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SOCIAL GOALS OF STUDENTS IN SERBIA

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**Abstract.** The results of the survey of Serbian students' preferences of social goals are presented in the paper. The survey was conducted in November 2014 on the population of students of the Serbian State University in Kosovska Mitrovica (UKM) and the University in Belgrade (UB). It is the part of a wider longitudinal research of social attitudes of students in Serbia, conducted by the Faculty of Philosophy in Kosovska Mitrovica (Serbia). The relation was researched to relatively general social goals, in this paper considered as goals whose fulfillment is not related only to the personal welfare of respondent, but is important for the whole society. Statistical importance of differences in preferences was tested among the offered social goals among the students studying at the two Universities in Serbia. It was established that such the difference exists in 5 out of 11 goals from the offered list.

**Key words:** students; social goals; Serbia.

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СОЦИАЛЬНЫЕ ЦЕЛИ СТУДЕНТОВ В СЕРБИИ

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**Аннотация.** В статье представлены результаты исследования предпочтений в социальных целях сербских студентов. Исследование проводилось в ноябре 2014 г. среди студентов Университета в Косовска-Митровице (УКМ) и Белградского университета (УБ). Оно представляет собой часть более широкого лонгитюдного исследования социальных позиций студентов в Сербии, проводимого Философским факультетом в Косовска-Митровице (Сербия). Исследовались отношения к относительно общим социальным целям, под которыми в данной статье подразумеваются те цели, чье осуществление не связано исключительно с личной выгодой респондентов, а имеет значение для всего общества. Мы тестировали статистическую значимость различий в предпочтениях между предлагаемыми социальными целями среди студентов, обучающихся в двух университетах в Сербии, причем было установлено, что такие различия существуют в отношении к пяти из одиннадцати целей предлагаемого списка.

**Ключевые слова:** студенты; социальные цели; Сербия.

**Introduction**

Although the research of social goals belongs to the field of value and value orientations, as certain authors notice, especially when they are formulated in a general manner, considering the idea that relatively stable and permanent orientation of individuals is the issue [1, p. 568], the authors in this paper consider primarily the preferences of individuals related to the current goals directed to welfare of community as an entity, liable to changes. Namely, the accomplishment of certain goals implies erasing from the list of priorities of individuals and groups (for example, admission of Serbia to the European Union (EU) or establishing a strategic cooperation with Russia). At that, the value dimension implied is not negated, especially

considering that the preferred social values may be interpreted as preferences of individuals oriented to the goals [3, p. 14; 10, p. 4]<sup>1</sup>, but which are not materialized only in the goals to whose realization they are directed [3, p. 14].

When choosing priority goals, individuals are certainly managed in some extent by interests of other people and the society as a whole, expressing their view of the community tendencies. There is no

<sup>1</sup> Other researchers of values and value orientations also imply even at operational level that research of value orientations implies "recording" of goals to which individuals and groups incline, even when they do not use the syntagm goals [5; 8; 9; and especially the survey of various theoretical conceptions of the value in 7].

doubt that their estimations are intermediated by both personal goals and interests, as well as by a series of other social factors. However, it is important that we understand the position of an individual in a society not only as the consequence of actions of other structures that determine his behavior, but also as the correlation of actions of those structures, as well as the intentional and conscious activity of social actors managed by certain goals of personal and social nature. The authors of the paper consider that it is especially important to monitor preferences of social goals within population of students, since they are not only the holders of realization of certain social goals, but also the key actors in creation of the preferred and new goals in the future.

### Methodological remarks

Presented results of the research are the part of a larger research of social attitudes of students periodically conducted by the Department of Sociology of the Faculty of Philosophy in Kosovska Mitrovica. Findings obtained in the research conducted in November 2014 at quota sample of UKM students are presented in the text, where the students of all faculties were included in the sample. The sample was realized with 345 respondents, with proportional disposition of students according to the faculty where they study, the gender and the year of study [4]. The research of students' population that study at the UB was conducted on two-stage quota sample realized with 391 examinees with proportional share of students from certain groups of higher education institutions, as well as according to the gender.

