

## **EDUCATION ON TOLERANCE DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY**

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**Abstract.** The article presents the most important results of a study, based on a concrete practice - an international project, titled “Teaching Tolerance”. This project has been carried out by partner institutions from Germany, Bulgaria, Turkey and some other countries as a part of the biggest European Community “Lifelong Learning (LLL) Programme”. The project ended successfully in 2008 but the LLL program is providing wide facilities for development of future teaching tolerance projects. From this aspect, the experience which was conducted will be beneficial for universities, schools, and other educational and cultural organizations which can develop projects or participate as partners in them.

*Keywords:* tolerance, teaching tolerance, intercultural education, international partnership, Lifelong Learning Programme

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### **Introduction**

Cultivation of the tolerance through educating and training is a contemporary and universal requirement and necessity with its widest

understanding. The fulfillment of this need is also an actual priority for the educational systems in European Union in which participate different nations, languages and cultures. The European community is required to improve this specific kind of education of people from different ages with the acceptance of values and norms of a new culture of tolerance. The updated Lisbon strategy of EU<sup>1)</sup> refers to especially the social cohesion and directs to the systematic and contiguous policy in this direction, to acceptance of common European dimensions and values, including also the culture of tolerance. Therefore, important role will play the education of people from all ages – i.e., lifelong learning. In accordance with this concrete precautions are undertaken. Not coincidentally, lifelong learning is already the biggest active educational program in Europe. The program could be the important instrument to resolve the current and significant problems of society and education, incl. via education and training on tolerance.<sup>2)</sup>

Development of education on tolerance through projects by Lifelong Learning Program is a problem with theoretical and practical aspects which are still not researched and worked out in necessary level. The report concerns some of these aspects presenting the results of the conducted research on the problem. The research is based on a concrete practice - an international partnership project, titled “Teaching Tolerance” from the Lifelong Learning Programme. This project has been carried out by partner institutions from Germany, Bulgaria, Turkey and some other countries and ended successfully in 2008. It provided the authors with good facilities for observation, inquiry researches, analysis of documents, practices and results, as well as derivation and summarizing conclusions and recommendations, concerns with development of teaching tolerance through possible future projects.

The purpose of the study was to shed light on the opportunities for development of training on tolerance by means of affiliated projects in accordance with the Lifelong Learning Programme.

The authors determined the following main tasks in accordance with the set goal: (i) to study the fundamental nature of education on tolerance in the context of the intercultural education and the lifelong learning; (ii) to analyze and summarize the practical experience of the implemented educational and pedagogic activities in connection with the “Teaching Tolerance Project”; (iii) to formulate basic conclusions and recommendations for future projects and initiatives, as well as for subsequent studies on the problem. The set purpose and tasks were completely achieved and in the context of this report will be presented some of the major results related to the perspective development of the actual and essential problem of development of training on tolerance.

### **1. The Intercultural education as a lifelong learning process**

Jean Monnet - regarded by many as a chief architect of the contemporary European unity, expressed the thought, that if this union had to be created now, he would start its construction with priority integration processes in the field of the education. The reasons are indisputable – the proper education serves as a powerful factor for the social-economic development and the employment, as well as for successful resolution of the problems of the civil society, the ecology, the social and cultural cohesion, etc. That is why the development of the education and more specifically - of the intercultural education - is amongst the priorities in the policy of the European Commission.

The intercultural education has many forms of appearance and various dimensions. Its variety of manifestation is reflected by the multitude of terms and definitions which attempt to embrace and express its essential characteristics - multicultural education, pluricultural education, transcultural education, etc. Usually, in connection with the expression of nature of the intercultural education, it represents education, which does not suppress the

cultural societies, allows them to maintain and extend their distinctive character, contributes for their successful integration, and is based on the common human values. There are some distinctions – for example: between multicultural (e.g., directed toward affirmation of the cultural pluralism) and intercultural (directed toward the dialogue, the mutual understanding, the respect toward the dissimilarities) education, training and upbringing.<sup>3)</sup>

In our opinion, the term „intercultural education” perfectly suits for designation of the phenomenon, whose essence is expressed by overcoming (by means of training and education to a wide extent) the limitations and achieving mutual social sensitivity, interactivity and synergy between different cultures. By its nature, the intercultural education represents also denial of opposite to its philosophy and still widely adopted (regrettably) policies and social practices of apartheid, segregation and assimilation. The central role in it plays the development of the tolerance as a form not only for parallel peaceful coexistence, but also for interaction of the cultures, serving as joint creators of the common future (Nomura, 2002).

