

**CEE** National identity  
in CEE countries



# Design of Educational Seminars: National Identity and Political Parties

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# Introduction

This paper connects political and educational science together to show what kind of impact political communication has on young generation in the field of national identity. The paper should serve as a starting point for broader discussion on the role of political parties among the young generation and its ability to receive political communication. The reason why it is the topic of national identity that is used for this purpose is quite evident – national identity is very often emotionally charged when used in the public arena. Considering the role of political parties in the current political and societal discourse one may undoubtedly observe the rise of national identity related issues in both numbers, as well as their relevance.

Therefore, the paper offers a pilot material to demonstrate how these topics may be used as an educational material for high schools. The material is based on research of political parties in the field of national identity undertaken in the V4 countries and Germany, as well as on practical experience gained in high schools both in the Czech Republic and Germany. It is important to mention that we are aware of the limited number of seminars that have taken place; more are undoubtedly needed to achieve a more complete verification of the proposed design.

Although two country-specific contexts are incorporated (namely that of the Czech Republic and Germany), the Czech context is targeted more extensively. The reason is the following: the main target of the project was the situation in the Czech Republic; the discussion about civic education in Germany is contrary to the state of affairs in the Czech Republic and other V4 countries well developed. Nevertheless, political discussion about national identity and the role of national identity within politics, still, is hidden into post-WWII heritage. Therefore, the pilot seminars were a valuable experience in having provided insight into how the young generation perceives the issues related to national identity, as defined by the research, without stressing these issues in political discussions.

The paper consists of the following parts: the first part defines the key terms the paper operates with (how national identity is understood, and the framework for political communication); the second part briefly introduces the questions that have to be asked while speaking about relations between the young generation and political parties; the third part introduces the structure of educational seminars as tested between April and June 2014. The last part summarizes the content dimension and compares the Czech and German workshops. In addition to this, the paper provides a selection of the most interesting outputs from a survey launched among participating students.

For a more insightful understanding, readers are welcome to consult country-specific analyses that are uploaded to the project web page [ceidentity.eu](http://ceidentity.eu) and for further information also use the data as well as blog/commentaries available on the web page.

## I) Assumptions:

National identity (among other collective identities people share) understood as a sense of belonging to one state or to one nation, a feeling one shares with a group of people, regardless of one's citizenship status, has been a complex phenomenon, changing over time. In spite of its ambivalences, however, the assumption we share is that it is not an inborn trait and that a person's national identity results also from the presence of elements from the „common points“ in people's daily lives: national symbols, language, national colours, the nation's history etc. (see i.e. Billing 1995). In this project, special emphasis is put on political parties as entities that exploit these „common points“ in order to clarify and/or strengthen their political message and therefore influence both the stances and behaviours of potential electorates. The exploitation of national-identity-shaping-issues frequently becomes a distinguishing mark for parties and political milieus. The exploitation itself is in this project perceived simply as a communication procedure that has been chosen by politicians to reach their target groups.

Framework of political communication:

The starting point for the analysis is Communication Model provided by J. Dan Rothwell, which distinguishes between eight terms of communication:

- 1) Noise; interference with effective transmission and reception of a message
- 2) Sender; the initiator and encoder of a message
- 3) Receiver; the one that receives the message (the listener) and the decoder of a message
- 4) Decoder; translates the senders' spoken idea/message into something the receiver understands by using their knowledge of language from personal experience.
- 5) Encoder; translating and putting the idea into spoken language while putting their own meaning into the word/messages
- 6) Channel; the medium through which the message travels such as through oral communication (radio, television, phone, in person) or written communication (letters, email, text messages)
- 7) Feedback; the receivers' verbal and nonverbal responses to a message such as a nod for understanding (nonverbal), a raised eyebrow for being confused (nonverbal), or asking a question to clarify the message (verbal)
- 8) Message; the verbal and nonverbal components of language that are sent to the receiver by the sender which conveys an idea (Rothwell 2010).

All eight terms are necessary elements of communication procedures – as well as the control over those eight spheres – is important for the effectiveness of the communication. In the context of our project the unit object of analysis is the message (components of the language that convey the idea). Focusing on the message element in political communication that influence the collective (national) identity author aims to explore mostly inconsistencies, disagreements, oppositions – elements that fuel public discussions and strongly shape the various political cleavages.

## Nationalism, National Identity

The term nationalism covers a wide scope of definitions that focus mostly on the national-building processes. The current discussion on use of the term nationalism focuses on its critical use as a societal and scientific issue. However, it is difficult to distinguish between nationalism and national identity, and their use in the political process (e.g. in the case of election). Therefore, one can understand the term national identity as a political tool that represents a specific environment of the territory. The strength of using national identity depends on the specific national environment (e.g. national minorities, historical experience), external influences or economic conditions. To analyse parties' national identity perception, one can explore policy fields and various dimensions of public opinion framing: how political parties use national identity-related issues; how and if they aim to enhance the feeling of unity, if unity is their goal at all; whether they evoke a sense of existential threat and danger, whether they use national mythology to create a feeling of unity; whether and how they use national symbols, including national heroes, how they develop a national myth and a clear understanding of the nation's borders; if they're trying to develop national culture and traditions that are vigilant towards external influences; whether the state is to serve to all of its citizens and whether the various cultures are perceived as equal with no declared support for any specific one; as well as how cultural and ethnic diversity within society and cooperation with other nations is perceived.<sup>1</sup>

## Political Parties and Young Generation

In terms of research, the relationship between political parties and the young generation in the Czech Republic, as well as the parties' communication towards the youth, are largely unexplored issues. Perceptions of national identity and other related topics (such as the question of ethnic minorities, attitudes towards history, traditions and customs, approach to European integration, etc.) are largely drawn on by political parties, a phenomenon, which is related to the emergence of new political entities on the Czech political scene. With regard to the political parties' reluctance to actively and constructively engage with certain thorny social issues, the possibility for manipulative actions towards the youth on part of the political parties is increasingly conceivable. The changing political and social environment in the Czech Republic presents a threat of potential manipulative actions by the political parties. The lack of coherent research into the young generation's attitudes

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<sup>1</sup> For better understanding see <http://www.cceidentity.eu/news/how-understand>

towards issues related to national identity and their perception of the political parties' activity is at the root of an inability to adequately face manipulative forms of communication.

In order to better understand the youth and their attitudes towards issues related to national identity, it is arguably desirable to focus on the following questions:

- 1) How does the young generation perceive the activity of political parties? To what extent are political parties capable of capturing the youth's attention, interest and imagination? Are the parties capable of identifying with the youth?
- 2) What form of communication and what channels do political parties use to attract the young generation?
- 3) What are the youth's attitudes towards national identity and related issues?

