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## SOCIAL GOALS AND VALUES OF BELGRADE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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The research of social goals and aims as the basic grounds and components of social development is extremely significant for the understanding of the direction in which society is heading. Their generalized ideological profile is a relevant indicator of the dominant form of socialization in society, which is of special significance in studying youth values. The article presents to the reader the results of an empirical study conducted in the University of Belgrade in May 2010.

**Key words:** social goals, values, attitudes, students, University of Belgrade (Serbia).

Sociologists have defined the social context in which new generations of children and youth grow up in Serbia as a period of a “specific anomic transformation of society” [19]. Social scientists have almost reached a consensus on the subject, regarding the dominant determinants of the social environment of the societies in transition. The economic crisis, manifesting itself in a dramatic fall of production, growing unemployment, formation of a parallel, “grey economy” and lower life standards of citizens are only a part of the collage that illustrates a society in transition. Some other manifestations of the crisis are visible in the retarded reconstruction of the most important social institutions, resulting in their inefficiency, frequent political conflicts and absence of consensus on the most important global social goals, as well as the higher crime rate and other forms of pathological phenomena in society.

The transformation of the economic system, often followed by different forms of predatory practices in privatization [8; 21] causing enormous damage to the state and the overall context that “allows” some to make a big fortune, while the broadest social groups tend to become impoverished, has slowly introduced Serbia among the states with considerable social stratification. One should also take into consideration the specific developments in Serbia, where the state is still suffering from plunder in Kosovo and Metohija [13]. This creates a possibility that some other territories will be questioned (e.g., Old Raska, the two southernmost municipalities in central Serbia inhabited mostly by Albanians: Presevo and Bujanovac, insisting on giving more autonomy to Vojvodina, etc.). Distinct social differences and a weak potential for investments in efficient social protection have given rise to a special surviving strategy of Serbian citizens — escape to privacy and indifference to questions of public interest. Therefore, the overall political and economic power has been concentrated in the hands of a small number of people making up the political and economic “elite” [5. P. 79—80; 11], and their concern for the general welfare of those on whose behalf they manage the economic and social resources is rather questionable. Such an economic and political context is suitable for the processes

of ‘re-traditionalization’ [17] in contrast to the expected tendency of strengthening the autonomy of contemporary Serbia.

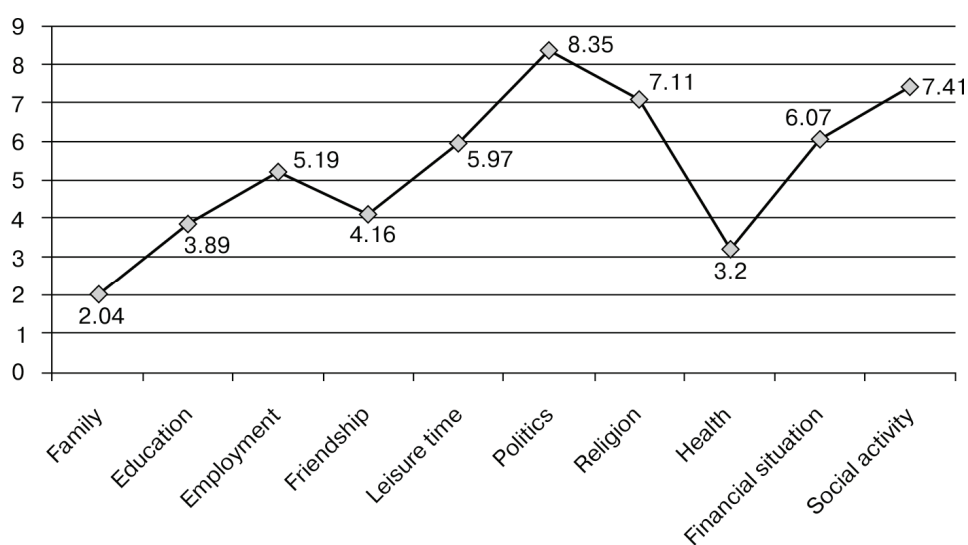
The research was focused on student groups in several countries (Russia, Serbia, China the Czech Republic) in 2010, and the same instrument was used — a questionnaire with some questions adjusted to the conditions of the country under study only when it was necessary (e.g., names of institutions). The results presented in this work originate from the research conducted among the students of the University of Belgrade in May 2010 (1). They refer to the value orientations of the student population of Belgrade University. The analysis was made on the material of a two-step quota sample, which originally was to include 500 respondents, but in effect had 430 students (2): we took into consideration the proportional number of students in certain groups of higher educational institutions. The questionnaire for Serbian students carried a number of additional specific questions.

