

## THE 14-YEAR OLD PUPILS' ATTITUDES TO IMMIGRANTS AND ETHNIC GROUPS IN SLOVAKIA

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*This article represents the results of quantitative research of ICCS 2009 in the field of Slovak 14-year-old pupils' attitudes to immigrants in the Slovak Republic. The research confirms that the new opportunities in freedom of movement within European countries often bring greater concerns than the real economic, cultural and social consequences of this freedom are. Slovak pupils expressed highest tolerance to those immigrants who come from poor countries, who have different religious beliefs and who have different racial or ethnic origin. According to the pupils, proficiency in the national language is an important precondition for offering equal opportunities to the immigrants. They expect that the immigrants will adapt their lifestyle to the majority and simultaneously will learn the national language.*

**Keywords:** multiculturalism, immigration, political and economic asylum seeker, tolerance.

*В статье представлены результаты количественного исследования, проведенного в 2009 году в рамках проекта по изучению гражданского образования (ICCS), и по священному изучению отношения 14-летних словацких школьников к иммигрантам в Словацкой Республике. Исследование подтверждает, что новые возможности, которые предоставляет свобода передвижения внутри европейских стран, зачастую приносят больше проблем, чем реальных экономических, культурных и социальных выгод от этой свободы. Словацкие школьники склонны проявлять значительную толерантность к тем иммигрантам, которые являются выходцами из бедных стран, исповедуют различные религиозные верования и имеют разное расовое и этническое происхождение. По мнению словацких школьников, знание национального языка является важной предпосылкой для предоставления равных возможностей для иммигрантов. Они ожидают, что иммигранты будут адаптировать свой образ жизни к образу жизни большинства, в том числе будут изучать национальный язык.*

**Ключевые слова:** мультикультурализм, иммиграция, политические и экономические иммигранты, толерантность.

*У статті представлено результати кількісного дослідження, проведеного в 2009 році в межах проекту з вивчення громадянської освіти (ICCS), та присвяченого вивченню ставлення 14-річних словацких школярів до іммігрантів у Словацькій Республіці. Дослідження підтверджує, що нові можливості, які надає свобода пересування всередині європейських країн, найчастіше приносять більше проблем, ніж реальних економічних, культурних та соціальних вигод від цієї свободи. Словацькі школярі схильні проявляти значну толерантність до тих іммігрантів, які є вихідцями з бідних країн, сповідують різні релігійні вірування і мають різне расове та етнічне походження. На думку школярів, знання національної мови є важливою передумовою для надання рівних можливостей для іммігрантів. Вони очікують, що іммігранти будуть адаптувати свій спосіб життя до способу життя більшості, зокрема будуть вивчати національну мову.*

**Ключові слова:** мультикультурализм, иммиграция, политичні та економічні іммігранти, толерантність.

### Introduction

In sociological reflection, European integration is a project of political, economic and social unification that offers opportunities to all nation states to integrate their values and culture not only into the common European treasury, but also into the programmes of educational process of young generation. Many European research projects<sup>1</sup> emphasise the fact that the present generation of European young people does not have a direct memory of

<sup>1</sup>MYPLACE is the abbreviation for Memory Youth Political Legacy And Civic Engagement. The project examines how the shadows of totalitarianism and populism in Europe influence the formation of social participation of young people. It is a multi-dimensional integrative project FP7 funded under the 2010 Social Sciences and Humanities call for proposals "Democracy and the shadows of totalitarianism and populism: the European experience". It brings together a consortium of 16 research institutions from 14 European countries as well as 14 stakeholder public institutions (museums, NGOs, archive and documentation centres). The University of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia is one of the project partners. The coordinator for Slovakia is Professor Ladislav Macháček. The project is running from 1 June 2011 until 31 May 2015. For further information see <http://www.fp7-myplace.eu/>

the Cold War, any related concerns and prejudices that divided Europe, or hardly any exact life experience in a communist-, fascist- or other authoritative regime. Simultaneously, this generation was raised in the period of the first global economic crisis after the World War II that could objectively support the right-wing extremists' activity.