To better target such educational seminars, it is important to see and understand the overall macro picture of the real political and social world as well as how young people perceive it. To this we hope we can help by this particular analysis which serves as a basis for the outer look to the problematic by young people. Speaking about youth transitions and their links to nationalism and extremism, there is much sociological, psychological, political science and pedagogical research that has been made and can serve as a basis (Bendit 2012, Biggart-Kovacheva 2006, Billari 2010, Bötticher – Mareš 2013, Dulemba 2010, Edelstein 2003, Kovacheva 2001, Mudde 2007, Pfaff 2009, Pople – Hazekamp 2007, Pyšňáková 2007, Roberts 2009, Tomasi 1995, Turner 1998, Walther 2006, to mention just a few). We have to bear in mind also that the common political scientists picture of the nationalistic parties voters is made up by mostly unemployed young men with lower levels of education, who are often from smaller cities or areas where there are lots of workers with migrant background or of ethnic origin, who can be often easily perceived as “the others” in the sense of national categorizing or stereotyping. However, this problem is not relevant only for men; we can contrast it with a typical profile of youth voting abstainer: a woman under the age of 25; who sees herself as belonging to the lower tiers of society; has only a secondary education; and is either not working or is in manual Employment (Bouza 2014) (if we consider the European parliament election). But also young women can be easily motivated to engage in nationalistic movements or even parties, as can be illustrated on two examples from the Czech Republic: the leader of the Czech National Party in the 2002 – 2009 period was such a young lady and also the Chair of the Worker's Youth organisation was for several years a young girl. We should bear in mind also the fact that young people are not so politically apathetic as it is often presented. Youth participation experts and studies (e.g. EACEA 2013, Norris 2003) stress even more often that young people are just changing the repertoires of their activism from traditional to more creative ways and approaches but are more active than earlier. The resonance of nationalism, national identity and related issues among the youth is thus very relevant and topical.

## Young people and social-psychological aspects of extremism and nationalism

During adolescence, subjective opinions are often perceived as the only truth. High sensitivity and the effort to remain distant and reserved with regard to the stereotypically perceived world of adults. Actions are often short-circuit and priority is often given to radical approaches of problem-solving (Novosad 2010). The tendency to get inspired by easily understandable ideologies, religions, group opinions and pressures should be understood as partly natural to young people. Young people often perceive the world very narrowly and idealistically; the clash with the reality could thus be very influential on the opinion- and value-building of young people as well as on their further actions which could lead toward socially and politically extreme behaviours. Intelligence, self-confidence, empathy, self-efficacy and other psychological aspects can step in the game. Unintended consequences of conduct and thinking are often present as well and could originate also in the inner conviction that own opinion and actions fight for the good of the society, social group, nation, state, own culture, language... The perception of real social values, as respect toward the differences and different life situations among people, is still in the process of developing in adolescents. Being surrounded and receiving support from the family as well as gaining the social group recognition are very important in dealing with the simplified way of adolescent thinking and help young people build their self-confidence and certain life perspective. Without such support the adolescents often lean toward different subcultures and unhealthy way of spending free time. Such alienation from the major social values based on the individual rights of humans could lead to value changes in the character of adolescents. Also the need to deal with own social/national group history, historical subjective injustices could be very easily manipulated in such simplified environments (Šerek, Petrovičová 2012).

## II) Design of educational seminars

On the basis of this initial introduction, a semi-structured group discussion about six selected statements of Czech politicians from across all parliamentary parties was conducted. In the course of the discussions, the students' task was to reformulate the statement in their own words, match it with one of the political parties, take a unified stand on the statement and present it to others. In a semi-structured group discussion, using the method of parliamentary debate, the students subsequently faced disagreeing arguments of their classmates, to which they responded with counter-arguments. The closing discussion aimed to draw attention and to reflect on the shifts in the students' attitudes and/or their reinforcement that took place as a result of this exercise in argumentation.

### The predominant factors influencing the seminars' implementation

The goal is to design educational seminars that will be widely used on an international basis. Nevertheless, the national context determines the form and content of individual seminars significantly. These factors can be grouped into following dimensions:

- 1) The level of knowledge individual students have that determines their perception of misused issues as well as general attitude to the topic
- 2) The level of students' ability to discuss and critically think, which influences the perception of of political parties' activities
- 3) The environment of a particular school location; in this respect, the correlation between economic prosperity and social inclusion/exclusion is evident.

These elements influence the implementation as follows:

- 1) The less economically developed an area is, the less are students able to focus on the role of political parties and the less they are able to perceive different parties' attitudes
- 2) The less economically developed an area is, the more probably they will welcome simple and easy solutions
- 3) The less economically developed an area is, the less students feel attracted to the parties; even if they are faced by an upcoming election

## The structure

### 1. Introduction of the topic and the filling up of survey on national identity

The survey outputs will serve as material for specification of the seminars in order to focus on particular issues or dimension of communication (for current survey outputs see the attachment). The survey helps to start up the group discussion on national identity definition and the role of political parties within this topic.

The survey consists from three parts (see attachment):

- i. Focus on participation (do they discuss their political opinions with their friends/parents?)
- ii. Focus on origin (level of parents' education)
- iii. Focus on their attitudes in the field of national identity with a further focus on: i) symbols, the nation as such, traditions; ii) ethnic minorities and immigration; iii) the EU and foreign policy

### 2. Introduction into national identity and political parties

- a. Collecting ideas – what is national identity?

Students were asked to come up with definitions and ideas on the following topic: “what belongs to national identity?” Although the group discussion depends on the environment (as described above), the ideas can be divided into three categories:

- i. Referring to symbols, traditions, history
- ii. Referring to the EU and relations to neighboring countries
- iii. Referring to ethnic minorities and immigration

- b. Collecting ideas – what is the function of political parties; what parties do the students know?

This amounts to a rather informative part of the seminar with the aim to show a clash between discussed topics and political parties; the questions we aimed to answer were the following: how do parties aggregate interests, how do they differ ideologically, what parties are currently governing/represented in the parliament? Even though the seminars were undertaken during the election campaign, its impact on the students was very low. In future seminars, intensive introduction into the topic of political parties is needed.



c. Matching

The brainstormed ideas on national identity were matched with political parties according to research on political parties and their positions undertaken for research project [ceeidentity.eu](http://ceeidentity.eu). Based on this knowledge, a list of parties was created in order to show the emphasis given on national identity within each party's profile. The goal is to show in simple way the differences among parties in field of national identity perception.

### 3. Discussion of politicians' quotation

The students were divided into six groups according to the number of selected quotations from the Czech politics. Even though the initial idea was to incorporate the quotations from e.g. Slovakia or Poland, after the first seminars we decided to focus on Czech parties purely; the main reason was the students' inadequate knowledge of the societal and political context of these countries.

Each group was supposed to:

- a. discuss the quotation within the group,
- b. select one person to present to all,
- c. shortly reformulate the content and the message of the quotation

The quotations were selected according to the following methodology:

- a. it represents the mainstream opinion of the party
- b. it belongs to a publicly known politician, such as an MP or a high party official
- c. quotations follow the selected case studies according to the research design of research part of [ceeidentity.eu](http://ceeidentity.eu) project

After the presentation of all groups/quotations a discussion with the whole classroom followed (discussion was led by instructors).

Note: the aim was to discuss the main problematic issues to show manipulating communication of the parties. Therefore, the discussion uncovered these basic features: according to the level of students' knowledge the level of arguments' simplification was used; the lower level of knowledge, the higher level of simplification. In the second round, the focus was given on examples from daily life as well as their personal experience. At this point the seminar stressed the confrontation between their individual opinions and parties' argumentation. In this sense, students expressed their rather negative attitudes towards political parties. In this moment it is highly important to stress the dichotomy between their

personal attitudes towards specific issues; if it is perceived as very relevant, the attitude of individual political parties' must be shown. In case they are not able to discuss the individual parties' attitudes, it opens the possibility to show the parties' role and their ways of communication.