In the article, we introduce only the basic research results at a descriptive level, since the more detailed value profile requires a more precise scale for identifying value dispositions and, accordingly, a suitable data processing technique. The research instruments contained a series of questions regarding the social environment, when the students could answer them in different manners, applying evaluation scales with five modalities of answers to measure the intensity of attitudes, and in certain cases — through dichotomous answers. Personal preferences (value priorities) were identified by determining the significance the respondents assigned to each object of evaluation. A number of self-estimation scales was also applied (religiousness, optimism, etc.). Due to inevitable limitations in the duration of the inquiry, the preciseness of measurement was sacrificed to getting a wider description of Serbian attitudes, opinions and preferences.

The results of value internalization during the socialization process that the new generations have come through are visible in their evaluation of certain aspects of life, and the acquisition of a certain hierarchy of value dimensions. Family, education, work, friends, health, material standards, etc. found their place on the list of the values offered to the respondents. The students had the task to evaluate each of the offered areas of life along the continuum on the 1—10 scale. The average mean value (3) of certain aspects of life shows that the questioned students valued the family, health (4) and education the most, which is not surprising. Sociologists often claim that the family has the characteristics of being “the only stable component of every-day life” and that “people give it an extreme importance and have trust in its strength” [2. P. 268]. Without discussing such attitudes with the use of adverse indices [7] it should be mentioned that the authors are right at least regarding the evaluation of the family by our respondents. Friendship and work are also very important life segments. Material standards appear to be more important than religion, politics and social activities, but less important than leisure time.

Proceeding from the analysis of the students’ answers, it can be concluded that non-material and personal aspects of life that also include the primary social relations (evaluated as objects of the highest value) as well as education (was highly evaluated), are more important than the other areas of life presupposing involvement in the life of a wider community (Graph 1). Politics and social activities are of least importance for the students, regardless of the fact that they represent forms of activity with a long-term ef-

fect on other aspects of a person's life. However, from the answers to other question regarding the influence of the general situation in the country on the realization of one's personal plans, it can be concluded that students are fully aware of the impact that the social environment has on one's personal life. Namely, a considerable number of students believe that the situation in the country significantly affects the realization of personal plans (47.4%), while every tenth student considers that the realization of one's plans completely depends on the situation in the country. Only 8.8% believe that the situation in the country has no connection whatsoever to their life plans. Thus, despite their view on politics and social activities as those of lower rating, the students are aware of the influence of the general climate in the country on their overall professional and personal achievements.



**Graph 1.** Evaluation of importance of certain aspects of students' life

The data obtained from the questionnaire regarding the students' motivation in getting a higher education shed additional light on the fact that they highly value education in the context of ranking preferences of relatively generalized personal and social value goals. The basic results suggest that two reasons dominate in the students' answers: the wish to acquire knowledge necessary for their future life, as well as the intention to become a qualified expert – these mostly complement each other, therefore, they combine the status and direct benefits given by education. Getting a diploma appears a little more often than the other offered reasons — 7.4%. So, regardless of the popularity of sinecures in Serbia, which to a certain extent undermine the value of diplomas in the job market, most students truly appreciate higher education and are motivated by the wish to become a professional in a certain field, considering that education will give them the necessary knowledge for their future life. Students very rarely chose other options connected with the ultimately pragmatic reasons for studying, such as postponing military service or possibly meeting a partner for marriage at college, etc.

*Table 1*

**Distribution of students' answers to the question on the motivation for studying**

%	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
		79.8	60.5	7.4	2.8	1.9	5.4	2.0	1.5
<b>Rank</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>5</b>

Legend:

1. I wish to acquire knowledge, necessary for my future life
2. I wish to become a qualified expert
3. All I need is a diploma
4. My parents insisted on this
5. The company in which I work/will work requires this
6. It is boring to sit at home
7. Studying is an excellent opportunity to meet a good spouse
8. Possibility to postpone military service
9. Something else

When displaying expectations of their future employment the students gave the highest value to ‘good material satisfaction’ (69% state that the job should be “well paid”), as well as ‘interest’ — 66.7%. More than half of the recorded answers (54.8%) show that the possibility to build one’s career is also very important as a status dimension of future employment. In addition to that, the possibility that a job provides freedom and self-realization as one of the important dimensions of future employment was highly evaluated by almost half of the students — 48.3%.