Until mid-nineties of the last century, the European educational priority was given to improvements in the education of each new generation young people as well to measures for development of educational processes for the adults. The goal of the European Commission was to achieve an educational process (including intercultural aspects), which continues throughout the active, working period of life – by means of the so-called “permanent education” (for adults).

Since 1996, this goal was modified by the conducted campaign “European year of Lifelong Learning”. The campaign made popular a new paradigm for development of the education during XXI century, while the European Commission, UNESCO, the organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and other international organizations started active development of this new conceptual vision for the education.

Resulting from their activity was stimulated the implementation of reforms in the Member States and the countries – partners of the European Union, intended the development of pan-European Lifelong Learning Area.

Being a system for holistic, intercultural education, the Lifelong Learning shall comprise completely diverse educational processes which at present take place to certain extent in accordance with the individual capabilities, when and where this is necessary for the people and as much as the specific conditions of their life permit. However, these processes are still not organized in a complete frame, capable to provide purposefulness, continuity, sequencing and other attributes of consistency. Namely this, as well as complete transparency and equality of the formal, the non-formal and the informal education shall be provided by the system for Lifelong learning. (Катански, 2005).

It follows, that the new dimensions of the intercultural education are in connection with the formal, the non-formal and the informal learning in all domains of the human activity, which continues life long. Within its contemporary dimensions, the intercultural education creates opportunities for cultivation of the human capabilities and interactions between other people for the purpose of affirmation of the common human values. (Колева, 2007). Being holistic, intercultural education, the Lifelong Learning is intended for humanization of the human interactions and the development of tolerance. (Nomura, 2002).

The development of Lifelong Learning requires specific actions as well – European programs, intended to direct the educational reforms to the proper direction. That is why, by virtue of Decision 1720/2006 of European Parliament from the beginning of 2007, the European Union introduced its newest educational programme „Lifelong Learning” with a budget, amounting to 6.970 billion EURO, which is opened for the 27 member states of the European Union, including Bulgaria, as well for Norway, Iceland,

Lichtenstein and Turkey. It replaced the existing programme „Socrates” in the form of a unifying framework of the already established programs „Comenius”, „Erasmus”, „Leonardo da Vinci” and “Grundwig”, etc.

Near the end of 2006, the largest so far European educational programme was presented during special conference in Sofia. Being a new member of the European Union since 2007, January, 1<sup>st</sup>, Bulgaria joined to its application and extended the partnership participation in the European process for creation of the new education of XXI century – the Lifelong Learning. This partnership created new conditions and opportunities for development and intercultural education in the country, based on its new specific types, including education and training on tolerance.

## **2. The essential characteristics of training on tolerance**

Our participation in the Lifelong Learning Programme with the project „Teaching Tolerance” was related to conducting intercultural education, so it had emphasized supra-national character. The educational activities, which we united for the purposes of the project, were developed in international and European scale, within the context of the globalization and the active cohesion policy of the European Union. In this respect, the implemented training in tolerance can be determined as a specific type of intercultural education, which possesses its own, still not completely studied, nature. Namely this was chosen by the authors of the report to serve as main subject of the study. Its clarification as early as during the preparatory phase of the project was important in light of the creation of a methodological vision for the organization and the implementation of the training.

The supposition of the authors, which was confirmed during the process of the study, was based on the notion, that in its essence “Teaching Tolerance”, even in cases, when it is not related to educational establishments,

represents not only part of the inherent formal education, but also integrates within mainly informal and non-formal training activity.

In accordance with its essential characteristics, training on tolerance (carried out in accordance with projects in connection with the Lifelong Learning Programme), is of mixed type – both non-formal and informal. It is institutionalized to a certain extent, but at the same time, it is also not isolated (standalone), because it is carried out in the form of self-training within the process of other activities, though sometimes this is not even recognized. It is intended to satisfy the needs and the interests of the trainees, created and developed during the process of their activity in the different domains of life. “Teaching Tolerance” is not an isolated, organized and purposeful process. In the form of learning during the process of other activities (informal education), it allows additional development, enhancement and perfecting of the knowledge, the skills and the experience of the people, acquired by means of the formal and the non-formal training. In many cases, new knowledge is acquired, the preparation in different fields is enhanced and its practical implementation is facilitated (Katansky, 2008).

