it serves as a differentiator

between different ethnic groups, and that the formation of ethnic identity begins in this period of children's development. And it is also evident that during this period of the development of children of Bulgarian ethnicity, the identification of ethnic (Bulgarian) identity with national identity begins. That is why they define children of Turkish and Roma origin as Bulgarians, considering their nationality. In addition to language, the other indicators of national identity that children aged 7-10 confirm as formed are: the *Bulgarian flag* (100% of children); the ongoing formation of awareness of the *national history and historical past* of the Bulgarian people, as children's knowledge in this regard is significantly increasing (100% of the children mentioned at least three names of famous Bulgarian historical figures, the most frequently mentioned being Vasil Levski, Hristo Botev, Baba Tonka and the children also have a much better general idea of Bulgaria's history, pointing out that our national history is filled with battles with other countries for the preservation of the territory and the change of various rulers, without, however, being able to point out specific historical events); *national cultural traditions* (100% of the surveyed children were able to name at least one traditional holiday that they know, and in most cases they named several holidays, the most frequently mentioned being Christmas, Easter, Baba Marta, Tsvetnitsa, Lazaritsa); *Bulgarian national folklore* (80.3% of the children mentioned at least one Bulgarian folk tale and 56.5% of them mentioned at least one Bulgarian folk song); *traditional national dishes* (100% of surveyed children indicated at least two traditional national dishes). 60% of the school children show the beginnings of the formation of a new indicator of national identity - *Bulgarian national culture and art*. In this regard, children can identify some famous Bulgarian writers, the most frequently mentioned being Ivan Vazov. Some of the children during this period have a formed idea of what *patriotism* is (17.5% of the children).

*"Patriotism is love for your country"* (boy, 9 years old, from Vetovo).

And if so far we have been talking about the formation of cognitive indicators of national identity, then the developed notion of patriotism as love for the homeland can be seen as the beginning of the formation of the emotional indicator of national identity, associated with the development of a sense of belonging to Bulgaria. In this way, the notion of national identity is increasingly filled with concrete cognitive as well as emotional content.

During this period, the formation of the concept of national and ethnic identity in children of **Turkish ethnicity** continues, with the development going in the direction of the formation of

new indicators of national and ethnic identity and the enrichment of the existing ones. At this stage, 100% of all children interviewed define Bulgaria as their homeland, and homeland is described as "the place where I was born". *Language* again becomes a key indicator. But if for the children of Bulgarian ethnicity the language turns in this period from an indicator of national identity into an indicator of ethnic identity, for the children of Turkish ethnicity the transformation is exactly the opposite - from an indicator of ethnic identity (the Turkish language they use at home), the language turns into an indicator of national identity, insofar as the importance of the Bulgarian language as the language of communication at school is realized. In this way, the notion of language as a unifying and at the same time differentiating factor between children is formed, and in this sense as a factor forming identity - ethnic and national. This once again confirms the fact, established at the previous stage of child development, that for children of Turkish ethnicity the formation of the notion of national identity goes along with the formation of the notion of ethnic identity. In addition to language, other indicators of national identity that continued to enrich during this period are: the *Bulgarian flag* (known by 100% of the children), *national cultural traditions* (100% of the surveyed children were able to name at least one traditional holiday that they know, and in most cases they named several holidays, the most frequently mentioned being Bairam, Ramadan, Easter, Christmas), *Bulgarian national folklore* (50% of children can name at least one Bulgarian folk tale), *traditional national dishes* (80% of the children mentioned at least two national dishes). At the age of 7-10, another indicator of national identity begins to form, which is missing at the previous stage - it is the awareness of *national history and national historical past*. And although children at this age are not distinguished by a very profound knowledge of the history of Bulgaria, but it is a fact that all 100% of the surveyed children identify as prominent Bulgarian historical figures Vasil Levski and the authors of the Slavic alphabet brothers Cyril and Methodius. Among 60% of the children of Turkish ethnicity at the age of 7-10 years can be found the beginning of the formation of the new indicator *Bulgarian national culture and art* as an indicator of national identity. In this respect, the only Bulgarian writer mentioned was Ivan Vazov, but he was mentioned by 100% of the children surveyed.