In the present context of European financial crisis and economic recession, the extreme right-wing political parties are becoming more and more visible. In many European Union member states, right-wing extremist parties achieved a significant support of voters in the 2009 European Parliament elections<sup>2</sup>. They were elected in national parliaments also in those countries where they were not very successful in the past (e.g. Jobbik party in Hungary).

Sociological researches in the Czech Republic (Bartos, F. 2012) and also in the Slovak Republic<sup>3</sup> confirm that a certain small part of young generation is prone to accept radical political solutions offered by minority politics (particularly in case of immigrants as well as the Roma community).

Before 1989, Slovakia was a typical emigration country. Political, social and economic problems were the primary obstacles for increasing the number of immigrants. After Slovakia entered the European Union in 2004 and the foreign investments in industry rose, also Slovakia became the target for economic immigrants from the South-Eastern and Eastern Europe as well as from Asian countries. In this context, it became interesting to see the attitudes of native inhabitants, in particular the young people towards this phenomenon that has been well-known in Western Europe for a long period of time.

The **subject of the research** focused on measuring the rate of ethnic intolerance, racism or xenophobia among the young generation in Slovakia is relevant mainly due to Slovakia's integration into the European Union. The research among young people in Slovakia that was a part of the international project ICCS 2009 helps us to find several answers to this subject.

### **ICCS 2009 Research**

Social-political and pedagogical-educational situation in Slovakia in the year 2009 represents an important context of ICCS 2009 research. It is necessary to emphasise that the consequences of the financial crisis were not obvious at that time; and that, as a result of the social-democratic government policy led by Robert Fico, Slovak society did not have to undergo sparing and restrictive measures yet. These measures were realised by following right-wing-liberal oriented Iveta Radičová's government, elected in 2010.

In this study we focus on the particularly delicate field of social life, the equity of ethnic groups and immigrants. The analysis and interpretation is aimed at those empirical data of ICCS 2009 research<sup>4</sup> that deal with the field of citizenship principles<sup>5</sup>; in which many issues deals with **equity** (fair treatment for all people) and **social cohesion** (fellowship with other people in the whole society).

Our task is to verify the hypothesis that young people adopt the traditional defence mechanisms of national societies against cultural diversity and multiculturalism, at present connected with the process of European integration. We are particularly interested in the social classes from which these young people originate, and in the specific situation on the labour market within which the young people's opinions and attitudes to this field are changing.

### **1. The attitudes to migration within Europe**

New opportunities in freedom of movement within European countries often bring greater concerns than the real economic, cultural and social consequences of this freedom are. As specified in several analyses, "in Slovakia, the theme of migration and immigration had been out of focus of the political elite for many years; and even today we cannot state that it belongs to the primary themes for political discourse. The discussions about migration evolved to a greater extent, when certain large companies had announced the lack of labour force and had started to hire workers from abroad" (Štefančík, 2010, p 19). In contrast with Slovakia, the issues of migration

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.iuventa.sk/files/documents/7\\_vyskummladeze/spravy/davm024/prvovolici-aj-preview-20100126.pdf](http://www.iuventa.sk/files/documents/7_vyskummladeze/spravy/davm024/prvovolici-aj-preview-20100126.pdf) Macháček, L. Slovak Students as First-time Voters in European Parliament Election in 2009 UCM, Trnava 2010, 34 p.

<sup>3</sup> VAŠEČKA, M. (2009). *Postoje verejnosti k cudzincom a zahraničnej migrácii v Slovenskej republike* [online]. [*Attitudes of the Public towards Foreigners and International Migration in the Slovak Republic*] [online]. Bratislava: IOM – Medzinárodná organizácia pre migráciu (International Organization for Migration). Retrieved from <http://www.iom.sk/sk/aktivita/integracia-migrantov/dokumenty?download=22>, accessed 30<sup>th</sup> November 2010. ISBN: 978-80-970307-0-4.