In spite of the fact that this specific project was intended for pupils, in practice in the training were involved people of different age, quite often they interchanged their places as trainees and tutors. In order to develop their own competence in the field of the tolerant thinking, attitude and action, these people had to acquire basic factual knowledge, to understand the facts and the ideas within the context of the conceptual framework, to organize their knowledge so that its retrieval is facilitated, in the form of skills for practical application in a close, as well in a context, which differs from their own experience. Substantially and methodologically, “Teaching tolerance” was organized around key notions and mastering of skills for the purpose of application in a concrete, close to the real life for successful integration in the multicultural environment. For the training organization and accomplishment

under the conditions of the project, the vision of the socio-constructivism, presented in its most synthesized form, the basic constructivist notions are as follows: (a) The learning, irrespectively of the domain, where it occurs and takes place (cognitive, affective, inter-personal or psycho-motor), includes process of individual transformation. The people learn by means of “embedding/integration” of the new knowledge into already existing cognitive structures (Honebein et al., 1993); (b) Knowledge and its meaning are not fixed in advance; they are rather constructed by the individual by means of his/her experience in a practical context. The learning and the context of the learning represent phenomena, which are in close mutual relationship (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). The learning represents “creation of own meaning”. All of us derive meaning and relate this new experience to experience, which has been already acquired and reasoned. The social interactions serve not only as a supporting component, but also as an essential component in the cognitive development (Duffy & Cunningham, 1996); (c) The learning is always dialogic, irrespectively whether it is carried out directly (subject to subject), or indirectly – by means of a product, created by other subject. (Newman et al., 1989).

The above ideas and notions about the nature of the learning were embedded in the foundation of our vision for practical organization and implementation of the training. In accordance with it, the trainees are included in the situations of “Teaching Tolerance”, based on their preliminary knowledge. The task of the instructors is to identify such knowledge and to support the process of augmentation of new experience. This represents a process, carried out by the trainees themselves, by means of implementing of variety of actions and interactions. The learning in the process of the activity shall gradually attain an autonomous character, upgrading to self-training, which possesses the attributes of the non-formal and the informal education.



The main idea during our efforts for the implementation of the Project can be formulated as development of versatile skill – the skill to learn how to live together, to be united in the diversity, to accept the dissimilarity, e.g. – to be tolerant. Analyzing and summarizing the experience after this project, we would like to stress, that namely the tolerance evolves into key social skill of XXI century, while “Teaching Tolerance” for the people of all ages is very essential component also in the system of lifelong learning.

### **3. Analysis of the project experience and results**

The Project „Teaching Tolerance” was officially assessed by the authorized national agencies as one of the successful projects of the European “Lifelong Learning Programme”. The Project was successful not only because it was organized and conducted in accordance with the criteria and the requirements of the programme, but also it had an innovative characteristic and created a model of good practice, which must be studied, popularized and disseminated.

An important aspect emerging from the experience of the project was the selection of adequate methods and means for achievement of the goal and the tasks. It was expected, that the implementation of the above project can bring successful answer to the main question: *How to teach and learn tolerance?* In order to resolve this question, the project stressed on the development of the creative potential of the pupils as well as on the innovations in the work of the instructors. Some leading models, which have proven pedagogic efficiency, were used in the global educational practice, such as: (1) *Project-based training* - The complete design of the project took into consideration this exceptionally reliable model for learning of content, with integrative character. Such projects require synthesis of notions and theories from different training disciplines, or assume application of knowledge in such disciplines in an integral practical context. The project

