

# SOCIAL VALUES AND POLITICAL PRIORITIES OF STUDENT'S POPULATION IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

---

Slavo Kukić	Željko Marić	Marija Čutura
University of Mostar Faculty of Economics in Mostar Bosnia and Herzegovina  slavo.kukic@tel.net.ba	University of Mostar Faculty of Economics in Mostar Bosnia and Herzegovina  zeljkomaric100@hotmail.com	University of Mostar Faculty of Economics in Mostar Bosnia and Herzegovina  Marija.cutura1@tel.net.ba

---

*Abstract: Young population, of the countries in transition is more influenced by the changes in the society than any other social group. So, the attitudes about social reality of young student's population can represent a degree of development for entire society and potential trends in changing environment. In our research we had intent to find out how the young student's population in University of Mostar, as the only University of Croatian language in Bosnia and Herzegovina, sees political and social reality in their country. What is the most important in their perception: national issues, economic issues, social problems, crime and corruption, or issues of joining to the European associations? The main purpose of this research was to establish level of political culture and character of social values of student's population. Research was done during September 2002. Just before the last elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina.*

*Keywords: Social values, Student's population, National issues, Economic issues*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The question of identity is certainly one of the most crucial philosophical and sociological questions in the modern world of today. That is, after all, one of the basic questions of the very essence of man. Of course, the question of identity is often reduced on only one of its dimensions – on its ethnic, national or confessional belonging. In such cases, though, it is the matter of reductionism, which cannot stand any single, more serious theoretical examination. Indeed, there is no lack of reasons for such a judgment. After all, a man can have a multifold identity, identity that is determined according to different characteristics: his lingual, national or confessional belonging, but also his citizenship, place of birth and regional belonging, permanent residence, profession, political belonging, sex, and so on.

After all, identity can also be determined by the age. In the context of this work, we are interested in precisely that sort of identity. We want to research the identity of the youth, a social group that is also forced to fight for their own place under the sky of the contemporary society. That struggle reached its peak at the end of sixties when this social group succeeded to make its way to both political and general civilization scene by protests. The slogan, 'Let's be real, demand impossible!' dates back to that period. The basic characteristic of the youth from '68 was their faith in changes in society and in the world as well, the changes for the better realized by their own plans and programmes, but also with their energy with which they wanted to model the world so that it would reflect their vision. During that struggle, they could very often be extremely rude, radical, and violent. They were exposed as heroes ready for sacrifices and self-denial, they were percept in that way, and they were recognized as idealists.

The youth generation in contemporary world, the one we live in, quite opposite to the readiness to protest in their wish for changes from '68, do not feel any need to change anything. In other words, that is not the subject of their interest at all. Instead, they turn to the construction and building of their own world, directed towards pleasantries and joy, love of life, ecology and peace. They are sensitive to the questions of civil and human rights, that is to the questions of equal rights for all – for the poor, deprived, for those without any chances. The focus of their interest is also the issues of sex relationships, especially those of social deprivation of women.

However, in the context of this analysis, our interest is directed, before all, to the issue of social values and political culture of the young in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as to only one part of their identity – the question of their interest in politics and political processes. And of course, to the way in which the young see and experience political and social reality that surrounds them.

## **2. POST-DAYTON TENDENCIES IN THE YOUTH INTEREST IN POLITICS AND POLITICAL PROCESSES**

The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina had disastrous effects.<sup>1</sup> According to that, it was logical to expect that, upon its ending, the demand for changes in the social being of this country would be strongly expressed, in order to make impossible any repetition of such a scenario in the future times, but which would also rebuild the life of the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina on completely new foundations. The post-war processes, however, have not given any reason for too great optimism. Just the opposite.

In the context of this analysis, however, we are interested in only one kind of those processes – the one regarding the interest of the young people to influence those changes themselves by participating in political life, determining their direction, but also to influence the structure and intensity of their occurrence.

Researches, however, conducted during the year 2000, did not give reason for too great optimism. On the contrary, the tendencies they showed were not encouraging at all. Relatively insignificant proportion of that population, for example, only 5% of them, hardly spent any of their free time on activities connected with politics.