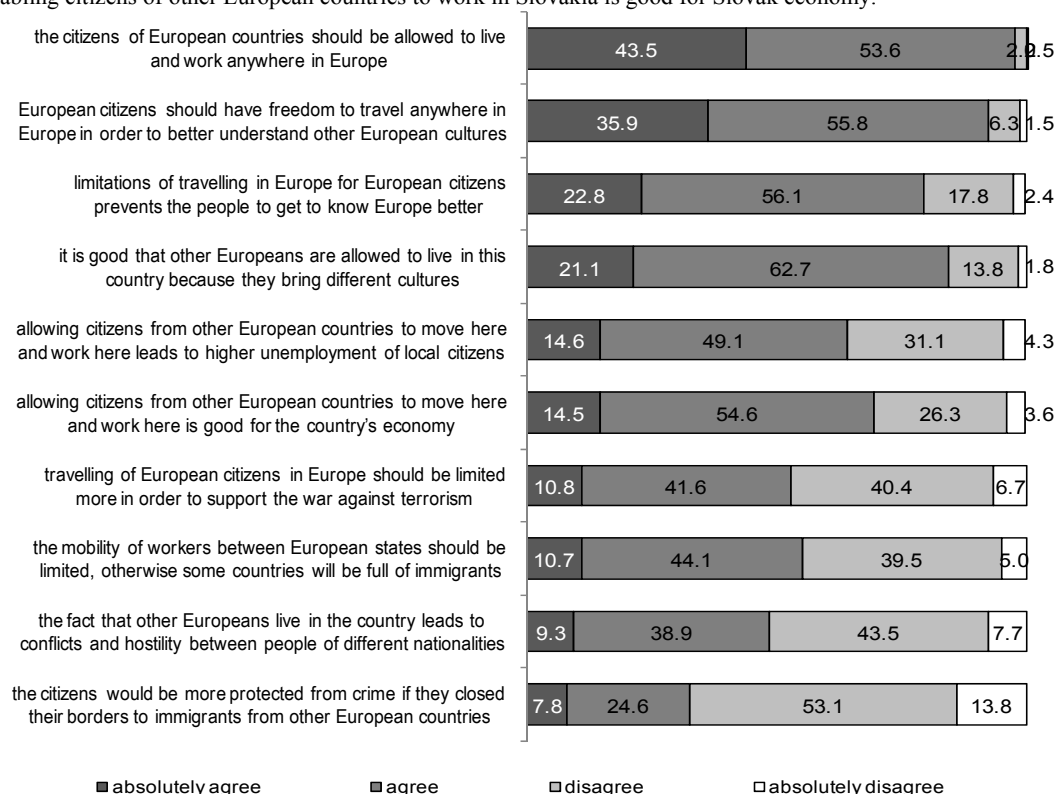
<sup>4</sup> The aim of ICCS 2009 study in Slovakia was to identify knowledge, attitudes and opinions of pupils in eight grade of primary schools and fourth grade of eight-year grammar schools, as well as opinions and attitudes of their teachers and school principals. In Slovakia, 138 schools (of which 12 were grammar schools) participated in the study; overall 2970 pupils and 1984 teachers were tested and questioned. Sampled schools with Slovak language of instruction participated in the main study. The testing itself took place from 18<sup>th</sup> May to 30<sup>th</sup> May 2009.

<sup>5</sup> 38 countries from America, Asia, Oceania and Europe including Slovakia and the Czech Republic participated in the ICCS 2009 (Soukup, 2010). International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2009 was the second study of its kind with participation of the Slovak Republic (1999). The ICCS research identifies the ways of how young people are preparing to take over the roles of citizens in different countries in the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Its aim is to find answers on new global challenges in education of young people on citizenship.

and immigrants are intensively discussed for several decades in Western European countries.