The idea of success is equally associated with success in the career and creative self-realization, which are the two most common answers (52.9% and 51.2% respectively), combined with the answers like, ‘I associate success with family welfare (44.1%), social recognition (37.9%), glory, material benefits and wealth’ (37.2%).

As for the factors crucial for a successful professional career, we found that in 58.2% of cases the students completely agree with the assertion that “acquaintances and connections are very important in achieving professional success”. If we add the attitudes of respondents who mainly agree with this attitude, we may conclude that only every tenth student considers acquaintances and connections to be unimportant for a successful career. Students believe that the mentioned circumstances are more important than a diploma of a prestigious faculty, the support of parents, friends and close people or merely luck. In other words, according to the obtained results connected with the mentioned personal characteristics, hard work and strong professional skills, students consider acquaintances and connections a very important factor for a successful career, which shows that the students’ awareness of the social disparity in vertical social mobility has been established earlier [3]. Besides, there is also a tendency to find a “bypass” as an easier way to achieve the wanted goals (success). Such results are understandable in terms of the existing social disparities in the educational system in Serbia [3; 11; P. 1—16], therefore, these should be interpreted in the light of the social selection mechanisms and the disclosure of irregular manifestations of sociability within the educational system [10. P. 360].

In terms of how the students see their future, it is interesting to mention their plans for the future. The answers show that the majority of students (44.5%) make plans only for the closest future, less than a third (30.1%) plan their lives a little further, while 16.1% mostly do not plan or never think about the future (9.3%). The collected data are in ac-

cordance with the trend in the countries with transitional economies where the economic crisis created a feeling that every-day life is a struggle for survival. The phenomenon of “shrunk perspective” dominates in the social atmosphere of communities suffering from transition hardships, which manifests itself in redefining long-term goals, interests and strategies and urges people to plan in more and more limited terms, i.e. “their reduction to here and now” [4. P. 372].

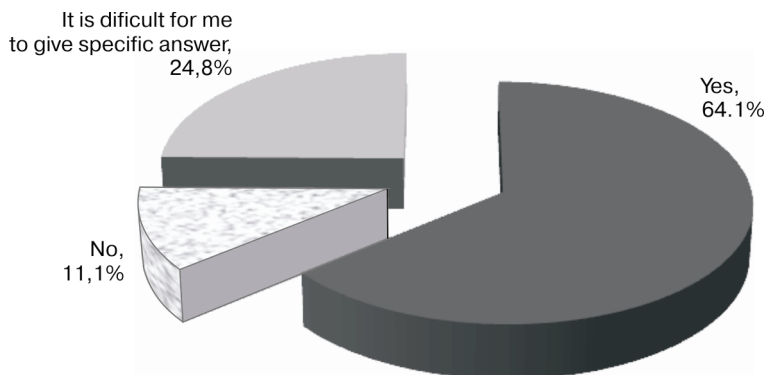
Religiosity was also on the list of value orientations. The results show that 74.9% of students consider themselves as “believers”, 6% defined themselves as “believers who do not belong to any confession”, and almost every fifth denied his religiosity (19%). We suppose that the results would be slightly different if measured with an attitude scale that would comprise statements that, apart from the indicators of religious participation, would also measure the dogmatic and eschatological dimensions of religiosity. We mention this because students did not declare in the expected way the most usual indicators of religious participation (e.g., the frequency of attending religious institutions). Namely, the majority of students go to church several times a year (40.8%), i.e. only during the great religious holidays (19%), while the percentage of students that do this every day (14.6%) or twice or three times per week (1.4%) is considerably lower, and this does not agree with the volume of religious declaration.

The revival of religious feelings recorded in Serbia in the past decades is rather a manifestation of traditional religiosity and actualization of its anthropological foundation in the time of crisis than a fundamental turn to religiosity implying all the basic dimensions of religiosity [9. P. 886]. This is partially proved by the data obtained in answers to the question as to what people find/look for in religiosity. Students usually gave the following answers: soul purification, repentance (52.4%), moral support (50.3%), remission of suffering (49.2%), meaning of life (36.4%), soul salvation, a way to eternal life (36.2%), a sense of ‘togetherness’ with other people (22.4%). Every tenth student considers that in religion people look for an escape from reality — 11%.