During this period, the formation of a notion of national and ethnic identity in **Roma children** begins, but these two notions are still very general, blurred and undifferentiated, expressed in the awareness of a limited number of indicators. As with the other two ethnic groups, the process of identity formation in Roma children begins with *language*, insofar as language is the

first thing these children perceive as distinguishing them from other children. On the one hand, it is their mother language, which they speak at home, and on the other hand, it is the Bulgarian language, which they are taught in school and which they do not speak well. Thus, language becomes for Roma children the first indicator that simultaneously fulfils the functions of indicating both ethnic and national belonging. And even though children at this stage of their development are not yet clearly aware of the difference between the both, they are still aware that their mother language (whether Roma or Turkish, depending on which of the two they consider their mother language) is the one that brings them closer to children who speak the same language, and on the other hand, the Bulgarian language is the one that distinguishes them from other children, but at the same time the one that is common to all children at school. This, it could be said, is the first time, when children meet and get acquainted with the role of language as a community forming - the community of Roma/Turkish speakers and the community of Bulgarian speakers, which unites all speakers of different mother languages and which, moreover, has a formalised character, insofar as Bulgarian is the official language of education in school. The notion of national identity at this stage is limited to the formation of three indicators of national identity, although not in a fully developed form. First of all, 47% of the children confirm their understanding of Bulgaria as their homeland, yet the notion of homeland is still quite generalized, reduced to the understanding "because I was born here" or "because I live here". Second, it is the knowledge of the *Bulgarian flag* as one of the symbols of the state, which 42.3% of the children confirm. And third, it is the knowledge of *national cultural traditions*. In this regard, 44.8% of the surveyed children mentioned at least one traditional holiday or custom, the most frequently mentioned being *Vasilitsa*, *Virgin Mary*, *St. George's Day*, *Koch Bayram*, *Sheker Bayram*. Here again we have a mixing of Christian and Muslim holidays and customs, as the Roma in Vetovo practice both religions. But more important is that these holidays and customs, which are characteristic of the Turkish and Roma ethnic groups, the Roma children present as national Bulgarian holidays and customs, which actually reflects an understanding of national culture and traditions as uniting the culture, traditions and customs of different ethnic communities.

### **Formation of national and ethnic identity in the age group 11-13 years (Grade V-VII)**

During this period, the formation of the notion of national identity among children of **Bulgarian ethnicity** continued, as the content of the notion became increasingly detailed and comprised

of an increasing number of indicators. At this stage of their development, 40% of the interviewed children, when describing themselves, used the definition "Bulgarian" among the characteristics they used to describe themselves, and this, given that nothing in the question asking them to describe themselves suggested that we were interested in national or ethnic belonging. Moreover, when using the definition "Bulgarian", the children have in mind their nationality, which became clear after additional questions were asked after it was noticed that in many of the questionnaires "Bulgarian" was written in capital letters. The answer the children gave was that this was their way of expressing the fact that they were from Bulgaria. All interviewed children (100%) define Bulgaria as their homeland, and the definitions of homeland and the cognitive content embedded in this concept are now much more diverse. The sense of "belonging" to Bulgaria, which 100% of the interviewed children stated, as well as the "strong sense" of belonging to Bulgaria, which again 100% of the interviewed children confirmed, is in fact an expression of the emotional component of the developing notion of national identity. An indicator of the developing emotional component of the national identity is still the idea of *patriotism*, understood as love for the homeland (36.7% of children). An indicator of the deepening differentiation of the emotional component of national identity is the fact that 11-13-year-old children are also able to express their personal *motives for pride* as citizens of Bulgaria (27,6% of children) which they associate with the culture, historical past and the beauty of the country's nature. As for the cognitive component of national identity, an indicator of the enriching cognitive content of the notion of national identity in the age period 11-13 years is the fact that children at this age already know very well what the *Bulgarian state borders* are (with 80% of children identifying all the countries that Bulgaria has borders with). Awareness of the *national history* and the *historical past of the Bulgarian people* is still being developed, and the knowledge of Bulgaria's national history is being enriched and deepened (100% of the children mentioned at least 2 names of prominent Bulgarian historical figures and also 100% of the children mentioned at least 2 important historical events from Bulgaria's past). Another important indicator of national identity, which all 100% of children aged 11-13 confirm, is the *Bulgarian flag* as part of the symbols of the Bulgarian state. It turns out that, unlike in previous age periods, 40% of the children also know the *Bulgarian national Anthem*. *National cultural traditions* are another important indicator of national identity, which is developed and enriched with new content in the 11-13 age period - in this respect, 100% of the surveyed children were able to name at least three national traditions they know, the most frequently mentioned being Christmas, Easter, Baba Marta, Christmas Eve; 100% of the