List of social goals was made considering the domain of the current politics in Serbia, but also the ardent social problems of a society in a late transition, characterized by a series of distinctivenesses [12, p. 89-148]. A list of 11 goals was offered to examinees that often stand in political agendas of societies faced with similar challenges. A possibility for examinees to add the priority goals goes without saying. Short-term «daily-politics» goals were omitted from the list, as well as those extremely generalized that get a form of general values. Examinees estimated the importance of the listed social goals at the scale 1-5<sup>2</sup> or formulated other goals and determined their priorities.

Presumption of researchers was that there was a significant difference in social goals preferences between students educated in the capital of Serbia and their colleagues educated in the southern Serbian province, since determination of social priorities was

intermediated by current social factors that form experience and perception of actors.

### Review of Research Results and Discussion

Regarding the examinees that study at the Serbian State University at K&M, the preservation of Kosovo and Metohija as the integral part of Serbia and the struggle against corruption and criminal stand out as the top-priorities according to their importance. The first goal as the one of the top-priority was stated by 42,5 % and the second goal by 41,8 % of the students from the north of K&M. The high share of students that consider these goals to be the top-priorities is the consequence of the longtime attempts of Serbia to solve the issue of its southern province status, which is directly reflected on the quality of life in that part of Serbia. It is not negligible that the issue of K&M status represents the part of negotiating agenda for admission of Serbia to the EU. The similar situation is with the high level of corruption and criminal that Serbia is trying to reduce.

The examinees from the UKM also recognized the adverse demographic processes as the ardent problem, due to low rate fertility, relatively high mortality, migration movements and aging of population, which demand a fast response of the society in order to keep the number of Serbian citizens at least at the current level [6]. There is no doubt that the reasons should be looked for also in the attempts of Albanian separatists lasting for several decades to capture this area by increase of population, which is confirmed by the findings of the academic Macura that Kosovo authorities of the period, preparing the secession from Serbia, «tacitly supported pronatality consciousness» [2, p. 313]. Therefore, even 37,7 % of students consider that one of the top-priority goal of Serbia should be the growth of natality of Serbian citizens. A third of students consider that the main goals should be a faster economic growth and a pursuit of a higher life standard of citizens, i.e. building a strategic partnership with Russia (see *table 1*), which also might be considered as the logical finding considering the longtime low rate of economic growth, low wages and high rate of poverty in Serbia<sup>3</sup>. A quarter of this population as the top-priority goals see the rehabilitation of culture and tradition (25,5 %), accession of Serbia in the EU (24,7 %), but also accession to NATO alliance (27,5 %). This indicates to direct actions of social

<sup>2</sup> 1. One of top-priorities; 2. High importance; 3. Middle importance; 4. Small importance and 5. Not important at all.

<sup>3</sup> According to the latest data of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, the rate of risk from poverty in 2015 was 25,4 %, placing Serbia at the inglorious first place in Europe, while the rate of risk from poverty or the social excludability was even 41,3 % [11].

factors to creation of the idea of priority social goals. Most of the students live in precariousness due to the open issue of the K&M status, aware of the fact that there are less and less members of their national community in this territory, confronted with disturbed personal and property safety [12, p. 102-113], significant problem of corruption and criminal. Poverty and attempts to preserve the cultural identity of a small number of Serbs that live in the territory of K&M only complete the determinants of the social context that acts as predictor of value orientations, even the comprehension of social goals.

Simultaneously, it is surprising that over a third of the examinees from this University do not consider as relevant goals preservation of K&M as the integral and sovereign part of Serbia, not the accession of

their own country to the EU (*table*). Almost every fourth examinee in this subsample considers as completely irrelevant social goals the issues of the struggle against criminal and corruption (26,8 %), the growth of natality (26,5 %), the faster economic growth and increase of life standard (23,5 %). Maybe these results could be interpreted as the absence of prospects that young people feel in the everyday survival at the far south of Serbia. Argumentation for such the interpretation may be justified by the fact that significantly greater share of students from the UKM, comparing to their colleagues studying in Belgrade, also consider as completely irrelevant other goals that were offered in the research. Such the finding implies the presence of value vacuum among the students' population from K&M.