How do Slovak 14-year-old pupils, i.e. our respondents perceive these concerns? What is their attitude to those European citizens who travel throughout Europe or moved to another European country and became its citizens? Our respondents had the opportunity to present their opinions to these and similar issues by providing answers to 10 questions analysed below (see Graph No. 1). Each question had the following answer scale: *absolutely agree*, *agree*, *disagree* and *absolutely disagree*. Some questions, mainly those formulated positively, refer to the possible advantages of travelling across European countries; the other, rather negatively formulated questions deal with closing borders and other limitations of freedom of movement across Europe.

According to the first group of questions, we found that the pupils agree with the statement that citizens of European countries have the possibility to live and work anywhere in Europe, i.e. the majority of pupils (97.1 %) replied to the question with *absolutely agree* or *agree*. Similarly, the majority of pupils (91.7 %) agreed that European citizens should have the possibility to travel anywhere across Europe in order to better understand the culture of other European countries. The pupils expressed similar percentage of agreement (83.8 %) with the statement that it is good to enable the citizens of other European countries to live in Slovakia also because they bring a different culture. We noted the decreasing trend of agreement (78.9 %) with the statement that if the travelling of European citizens across Europe was limited, it would prevent the people from getting to know Europe better. The overall support of pupils lowers to 69.1 % in case of the statement that the opportunity enabling citizens of other European countries to work in Slovakia is good for Slovak economy.



Graph No 1. The attitudes of pupils to migration in Europe (%)

The second group of questions was formulated in the negative sense, individual questions dealt with *limitation of mobility of citizens within Europe*, *closing the state borders* etc. The first question identified the attitudes of pupils to limitation of travelling of European citizens with the aim to support the war against terrorism. More than 52.4 % of pupils accepted this measure as legitimate, while this opinion is mainly shared among pupils from primary schools (overall 55.5 %, whereas only 29.2 % of grammar school pupils share this opinion). The differences in opinions appeared also in relation to the size of municipality where the respondents came from. Most pupils (approx. 60 %) with

the attitude to "limit the freedom of travelling" came from smaller municipalities of maximum 3,000 inhabitants; least pupils sharing this opinion (44 %) came from towns with more than 30,000 inhabitants. Gender of the pupils does not play an important role in this case. It is necessary to mention that in this case, pupils in Czech Republic (43.5 %) and also in Switzerland (46.6 %) expressed more liberal opinions on travelling of European citizens, whereas the opinions of pupils from other EU countries were rather conservative, similar to Slovakia (53.6 %).

Subsequently, the pupils were asked express the level of agreement with the statement that *residence of other European countries' citizens causes conflicts and hostility among people of different nationalities*. Overall 48.2 % of Slovak pupils expressed agreement with this statement (in the Czech Republic even 57 %). There are significant differences in attitudes of grammar schools (34.6 %) and primary schools (50 %) pupils, the difference in percentages representing 14.6 %. The deepest concerns were expressed by the Swiss (60.2 %) – the similar level to the Czech Republic. Other EU countries (46.9 %) and Slovakia are very similar in percentage.

The subject of the next question was the limitation of mobility of workers from one European country to another (54.8 %) of the total number of respondents in Slovakia agreed with the statement that *"if such a limitation is not applied, the countries will be full of immigrants"* (in the Czech Republic, even 67 % agreed). Analogically, these concerns were expressed mainly by primary school pupils (55.9 %), less by grammar school pupils (46.3 %). There were also gender differences in responses to this question. 60.2 % of Slovak boys (72 % of Czech boys) agreed with limitation of workers' mobility in contrast with 44.9 % of Slovak girls (61 % of Czech girls). The leading supporters of workers' mobility limitation were found in Switzerland (68.7 %), mainly among boys (71.6 %).