children named at least one Bulgarian folk tale, 80% - at least one Bulgarian folk song and at least one Bulgarian proverb; and 100% of the surveyed children named at least two national Bulgarian dishes. The indicator *Bulgarian national culture and art* can be found in 80% of the children as an indicator of national identity, the beginnings of which are set in the previous age period, and at the age of 11-13 its cognitive upgrading and enrichment continues. The age period 11-13 marks the start of the formation of two new indicators of national identity - *Bulgarian national science* and *Bulgarian national sport*. As for the indicator *Bulgarian national science*, the only famous Bulgarian scientist that children aged 11-13 know about is John Atanasov, but he is identified by 50% of them. Regarding the indicator *Bulgarian national sport*, children's knowledge is more extensive. Among the prominent Bulgarian sportsmen, they mention the names of Ivet Lalova, Hristo Stoichkov, Stefka Kostadinova, Taibe Yusein, Grigor Dimitrov - and again 50% of the children mentioned at least one famous Bulgarian sportsperson. What makes an impression is that for the first time, when identifying famous Bulgarian figures, only among the sportsmen the children identify a person who is of Turkish ethnic origin, i.e. here for the first time we meet an understanding of the national as including the ethnic specificity of minority ethnic groups. This is also fully in line with the significant progress observed during this period of the children's development in the awareness of ethnic differences and in the formation of a notion of *ethnic identity*, which was initiated during the previous age period. This period can be associated with the formation of a number of new indicators of ethnic identity such as: the language of the ethnic group; the culture, traditions, customs of the ethnic group; the religion of the ethnic group; the specific dress of the ethnic group; the specific names of the ethnic group; the specificity of employment typical for the ethnic group. In this regard, we will quote two statements by children aged 11 and 13).

*"I recognise Bulgarians by their names, holidays and culture. The Roma are more dark and they pick iron. And I know the Turks by their name; their culture and holidays are different; they also differ in the way they dress"* (boy, 11 years old, from Vetovo).

*"Ethnic groups differ in culture, religion, clothes, way of speaking, language and holidays"* (girl, 13 years old, from Vetovo).

Although during this period of development of children of **Turkish ethnicity** the construction of the notion of both ethnic and national identity has progressed, which is expressed in the increasing number of indicators reflecting the developing cognitive content of the notion of

identity, none of the children studied, when identifying themselves, mentioned their nationality among the characteristics with which they described themselves and only 10% of the children mentioned their ethnicity. Among the characteristics with which children describe themselves, it is personal qualities that completely dominate. This specific character of the process of identity formation of children of Turkish ethnicity reflects the fact that although national identity is important for the representatives of Turkish ethnicity, it does not have the same significance as for the representatives of Bulgarian ethnicity. And the minor importance given to ethnicity for self-definition can be explained by the answers given by children of Turkish ethnicity to the question: 'Does ethnicity matter for relationships between people in the city?' For 75% of children, ethnicity "rather does not matter", while for 10% it "does not matter at all" and only 15% said "neither yes nor no". However, although nationality was not present in the self-definition of children of Turkish ethnicity at the age of 11-13, 100% of the surveyed children confirmed that they consider Bulgaria their homeland because "they were born here", "they live here" and because it is "the birthplace of their fathers and grandfathers". The *sense of belonging to Bulgaria* is an indication of the developing emotional component of national identity. Unlike the children of Bulgarian ethnicity, 100% of whom stated a strong sense of belonging to Bulgaria, the children of Turkish ethnicity showed a variety in the gradation of the sense of belonging, with 40% stating a strong sense of belonging, 20% stating a weak sense of belonging, and 40% being unable to answer. These assessments are also an indicator of the lower importance that national identity has for the Turkish ethnos compared to the importance that it has for the Bulgarian ethnos. Another aspect of the emotional component of national identity is the sense of "*belonging*" to Bulgaria, which the surveyed children stated. In this respect, 100% of the children confirmed their sense of "belonging" both to the state and to their ethnic community, which once again confirms the equal importance that representatives of the Turkish ethnic group attach to national and ethnic identity, an attitude that is formed as early as at the age of 11-13. As for the cognitive component of national identity, an indicator of the expanding and enriching cognitive content of the notion of national identity in the age period 11-13 years is the fact that children at this age already know quite well the *Bulgarian state borders* (with 50% of them mentioning all five countries with which Bulgaria borders), the *Bulgarian flag* (indicated by 100% of children) as part of the symbols of statehood, and 60% of the children know the *national Anthem*. *National cultural traditions* (100% of the surveyed children were able to name at least three national traditions that they know, also 100% of the children named at least one Bulgarian folk tale, one Bulgarian folk song and one Bulgarian folk

proverb), *Bulgaria's national history and historical past* (100% of the children mentioned at least two names of prominent Bulgarian historical figures and at least two important historical events from Bulgaria's past), *Bulgarian national culture and art* (85% of children name at least one famous Bulgarian representative of art and culture) are other important indicators of national identity that are developed and enriched with new content in the 11-13 age period. The age period 11-13 marks the beginning of the formation of two new indicators of national identity - *Bulgarian national science* (50% of children identified at least one prominent Bulgarian scientist) and *Bulgarian national sport* (50% of children identify at least one famous Bulgarian sportsperson).