Besides the above given data concerning the correlation of personal and social goals, obtained by evaluating the effect of the actual situation in the country on the realization of personal goals, we identified the attitude to the country and interiorization of pro-systematic values expressed in the students’ self-evaluation of patriotic feelings, their evaluation of Western politics, their feelings of pride in the country’s history, cultural, material and other potentials of the country, confidence in social institutions and the evaluation of problem settlement in Kosovo and Metohija (K&M). It is important to note that investigating the attitudes of students as regards K&M does not only have a general significance in discovering the opinions of a relatively small part of the population on this acute question. It also has a special significance, as students are the most educated members of society from whom, as a rule, social and political elite of the nation is recruited [1; 20. P. 253; 12].

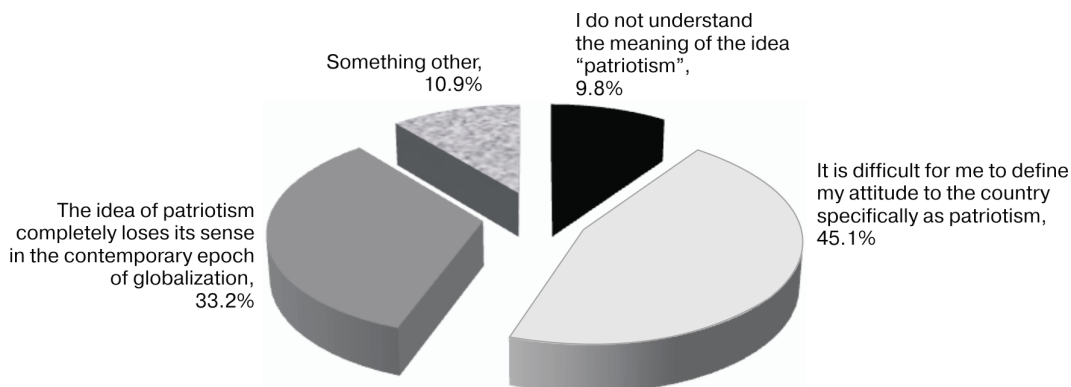
The national structure of the student body is an important factor in the discussion of their acceptance of patriotism as a value, especially as regards the fact that leaders of some national minorities contested Serbia as their state. In the case of Belgrade University students, 93.9% of them pronounce themselves as Serbs. Answering the direct

question, “Do you consider yourself a patriot?” 64.1% answered “Yes”, 11.1% said “No”, 24.8% declared that it was “difficult for them to give a concrete answer”. If we sum up those who decidedly answered “No” and those who had difficulties giving an answer, it becomes evident that over  $\frac{1}{3}$  of Belgrade students have problems in qualifying themselves as patriots.



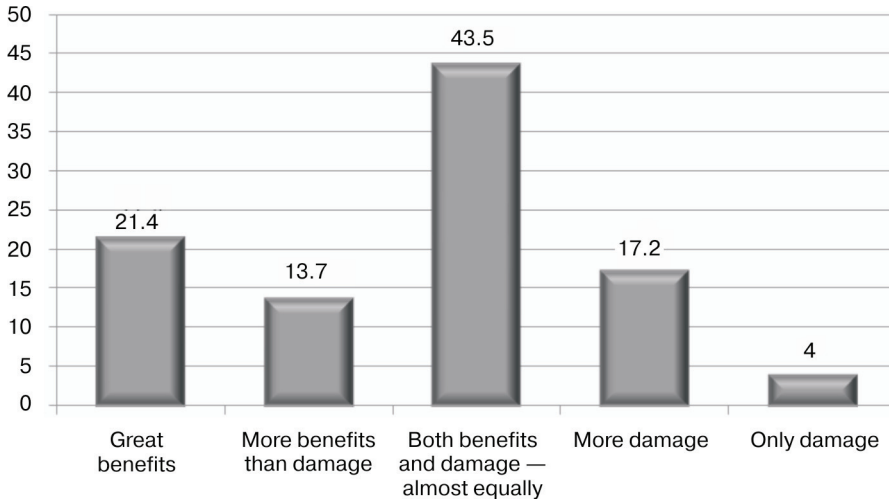
**Graph 2.** “Do you consider yourself a patriot?” (%)

Among those who had such a problem, 9.8% answered that “they do not understand the meaning of ‘patriotism’”, 45.1% stated that “it was difficult for them to define their attitude to the country as patriotism”, while 33.2% consider that in the era of globalization “the idea of patriotism completely loses its meaning”.