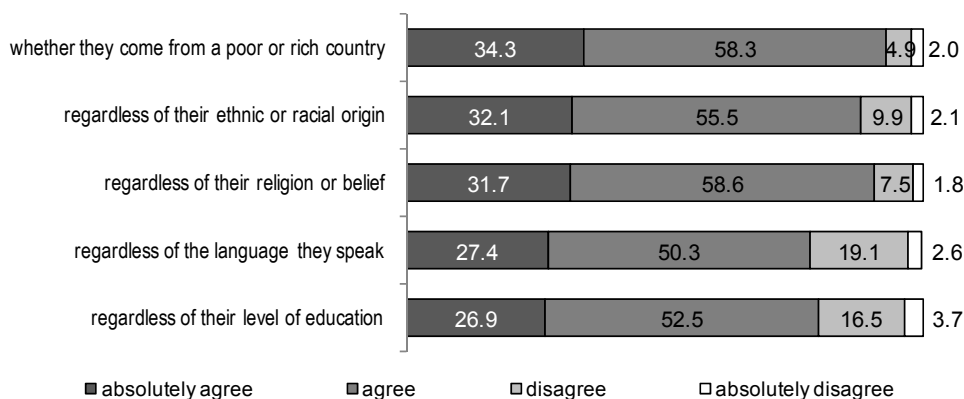
Another possible consequence of immigration of other European countries' citizens to our country might be the increase of unemployment among Slovak citizens. 63.7 % of pupils in Slovakia agree with this statement (70 % in the Czech Republic).

The subject of the last question was closing the borders to immigrants from other European countries *in order to protect Slovak citizens from crime*. This measure would be appreciated only by one third of Slovak pupils (32.4 %).

## **2. The opinions on equality of opportunities for foreigners in the Slovak Republic**

The attitudes of pupils to immigrants with permanent residence in their countries represent an important part of ICCS 2009 European questionnaire. The aim of following group of questions was to find out the extent of Slovak pupils' support of the principles of equality, equity and tolerance in relation to citizens from other European countries living in the Slovak Republic.

According to the data in Graph No. 2, it was shown that the pupils do not consider important whether the immigrants came from a poor or rich country (92,6 %) of pupils in Slovakia (90 % in the Czech Republic) absolutely agreed or agreed with this statement. Other factors of immigration that would be tolerated by the pupils were ethnic or racial origin (87,6 %) and mostly the religion (90.3 %); whereas in the Czech Republic, both cases have the same value of 83 %.



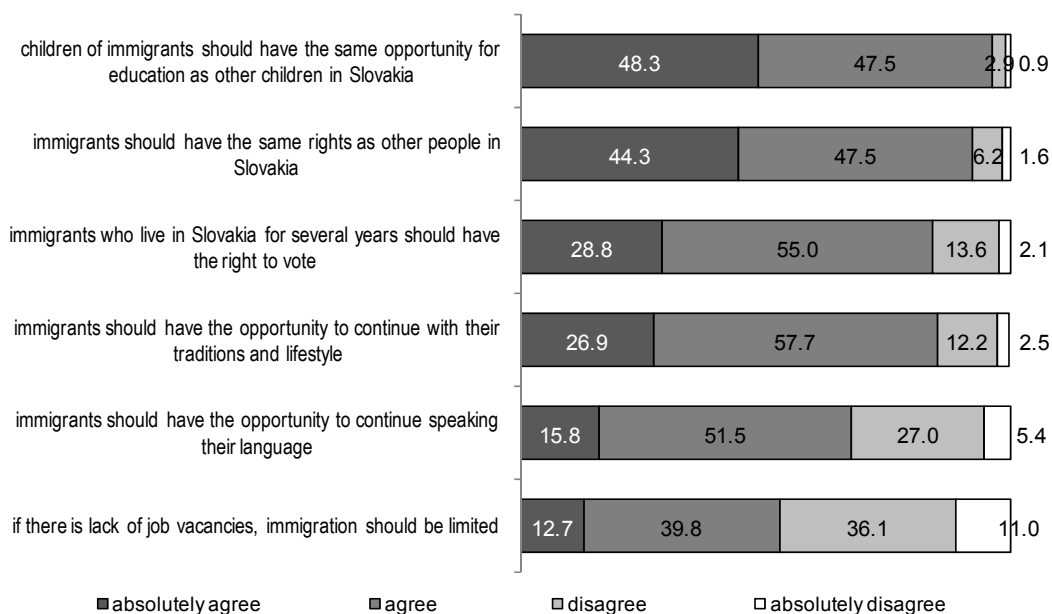
Graph No 2. **The attitudes of pupils to immigration into the Slovak Republic (%)**