During this period of **Roma children's** development, the construction of both national and ethnic identities marks the first more significant progress, although the number of indicators reflecting the developing cognitive content of identity still remains relatively limited. In addition, none of the surveyed children, when describing themselves, mentioned their nationality among the characteristics they used to describe themselves, and only 5% of the children mentioned their ethnicity, as these were Muslim Roma children who identified themselves as Turkish, but there was not a single child who identified himself as Roma. However, although nationality is not present in the children's self-definition, there has been a clear progress in the formation of the *concept of homeland*, with 73.5% of children confirming that they consider Bulgaria their homeland. Despite the progress in the formation of the notion of homeland, at this stage of children's development it is still not possible to talk about the formation of the *emotional component* of the developing notion of national identity, insofar as Roma children are not able to determine the *strength of their sense of belonging* to Bulgaria, nor whether they feel "own" or "foreign" in Bulgaria, as well as to indicate *what they are proud of as citizens* of the Republic of Bulgaria. An indicator of the relatively slow development and concrete content completion of the cognitive component of national identity is the fact that Roma children aged 11-13 still do not know well the *Bulgarian state borders*. Overall, only 33.3% of the children confirm that they know the Bulgarian state borders, but when asked to name the countries with which Bulgaria borders, they usually mention only Turkey and in a few cases Romania. A cognitive transformation can be observed in the identification of *state symbols (flag, Anthem)* as indicators of national identity. The number of children confirming that they know the *Bulgarian flag* and correctly pointing out its colours - white, green and red - increased up to 45.5%. However, none of the children confirmed knowing the *Bulgarian national Anthem*. Children of

Roma ethnicity aged 11-13 do not know well the *historical past of Bulgaria* and are not able to point out important historical events from the country's past, nor prominent Bulgarian historical figures. They are also unable to name prominent figures of *Bulgarian national culture and art, of Bulgarian national sports, of Bulgarian national science*. However, *national cultural traditions* are one of the indicators of national identity that show cognitive progress. As national traditions and holidays 100% of the Roma children mentioned the celebration of St. George's Day, Vasilitsa, the Virgin Mary, Easter, Christmas, Bairam, Ramadan, i.e. here again we have a mixing of holidays and traditions of different ethnicities and religions and an understanding of the national as including ethnic specificities and differences. Roma children aged 11-13 also demonstrate knowledge of Bulgarian national folklore. In this respect, 57% of the children mentioned at least one Bulgarian folk tale; 36.7% of the children mentioned at least one Bulgarian folk song, and 24.5% mentioned at least one Bulgarian folk proverb. At the same time, however, all 100% of the children surveyed indicated that they did not know the folklore of their ethnic group. And this also has its explanation. Speaking in the words of two of the parents of the children interviewed, it sounds like this:

*"We don't have our folklore. We translate Bulgarian proverbs and fairy tales into Gypsy"* (female, of Roma origin, 33 years old, from Vetovo).

*"We tell Bulgarian fairy tales, but we tell them in Gypsy, we sing Bulgarian songs, but we sing them in Gypsy"* (female, Roma origin, 32 years old, from Vetovo).

What more explicit illustration of the model of collective identity of the Roma ethnos, where national identity is leading and dominant, but always ethnically coloured, and the ethnic is always perceived as part of the national.

### **Formation of national and ethnic identity in the age group 14-18 years (Grade VIII-XII)**

What should be noted first is that at this stage of their development 30% of the interviewed children of **Bulgarian ethnicity**, when describing themselves, among the characteristics used to describe themselves, they use the definition "Bulgarian", while the remaining 70% characterize themselves by their personal qualities. The smaller share of children who focus on their national belonging compared to the previous stage is explained by the fact that the age period 14-18 years is the time when children are on the threshold of maturity, on the threshold of their active involvement in the life of society, therefore during this period more