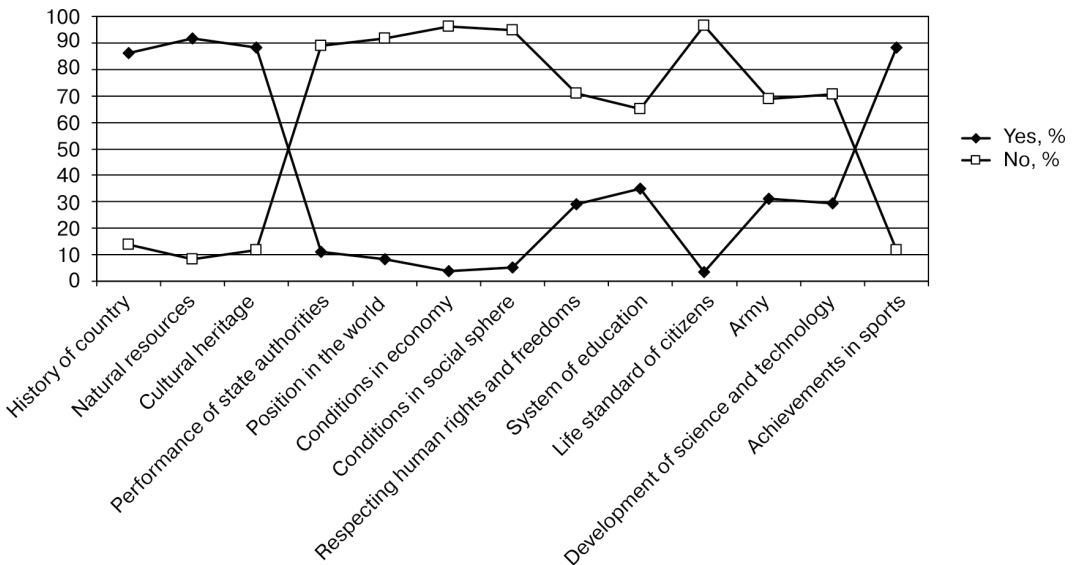
**Graph 3.** Distribution of students’ answers to the question why it was difficult for them to answer the question on their patriotism (%)

Given the dogmatic attitude, generally spread among the members of almost all the political parties in Serbia, that there is no alternative to Serbia becoming a member of the European Union [14. P. 167—173], we were interested to find out how students evaluate the results of cooperation with Western countries. All the more so, because the policy of Westernization — in the sense of completely non-critical acceptance of all the values and everything that comes from the West — is the dominant policy pursued in all transitional societies, and, on the other hand, because criticism is an inherent characteristic of intellectuals, especially regarding the young ones.



**Graph 4.** Distribution of answers to the question of how students evaluate the rapprochement between Serbia and Western countries (%)

As for different elements of patriotism, we were interested in what makes the students proud of their country. We can see in Graph 5 that Belgrade students are mostly proud of something neutral in the contemporary social-political context: natural resources, achievements in sports, cultural heritage, history of Serbia and, significantly less than all these, the educational system. On the other hand, they are the least proud of life standards, the situation in the economy, conditions in the social sphere, Serbia’s position in the world and the work of the state institutions.



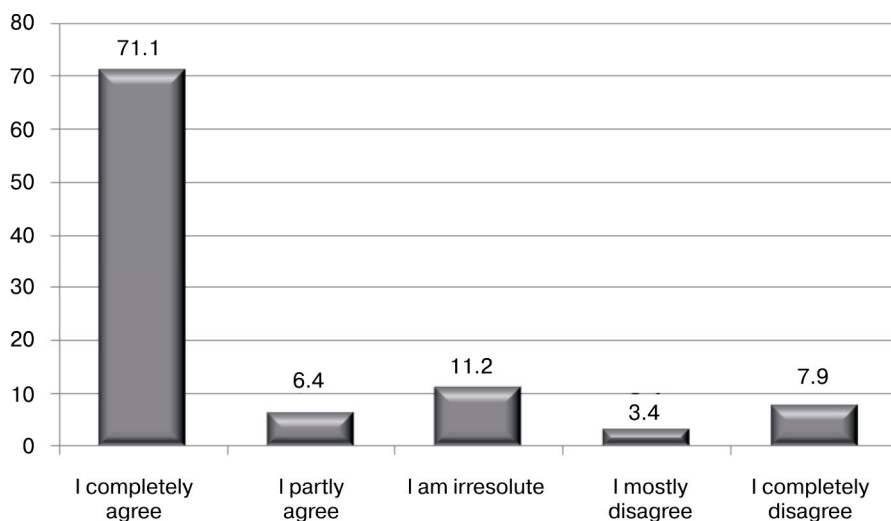
**Graph 5.** Distribution of students’ answers to the question what they are proud of in Serbia (%)