Table

Preferred social goals (SG) with students of the University in Kosovska Mitrovica and students of the University in Belgrade (finding in %)

	One of top-priorities		High importance		Middle importance		Small importance		Not important at all	
	KM	BG	KM	BG	KM	BG	KM	BG	KM	BG
SG1	20.2	27.3	18.4	22.9	32.4	26.4	12.5	11.8	16.5	11.6
SG2	33.3	44.0	19.8	18.2	11.1	9.2	12.3	9.0	23.5	19.6
SG3	41.8	43.7	8.9	17.6	12.6	9.1	9.8	10.7	26.8	19.0
SG4	37.7	32.4	10.2	18.3	15.1	21.3	10.5	11.4	26.5	16.6
SG5	13.0	8.6	17.1	21.9	33.7	38.5	21.0	18.3	15.2	12.7
SG6	12.5	14.4	21.1	23.8	37.1	36.7	17.9	15.5	11.5	9.7
SG7	25.5	27.5	17.2	22.8	22.3	21.1	17.2	13.3	17.8	15.3
SG8	24.7	15.3	8.3	14.8	19.6	27.3	12.8	15.3	34.6	27.3
SG9	42.5	30.4	7.6	17.6	9.5	20.4	5.1	13.1	35.2	18.4
SG10	27.5	18.2	9.6	10.1	14.1	19.3	12.8	12.3	36.1	40.1
SG11	33.9	20.7	10.1	21.6	16.1	31.4	12.0	13.2	27.8	13.2

Legend:

- SG1 – Further development of state on principles of the rights
- SG2 – Faster economic growth and accomplishment of a better life standard of citizens
- SG3 – Struggle against corruption and criminal
- SG4 – Growth of natality
- SG5 – Privatization
- SG6 – Realization of social programs
- SG7 – Restoration of culture and tradition
- SG8 – Accession of Serbia into the EU
- SG9 – Preservation of K&M as the integral and sovereign part of Serbia
- SG10 – Accession of Serbia into NATO
- SG11 – Development of strategic partnership with Russia

When analyzing the obtained results of the research on the subsample of students of the UB, almost identical list of top-priority goals may be observed, with a slightly different share of students that emphasize these priorities. They emphasize as the top-priority goal the faster economic growth and the increase of the life standard (44 %), as well as the struggle against corruption and criminal (43,7 %), while almost every third examinee emphasizes the growth of natality (32,4 %) and preservation of K&M as the integral and

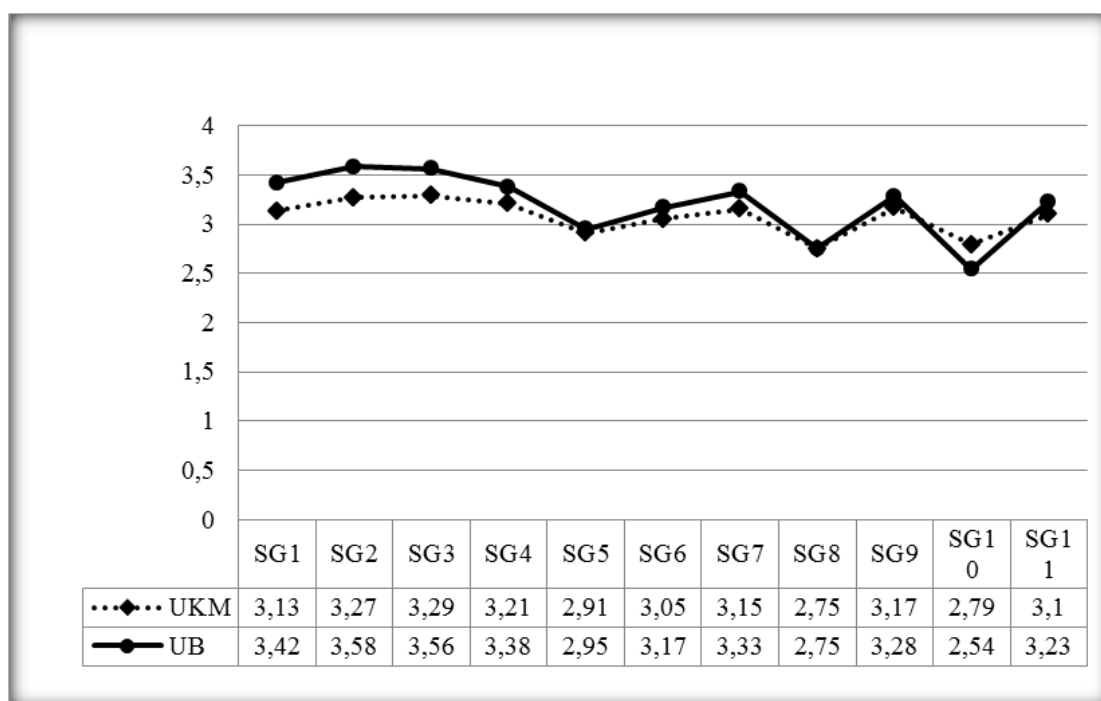
sovereign part of Serbia (30,4 %) as something to which should be tended urgently in own country.