important for them are their personal qualities, which predetermine their success in life, so they focus primarily on these qualities in their self-determination. Despite the low proportion of children who self-identify as Bulgarians, it is impressive that all of them (100%) identify Bulgaria as their homeland. There is also a significant enrichment of the emotional component of the national identity, which can be represented by many more indicators compared to the previous period, namely: the *feeling of belonging to Bulgaria*, which 80% of the children declare, and which is a new indicator of the emotional content embedded in the national identity, which was missing at the previous stage; the *strong sense of belonging to Bulgaria*, which 100% of the surveyed children declare; the *feeling of "one's own" in Bulgaria*, with 75% of the children choosing the answer "one's own in the state", and 25% - "one's own in the state and in my ethnic community". The choice of the answer "one's own in the state" indicates the presence of an already formed notion of the *institutional aspect of national identity*, which was missing until this stage. And the choice of the answer "one's own in the state and in my ethnic community" indicates a formed understanding that the national and the ethnic are not overlapping categories and that there is a difference between the Bulgarian national identity and the Bulgarian ethnic identity, and it should be noted that this answer is chosen, respectively the difference is realized, only by children aged 17 and 18. An indicator of the becoming more complex structure of the emotional component of national identity is the developing notion of *patriotism*, confirmed by 100% of the children and the increasing *motives for pride as citizens of Bulgaria* that the children formulate namely *Bulgarian national historical past* (mentioned by 100% of children); *Bulgarian national traditions and customs* (also mentioned by 100% of children); *Bulgarian national culture and art* (mentioned by 75% of children); *Bulgarian national sport* (also mentioned by 75% of children) and *Bulgarian national science* (mentioned by 50% of children). During this age period, the development of the notion of national identity continues in the cognitive aspect, as in the aspect of content it becomes more and more detailed and covers an increasing number of indicators, namely: the *Bulgarian state borders*, which 100% of the children confirm that they know; the *national history and historical past of the Bulgarian people* with 100% of the children mentioning at least five historical events from Bulgaria's past; the *Bulgarian flag* as part of the symbols of statehood and the *national Bulgarian Anthem*, which 100% of the children confirm that they know; *national cultural traditions* with 100% of the children being able to name at least five national Bulgarian traditions and 100% of the children naming at least one Bulgarian folk tale, one Bulgarian folk song and one Bulgarian proverb; *Bulgarian national culture and art* with 100% of

the children naming at least two prominent figures of Bulgarian national culture and art, and 30% naming three such figures; *Bulgarian national science* with 75% identifying at least two representatives of Bulgarian science; *Bulgarian national sport* with 100% of the children naming at least three famous Bulgarian sportsmen. And although in the age period 14-18 years the development of the understanding of ethnic identity and ethnic differences continues, which is expressed in the enrichment and upgrading of the content of the already formed indicators of ethnic identity, rather than in the emergence of new ones, the identification of the national Bulgarian identity with the ethnic identity of the Bulgarian ethnos continues even during this period of the development of children of Bulgarian ethnicity.

As with children of the Bulgarian ethnicity, the most important for the self-determination of children of the **Turkish ethnicity** during this period of their development are personal qualities and characteristics, which is why 100% of the children surveyed, when defining themselves, characterize themselves through their personal qualities, and none of them indicates their ethnic or national identity. However, all of them (100%) define Bulgaria as their *homeland*. The emotional component of the notion of national identity continues to develop, which is expressed primarily in the stated sense of belonging to Bulgaria – for 45% of the children this feeling is strong, for 25% - it is weak, and 30% of the children do not answer. These assessments are an indicator of the lower importance that the national identity has for the Turkish ethnos compared to the importance that the Bulgarian ethnos attaches to it. This is confirmed by the *feeling of belonging to Bulgaria* that the children of Turkish ethnicity declare. It is noteworthy that 33.3% of the children declare the strongest sense of belonging to Bulgaria, but the same number – 33.3% each, confirm the strongest sense of belonging to the city they live in and to the region they live in, i.e. the sense of belonging to Bulgaria is not first for children of Turkish ethnicity as it is for children of Bulgarian ethnicity. But when it comes to the sense of "belonging" in Bulgaria, 100% of the children confirm their sense of "belonging" both to the state and to their ethnic community, which once again confirms the equal importance that representatives of the Turkish ethnos attach to national and ethnic identity, an attitude formed in the childhood. An indicator of the developing emotional component of the notion of national identity are the increasing *motives for pride as citizens of Bulgaria* that children of Turkish ethnicity derive namely *Bulgarian national historical past* (mentioned by 66.7% of children); *Bulgarian national culture and art* (also mentioned by 66.7% of children); *Bulgarian national traditions and customs* (mentioned by 50% of children); *Bulgarian national*