Proceeding from the fact that more than  $\frac{1}{3}$  of students of Belgrade University do not consider themselves as patriots or at least do not have a clear attitude to this notion, we

can refer them to cosmopolites in the ideal sense of the word, devoted to the values of the West. However, if we combine the answers to the question “Do you consider yourself a patriot?” and to the question regarding the benefits of the rapprochement between Serbia and the West, we will see that this assumption is incorrect. Among those who do not consider themselves as patriots, 25.5% believe that the rapprochement between Serbia and the West has brought great benefits to Serbia, 19.1% — that there were more benefits than damage, unlike 12.8% who consider that there was more damage than benefits, and only 2.1% see only negative consequences. 40.4% of the students believe that the consequences were almost equally good and bad.

Among those who see themselves as patriots, there are fewer students who believe that the rapprochement between Serbia and the West has brought great benefits to Serbia — 24.9%, with only 7.7% of patriot students who think that there are more benefits rather than damage; unlike 18.7% of the respondents stating that there was more damage, and 4.8% of those who see only negative consequences. Here the middle category — 43.6% — also dominates, with the students believing that these consequences are equally good and bad. This leads us to the conclusion that although the majority of Belgrade students are critical about the process of Westernization and its impact on Serbia, however they avoid painting it black and white.

Concerning the question of Kosovo and Metohija, Belgrade students express very patriotic views stating that they are an integral and inalienable part of the Republic of Serbia and that Serbia should not recognize the so-called “independence of Kosovo”.

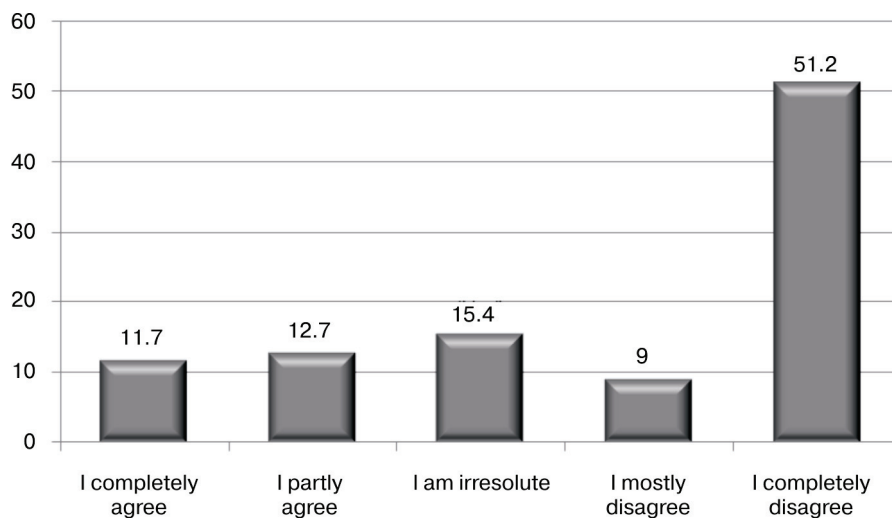


**Graph 6.** Distribution of students' answers on the attitude that Serbia should not recognize “independence” of Kosovo (%)

Therefore, a resolute resistance to the independence of K&M was expressed by 71.1% of Belgrade students, to which we should add partial resistance of 6.4% students, which amounts to over  $\frac{3}{4}$  of those who do not recognize the so-called “independence”, with 11.2% of students feeling irresolute. On the other hand, the percentage of students that plead for the recognition of Kosovo is 7.9% and is a bit lower than the 8.6% figure