model of the training was connected with more long-lasting training activities, which also had more long-lasting results, while integrating the educational content with problems from the real life, thus providing strong motivation for the trainees, allowing them to follow their own interests and to demonstrate their abilities. The application of the model shifted the balance from the tutor to the pupil, thus qualitatively changing the traditional roles for the training in school. In the created by this model specific situation, the educational content was not offered in “prepared” by the tutor, and the pupils were working individually with the information, while discussing the problems and checking the truthfulness of their own knowledge, conclusions and hypotheses, creating joint strategies etc. In the process of work, developed were communicative and team work skills, which are very important for the contemporary life. At the same time, by means of successful team work during the implementation of the project, conditions were created also for drawing out of the individual contribution – depending of their knowledge, skills and capabilities, each of the participants contributed for achieving of the mission of the project; (2) *Collaborative and cooperative learning* – one of the contemporary models of training, based on solid theoretical foundations, resulting from enhanced practical studies. The main characteristics of this model are connected with clear feeling for positive interdependency and assistance, perceived personal responsibility in regard to the implementation of the group goals, continuous use of relevant skills, which are between persons and are typical for work in small teams, permanent recognition of the process of interaction from the group (reflection), with the purpose of improving of the teamwork efficiency. These characteristics of the model became apparent to full extent during the implementation of the project; (3) *Experiential learning* - model with set of instructive, functional and organizational modifications. The learning, based also on the experience, can be defined as a process, where the trainee reflects on his/her own experience (cognitive, emotional, practical, experimental), and

based on this synthesizes new knowledge. The application of the model in the work on the project has stimulated the pupils to attain new knowledge based on their own experience, as well to apply them in new situations; (4) In accordance with the goals, the environmental conditions, the age and the experience of the participants and also other models of training and educational work were used. For example, in close relation to the collaborative and cooperative learning, used was the problem-solving method, which caused strong activation amongst the pupils. Also, brain-storming was used in connection with tasks, related to representation of the features of different societies and cultures, playing roles, etc. All these models were applied reasonably and in correspondence with the organization and the implementation of “Teaching Tolerance”, which had motivating effect on the trainees, as well on the tutors.

The balanced diversity of models contributed for achievement of quality results as following: (i) “Teaching Tolerance” was integrated successfully in the system of school and out-of-school activities of all participants in the project - France, Germany, Poland, Turkey and Bulgaria. In this aspect, the efforts of the participating schools, of the tutors, of the trainees and their families must be noted too. The state and the local authorities also have played an important role, the same is valid for the mass media in all countries, which cooperated and supported the project, understanding the importance of these activities for the development of tolerance, interaction and cooperation of the multicultural and the mixed ethnical societies; (ii) The main team of 24 experts trained over 200 tutors in skills for work in multicultural environment. They used the new skills in out-of-school activities for “Teaching Tolerance”, encompassing over 10 000 their pupils. Particular attention was devoted to work with pupils and their parents of Romany origin, as well with families in unfavorable position, in order to encourage their participation in education; (iii) especially for the purpose, club for pupils was

created, which had particular essential importance for the successful implementation of the project, leading to very good results. The trainees demonstrated strong desire to participate in this activity, which included explaining of the purpose of the project and its social mission, acquiring and dissemination (via website and using other channels) of additional information to all interested persons, conducting of thematic meetings with suitable official guests, charity activities for homes for elderly people, orphanages, etc.; (iv) Separate organized team investigated the national customs, the religious and the national holidays, collected suitable textual, photographic and other materials related to the tolerance, and based on the above, an artistically- created international calendar was prepared. This joint product was distributed to many schools on the territory of Bulgaria and in the remaining countries in accordance with the project, in this way they become aware of our work and some of them started their own activities in accordance with the training in tolerance; (v) The partnership appeared as a substantial factor for forming and the development of numerous and various knowledge, skills and competency, which is extremely important for the young people. In this context, we can mention the enriched knowledge about the cultures, the improved social skills and competence for training and the creative activity in a multicultural environment. By visits to various countries, the young people were involved in intercultural dialogues and practices of interaction between cultures, thus they attained self confidence and motivation for their further personal development; (vi) The project contributed for creation of interdisciplinary connections for teaching history, geography, literature, philosophy, psychology, artistic drawing, information technologies and English language.<sup>4)</sup> This connection between the different disciplines was useful for the tutors, who exchanged experience and knowledge, recognized the importance of all training disciplines in such context. As a whole, the participation in the project encouraged the tutors to perfect their skills and to

experiment, to seek and discover new opportunities for professional development.