Reasons for this are, of course, rather varied. Indifference to politics is one of the main ones. Three years ago, at least three kinds of information pointed to that. In the first place, it was the direct confession of about three fifths of total youth population at the age between 15 and 30. Then it was the matter of the information that only 8% of them were members of a political party at that time. In the end, the matter of the belief of young people that they could not influence the policy of Bosnia and Herzegovina also appeared here.<sup>2</sup>

Has anything changed in the meantime? And if it has, what is it? Those questions were our motive to undertake a research of similar type three years ago. This time, however, our research ambitions were somewhat more modest. First of all, we were satisfied by the research limitation to student's population. At the same time, the research was focused on the student's population at the University of Mostar.<sup>3</sup> In fact, in this way we can talk more reliably only about the state of matters within the Croatian youth corpus, or, more precisely, within the Croatian academic youth corpus in B&H. But it is our belief that based on the results; it is possible to make some broader theoretic generalizations.

---

<sup>1</sup> According to present estimations, in the last war in Bosnia and Herzegovina approximately 300,000 of its citizens were killed, and over 2,000,000 of them were forced to leave their pre-war homes for the same reason. In this war over 400,000 constructions were destroyed, and the economic activity of the country was reduced to approximately 20% of that in the pre-war period.

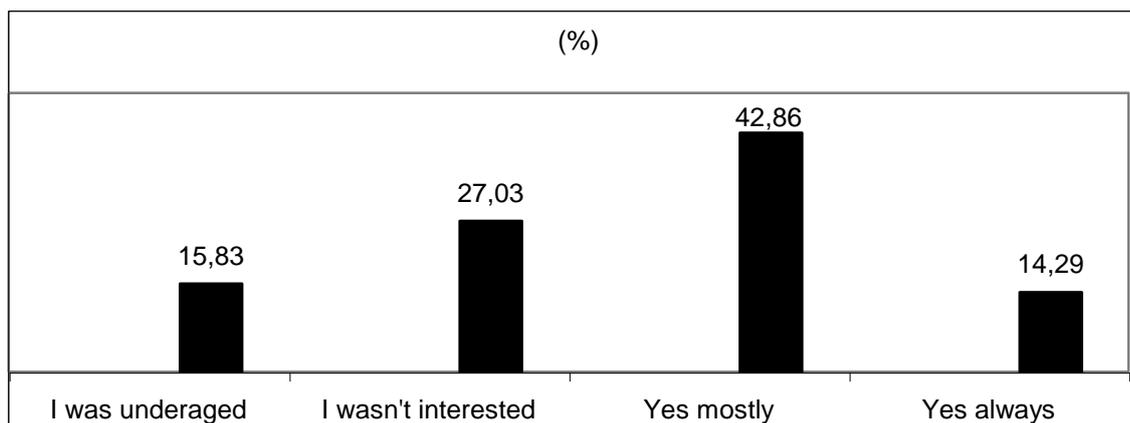
<sup>2</sup> In 2000, only 2% of them believed that such a possibility was a reality at all in any significant or sufficient measure.

<sup>3</sup> The research included 259 students from 7 faculties – Pedagogy, Economy, Law, Medicine, Civil Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Agronomy. By the age structure, 50,19% of them are 18-20, 44,4% are 21-23, and 5,41% are 24 and older. In the total structure of the sample, 65,25% are women, and 34,75% are men. In the end, the sample included students from all parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, from which the population of this University is recruited. That is to say that five cantons were included – Herzegovina-Neretva, West Herzegovina, Herzeg-Bosnia, Middle Bosnia, and Zenica-Doboj.

### 3. PARTICIPATING IN POLITICAL LIFE AND EVALUATING OF POLITICAL PARTIES

So, has anything changed in the mental structure of young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the last three years? Something that would deserve theoretic attention? The latest research, to our opinion, does not give any arguments for such conclusions. On the contrary. Relative disinterest in politics and political processes is an essential characteristic of this part of Bosnia and Herzegovina population today. The data in the Figure no. 1 show this very well.

Figure no. 1: Participation of student's population in election process



Several regularities can be seen here. Tendency towards political participation, if we are to judge according to participation in elections, is more significantly expressed with men than with women.<sup>4</sup> Truly, we do not have sufficient indicators on the basis of which we could analyze in details the reasons for this. We are still inclined to believe that they should be looked for on several sides – but before all, in tradition and already formed socio-cultural code.