Accession of Serbia to NATO is completely irrelevant social goal for 40,1 % of students from the UB. The result is expected considering the vivid memory to NATO aggression to Yugoslavia in 1999, with numerous victims and damages, but also the clear attitude of the political class and public opinion against the Atlantic integrations of Serbia. However, it is unexpected that more than every fourth (27,3 %)

considers the preservation of K&M within Serbia as a completely irrelevant social goal. Unexpectedly relatively great share of examinees in both subsamples pronouncing in such the way on the referred goal may be interpreted sociologically as an expression of the revolt because of the constant crisis regarding the solving of the K&M status, the condition of «sliding independence» where Serbian authorities are making ever greater concessions leading *de facto* to the acceptance of the independence as *fait accompli* because it is the condition for the accession of Serbia to the EU, proclaimed to be a dogma by the political class of Serbia after 2000. In that sense, students of both Universities are against so-called Brussels Agreement – it has a relative majority among Belgrade students, but

below 1/2, while the share among students in Kosovska Mitrovica, feeling its consequences, is 62,7 %.

Average values of preferences were calculated with the aim to compare the established differences within the preferred social goals in subsamples of students, showing that in general the differences in estimations of priorities are not great. When the results are summarized, the impression is that students of both Universities give the same value in average to the listed social goals. Namely, although the average value obtained on each of the offered social goals has the possibility of variation from 1.00 to 5.00, it varies in a narrow range in both samples (*graph*), which is the finding similar to the results from previous researches conducted in 2009 and 2010 [13, p. 302].



Graph. Average value of estimating importance of certain social goals in subsamples

Comparing the results of the researching evaluation of social goals in subsamples of students from both Universities shows that the majority of social goals are evaluated as more important by the students from the UB in comparison with their colleagues from the UKM, with the exception of the accession to NATO, which is evaluated as a less important social goal by the students from the capital in comparison with their colleagues from K&M. However, the share of students responding to the direct question regarding their attitude on the accession of Serbia to NATO within the Euro-Atlantic integration was 69,8 % against in Kosovska Mitrovica and 64,3 % against in Belgrade. In average, the attitudes of examinees in both

subsamples are the most similar regarding the evaluation of the accession of Serbia into the EU as the social goal, as well as the privatization, being also among the least important goals according to the evaluation of students from both subsamples, together with the accession of Serbia to NATO. Students of both Universities in average evaluate identically the goal of preserving the sovereignty of Kosmet within the borders of their state.