#### **4. Remarks on the tolerance questionnaires**

The questionnaire on tolerance that was prepared during the study (see appendix) showed the differences of the students and their diversities. The students were introduced with the results at their own school as well as with the results of five partner schools which were presented in the project meeting. It was interesting when there were coincidences of the same ideas from different countries and cultures. The questionnaire showed that the pupils think optimistic for the future. The pupils who answered the questionnaire were from the age span of 12 to 17.

According to the results of the questionnaire on tolerance, 80-95 % of the students understand the tolerance as “accepting people as they are”. Many of the students from Bulgaria and Poland believe that they live in intolerant society; on the other hand, the ones from France, Germany and Turkey believe that they live in a tolerant society. This conclusion can be drawn by analyzing the second graph where we can see the differences in these countries.

To the question “Do you think it is possible to have a close friendship with a person of a different religion?” most of the partners answered “Of course”. The students from Turkey responded as “Yes, but not without difficulty”. The same results can be seen in the responds to the question “Do you think it is possible to have a close friendship with a person of different culture?” This similarity shows that how related and close are the “religion” and “culture”.

The answers to the question “What do you consider to be an obstacle to tolerance?” from Bulgarian students are “religion, culture, social statue and education”, Polish students: “religion and culture”, Turkish students: close results, but language and age are considered as low level obstacle, French

students: the highest level obstacle is education followed by religion and social status.

The question “Do you believe that religion affects people’s tolerance?” is answered as “sometimes” by many of the children.

Most of the students responded to the seventh question as they believe that tolerance is acquired first in the street, than at school.

“Where would you like to see more tolerance?” – The top results are “in the street” and “at school”. 63% of German students pointed out that they want to see more tolerance also in their families.

In the final graph, 40 % of Bulgarian and Polish students think that tomorrow’s world will be “more tolerant”, 55 % of Turkish students think that it will be “less tolerant” where the other partners’ results are less than 30%, about 35% of Bulgarian, Polish, French and German students believe that tomorrow’s world will be “the same”, whereas Turkish students’ results are less than 20%.

These results show that many of the students think positive for the future. The different answers manifest the diversities of the ideas and thoughts of the students. Moreover, these results indicate that despite the differences, the students are ready to work, to study, to share in tolerance. They are ready to prevent possible problems and expect to see the tolerant atmosphere in all sectors of society.

## **5. Conclusions and comments**

The conducted study on the problem for the development of “Teaching Tolerance”, based on use of projects in accordance with the European programme „Lifelong Learning”, has achieved its goals and tasks. The obtained results provide for the following more important conclusions and comments:

a) In its essence, “Teaching Tolerance” represents a specific didactical phenomenon, which even in the conditions of a school system features characteristics that are typical for the non-formal and the informal education. It represents training with inter-cultural character, which in practice is carried out during process of various activities within the entire range of the life, thus concerning all human ages. In this aspect, the contemporary “Teaching tolerance” must be considered as component of Lifelong learning, being connected to its goals and principles.

b) The conducted studies by means of questionnaires on the subject of the training – the tolerance, exhibited a nationally conditioned variety of the ideas and the thoughts of the trainees. Apart from this, these results have shown that in spite of the objectively existing differences in the notions regarding the tolerance of the representatives of different cultures, there is a common optimism about the future, as well an explicit desire of the questioned persons to be instructed in tolerance and to live under the conditions of shared tolerance.

c) During the process of the study it was proven that after the assumption, that the tolerance can be learned, it can be also successfully taught, including in training establishments. However, the experience after the project revealed, that it is necessary to use untraditional approaches and models of teaching and training. In addition to this, it is not necessary to introduce new standalone training discipline in the schools, the colleges and the universities. It seems far more rational to embody the training content in some suitable training disciplines, such as history, geography, ethics, language training and similar, as well in the system of out-of-class and out-of-school work. Under these conditions, “Teaching tolerance” shall not be related to offering of so-called “ready-made knowledge and skill“, but rather to the logistics and management of their standalone activity during acquiring of knowledge, skills and intercultural competency.