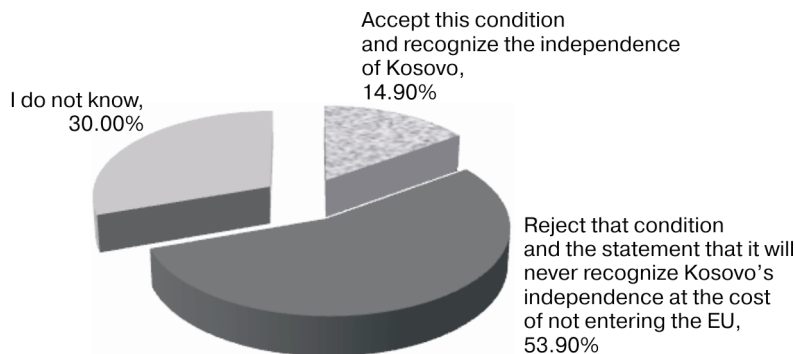
shown by Prishtina University temporarily? placed in Kosovska Mitrovica [18]. In spite of the fact that many people both in the past and today suggest “division of Kosovo” as a solution to this “frozen conflict”, (which lately has been getting more and more “defrosted” and is about to flare up), Belgrade students oppose this solution. Their logic is — why should we share what is ours in essence?



**Graph 7.** Distribution of students' answers on the territorial division of Kosovo (%)

Overall, the students' disagreement with the idea accounts for 60.2%, and as compared with the cited research in the University in Prishtina temporarily placed in Kosovska Mitrovica, the difference in the expressed disagreement with the students from Kosovo is only 1.1% [18]. Irresolution about the “division of Kosovo” was expressed by 15.4% of Belgrade students, while agreement was shown by almost  $\frac{1}{4}$ , or 24.4% (complete agreement 11.7%, partial agreement 12.7%). However, this resistance is not very firm, so, with the persistent pleading from the Serbian state bodies, representatives of foreign countries, including Russia, we can expect movement towards affirmation of the “division of Kosovo”, although even then it would be questionable. The results of the survey point to this — one cannot “mostly disagree” on the question of division, therefore the majority of students who gave this answer should be counted together with those who “silently” opt for this idea. This argument mostly refers to the category of “irresolute” students and those who “partly agree”.

The actual question facing the Serbian community, both political and academic, is if it is possible to forsake the idea that Kosovo and Metohija are part of Serbia for membership in the European Union, which is messaged by the Western countries to the state authorities of Serbia in the form of various conditions. In this respect, it is interesting to monitor the evolution of the agendas of political parties regarding this question [15; 16], which does not correspond to students' clear attitudes. Since this research was carried out in 2010 and since then the attitude of Western countries to the Serbs in Kosovo and to Serbia has been radicalized, it is reasonable to assume that the number of people who plead for rejecting this condition because of the risk of not joining the European Union has grown.



**Graph 8.** “If recognition of “independent” Kosovo by Serbia were a condition of Serbia joining the EU, Serbia should”

In the context of evaluating policies and social activities, the data concerning the level of confidence in state institutions is very interesting. Students showed the greatest confidence in the Serbian Orthodox Church — the mean value on the confidence scale is 2.93, in the media — 2.52 and in the Army — 2.09, and the least confidence — in big business, 1.52, political parties — 1.55 and international NGOs acting in Serbia — 1.63. The mean values of confidence in the Government of Serbia, Parliament and Police are also very low — below 2, which means that the answer “mostly do not believe” dominates among the students (Table 2).

Table 2

**Students’ level of confidence in certain institutions of the state of Serbia**

HOW MUCH DO YOU BELIEVE IN:	COMPLETELY BELIEVE	MOSTLY BELIEVE	MOSTLY DO NOT BELIEVE	DO NOT BELIEVE AT ALL	I CAN NOT ANSWER	MEAN VALUE
The Government of the Republic of Serbia	5.1	21.7	31.9	29	12.3	1.78
The Parliament of RS	3.4	16.5	35.7	31.8	12.6	1.66
The President of the Republic of Serbia	9.9	28.7	30	22.5	8.9	2.08
Political parties	2	10.5	37.1	41.7	8.8	1.55
Local NGOs	2.7	21.8	31.9	36	13	1.71
International NGOs acting in Serbia	2.2	20.9	31.3	29.4	16.3	1.63
Police and bodies for protection of rights	2.7	28.1	32.7	28.8	7.7	1.89
The Courts	3.9	31.2	30.3	26.2	8.5	1.96
The Banks	5.3	30.8	30.5	24.7	8.7	2
Big business	3.2	9.3	38	35.9	13.7	1.52
The Mass media	5.1	34.1	30.2	22.9	7.6	2.52
The Serbian Orthodox Church	22.5	36.3	20.6	11.9	8.7	2.97
The Army	9.1	33.6	27.8	16.4	13.1	2.09

Students are not satisfied with the social institutions in Serbia and have no confidence in them. For this reason, it is interesting to see how much they personally contribute to changing the situation. As for the question on their interest in politics, half of the students state that they follow political actions only when necessary, that they do not try to know everything, but they are not completely indifferent to politics. However, every

third student is not interested in politics (hears something by chance or is not interested at all). The students who are not interested in politics explain it in various ways: they say that politics is “a dirty thing” (30.4%), that they lack time (29.3%) or do not see any point in dealing with politics (22.1%). Every tenth student uninterested in politics explains it saying, “it is too early for me to deal with politics”. Only 42.8% of students take part in all elections, 36.7% only vote at the most important elections, every fifth student is disappointed by the outcomes of the elections and never votes, as he is sure “it will not change anything”.