This can be easily shown on the case of the Roma minority and role of political parties versus societal relevance; joining the Eurozone; attitudes towards immigrants.<sup>2</sup>

- a. What is the main factor in their arguments; under what conditions are students able to change their opinions?
- b. How do they react to counter-arguments?
- c. How do they react to simplifications – are they able to identify manipulative arguments of instructors acting as politicians; and
- d. How do they perceive the role of political parties?

#### 4. Evaluation

During the final discussion it is highly recommended to again stress the following: in order to evaluate the message properly one has to consider these three factors:

- a. Context of message
- b. Content of message and language used
- c. Who is the sender – personality

This may be shown on the case of anti Roma riots (August 2013, the Czech Republic): how do the quotations reflect the societal context; if the parties politicize it later, why they do so.

How the target group (Roma) is described; is the societal or ethnic origin used? To what extent do parties use emotions and exclusion rhetoric?

How reliable is the political figure; is that only a purposeful political action or is it based on personal experience/opinion of the politician?

## III) Content Guidelines for Educational Seminars

These guidelines should serve to better understand the youth's attitudes towards political parties' activities in the field of national identity, as well as their opinions and a way of arguing. The

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<sup>2</sup> For more details on Roma issue in the Czech politics: <http://www.cceidentity.eu/blog/anti-roma> and <http://www.cceidentity.eu/blog/interview-roma>

paper is based on the results of the surveys filled out by Czech and German students, and on experience gained from the seminars undertaken.

In terms of getting a better picture about the students' argumentation, the results of the survey may be insightful. Although the Czech and German outputs are different in terms of the number of participating students (150 Czech and 70 German students), for the purpose of the basic overview the survey may nevertheless be helpful. The questions listed below show how the students were introduced to the topic while stressing the need to think about political actions/communication.

How to start a discussion on national identity? Below, a set of kick off questions is listed that may be helpful at the beginning of the seminars:

1. What kinds of symbols that refer to the nation and national identity are used?
2. What is the context in which the message has been framed?
3. What are the potential social and political consequences of these actions?
4. What do you think about the symbols used in the public sphere that imply the issue of national identity in some way? And how are they used in regards to political parties?

## What is “national identity” in students' understanding?

The ideas students come up with may be summed up into the following groups: a) emotion-based such as patriotism, dignity, symbols, culture, or national currency; b) group of individuals united into society; c) set of certain norms.

## What is the role of political parties?

It is often argued by students that political parties fail in the following activities: a) parties are not able to deliver believable political solutions, particularly in relevant policy fields such as Roma integration; b) the parties transmit various opinions – it is unclear who is responsible for asserting the policies and proposals. Therefore, small parties with limited members and outputs, such as Úsvit, are received better by the students; c) the parties simplify their messages, and it is therefore unclear to the students how the parties plan to achieve their stated goals.

Besides this, based on our experience from the pilot seminars, the level of critical thinking may be expected as rather low.

## How do the students react to individual cases? (Czech Republic)

According to the above-mentioned students' definitions of national identity and the role of political parties, the general manner of argumentation by Czech students is described in the following

paragraphs. While no school is mentioned directly, the difference in the general level of knowledge among them is evident. It must be noted that in each group, at least a couple of individuals were able to discuss these topics in a broad perspective.

There are three cases that are often a matter of broader discussion: Roma minority; Immigration; joining the Eurozone.

### **1. Roma minority (summary of students' argumentation)**

- a. political parties are unable to politicise this issue, because the Czech society is rather racist
- b. Roma are advantaged – all arguments that do not stand on the “Roma side” are evaluated as extremism
- c. if there were a party which would promise to solve the Roma integration problem, it should get a chance to implement its policies
- d. political parties generally ignore this societal problem even though some parties politicize it
- e. generalizations are used very often in the parties' communication

### **2. immigration (summary of students' argumentation)**

- a. Immigrants increase the unemployment of Czechs.
- b. They should fully accept our conditions and culture; students are able to distinguish between “fear” and “the lack of knowledge” only with difficulties. Although Slovaks are welcomed, Poles, according to their argumentation, are less welcomed or even not welcomed; the Vietnamese generally do not stir emotions, but Arabic people or Muslims do. Again, there is evidence that these arguments are driven primarily emotionally.
- c. Regarding the political parties, students may easily adopt arguments picked by parties politicizing these issues without regard for broader consequences and stressing the exclusion of the “others” from the society
- d. In this respect, attention has to be paid to the fact that parties currently stressing these issues will be able to draw the attention of the young generation also in future. Thus, the main focus will be given by parties on influencing the public discourse through indirect tools such as social media.

### **3. joining Eurozone and further EU integration (summary of students' argumentation)**

- a. Students use emotional arguments above all; the national currency is perceived as a national symbol which should be given a higher priority than economic profit (even if the profit is evident).
- b. The desire for deeper integration is not an issue for students; having an opinion on the European common currency generally marks the limit of their engagement and discussion abilities. When deeper integration is discussed, discussion is carried in the sense of the “pomazánkové máslo” affair (whereby in the Czech Republic, a commonly used spread cannot be called “butter spread” as it does not contain a sufficient amount of butter); the context in which discussion is carried out can be summed up in the following sentence: “The Brussels is abolishing our traditional food.”

## How do the students react to individual cases? (Germany)

The structure was the same as in case of the seminars carried out in the Czech Republic; the most significant difference could be observed in the introducing discussion on national identity and the role of this topic in the society and politics. This observation is likely related to the different level of civic education and different approach to the topics not only relating with topics of national identity in Germany (for more information see activities of Federal Agency for Civic Education, BPB). Moreover, one should consider also the fact that students are more trained to think critically. Therefore, to compare Germany and the Czech Republic in the field of civic education is very problematic.

The issues that have been mentioned during seminars may be summed up as follows:

### **1. rare arguments on integration of immigrants:**

Society is used to variety – the tricky issue of immigration was the subject of political discussion already a decade ago; there is now political consensus of parliamentary political parties on the advantage of immigration. In this respect, the students' argumentation more or less corresponds with the political debate. Interestingly, even the topic of misusing social assistance raised by the CSU was not an issue for discussion in the sense of its strong support or refusal.

### **2. the appropriateness of support of AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) anti- EU integration policy**

The core message has dealt with the conviction of AfD to represent different ideas in the politics contrary to populist on purpose use of anti EU-integration policy with national identity coloured aspects. In other words, to what extent is it acceptable to use anti-EU sentiments with regard to the post-WWII legacy of German political representation?

Nevertheless, the national identity-based arguments did not play a crucial role in students' opinions, even if the rhetoric of AfD is strongly linked to defending own national interests.

### **3. the abolishing of the NPD radical right party**

The argumentation was closely connected with the topic of appropriateness of existing party that is openly against current societal consensus and spreads anti-democratic values; the debates proved many similarities with discussions on the role of AfD in the German politics. In all seminars, there was a widespread agreement that parliament parties are not passive in providing anti-radicalism instruments.

## Comparing Czech and German seminars – how the examples of best practice may be used?

It is evident that Czech and German political and societal contexts are not comparable. Therefore, for the implementation of anti-manipulation tools it is necessary to focus primarily on supporting critical thinking among students. The evidence from Czech seminars demonstrated how students adopt purposive argumentation without critical evaluation. However, the ability of political parties to inspire the imagination of youths and attract their attention should also be paid attention to. As the graph based on data gained during the educational seminars shows, the level of students' interest in politics as well as the ability of political parties to appeal to the young generation is very low. At the same time, due to the fact that only 150 students participated in the survey, its results are not conclusive and cannot explain the wider context of political participation. Nevertheless, they are suggestive of a general trend of low interest in politics among the young generation. To place these results into a broader context, the example of project One World at High Schools organized by NGO People in Need may be used. The results show the long term ability of so called traditional parties to attract young generation and at the same time students' decreasing interest in participating on politics.