Since comparison of average values on the assessment scale of the importance of certain goals does not show enough difference between the subsamples, the statistical importance of recorded differences was tested with the aim to verify the hypothesis. It was established that a statistically



important difference between evaluations of examinees in samples was recorded in case of evaluation of the following social goals: struggle against corruption and criminal ( $\chi^2_{(4)} = 16.442$  [N=689] Sig. 0,002; Cramer's V = 0.154); growth of natality ( $\chi^2_{(4)} = 20.718$  [N=691] Sig. 0,000; Cramer's V = 0.173); accession of Serbia into the European Union ( $\chi^2_{(4)} = 21.170$  [N=671] Sig. 0.000; Cramer's V = 0.178); preservation of Kosmet as integral and sovereign part of Serbia ( $\chi^2_{(4)} = 62.207$  [N=673] Sig. 0.000; Cramer's V = 0.291); construction of strategic partnership with Russia ( $\chi^2_{(4)} = 58.547$  [N=673] Sig. 0.000; Cramer's V = 0.295).

Namely, students from the UB see the struggle against corruption and criminal as more important social goal than their colleagues from K&M. almost two thirds of examinees in this subsample estimate that it is one of the most important or very important social goal (61,3 %), while such the opinion share a half of their colleagues from K&M (50,7 %). Simultaneously, the difference is significant also in the case of the share of examinees in subsamples that evaluate this goal no importance at all. Students from K&M lead in such the evaluation with 26,8 % having such the attitude, while the same evaluation have 19 % of their colleagues that study in the capital.

Similar differences were noticed regarding the evaluation of the importance of the growth of natality as a social goal of Serbia, being more significant primarily in the share of students that consider this issue as without importance at all – 16,6 % of students from the UB and 26,5 % of examinees from the UKM.

Students from K&M are little closer to the official political attitude regarding the accession of Serbia into the EU. A quarter of them (24,7 %) consider this to be one of the top-priority goals, while only 15,3 % of their colleagues from the UB consider the same. The greatest share of students from the capital estimate that this goal is of middle importance (27,3 %) and the same percentage consider that this is the goal of no importance at all. Simultaneously, over a third of their colleagues from K&M give no importance to this goal (34,6 %). However, when the question is asked if they would support the accession of Serbia into the EU, the share of 61,8 % of students from Kosovska Mitrovica and 37,8 % of students from Belgrade would not support this even under the same conditions that had been valid for the other states - new members of the EU. The accession of Serbia into the EU under the same conditions would support 34,8 % of students in Belgrade. This result of our research from 2014 represent the first empirically established moderate Euro-skepticism with Belgrade

population of students. If the accession of Serbia to the EU is hypothetically conditioned with the recognition of the «Kosovo independence» by Serbia, then the share of students against such Euro-integrations of Serbia is 73,5 % in the north of K&M and 53,4 % in Belgrade.

Differences of the similar profile were established regarding the goals of preservation of K&M within Serbia and the strategic cooperation with Russia. There are more students from K&M than from Belgrade who think that these are the top-priority goals of Serbia, with the difference going up to 13 %. However, their share is leading also in the group with the opposite opinion – that this goal has no importance at all. On the other hand, 85,8 % of students from Kosovska Mitrovica and 57,2 % of students from Belgrade do not support the attitude that «Serbia should recognize Kosovo independence» regarding the personal attitude on a possible solution for the status of K&M. Simultaneously, regarding the benefits from the politics of our state from the rapprochement with Russia, 80 % of students from Kosovska Mitrovica observe such the benefit (55,7 % consider that it is a «great benefit»), opposite to 52,3 % of their colleagues from Belgrade (19,1 % consider that it is a «great benefit», 32,2 % «more benefit than damage»). On the other hand, only 7,3 % of students from the north of K&M and 13,8 % of students from Belgrade see the benefit from the rapprochement with Western countries

### Towards conclusion

Generally, students from the north of K&M are more inclined to shared evaluations of the offered social goals than their colleagues from the UB. It seems that a part of young people from the southern Serbian province display a complete resignation for important social issues, but Belgrade students also display dissatisfaction. In that sense, the evaluation of the authors of the text made a few years ago is completely current – «traumatizing social context cannot be stimulative for taking over the role of the bearer of social changes, which is the most common «natural epithet» attributed to young generation». It is possible to explain partly by this the aloofness of young people for any kind of political and public engagement [13, p. 302]. The attitude «it is against my will, but I do not make decisions» imbues the differences noticed among the personal attitudes of students in both University centers and their ranking according to the importance of the social goals of Serbian society.

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