Citizens who come from other European countries to Slovakia should have the same opportunities as the Slovaks, regardless of the language they speak. In this case, the tolerance is slightly lower (77.7 %). The level of education has a very similar rate; approximately 79.4 % of pupils consider the achieved level of education of immigrants a relevant factor for equality of opportunities.

Slovak pupils expressed the highest tolerance also to those immigrants who come from poor countries, who had a different religion or racial-ethnic origin. However, the level of education and mostly the proficiency in the national language (approx. 20 %) are important for Slovak pupils in order to provide equal opportunities to immigrants.

### 3. The rights of immigrants

Similarly, the opinions on the *rights of immigrants* were surveyed (see Graph No. 3). Also in this field, the pupils support the equal civil rights of the immigrants, their possibilities to achieve good education, to participate in political life as well as their chance to develop their traditional culture and lifestyle.



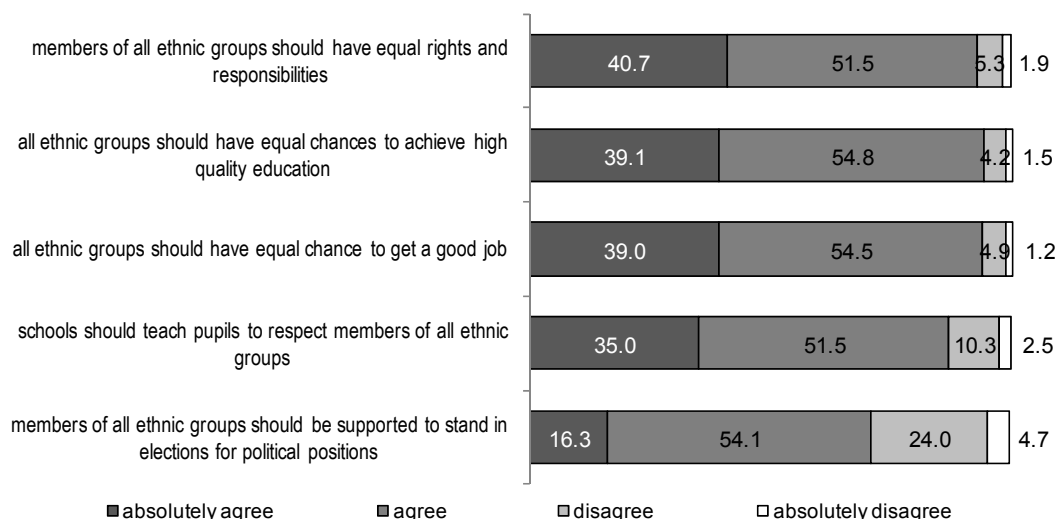
Graph No. 3: **The attitudes to immigrants (%)**

In case of immigrants, universally applicable defence mechanisms of majority are evident when the situation on labour market is deteriorating. A relatively significant group of pupils expressed the opinion that immigration should be limited in case of lack of job opportunities. 12.7 % of pupils in Slovakia definitely agree with this attitude. It is remarkable that this attitude is more common among boys (16.7 %) and less among girls (8.8 %). In comparison with European average, the support of limitation of immigration among Slovak pupils has not reached the level of other European pupils (19.1 %).