At the same time, the evidence gained in the course of the educational seminars in Germany seems to confirm that the government's long-term interest in improving the critical thinking of students may serve as a successful prevention tool.

## V) Summary

This experience serves as a starting point for a broader discussion on the role of political parties' communication in the context of enhancing the democratic principles of a society. Following the insights arrived at during the field work, it is important to target the young generation in making them interested in political participation if they are not to be easily manipulated by the existing political representation, which arguably is characterized by such manipulative tendencies. Issues related to national identity serve as a convenient tool to demonstrate that manipulation is taking place: in the public discourse, issues related to national identity are discussed in a context that is marked by a high degree of emotion rather than characterized by a high degree of critical thinking, a situation to which political parties which benefit from it politically, undoubtedly contribute. Importantly, such rhetoric may pay dividends particularly in economically excluded regions where strategies such as emphasizing the "out" groups, focusing on policy fields susceptible to emotionally-charged manipulation (such as the bureaucratic and distant EU institutions), stressing the Roma issue and what is argued to be a misuse of the social system on their part, or highlighting the brave role of the nation in history, may score political points for those parties advancing it.

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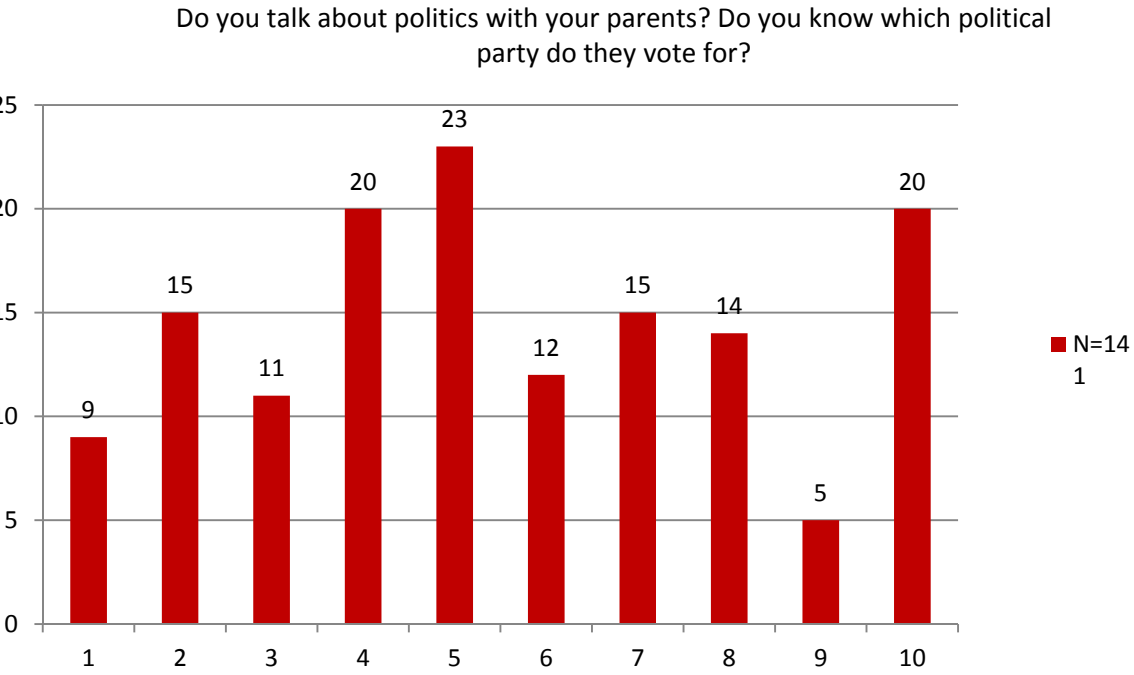
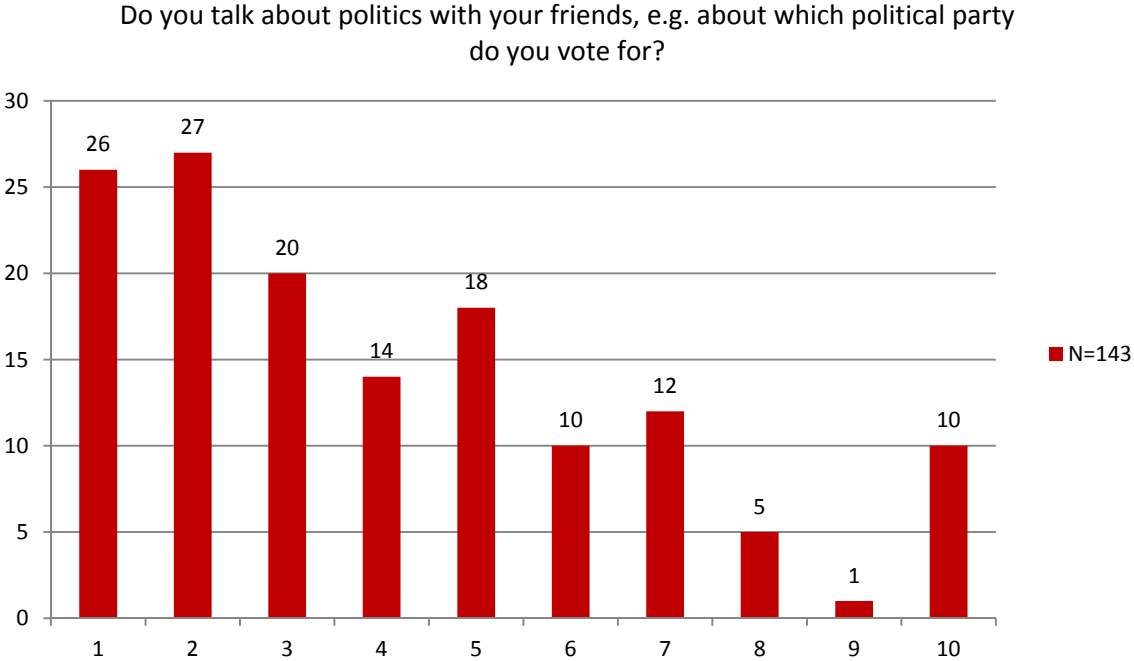
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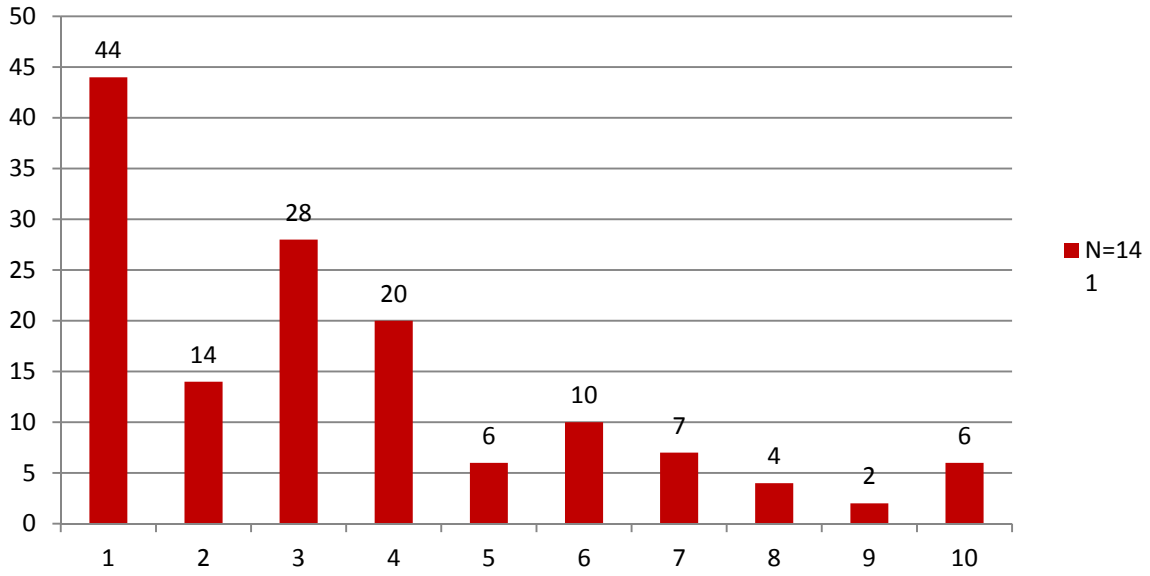
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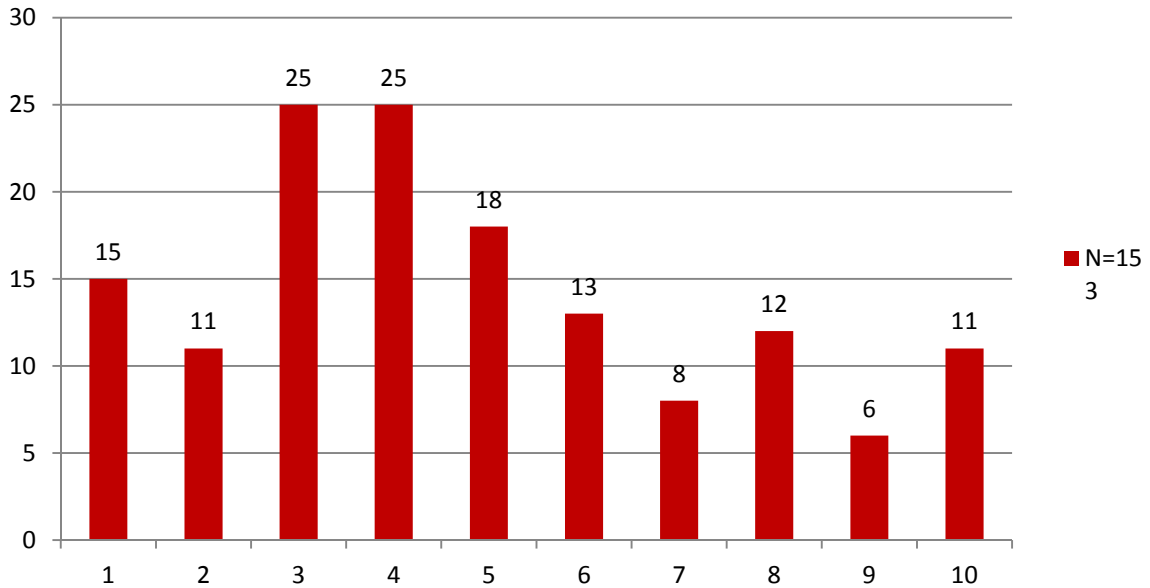
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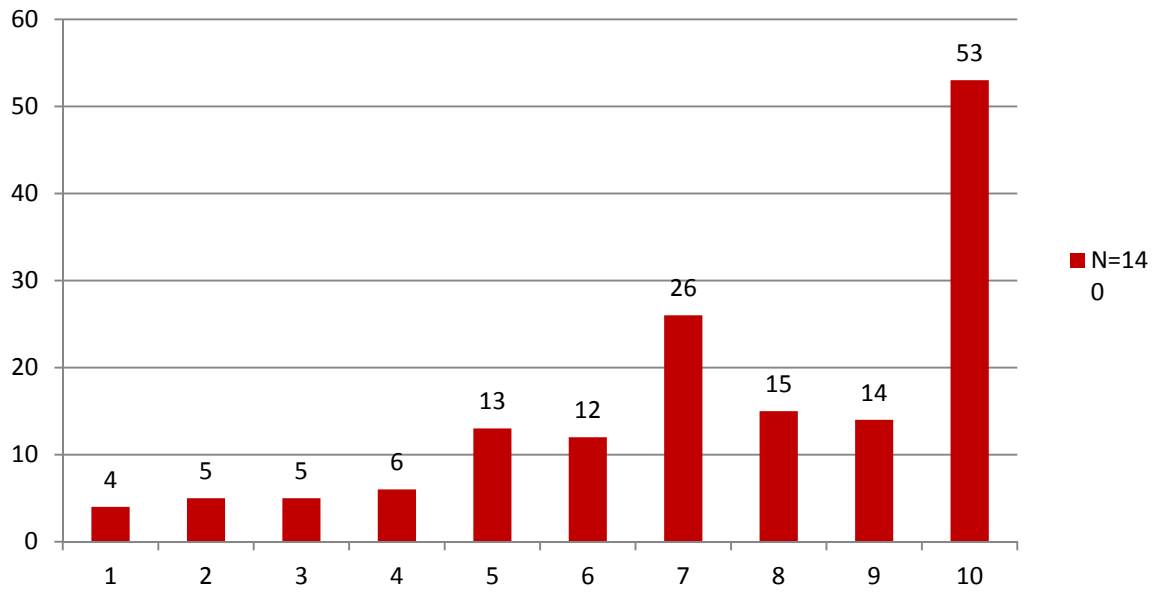
Are political parties able to draw your attention?