*science* (mentioned by 35% of children) and *Bulgarian national sport* (mentioned by 30% of children) and the developing notion of *patriotism* which for 100% of the children means "love for Bulgaria as a homeland", but also "love for the birthplace" (for 50% of the children). The development of the notion of national identity continues during this age period also in cognitive aspect, as in content it becomes more and more detailed and comprises of a growing number of indicators, namely: the *Bulgarian state borders*, the *Bulgarian flag* and the *Bulgarian national Anthem*, which 100% of the surveyed children already know. Other important indicators of national identity, the content of which continues to enrich and develop at this stage of children's development, are the formation of an understanding of the *national history* and *historical past of the Bulgarian people* with 100% of the children mentioning at least three historical events from Bulgaria's past; of *national cultural traditions* with 100% of the surveyed children being able to name at least five national Bulgarian traditions that they know and also 100% of them naming at least two Bulgarian folk tales, one Bulgarian folk song and one Bulgarian proverb; of *Bulgarian national culture and art* with 100% of the children naming at least two prominent figures of Bulgarian national culture and art; of *Bulgarian national science* with 100% of the children naming at least one prominent Bulgarian scientist; of *Bulgarian national sport* with 100% of the children naming at least three prominent Bulgarian sportsmen. At this stage of the age development of the children of Turkish ethnicity it is particularly evident that although they make a clear distinction between ethnic and national identity, identifying prominent representatives of Bulgarian national sport, Bulgarian national culture and art, and including among them people of Turkish and Roma ethnic origin, they actually show in this way that the national Bulgarian should be understood as uniting the specificities of all ethnic communities that make up Bulgarian society, and not only of Bulgarian ethnicity.

If for children of Bulgarian and Turkish ethnicity the most important for their self-determination during this period of age development are personal qualities and characteristics, for children of **Roma ethnicity** things are different. For them, this is the stage when both national and ethnic identity receive the highest development both cognitively and emotionally. Thus, 37.7% of the children self-identify as Bulgarians, 15% as Turks and only 10.5% as Roma, and these 10.5% are part of the 37.7% who self-identify as Bulgarians, i.e. 10.5% of the children self-identify as both Bulgarians and Roma, or in other words, both through their national and ethnic belonging. The remaining 47.3% of the children define themselves by their personal qualities and characteristics. What is impressive is that the share of children of Roma ethnic origin who

define themselves by their national identity - 37.7% - is higher even than the share of children of Bulgarian ethnic origin of the same age who define themselves by their national identity – 30%. These results are indicative that the model of collective identity, which is characteristic of the Roma ethos as a whole and which is distinguished by a dominant national identity that creates the core of group identification, and which is additionally colored with ethnic elements and specificity, is already present in Roma children aged 14-18. This complex interweaving of national and ethnic elements in the collective identity of the Roma ethnos is very well represented by the words of one of the interviewed girls, however complicated they may sound:

*"We call ourselves Bulgarians. I am not a Roma, but a Bulgarian. But I am a Roma and I admit it. But I don't feel Roma, I feel Bulgarian"* (girl, 17 years old, of Roma origin, from Vetovo).

Indicative of the progress in the development of the notion of national identity at this stage of the age of Roma children is the understanding of the homeland they demonstrate - 75.5% of the children define Bulgaria as their homeland. As a definite proof of the progress in the development of the notion of national identity, we can also identify the gradual development of the *emotional component* of national identity, which was completely lacking in the previous age stages of the development of Roma children and whose beginning is exactly in this period. In this respect, the development of a *sense of belonging to Bulgaria* should be mentioned - and although only 41.5% of the children declare a strong sense of belonging to Bulgaria, while 30% have a weak sense and the remaining 28.5% cannot define it, the fact that slightly less than half of the children aged 14-18 declare a strong sense of belonging to Bulgaria is indicative of the progress in the development of the notion of national identity in its emotional dimension. This is confirmed by the *feeling of belonging to Bulgaria*, which 45% of Roma children state. Despite the relatively strong sense of belonging to Bulgaria when it comes to feeling "one's own" in Bulgaria, as representing another aspect of the emotional component of national identity, the answers given by the children show a relatively wide variety of opinions: 20.3% of them feel "one's own in their ethnic community"; 24.7% feel "one's own in the state"; 30% feel "one's own in both – the ethnic community and the state" and 26.3% feel "foreign in the state". The relatively equal proportions of children who feel "one's own in their ethnic community" and "one's own in the state", and at the same time the fact that the highest proportion of children feel "one's own in both – the ethnic community and the state", explains why for children of Roma ethnicity the development of the ethnic always goes in parallel with the development of



the national and why the ethnic is perceived as an integral and important part of the national, contributing to its specificity. As an indicator of the emotional component of the national identity can also be pointed out the *motives for pride as citizens of Bulgaria*, which Roma children at this stage of their development are already able to identify among which can be pointed out: *the Bulgarian national traditions and customs* (mentioned by 37.7% of children) and *the traditions and customs of the ethnic community* (mentioned by 24.7% of children). These responses are another confirmation of the specificity of the model of collective identity typical for Roma ethnicity, which is characterized by the dominance of national identity, forming the core of group identification, but which is additionally colored with ethnic elements and at the same time indicates the growing linking of the national with the ethnic and the consideration of the national as containing the ethnic. The development of the notion of national identity in Roma children continues during this age period in *cognitive* aspect, as in terms of content it becomes more and more detailed and covers a growing number of indicators. In this respect, first of all, we should mention the knowledge of the *Bulgarian state borders* (20.3% of children), the identification of the *state symbols* (*flag* – 73.2% of children, *Anthem* - 9.3% of children) as indicators of national identity. Another important indicator of national identity, which was lacking in the previous period of the development of Roma children and which is starting to be developed and filled with concrete content, although still relatively limited at this stage of the children's development, is the development of the awareness of *national history* and the *historical past of the Bulgarian people* with only 12.8% of the children mentioning at least one historical figure and 10.5% - at least one important historical event from Bulgaria's past. *National cultural traditions* are the next important indicator of national identity, which develops and is filled with new content in the 14-18 age period with 45% of Roma children mentioning at least one Bulgarian national holiday or custom. The age period 14-18 marks the cognitive upgrade of the notion of identity with another indicator - *the Bulgarian national sport*. In this regard, 24.7% of Roma children mentioned at least one prominent Bulgarian sportsman. However, children of Roma ethnicity are not able to identify prominent figures of *Bulgarian national culture and art* and *Bulgarian national science*, therefore national culture and art and national science are not part of the indicators of national identity for them at this stage of their development. As far as *ethnic identity* is concerned, the 14-18 age period is one in which its development continues, and at this stage it is expressed in the development of specific indicators of ethnic identity as opposed to the more generalised and undifferentiated to specific indicators notion of ethnic identity that characterises the

previous age period of children's development. The specific indicators of ethnic identity that are identified at this stage of the development of Roma children can be divided into three, namely: the culture, traditions, customs of the ethnic group; the specific food of the ethnic group; the religion of the ethnic group.

## Discussion

The study of the stages of development of national and ethnic identity in the three ethnic groups - Bulgarian, Turkish and Roma - showed that each of them is characterized by the specificity of the processes of ethnic and national identity development that unfold consistently in the course of ontogenesis from childhood to adulthood and, accordingly, by a different model of identity construction, which determines the current state of collective identification of the ethnic group and preconditions its specific structure and model of collective identity. Two factors are central to the model of collective identity construction for each ethnic group: the consistent development, refinement, and upgrading of the structures of intelligence and the influences of the external social environment. And if the first factor leads to two very significant consequences, which are common to all three ethnicities: 1) the lack of distinction between ethnic and national identity at the early stages of child development, which is explained by the dominant child egocentrism, understood as the "inability to decentre" and to distinguish different points of view and perspectives; 2) followed by the increasing awareness and understanding of the difference between ethnic and national at the later stages of child development, related to the gradual overcoming of children's egocentrism and its displacement from the operational structures of the intelligence, allowing coordination and correlation of points of view, the second factor - the influence of the social environment - has different consequences for each of the ethnic groups, which determines the differences in the models of collective identity construction in each of them.

In the *Bulgarian ethnic group*, under the influence of the social environment and the prevailing social perceptions, attitudes and values, as well as depending on the existing accumulations in the collective identities of the ethnic group and the already existing collective memory, traditions and culture of the ethnic group, the beginning of the construction of national identity precedes in time the beginning of the construction of ethnic identity, and gradually in the course of ontogenesis a model of the construction of national identity as ethno-national,

determined by the specifics of the ethnos, and of ethnic identity as identical to the national identity is imposed.

In contrast to the Bulgarian ethnic group, in *Turkish ethnic group* the influence of the social environment and the existing collective memory, traditions and culture of the ethnos lead to a different model of construction of national and ethnic identity, where the beginning of the construction of the ethnic identity precedes the beginning of the construction of the national identity, but subsequently the construction of the two types of identity goes in parallel. However, if at the beginning the ethnic was seen as part of the national, and the national identity was seen as including the ethnic, then under the influence of the social environment and the dominant social perceptions, attitudes and values, the understanding of the exclusion of the ethnic from the national was gradually imposed, and therefore a model of collective identity of the representatives of the Turkish ethnic group was developed, which is distinguished by giving equal importance to both types of identification - the ethnic and the national.

In the case of the *Roma ethnicity*, unlike the Bulgarian and Turkish ethnicity, the development of national and ethnic identity goes parallel and simultaneously from the very beginning and throughout the subsequent process of ontogenetic development. But more important is that throughout the process of ontogenetic development the ethnic is seen as part of the national. This becomes the basis of the model of collective identity of the Roma ethnicity, characterized by a dominant national identity that forms the core of group identification, but which is always meaningfully charged with specific ethnic elements and characteristics.