d) The role of the tutors for the successful implementation of international collective projects and achieving their goals has considerable importance. This role exceeds the merely instructing functions of the tutors, and includes moderation, logistics, and consultations during the standalone (individual or teamwork) work of the trainees, which is connected with manifestations of creative art, with various forms of art, culture, sport, etc. In order to perform successfully, the tutors must possess extensive basic skills, such as knowledge of foreign languages, mastering of the new information and communications technologies, skills for work in a team, they should be acquainted with the intercultural education, and they must possess personal qualities, in order to serve as positive example for the trainees.

e) Under the contemporary social and economic conditions, the development of “Teaching Tolerance” shall depend on the development and the accomplishment of successful projects, as well as the inclusion of more trainees and tutors in educational mobility and international partnership. The implemented project is an example for the wide opportunities for development of “Teaching Tolerance”, embedded in the contemporary European programme «Lifelong learning». The success of the project and the existing considerable interest, not only in the member states, serve as an indication for the need for such projects, as well for enhancement of the educational dialogue between the cultures. Such projects should embrace more countries in the Balkans, following the lead of Bulgaria and Turkey. For this purpose, it is necessary to develop the administrative capacity of our educational establishments and our readiness for joint preparation and implementation of subsequent successful initiatives.

#### NOTES

1. [http://ec.europa.eu/growthandjobs/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/growthandjobs/index_en.htm)



2. Two of the purposes of the program outline concretely their role for development of European cultural identity, communication between the cultures, tolerance and respect to other cultures.
3. *Intercultural education in Bulgaria – ideal and reality*, Association Access, Sofia, 1999
4. Simultaneously the project gave possibility to be practised also the official languages of EU – English, French and German, as well as the neighbour languages (Bulgarian and Turkish), which coincides completely also with the aims of the official policy of European commission in this field – every European citizen to have a good command of not only maternal language but also two languages of the community, incl. the language of the neighbours.

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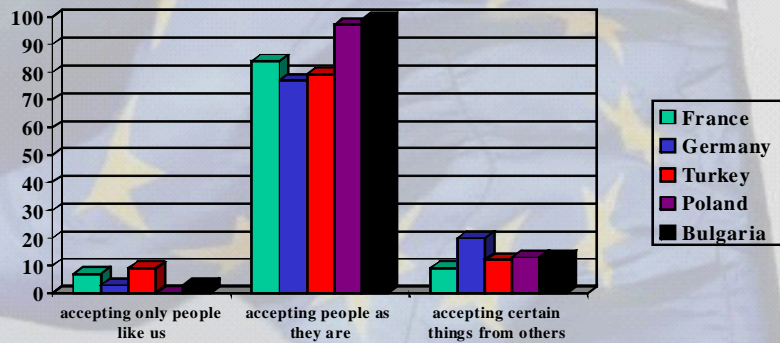
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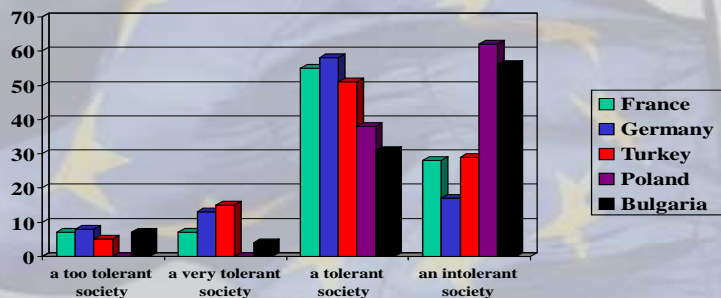
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APPENDIX: Students' answers of the questionnaire of the Project  
 "Teaching Tolerance"

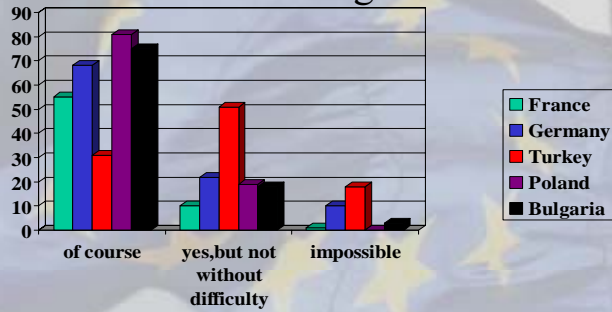
## 1. What do you understand by the word tolerance?