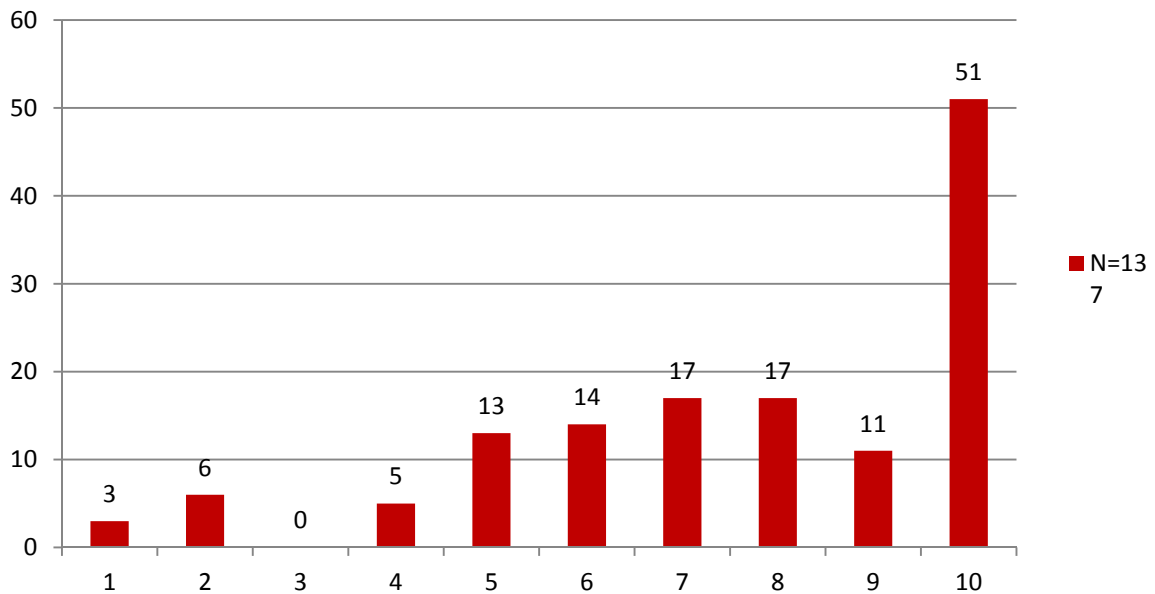
It is important for me, how the parties refer to the nation



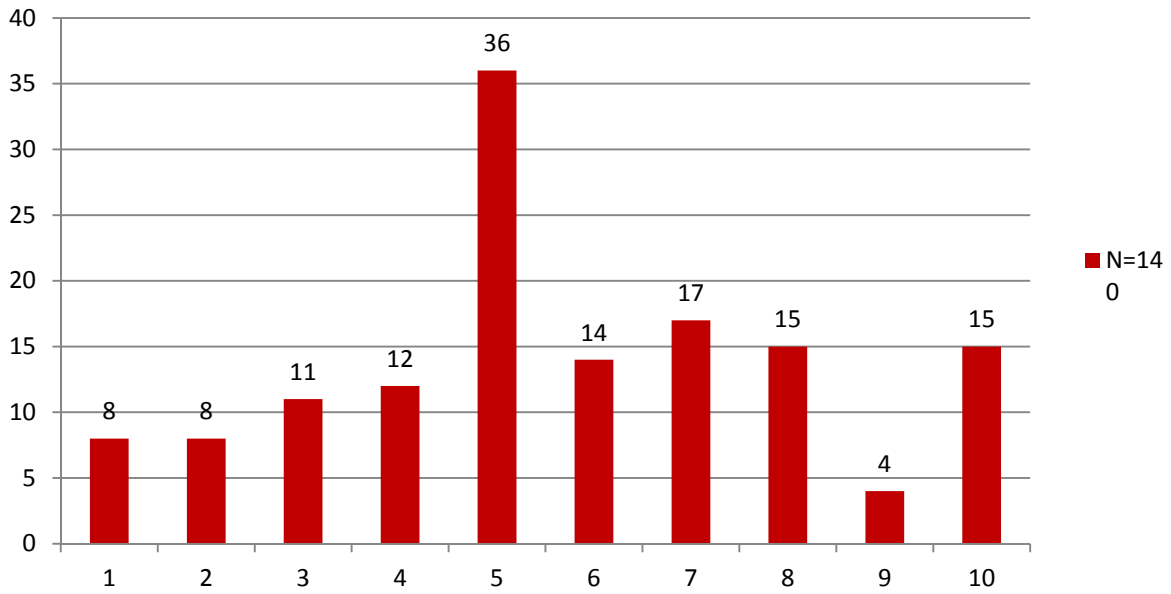
Cohabitation of Roma minority with the Czech society is a source of serious problems in the society.



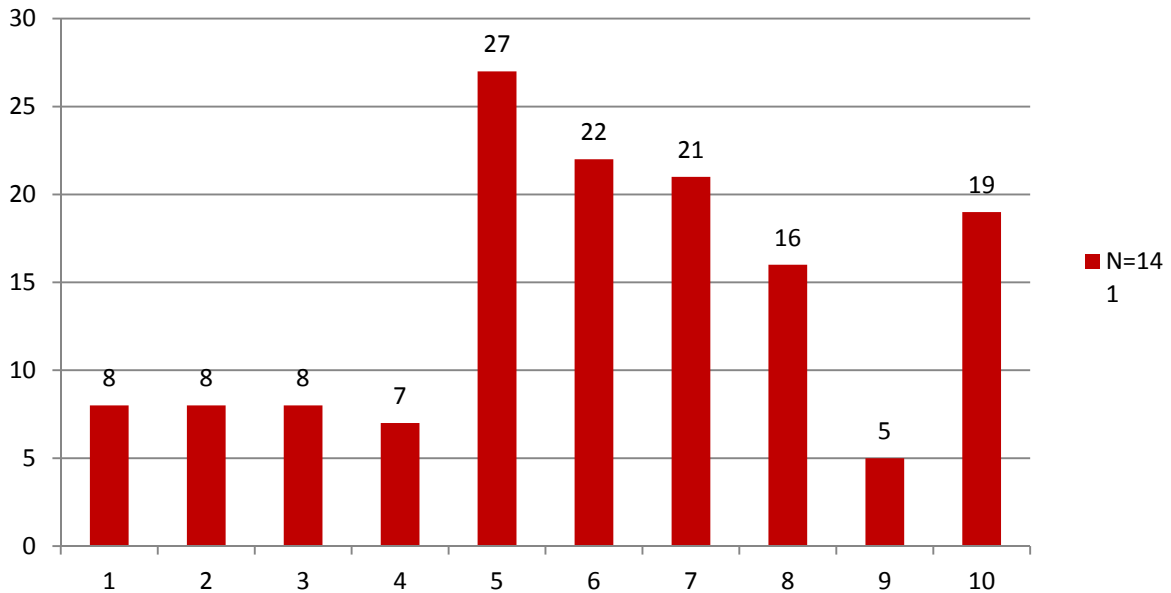
Roma as a minority should fully adapt in their habits to the Czech society.



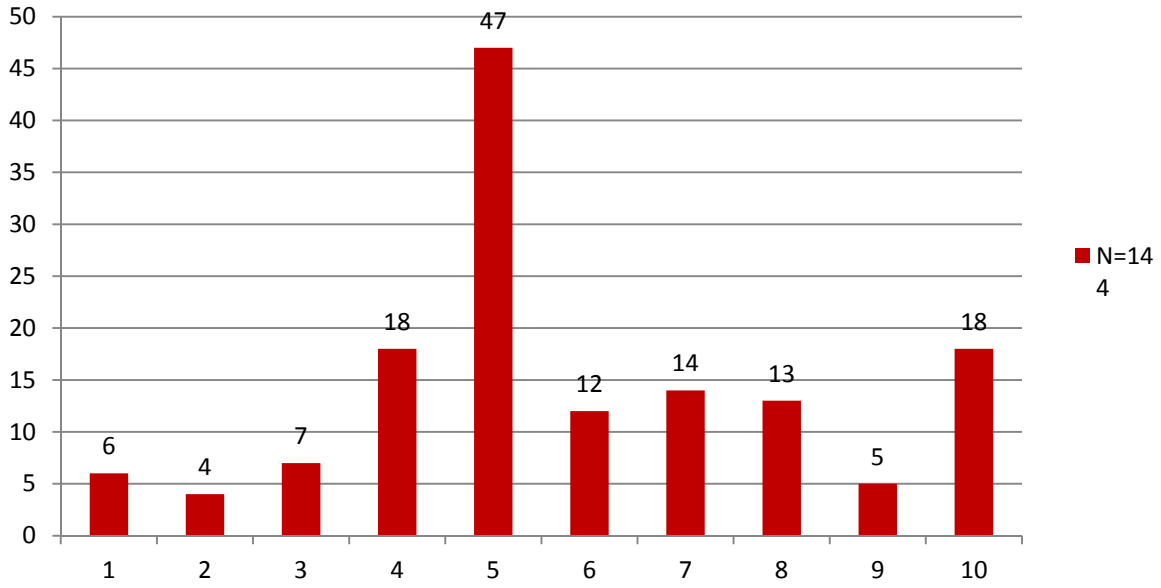
I find the idea of a uniqueness of the Czech nation attractive.



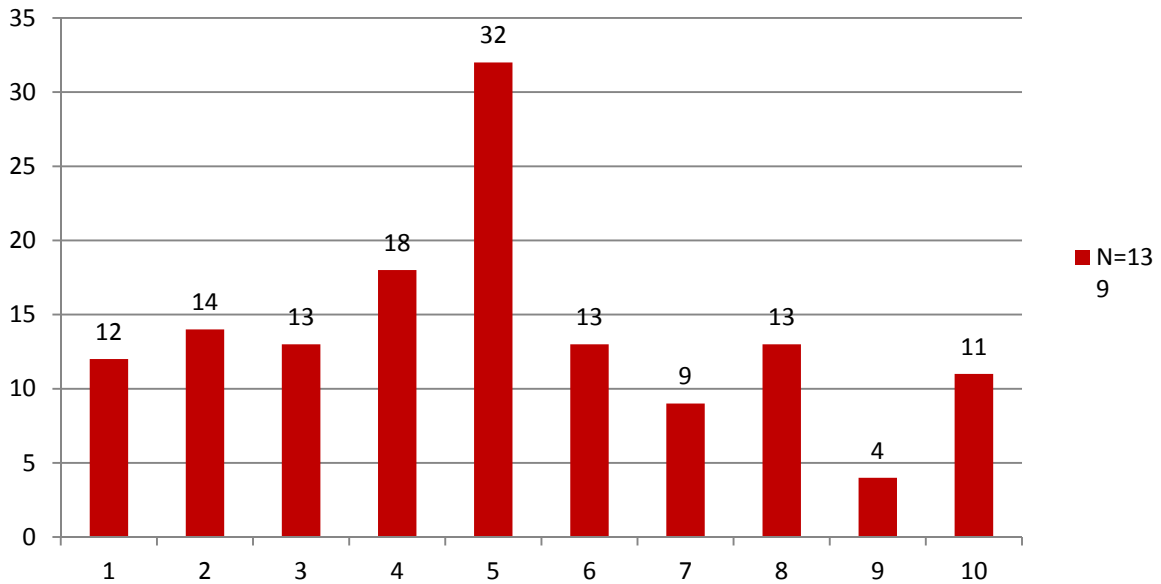
Teaching about national history in schools should support patriotism related to the Czech nation.



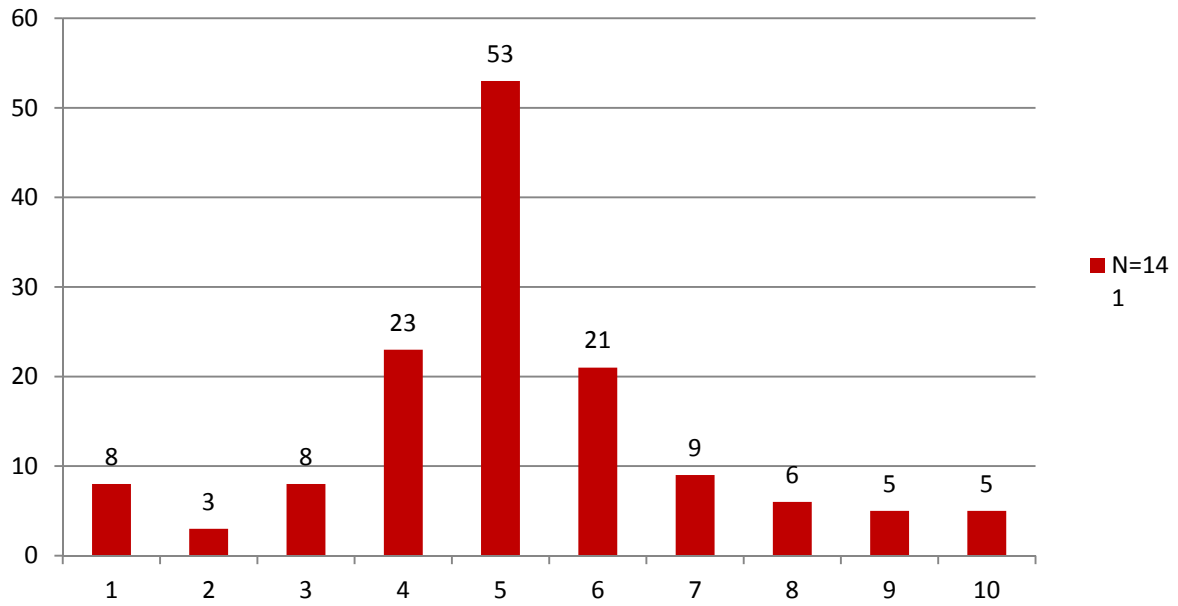
The issue of expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia is a closed chapter of both Czech and German history.



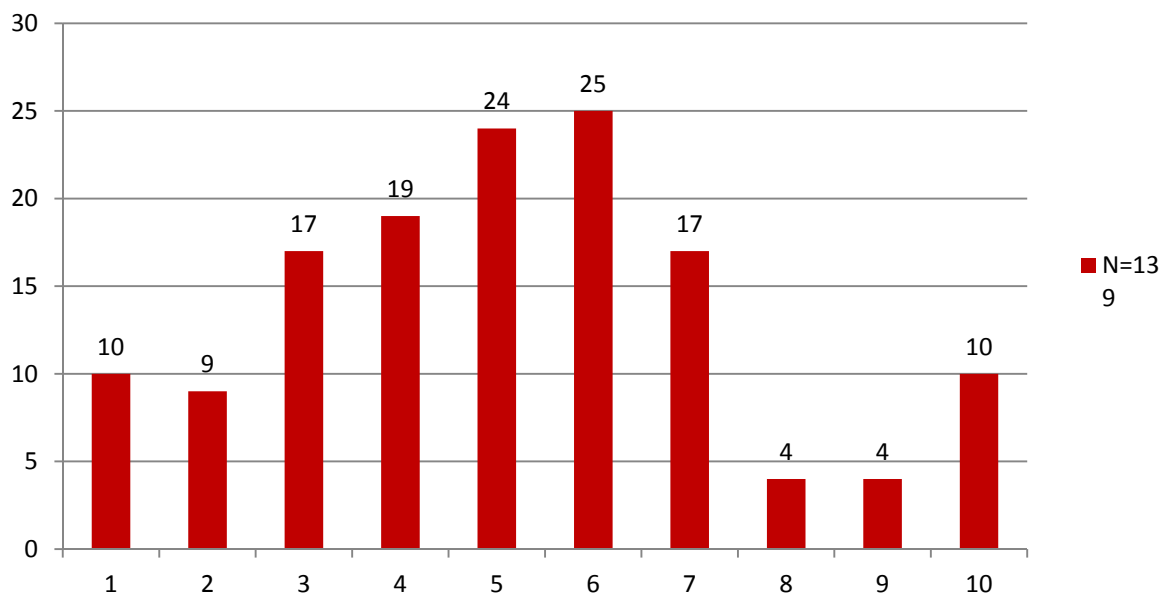
State should take an active interest in the issues of compatriots living abroad and create conditions for their contact with the homeland.



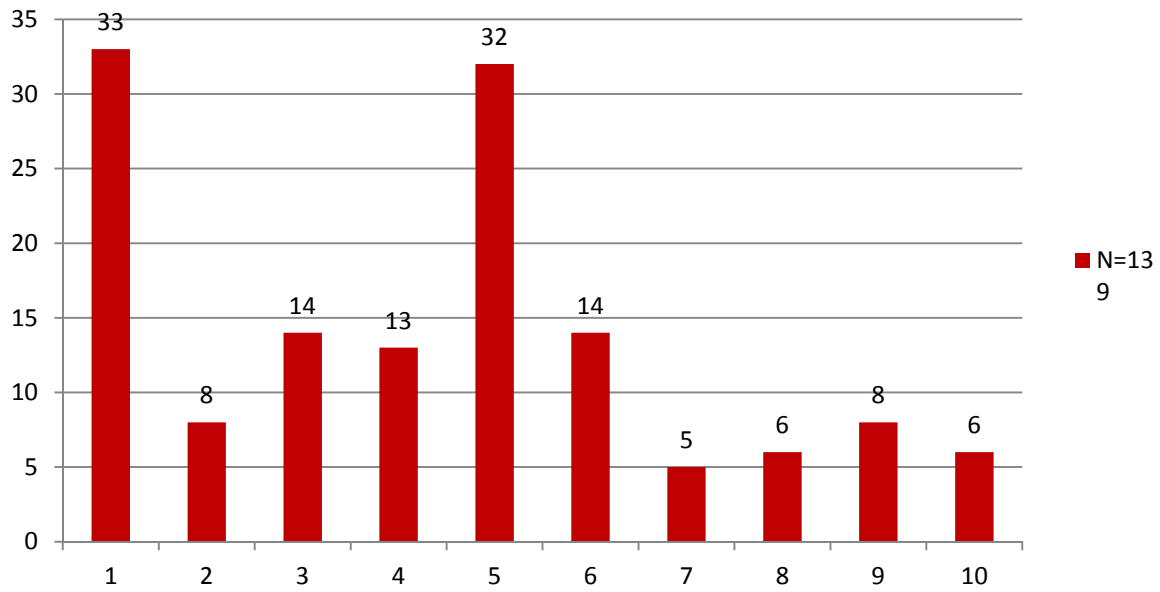
Foreign policy towards Russia should be based exclusively on promotion of economic interests.



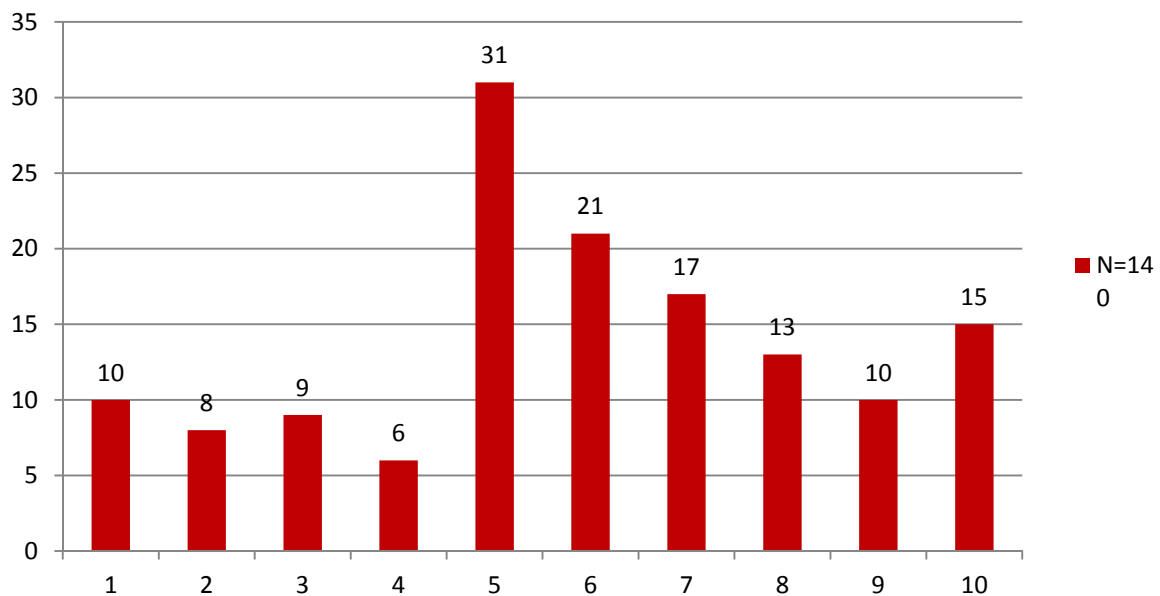
Czech's membership in the EU poses a threat to Czech sovereignty.



I find the idea of a united European nation attractive.

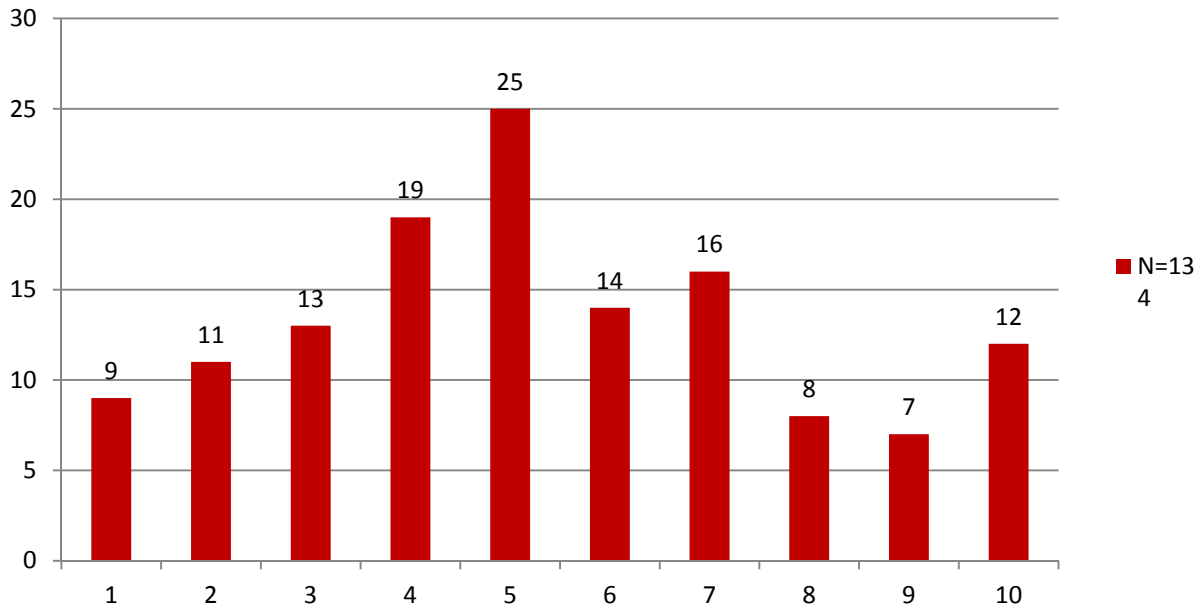


I agree that the EU states should be more interconnected.





Immigration (foreigners who want to settle in Czech Rep.) are a source of problems in our society.



Conditions for granting permanent residence and citizenship in Czech Rep. should be simplified.