The mother tongue of immigrants is a problematic issue within overall tolerance of Slovak pupils. They definitely support immigrants in preserving their native cultures (26.9 %); however, this support generally does not include using their mother tongue (only 15.8 %). Within European context, there is a higher tolerance among pupils from other EU countries (22.9 %); the lowest rate occurs among Czech pupils (12.5 %).

### 4. The attitudes towards ethnic minorities

Similarly, the attitudes of Slovak pupils to the equality of ethnic groups in the field of education, obtaining employment and civil rights and responsibilities were surveyed (see Graph No. 4).



Graph No. 4: **The attitudes towards ethnic minorities (%)**

The results are similar to our results in gender equality. A relatively high support of equality of ethnic groups in obtaining high quality education and also a good job was expressed. In case of equality of ethnic group members when entering politics, the situation is different. There are only slight differences between pupils according to their gender or type of school; however, it is true that support and tolerance of ethnic groups is higher among girls, grammar school pupils and pupils from families with higher socio-economic index.

In international context, the overall results of pupils' agreement are similar especially within Europe. For instance, in contrast with the Slovak Republic (35 %), more pupils from other European countries changed their attitudes from common "agree" to the category "absolutely agree" (43.6 %) in case of the statement "schools should teach pupils to respect members of all ethnic groups". Education of pupils in ethnic tolerance is still an actual topic (Macháček, 2011).

### Conclusions

The ICCS 2009 research confirmed that Slovak pupils expressed very friendly attitudes to Europe and mostly to the European Union (Macháček & Šťava, 2012a), they show interest in the European Union affairs and appreciate the EU's contribution to the development of Slovak society in all related fields. Positive attitudes of Slovak pupils are highest in the issues of the EU and the Eurozone enlargement; the pupils also support common procedure of *European countries in legislative and executive solution of those actual issues such as environment, education and also common European foreign policy*. Slovak pupils were particularly successful in completing the knowledge test on Europe and the European Union, and they significantly exceed the international average (Macháček, 2012).

The aim of our study was to compare and analyse the opinions and attitudes of young people towards migration and immigration as well as towards different cultures of minorities in the situation before and after Slovakia joined the European Union. This is important when taking into account the present process of *solving the economic and financial crisis in the EU, in which we frequently see manifestations of intolerance to those citizens who migrate for work and education within the conditions of free mobility of workers on the EU's labour market*.

The research confirmed that the new opportunities in freedom of movement within European countries often bring greater concerns than the real economic, cultural and social consequences of this freedom are. Nevertheless, the research results also proved that a certain small part of young people in Slovakia would be willing, for instance, to support temporary limitation of travelling of European citizens if its aim was to strengthen the war against terrorism. They also express the opinion that *the residence of other European countries' citizens in Slovakia rouses conflicts and hostility among people of different nationalities*. However, some of young people also expressed the opinion that *the consequence of movement of other European countries' citizens to our country might be the increase of unemployment among Slovak citizens*. 63.7 % of pupils in Slovakia agree with this statement (in the Czech Republic no less than 70 %).

If it concerns the tolerance of young people towards different minorities, we state that our pupils are not always able to distinguish between "ethnic minority", "economic immigrants" and "political asylum seekers". Slovak pupils expressed highest tolerance to those immigrants who have different religious views or racial-ethnic origin. On the other hand, young people have their own ideas about the rights and responsibilities of immigrants. According to them, mainly the proficiency in the national language is an important precondition for providing the equal opportunities to immigrants and asylum seekers, and they expect that the immigrants will adapt their lifestyle to the majority and simultaneously will learn the national language. When the situation on the labour market is deteriorating, universally applicable defence mechanisms of majority against the immigrants are evident. A relatively significant group of pupils, generally coming from less educated families, smaller municipalities and outermost regions share opinion that *immigration should be limited in case of lack of job vacancies*.

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