These differences in the models of construction of national and ethnic identity in different ethnic groups in Bulgarian society are closely related to their place and position in society. Thus, the Bulgarian ethnos as the leading ethnos in the country imposes its understanding of the national and therefore perceives the national identity as ethno-national, determined by the specificities of the leading ethnos. The Turkish ethnic group, because of its position as a minority ethnic group and its awareness of the fact that the perceptions of the leading ethnic group very often imply the exclusion of the ethnic from the national, seeks to assert the importance of ethnic identity and to affirm the equivalence of ethnic and national identities. And the Roma ethnic group, due to its position as the lowest status ethnic community, seeks to

prove that it is part of the national community, and therefore always tries to present the ethnic as an inseparable part of the national.

Thus, the process of identity formation among the three main ethnic groups in Bulgarian society, viewed as a sequentially developing cognitive process of accumulating knowledge and the corresponding emotions and feelings, completely fits into Piaget's concept of the successive stages through which intellectual and cognitive development passes, further developing it in the context of the social conditioning of these processes. It would be naive to assume that a scholar as serious as Piaget was unaware of the fact that, depending on the characteristics of the specific socio-historical and cultural environment, members of every society are subject to unique social experiences. In the preface to the Russian edition of his book "Language and Thought in Childhood", Piaget wrote about the influence of the social environment on intellectual development:

When working as I was forced to work, in only one social environment (the social environment of children in Geneva), it is impossible to establish this accurately. To achieve this, it is absolutely necessary to study children in different and, if possible, the most diverse social environments (Piaget, 1932, p. 56).

In this regard, Piaget emphasizes the need for comparative studies to examine the influence that specific family, school, religious, ethnic, and cultural environments have on intellectual development. However, he himself does not engage in such research. In fact, we did just that—we showed how the influence of the specific social environment in its various dimensions (ethnic, religious, family, cultural, etc.) predetermines the specificity of identification at the group level in the process of ontogenesis, i.e., among different age groups of representatives of the respective community. Similar studies are undertaken by some of Piaget's followers: Kohlberg (Kohlberg, 1976), Hyde (Hyde, 1979), Takeda (Takeda, 1977), Mori (Mori, 1976), Lahlou (Lahlou, 1989), Vergnaud (Vergnaud, 1981), Resnick (Resnick, 1987) et al., who examine the importance of the cultural environment for the formation of various concepts (of number, quantity, time, space, mass, etc.) in children of European (mainly English), Arab, Indian, Somali, and Algerian origin. However, none of them have studied the formation of identity in children from different backgrounds. There is also a lack of such studies in Bulgaria. Relatively similar subjects are addressed by Ganeva in her research (Ganeva, 2009), although it concerns the development of ethnic stereotypes in childhood rather than the formation of

identity. The study by Valchev and van de Vijver (Valchev & van de Vijver, 2009), which examines the understanding of national and European identity among Bulgarian and German students, is also worth mentioning. However, among Bulgarian studies devoted to the topic of identity, there is a lack of research focusing on the processes of its formation in the course of ontogenesis, particularly among children from different ethnic groups in Bulgaria, which highlights the contributory nature of the present study.

### Limitations of the study

Two main limitations of this study can be identified: first, it concerns the specifics of identity formation processes only among the three largest ethnic communities in the country—Bulgarians, Turks, and Roma—and does not address the other smaller ethnic communities that are also represented in our country; second, this study is territorially limited, i.e., it concerns the processes of identity formation in a small town in Bulgaria—the town of Vetovo, Ruse region.

It should be noted, however, that the study is representative of Vetovo insofar as it surveyed all children aged between 5 and 18 who were attending school and kindergarten in the town at the time of the study and, furthermore, it concerns the three largest ethnic communities in Bulgaria as a whole, not only in Vetovo, which makes it possible to identify typical dependencies and patterns. Furthermore, the specifics of the formation of national and ethnic identity are most clearly visible in small localities such as Vetovo, where ethnic groups live in close contact and interact on a daily basis. This allows the derived patterns and models of identity formation among the three ethnic communities to be largely considered as typical for Bulgaria as a whole.

### Conclusion

Thus, the derivation of the models of collective identity construction (national and ethnic) of the different ethnic communities in Bulgarian society allows to highlight their specificity. This specificity is the basis of the contemporary identity structure and the model of collective identification typical for each of the studied groups. From another point of view the similarities in the identification of the different ethnic groups of Bulgarian society have made possible the years of good neighbourly relations and peaceful coexistence. And if Bulgaria is generally characterised by a tolerant model of inter-ethnic interaction, the foundations of this model are laid in childhood. And regardless of the differences in the processes of forming an

understanding of ethnic and national identity in different ethnic groups, it is obvious that at their core is a common understanding of national identity, which allows each of the ethnic groups to find its place in society.

**Funding/Financial Support**

The authors have no funding to report.

**Other Support/Acknowledgement**

The authors have no other support to report.

**Competing Interests**

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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