Speaking of personal activities and anomie among students, it is important to note towards whom students primarily feel responsible. They are primarily responsible to the family and their peers (81.4%), to themselves (74.5%) and to friends (43.9%); only every tenth student feels responsibility to his people (9.7%) and the state (9.2%). The data presented in the research illustrate the life areas, which are the most valuable to students and partly shed new light on the already mentioned data concerning patriotism. It would be also interesting to check the attitudes regarding the duties of the state to the individual, as well as preferences bearing on personal and collective identities.

Our research mostly confirmed the results of the studies organized periodically in the previous period. Students show significant anomie and orientations towards religion, resignation to the future and unwillingness to plan their own life in the forthcoming periods. No doubt that there is a high degree of disappointment concerning the general life conditions in Serbia, which manifests itself in their extreme distrust towards the key state institutions, including political parties and both international and local NGOs. Under these circumstances, they show a resolute turn to themselves: this is the reason for the high evaluation of education, despite the wide spread of sinecure, for the turn towards the family and significant responsibility to the family and themselves. This is why they turn to the church, which is an intermediary “in communicating with God”, which eventually brings peace and seclusion.

The high evaluation of education is notable – the students study because they want to get knowledge necessary for their future life and becoming qualified professionals. The students show heterogeneity in their pro-social attitudes, attitudes to patriotism, political activities, to the effects of the established cooperation between Serbia and the West. Although one third of the students cannot define themselves as patriots, when reaching the terrain of “concrete patriotism” more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  are against recognizing the so-called “independence” of Kosovo, while 53.9% consider that this condition should be rejected even at the price of Serbia staying out of the European Union. They are also against the idea of “division of Kosovo” due to the logic “why should we share something that is ours?”, although in the meantime such attitudes might have changed due to the firm determination of the Serbian state authorities, the support of the Western countries and Russia.

The students in Serbia are mostly proud of the country’s natural resources, achievements in sports, the country’s history and its cultural heritage — in other words, of something that has a relatively neutral value. They are least proud of the situation in the economy, people’s material well-being, the country’s position in the world, the activities of the state authorities and conditions in the social sphere (they are actually ashamed of

these). The students show no pride in how human rights are protected, or in the functioning of the system of education in Serbia. They are aware of the impact of the current social environment on their personal and professional achievements and thus cannot be called optimists, essential characteristics of the youth in healthy social environments.

#### NOTES

- (1) The holder of the research project in Serbia was the Serbian Education Academy (SEA) and the executor was the Department of Sociology of the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Prishtina with contemporary head office in Kosovska Mitrovica. The manager of the research in Serbia was Prof. Dr. Danilo Z. Markovic.
- (2) At first, the proportions for certain groups of higher education institutions were established (socio-liberal arts, natural and technical sciences, engineering sciences, groups of medical sciences), and in the second step faculties from certain groups were chosen where research was conducted.
- (3) The value that is the closest to the mark 1 is of the highest valuation.
- (4) It is interesting that the family is a priority before health in the culture where the oath "I swear on my health" exists. Nevertheless, the data might be explained by the fact that extremely young people who are "having" health often do not consider it as a value.

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## СОЦИАЛЬНЫЕ ЦЕННОСТИ И ЦЕЛИ СТУДЕНТОВ БЕЛГРАДСКОГО УНИВЕРСИТЕТА

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Изучение социальных установок и целей как фундаментальных оснований и компонентов социального развития исключительно важно для понимания, в каком направлении движется общество. Их обобщенный мировоззренческий профиль — релевантный индикатор сложившейся в обществе доминантной формы социализации, что особенно актуально при изучении ценностей молодых поколений. Статья предлагает читателям результаты эмпирического исследования, проведенного в мае 2010 г. среди студентов Белградского университета.

**Ключевые слова:** социальные цели, ценности, установки, студенты Белградского университета (Сербия).