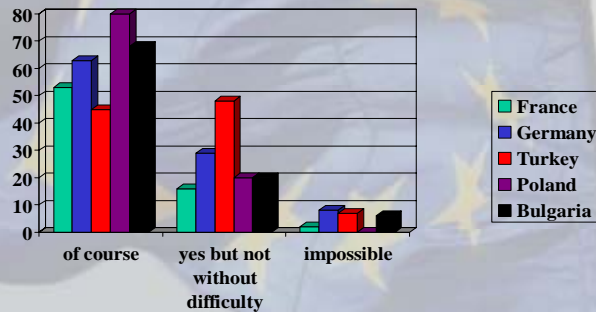
## 2. Do you believe that you live in:



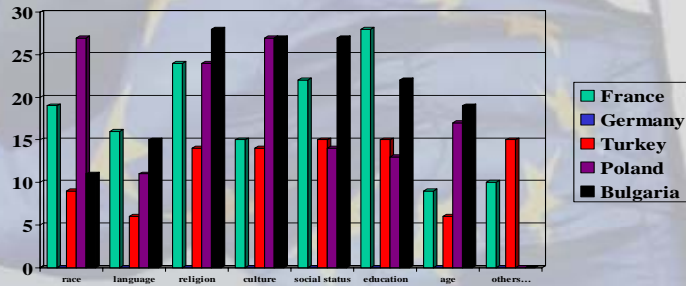
3. Do you think it is possible to have a close friendship with a person of a different religion?



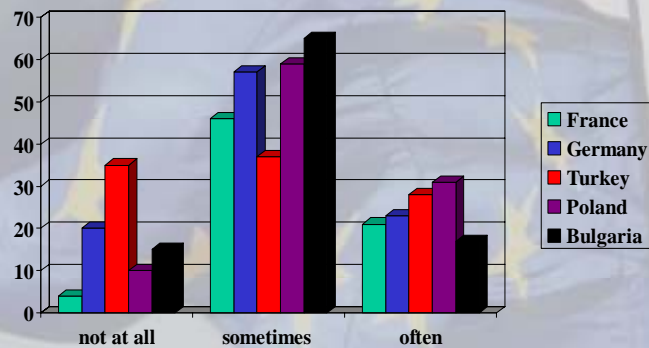
4. Do you think it is possible to have a close friendship with a person of different culture?



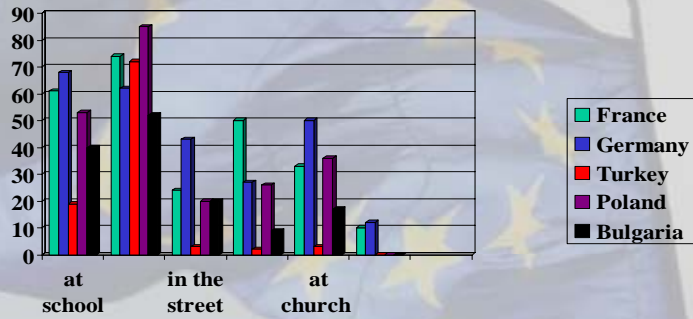
## 5. What do you consider to be an obstacle to tolerance?



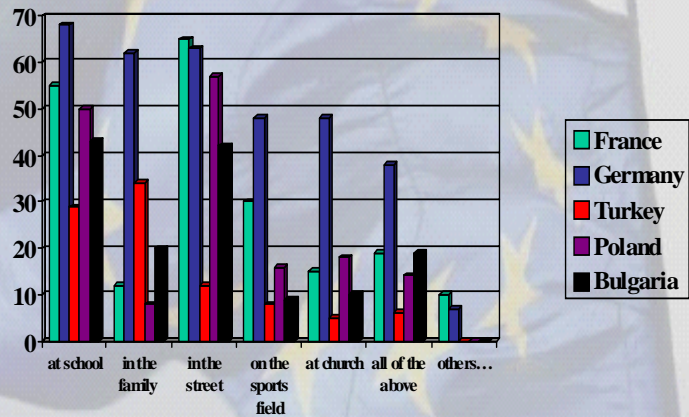
## 6. Do you believe that religion affects people's tolerance?



## 7. Do you believe that tolerance is acquired:



## 8. Where would you like to see more tolerance?



## 9. I think that tomorrow's world will be:

