How positive and negative contact relate to attitudes towards Roma: Comparing majority and high-status minority perspectives

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Abstract

Intergroup contact scholars have recently called for analyzing the effects of negative intergroup contact. In response to this call, we examined the correlates of positive and negative contact with one of the most stigmatized ethnic minorities, that is, Roma. We conducted a study in Bulgaria considering the point of view of the ethnic Bulgarian majority ($n = 516$) and of Bulgarian Turks ($n = 274$), an ethnic minority with higher status compared to Roma. Regression analyses showed that positive contact was associated with reduced prejudice and more support for pro-Roma policies, while negative contact revealed the opposite pattern. These associations did not differ between ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks. Moreover, positive and negative intergroup emotions mediated the relationships between positive and negative contact on the one hand and prejudice and policy support on the other. Our study highlights the importance of emotional processes involved in positive and negative intergroup contact experiences and encourages future research to analyze how absolute vs. relative status differences shape the effects of positive and negative contact in complex hierarchical societies.

Keywords: contact hypothesis, intergroup contact, positive contact, negative contact, prejudice, intergroup emotions, interminority relations, Roma, Bulgaria.

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Throughout European countries, the Roma represent one of the most harshly stigmatized and discriminated ethnic minorities (e.g., Hammarberg, 2012; Tileaga, 2006). Living conditions of Roma are generally poor and characterized by segregation in ghettos, low educational level and high unemployment. The roots of Roma exclusion can be traced back to the isolation and prejudice they face in everyday life (Zhelikova, Kosseva, & Hajdinjak, 2010).

Drawing on recent advancements of intergroup contact theory (e.g., Barlow et al., 2012), this study analyzed positive and negative contact with Roma as antecedents of anti-Roma prejudice and of support for governmental policies promoting Roma inclusion. We conducted our research in Bulgaria analyzing the points of view of the ethnic Bulgarian majority and of another ethnic minority, Bulgarian Turks. Indeed Bulgarian Turks have a higher status compared to Roma and a lower status compared to ethnic Bulgarians. With a study conducted in a complex hierarchical intergroup setting including three groups, we consider the point of view of the two ethnic communities with an advantaged status compared to Roma. The novelty of the study thus lies in assessing whether the associations of positive and negative contact with outgroup stances depend on the status difference with Roma which is more pronounced for ethnic Bulgarians than for Bulgarian Turks. While previous intergroup contact research has examined reciprocal contacts and attitudes between majorities and minorities, to our knowledge, this is the first study comparing contact experiences of a majority group and a high-status minority group with members of a low-status minority.

Our study further contributes to different aspects of intergroup contact research. First, we consider the associations of positive and negative contact not only with outgroup prejudice but also with support for governmental policies favoring Roma (see Dixon, Durrheim, &

Tredoux, 2005). Second, our research adds to the limited body of knowledge on interminority contact (e.g., Bikmen, 2011) by examining Bulgarian Turks' contacts with Roma, though the focus is on the perspective of the dominant group of the interaction. Finally, we contribute to the recent research endeavors on positive and negative contact, by testing the mediating role of intergroup emotions (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008) that has so far been neglected in research on negative contact (see however Techakesari et al., 2015; Visintin, Voci, Pagotto, & Hewstone, 2016).

Positive and negative intergroup contact

Positive contact between members of different groups is considered one of the most effective means of prejudice reduction (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011 for a meta-analysis). However, as pointed out by intergroup contact scholars (Paolini, Harwood, & Rubin, 2010; Pettigrew, 2008), intergroup encounters in everyday life can be perceived as unpleasant, unfriendly, and anxiety provoking (negative intergroup contact). Indeed positive and negative intergroup contacts are discrete experiences and not two opposite poles of a continuum (e.g., Barlow et al., 2012; Graf, Paolini, & Rubin, 2014; Pettigrew, 2008). An individual can have several encounters with members of an outgroup, and some of these encounters are experienced as positive and pleasant, while others are perceived as negative. Positive and negative contact experiences are independent predictors of prejudice and intergroup attitudes: While positive contact reduces prejudice, negative contact increases it.

In most previous studies, positive contact was reported far more often than negative contact (e.g., Aberson, 2015; Barlow et al., 2012 for relationships between Whites and Blacks in the US; Graf et al. 2014 for relationships between citizens of neighboring European countries; Brylka, Jasinskaja-Lahti, & Mähönen, 2016 for relationships between immigrants and Finnish nationals). However, in highly conflictual intergroup contexts or where ethnic minorities are very visible, overtly stigmatized and politicized, negative contact might occur

more often than positive contact. Most of the studies comparing the strength of the effects of positive and negative contact have indeed found that the relationship between negative contact and increased prejudice is stronger than the relationship between positive contact and reduced prejudice (Aberson, 2015; Barlow et al., 2012; Graf et al., 2014). Though some have found no reliable differences between the strength of the effects of positive and negative contact (Bekhuis, Ruiter, & Coenders, 2013) or that positive contact is more influential than negative contact (Pettigrew, 2008). In this study, we examine the occurrence of positive and negative intergroup contact experiences with Roma in Bulgaria and the relationship between these experiences and anti-Roma stances.

While the contact-prejudice relationships have been widely studied, less attention has been devoted to policy support as an outcome (Dixon et al., 2005; but cf. Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). Previous research has shown that positive intergroup contact is associated with endorsement of policies supporting outgroup members (e.g., Dixon et al., 2010 for policies supporting Blacks in South Africa), while negative contact is associated to opposition to such policies (Vezzali, Andrighetto, Di Bernardo, Nadi, & Bergamini, 2016 for policies supporting immigrant victims of an earthquake in Italy). Contributing to this body of knowledge, we investigate associations of positive as well as negative contact with support for governmental policies promoting Roma communities.

Positive and negative intergroup encounters happen between members of groups that differ in social status. Not only majority groups have higher status and more power in intergroup relations than minority groups, but also minorities can differ in status within a society. The complexity of status hierarchies within a society needs to be taken into account when examining the dynamics of positive and negative contact. Indeed, status differences shape contact effects: Positive contact seems to work better in reducing prejudice when the status of the ingroup is higher than that of the outgroup interaction partner in an intergroup

encounter (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005; see Bikmen, 2011 for interminority contact). This is likely to occur because members of higher status groups have less concerns that they are targets of prejudice or discrimination during intergroup interactions, and consequently have less negative expectations than lower status groups (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). Yet status differences can be more or less pronounced. While majorities are generally aware and sure of their advantaged status compared to ethnic minorities, interminority relations are likely to be more nuanced (see Craig & Richeson, 2016). During encounters with members of a more disadvantaged minority outgroup, members of a higher status minority may doubt the stability of their position and be aware of their overall disadvantaged societal status (see Lee, 1996). In a three-group social hierarchy, when members of the group with intermediate status are concerned about status stability, they might feel threatened by the lowest status group (Sollami & Caricati, 2015) and react with ingroup bias (e.g., Cadinu & Reggiori, 2002). Insecurity about status superiority and subsequent feelings of threat are then likely to curb the association between positive contact and positive outgroup stances and enhance the detrimental effects of negative contact. To account for the complexity of status hierarchies, we examine whether the associations between positive and negative contact with the lowest status minority and outgroup stances differ between the majority group and a higher status minority group.

Finally, the mechanisms through which positive and negative contact exert their effects on outgroup stances deserve attention. Intergroup emotions have been shown to play a crucial mediating role in explaining the effects of contact (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Miller, Smith, & Mackie, 2004; see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008 for a meta-analysis). Specifically, positive intergroup contact is associated to reduced prejudice through decreased intergroup anxiety (e.g., Vezzali, Giovannini, & Capozza, 2010) and anger (e.g., Kenworthy et al., 2016) and through increased outgroup empathy (e.g., Vezzali et al., 2010) and outgroup trust (e.g.,

Kenworthy et al., 2016). Intergroup emotions also trigger policy support (e.g., Cottrell, Richards, & Nichols, 2010). Indeed, empathy toward outgroup members reflects the awareness of their need for support, while trust toward outgroup members implies believing that outgroup members will not misuse provided support. Negative outgroup emotions such as anxiety and anger also relate to reduced support for policies targeting outgroup members (e.g. Cottrell et al., 2010). Despite the established role of emotions in intergroup contact processes, up to now there has been little attention on emotional mediators of negative contact (see however Techakesari et al., 2015 for intergroup anxiety; Visintin et al., 2016 for empathy). We examine simultaneously the mediating role of positive (trust and empathy) and negative (anxiety, anger, contempt) emotions in the relationship between positive and negative contact on the one hand and prejudice and policy support on the other.

Intergroup relations in Bulgaria

Bulgaria is a South East European country characterized by cohabitation of numerous ethnic groups. Besides the ethnic Bulgarian majority (84.8%, of the total population, 2011 Bulgarian Census), several ethnic minorities have historically lived in Bulgaria. Among these, Bulgarian Turks and Roma are the largest (8.9% and 4.9%, respectively).

Roma in Bulgaria have historically faced prejudice and discrimination both from the ethnic Bulgarian majority and from the other ethnic minorities (ECRI, 2009; Zhelikova, et al., 2010). Roma are still seen by other ethnic communities as dirty, lazy, prone to criminality, and living on social aid (Pamporov, 2009) and it is acceptable to express negative stances against Roma (see Zografova & Andreev, 2014). This numerical minority is highly visible in Bulgarian society, and often portrayed in the media as a problem for Bulgarian society (Naxidou, 2012). The supposed excessive support from the Bulgarian Government and from the European Union for social aid as well as integration and education programs are criticized. These conditions lead us to expect that, in contrast to other intergroup contexts, contact

experienced by ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks with Roma is interpreted negatively more often than positively.

Though both the Roma and the Bulgarian Turkish ethnic minorities have a disadvantaged status compared to the ethnic Bulgarian majority (Zhelikova et al., 2010), status differences are clear between the two ethnic minorities: Bulgarian Turks have a higher educational level, better job opportunities and are more integrated in Bulgarian society than Roma (ECRI, 2009). Differences in political representation also exist. Bulgarian Turks have representatives in the Bulgarian parliament with the Movement for Rights and Freedom party that, although formally not being an ethnic party, is mainly composed of and voted by Bulgarian Turks. Roma instead have very few representatives in the Bulgarian parliament. The examination of the point of view of both ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks is relevant, because members of both ethnic communities can influence, through their governmental representatives, decisions aimed at improving living conditions of Roma.

Research design and hypotheses

With a correlational study, we analyzed the associations between positive and negative contact with Roma on the one hand and anti-Roma prejudice and support for policies targeting Roma on the other hand. The points of view of the ethnic Bulgarian majority and of the higher status Bulgarian Turkish ethnic minority were examined.

Based on literature reviewed above and on the specificities of the intergroup context, we outline the following hypotheses:

H1. Contact with Roma should be perceived by ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks as negative more often than as positive.

H2. Positive and negative contact with Roma should be independently associated with prejudice and with support for Roma policies. For ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks,

positive contact should be negatively associated with prejudice and positively with support for Roma policies, while the pattern should be the opposite for negative contact.

H3. Regarding the role of status hierarchies within Bulgarian society, we derive two different exploratory hypotheses. On the one hand, compared to ethnic Bulgarians who are the numerical and dominant majority, Bulgarian Turks have a minority status in Bulgarian society and might be more uncertain about their advantaged status and feel more threatened by the Roma. Hence, the associations of positive Roma contact with reduced prejudice and with policy support would be stronger for ethnic Bulgarians than for Bulgarian Turks, while the associations of negative Roma contact with prejudice and with reduced policy support would be stronger for Bulgarian Turks than for ethnic Bulgarians (**H3a**). On the other hand, Bulgarian Turks' standing in current-day Bulgarian society is clearly higher than that of Roma. Thus, Bulgarian Turks should not anticipate being targets of prejudice and discrimination during encounters with Roma. It is therefore also plausible that no difference in the strength of the relationship of contact with prejudice and with policy support occurs between ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks (**H3b**).

We further examined whether emotional reactions toward Roma mediate the associations between positive and negative contact on the one hand and prejudice and policy support on the other hand. We considered the most reliable emotional mediators of contact, i.e. intergroup anxiety, empathy and trust toward the outgroup (Kenworthy et al., 2016; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008), as well as emotions particularly relevant in conflictual intergroup contexts such as anger and contempt.

H4. For ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks, intergroup emotions should mediate the associations of positive and negative contact with prejudice and support for Roma policies.

We also tested whether negative contact is a stronger predictor of prejudice than positive contact (Aberson, 2015; Barlow et al., 2012; Graf et al., 2014).

H5. For ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks, negative contact should be a stronger predictor (in absolute magnitude) than positive contact of prejudice and of support for Roma policies (positive-negative contact asymmetry).

Method

Dataset and sample

Between June and July 2014 we conducted a survey on intergroup relations in three Bulgarian districts using a two-stage cluster sampling method. Sampling points were selected on the basis of self-reported ethnicity data (Bulgarian National Statistical Institute: http://statlib.nsi.bg:8181/isisbgstat/ssp/fulltext.asp?content=/FullT/FulltOpen/P_22_2011_SRB.pdf) and eight respondents were sought from each sampling point. The sample was stratified by gender, age and urban versus rural residence. The questionnaires were administered by professional interviewers during face-to-face interviews. Respondents participated on a voluntary basis and did not receive incentives.

For the current study, we used data of ethnic Bulgarian and Bulgarian Turkish respondents (initial $n = 576$ and $n = 320$, respectively). Because the study focuses on positive and negative contact, we considered only respondents who reported having contact with Roma and did not impute missing values on the contact variables. The final sample included 516 ethnic Bulgarian respondents and 274 Bulgarian Turkish respondents. Table 1 displays the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample. Educational level, $\chi^2(3) = 110.96$, $p < .001$, and perception of own economic situation, $t(788) = 3.71$, $p < .001$, were different between the two subsamples. Ethnic Bulgarian respondents, compared to Bulgarian Turkish respondents, reported higher education and a better perceived economic situation.

Measures

Positive and negative contact with Roma were measured with two items each (based on Barlow et al., 2012 and on Schmid, Al Ramiah, & Hewstone, 2014), the first one referring to the frequency of positive/negative casual, everyday interactions with Roma and the second one referring to the frequency of positive/negative contact with Roma known well by the respondent. The two items were preceded by an introductory question asking whether the respondent had or not such kinds of contacts with Roma. Only respondents who declared having contact with Roma answered to the valenced contact items. The valenced contact questions were *"How often do you experience brief interactions with Roma, for example exchanging a couple of words on the bus/train, in the street, in shops, in the neighborhood and other places, as pleasant [unpleasant]"?* and *"If any, how often do you experience the encounters with Roma you know well as pleasant [unpleasant]"?* Response options were 1 (*never*), 2 (*seldom*), 3 (*sometimes*), 4 (*often*), and 5 (*always*). A principal component analysis (PCA) with oblimin rotation on the four contact items, conducted separately for ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks, corroborated the empirical distinctiveness between positive and negative contact. Based on the scree plot, we extracted two factors explaining 89% and 90% of the variance for ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks, respectively. The individual loadings of the items on their respective factors were between .92 and .96 for the ethnic Bulgarian and .93 and .96 for the Bulgarian Turkish sample.

To assess *prejudice* participants were asked to report their attitude toward Roma on a scale from 1 (*extremely negative*) to 7 (*extremely positive*). Answers were reverse coded so that higher values reflect more prejudice.

Support for policies favoring Roma was investigated with two items. Participants had to rate their agreement on a scale from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 5 (*completely agree*) with two statements: *"The government should improve the standard of living (health care,*

employment opportunities, education, housing, infrastructures) in Roma communities" and *"It is important to make efforts to improve the educational level of Roma"*.

Six questions assessed *emotions toward Roma*. Respondents were invited to answer, on a scale from 1 (*no, not at all*) to 5 (*yes, very much*), the following questions (based on Kenworthy et al., 2016 and on Vezzali et al., 2010): *"Do you trust the Roma"?, "Can you share joys and sorrows with Roma"?, "Can you understand the feelings of Roma"?, "Do you feel uncomfortable about meeting an unknown Roma"?, "Do you feel anger toward the Roma?" and "Do you feel disrespect toward the Roma?"*. We conducted a PCA with oblimin rotation on the six emotional reactions (for a similar approach when assessing several positive and negative intergroup emotions see Miller et al., 2004), separately for ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks. For both groups, the scree plot suggested a two-factor solution. The two factors explained 69% of variance for ethnic Bulgarians and 71% of variance for Bulgarian Turks and represented positive (trust, sharing joys and sorrows, feeling understanding) and negative emotions (anxiety, anger, disrespect). The individual loadings on the respective factor were between .61 and .94 for ethnic Bulgarians and between .74 and .92 for Bulgarian Turks.

For all the variables measured by multiple items, responses were averaged to create composite scores, with higher scores reflecting higher levels of the assessed concept. Reliabilities of measures, descriptive statistics and correlations between variables are reported in Table 2.

Results

To test Hypothesis 1 that interactions with Roma are perceived more often as negative rather than as positive, we conducted paired-sample *t*-tests between positive and negative contact. Supporting this prediction, ethnic Bulgarian respondents reported more negative than positive contact with Roma, $t(515) = 3.13$, $p = .002$, $d = 0.14$. For Bulgarian Turks instead the

two scores were not significantly different, $t(273) = 0.47$, $p = .636$, $d = 0.02$. Thus, interactions with Roma were not perceived more positive than negative.

To test Hypotheses 2-5, we ran regression analyses in Mplus 6. Preliminary analyses suggested that the clustered structure of the data needs to be accounted for (ICCs of prejudice = .25, of policy support = .36, of positive emotions = .26, of negative emotions = .31). Thus, regression analyses were conducted with the Complex command (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2010). Positive and negative contact were entered simultaneously as predictors, whereas prejudice and policy support were entered simultaneously as outcome variables. Correlations between the two outcome variables were estimated. In all regression analyses we included gender, age, educational level and perception of the economic situation as control variables. We reported unstandardized regression coefficients.

The analytical strategy for testing H2-H4 consisted in first testing regression models with the paths constrained equal across ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks (i.e., assuming that the paths are the same for the two groups). Subsequently regression paths were released one by one, to test whether a given path differs between ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks. An invariant path between ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks implies there was no moderation by ethnic belonging of respondents.

The regression model assessing the associations of positive and negative contact with prejudice and support for Roma policies, with the regression paths and the correlations between dependent variables constrained equal across ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks, fitted the data well: Satorra-Bentler scaled $\chi^2(5) = 3.21$, $p = .668$, RMSEA = .023, SRMR = .015, CFI = 1.00. As expected, positive contact was negatively associated to prejudice, $B = -0.42$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$, while negative contact was positively associated to prejudice, $B = 0.34$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$ ($R^2 = 28\%$ for ethnic Bulgarians and 37% for Bulgarian Turks). Positive contact was positively related to support for Roma policies, $B = 0.11$, $SE = 0.04$, $p =$

.004, while the association between negative contact and support for Roma policies was negative, $B = -0.17$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$ ($R^2 = 9\%$ for ethnic Bulgarians and 14% for Bulgarian Turks).[1] Positive and negative contact were thus independent predictors of prejudice and of support for Roma policies, confirming H2.

With the aim of exploring whether relationships between variables differed between ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks (H3), we released one by one the paths initially constrained to be equal. Model fit improved when releasing the equality constraint for the correlation between the dependent variables, Satorra-Bentler scaled $\Delta \chi^2(1)s = 4.03$, $p = .045$. The association between anti-Roma prejudice and policy support was stronger for ethnic Bulgarians (-0.22, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$) than for Bulgarian Turks (-0.08, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .030$). Releasing the equality constraints of the regression paths instead did not improve model fit, Satorra-Bentler scaled $\Delta \chi^2(1)s < 1.38$, $ps \geq .240$, suggesting invariance of the regression paths. Thus, the strength of the associations of positive and negative contact with prejudice and with support for Roma policies was not different for the two groups, supporting the alternative hypothesis H3b.

To verify whether intergroup emotions mediated the associations of positive and negative contact with prejudice and policies support (H4), we tested a path model with positive and negative contact entered as predictors and positive and negative emotions simultaneously entered as mediators. The direct paths from positive and negative contact to the dependent variables (prejudice and policy support) were estimated, as well as the correlations between mediators and between dependent variables (see Figure 1).[2] Initially, we constrained all the regression paths and the correlations between mediators and between dependent variables equal across ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks. This model fitted the data well: Satorra-Bentler scaled $\chi^2(14) = 10.39$, $p = .733$, RMSEA = .029, SRMR = .026, CFI = 0.99 (Figure 1).[3] When releasing one by one the paths initially constrained to be equal,

we did not find paths differing between ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks, Satorra-Bentler scaled $\Delta \chi^2(1)$s < 3.64, ps > .056, suggesting invariance of the paths and further corroborating H3b.[4] As shown in Table 3, both positive and negative emotions mediated the associations between both positive and negative contact on the one hand and prejudice and policy support on the other hand, fully confirming H4. The direct effects from contact variables to the dependent variables were reduced in the model including intergroup emotions as mediators compared to the model without the mediators.[5]

With the aim of comparing the strength of associations of positive and of negative contact with prejudice and policy support (positive-negative contact asymmetry, H5), we adapted the procedure used by Barlow et al. (2012, Study 2). We first reverse coded the scores of negative contact, so that both positive and negative contact would be negatively associated to prejudice and positively to policy support. Then, we ran regression analyses with prejudice and with policy support as outcome variables and constrained the regression coefficients of positive contact and of negative contact to be equal.[6] Constraining the regression coefficients equal did not worsen the model fit, Satorra-Bentler scaled $\Delta \chi^2(1)$s < 0.18, ps > .673, suggesting that the strength of the associations of positive contact and of negative contact with outcome variables did not differ. There was no evidence of asymmetry thus Hypothesis 5 was refuted. Next, we compared the strength of the associations of positive and negative contact with positive and negative emotions. Constraining the regression coefficients of positive and negative contact to be equal deteriorated the model fit both for positive emotions, Satorra-Bentler scaled $\Delta \chi^2(1) = 7.47$, $p = .006$, and for negative emotions, Satorra-Bentler scaled $\Delta \chi^2(1) = 5.88$, $p = .015$. Positive contact was a stronger predictor of positive emotions than negative contact, while for negative emotions negative contact was a stronger predictor than positive contact (see Figure 1), suggesting a match between valence of contact and valence of emotions experienced toward the outgroup.

Discussion

We analyzed positive and negative contact as predictors of anti-Roma prejudice and of support for Roma policies, considering the point of view of the ethnic Bulgarian majority and of Bulgarian Turks, i.e. an ethnic minority that has a higher social status in Bulgarian society compared to Roma. Ethnic Bulgarians reported more negative than positive interactions with Roma, while Bulgarian Turks reported similar frequency of positive and negative interactions with Roma. These findings clearly differ from previously investigated intergroup contexts, where researchers consistently found more positive than negative contact experiences (Aberson, 2015; Barlow et al., 2012; Brylka et al., 2016; Graf et al., 2014). They further demonstrate that relationships with Roma in Bulgaria are conflictual, and that, probably due to the high visibility and overt stigmatization of Roma, members of other ethnic communities do have contact with them but these contacts are often experienced (or at least interpreted) as negative. We further found that positive contact was associated to reduced prejudice and to more support for Roma policies, while negative contact was associated to increased prejudice and less support for Roma policies. These associations occurred among both ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks, without differences in the strength of the associations. Bulgarian Turks, although being a minority both in numerical terms and as regards to socio-economic conditions and power compared to ethnic Bulgarians, likely perceive their socio-economic and political status stable and higher compared to that of Roma. This is likely to explain the similar results pattern. Our research thus shows that the strength of associations of positive and negative contact with prejudice and with policies support did not differ between the majority group and the higher status ethnic minority, at least in this intergroup context. This finding suggests that it is the relative and not absolute dominant position that drives the interpretation of contact experiences and the subsequent outcomes of contact.

We also shed light on the mechanisms underlying the associations of positive and negative contact with prejudice and with policy support, previously understudied especially for negative contact. We showed that both positive and negative contact are associated with prejudice and with support for Roma policies via intergroup emotions. Similarly to positive intergroup contact (e.g., Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Miller et al., 2004; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008), negative contact with outgroup members elicits emotional reactions toward the outgroup. Specifically, we found that negative contact was related to negative emotions such as feelings of anxiety, contempt and anger and negatively associated with positive emotions such as empathy and trust (see also Techakesari et al. 2015; Visintin et al., 2016). Positive and negative emotions were then in turn related to prejudice and support for Roma policies.

Unexpectedly, we did not find that negative contact was a stronger predictor than positive contact of prejudice and of support for Roma policies. Some characteristics of the intergroup context might explain the absence of the positive-negative contact asymmetry. First, results might be affected by intergroup salience during positive and negative contact with Roma. Indeed, negative intergroup contact generally causes more intergroup salience than positive contact (Paolini et al., 2010), and increased intergroup salience has been proposed as one of the mechanisms responsible of the positive-negative contact asymmetry. However, since Roma in Bulgaria are highly visible, politicized and mediatized, intergroup salience during intergroup encounters might be high, irrespective of contact valence. Second, the positive-negative contact asymmetry found in previous research may have been, at least partly, due to different frequencies of positive and negative contact. As negative contact is usually less frequent than positive contact, unpleasant encounters might be perceived as unexpected and people would pay more attention to them. Experiencing or interpreting contact experiences with Roma in Bulgaria as negative is instead rather common and thus not

an unexpected, remarkable event. Thus, it would not be more relevant than positive contact in predicting prejudice.

However, we did find different strength of associations of positive and negative contact with positive and negative emotions. Specifically, we found a valence-match, with positive contact being more influential than negative contact for positive emotions and negative contact more influential than positive contact for negative emotions. Our interpretation is that positive experiences elicit more positive than negative emotional reactions, while negative experiences induce more negative than positive feelings. This finding corroborates the theoretical and empirical distinction between positive and negative contact, that are differently associated to positive and negative emotions. It further suggests that intergroup contact scholars should pay attention to the wording of prejudice measures when examining the effects of positive and negative contact. To avoid spurious results, prejudice measures should include a balance of items worded positively and negatively.

From a practical point of view, our results call for strong commitment from authorities to foster positive intergroup relations and reduce negative interactions between Roma and non-Roma. This could be achieved by promoting workplaces, schools, and neighborhoods as harmonious interethnic environments. We believe that a tolerant and multicultural interethnic climate is a starting point for achieving these goals. It is worth noting that ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks have representatives in the Bulgarian Parliament, while Roma presence in Bulgarian governmental institutions is very limited. Consequently, it is mainly ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks who have a voice regarding political decisions in Bulgaria and can actively support or oppose, through their parliamentary representatives, policies targeting Roma. Our study indicates that promotion of positive contact and reduction of negative contact with Roma have the potential to contribute to endorsement of pro-Roma policies and, if supportive policies are implemented, to reduction of inequalities.

Limitations of the study

We acknowledge some limitations of our study. First, the correlational nature of the data does not allow us to draw conclusions about causality. However, our predictions were based on prior experimental and longitudinal research. The examination of how actual contacts are experienced by non-student populations gives meaningful insights on intercommunity relationships, but future research should use experimental and longitudinal designs to complement our findings.

Second, we used short scales to assess some of the concepts. The low reliability of the measure of support for Roma policies is likely due to the use of only two items (Cortina, 1993). Furthermore, each intergroup emotion was assessed with a single item, except empathy that was measured with two items. Future research should use multiple item scales to measure intergroup emotions (e.g., Vezzali et al., 2010).

Third, our study considered only explicit measures of prejudice, and answers might at least partly be affected by social desirability concerns. Future research should also investigate associations of positive and negative contact with subtle or implicit forms of prejudice.

Finally, some of our results might be context specific and not generalizable to other intergroup contexts. In other intergroup contexts, we would also expect positive and negative contact to be associated with prejudice and policy support, and positive and negative emotions to act as mediators. Instead, the similar associations for positive and negative contact for the majority group and for the high-status minority might be due to the clear social hierarchy of ethnic groups in Bulgarian society. If a high status minority was unsure about its status, positive and negative contact effects may differ between majorities and high status minorities. Future studies in other intergroup contexts should explore how the complexity of status hierarchies shapes positive and negative contact effects. To allow a more complete test of the

alternative hypotheses put forward here, such studies should also assess perceived threat to status stability, absent in the current study.

Conclusion

Throughout European countries, Roma are targets of harsh discrimination and prejudice both by national majorities and by other minority groups. However, our study suggests that anti-Roma prejudice is not absolute and depends, at least in part, on contact experiences. While negative encounters with Roma can increase negative stances towards them, positive, pleasant encounters can reduce anti-Roma prejudice. A first step for promoting positive contacts between Roma and other groups in Bulgaria and beyond is the authorities' commitment to desegregation and reduction of inequalities.

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Footnotes

1. Regarding the control variables (regression coefficients not constrained equal across ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks), perceived negative economic situation was positively associated with prejudice among both ethnic Bulgarians ($B = 0.14$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .016$) and Bulgarian Turks ($B = 0.15$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .021$), and educational level was positively associated to support for Roma policies among Bulgarian Turks ($B = 0.15$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .017$). No other significant effects were revealed.

2. Indirect effects were calculated as the product between the regression coefficients of the predictor-mediator and the mediator-outcome variable relationships (bootstrapping procedures cannot be implemented when using the complex command in Mplus, Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2010, p. 548).

3. Significant effects of control variables (not constrained equal across ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks) were as follows: for ethnic Bulgarians those who perceived their economic situation as negative ($B = 0.13$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .020$) expressed more prejudice; for Bulgarian Turks, higher educational level was related to more support for Roma policies ($B = 0.17$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .007$), perceived negative economic situation was related to heightened prejudice ($B = 0.12$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .039$), men experienced more positive emotions ($B = 0.24$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = .001$) and women more negative emotions ($B = -0.17$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = .009$).

4. The regression path between negative emotions and prejudice was marginally different between the two groups ($p = .056$). For all the other paths, Satorra-Bentler scaled $\Delta \chi^2(1)$s ≤ 2.39, ps $> .122$. When releasing the regression path between negative emotions and prejudice, the association was significant and positive for both groups, but stronger for ethnic Bulgarians ($B = 0.51$, $SE = 0.08$, $p < .001$) than for Bulgarian Turks ($B = 0.30$, $SE = 0.09$, $p =$

.001). The indirect effects via negative emotions on prejudice were significant for both groups: for ethnic Bulgarians, the indirect effect of positive contact was $B = -0.07$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = .004$, of negative contact $B = 0.16$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$; for Bulgarian Turks, the indirect effect of positive contact was $B = -0.04$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = .024$, of negative contact $B = 0.10$, $SE = 0.03$, $p = .002$.

5. Given the low reliability of the measure of support for Roma policies (Table 2), we re-ran the regression analysis and the mediation model twice, including the two items composing the measure separately as the dependent variable (in addition to prejudice). For the first item (improving living conditions in Roma communities), the results pattern was identical in essence to the main analyses. For the second one (improving educational level of Roma), all the regression coefficients were in the same direction as in the main analyses, but did not always reach significance.

6. Given that previous analyses had demonstrated invariance of the regression coefficients, in these analyses we did not include ethnicity of respondents as a possible moderator. These regression analyses were conducted separately for each dependent variable.

Table 1. *Socio-demographic characteristics, separately for ethnic Bulgarian (n = 516) and Bulgarian Turkish (n = 274) respondents*

	Ethnic Bulgarians	Bulgarian Turks
Age		
Mean (Standard Deviation)	45.15 (17.16)	44.66 (16.95)
Range	15-89	15-84
Gender		
Males	49.6%	52.6%
Females	50.4%	47.4%
Education level		
Primary degree or less	0.2%	12.4%
Lower secondary degree	14.5%	32.5%
Higher secondary degree	64.3%	44.2%
Above higher secondary degree	20.9%	10.9%
Perceived economic situation		
Mean (Standard Deviation)	3.19 (1.01)	3.47 (1.02)

Note. Perceived economic situation ranges from 1 (*We have enough money and are able to save*) to 5 (*We have to cut back on consumption and we don't manage on our earnings*), with higher values indicating worse economic situation.

Table 2. *Reliabilities, means and standard deviations of the variables and correlations between them, separately for ethnic Bulgarian (n = 516) and Bulgarian Turkish (n = 274) respondents*

	Range	Ethnic Bulgarians		Bulgarian Turks		1	2	3	4	5	6
		Reliability	*M (SD)*	*Reliability*	*M (SD)*						
1. Positive contact	1-5	.86[a]	2.48 (0.93)	.91[a]	2.55 (0.97)	-	-.32***	-.51***	.22***	.61***	-.26***
2. Negative contact	1-5	.88[a]	2.72 (1.09)	.86[a]	2.59 (0.99)	-.52***	-	.46***	-.36***	-.40***	.47***
3. Prejudice	1-7	-	4.43 (1.25)	-	4.01 (0.98)	-.44***	.46***	-	-.35***	-.62***	.45***
4. Support for Roma policies	1-5	.57[a]	3.78 (0.89)	.48[a]	3.82 (0.66)	.22***	-.22***	-.33***	-	.24***	-.32***
5. Positive emotions	1-5	.83[b]	2.05 (0.84)	.86[b]	2.30 (0.82)	.52***	-.38***	-.47***	.28***	-	-.37***
6. Negative emotions	1-5	.67[b]	2.11 (0.82)	.70[b]	1.84 (0.72)	-.41***	.53***	.56***	-.26***	-.44***	-

Notes. [a] Spearman-Brown reliability statistic for two-item measures. [b] Cronbach's alpha. Correlations between variables reported below the diagonal are for ethnic Bulgarian respondents and above the diagonal for Bulgarian Turkish respondents. *** $p < .001$.

Table 3. *Indirect effects of positive and negative contact on prejudice and on support for Roma policies via positive emotions and negative emotions*

Predictor	Mediator	Prejudice	Support for Roma policies
Positive contact	Positive emotions	-0.15 (0.03)***	0.05 (0.03)*
	Negative emotions	-0.06 (0.02)**	0.02 (0.01)*
Negative contact	Positive emotions	0.05 (0.02)**	-0.02 (0.01)*
	Negative emotions	0.13 (0.02)***	-0.05 (0.02)**

Notes. Paths are invariant between ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks. Unstandardized coefficients (and standard errors) are reported. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

Figure 1. Path analysis of the effects of positive and negative contact on prejudice and on support for Roma policies via positive emotions and negative emotions. All the regression paths were constrained equal between ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks, as well as the associations between positive and negative emotions and between prejudice and policy support. Unstandardized coefficients (and standard errors) are reported. Control variables: gender, age, educational level, perception of the economic situation. $^*p < .05.$ $^{**}p < .01.$ $^{***}p \leq .001.$

0.04 (0.05)*ns*

-0.21 (0.05)***

R^2_{Bulg} = .32
R^2_{Turk} = .39

R^2_{Bulg} = .40
R^2_{Turk} = .51

Positive contact

0.42 (0.04)***

Positive emotions

-0.36 (0.06)***

Prejudice

-0.14 (0.04)***

0.42 (0.06)***

-0.10 (0.02)***

-0.14 (0.04)***

-0.08 (0.03)**

R^2_{Bulg} = .29
R^2_{Turk} = .28

0.13 (0.06)*

R^2_{Bulg} = .12
R^2_{Turk} = .19

Negative contact

0.32 (0.04)***

Negative emotions

-0.16 (0.05)***

Support Roma policies

-0.10 (0.04)*

0.15 (0.04)***