On the other hand, though, differences are also connected with the differences in age. Interest in participation in election processes is in direct proportion with the age. Relatively smaller percentage of participation in elections of the youngest ones, those at the age from 18 to 20, could also be explained by the fact that a significant part of them, at the time of the last elections, were not at the age of majority at all, because of which they did not even have the right to vote. But, that the interest for election processes among them is smaller is shown by the data connected with the proportion of those who directly admit their disinterest in election processes. Majority of them are relatively represented in the youngest group of students population.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, the correlative connection can also be established between the interest in participation in elections and the type of studies. Relatively greatest interest in participation in elections was identified with students of Law Sciences, whereas the lowest degree of interest was identified with students of different departments at the Pedagogy Faculty. The arguments are relatively understandable for both of these extremes. Inclination to participation in political life with the future lawyers has also been shown in other, up to now conducted researches. Increased interest among the students at the Pedagogy Faculty is again in close relation with differences in sex structure and with the fact that this type of studies belongs to the group of so-called 'female' studies.

<sup>4</sup> As for elections, 67,78% of men and only 51,74% of women always or mainly participate in elections. On the other hand, however, only 16,67% of men and even one third or 32,54% of women do not have any interest in elections.

<sup>5</sup> 30% of the students at the age between 18 and 20 did not attend the elections because they were not interested in them. There are 24,35% of such among those between 21 and 23 years of age, and within the population of 24 years of age and older, there are more than 21,43% of them.

A part of the answer to the question why at elections some of them participate and others not is also possible to find, in our opinion, in the information about the party which they gave their votes to, that is the party which they would have possibly given their votes to had they participated in elections. Namely, almost a half of those who participate in elections at all do that for the reason that they made clear beforehand the question of their political choice.

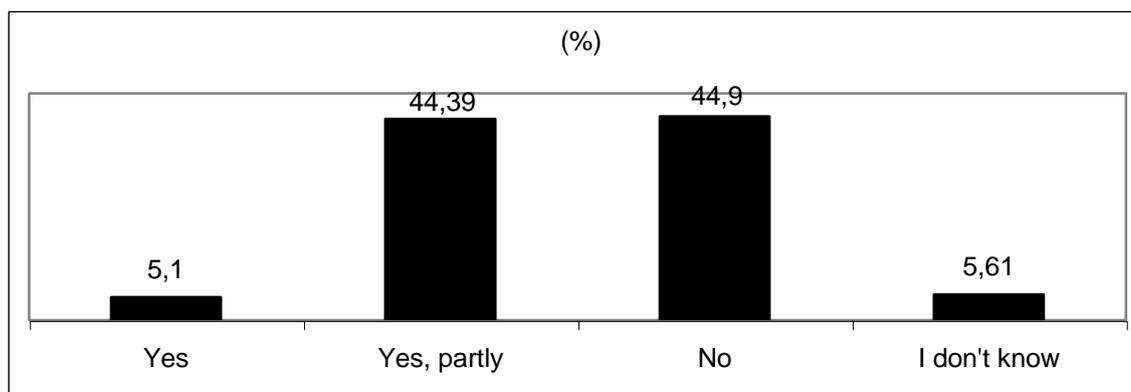
In all that, however, two more details are important. First, the strength of decision and choice decreases with the increase in age.<sup>6</sup> Second, it varies a lot from faculty to faculty. But, in all the philosophy of those differences, it is difficult to determine any regularity which would have any theoretic significance.

On the other hand, however, significantly different tendencies are characteristic for the part of population that never participates in elections. Among them, there are more of those who have not made their inner decision yet, but also those who tend to believe that there is no existing party, which would deserve their vote.<sup>7</sup> It is not clear enough, though, why even those who are, according to all indicators avoid participation in election process, more strongly inclined to one of offered political options. And there is more than one quarter<sup>8</sup> of them in the part of student's population that never participate in elections. We have not got the answer to that sort of question in this research, though, in our opinion, it might be both indicative and interesting.

Within this group – among the student's youth, that is, who never participate in the election process – we should probably try to find those who are otherwise uninformed about the party structure of the present government. The number of these, of course, is not small. Just the opposite. Almost one quarter of all the students<sup>9</sup> do not know at all what parties are in power or where they come from?

For this reason it seemed useless to us to test the mentioned group about what the existing government, that is, the parties that participate in it, do in that government. We were of opinion that such test should be conducted only in that part of population who had fundamental information on what party – or parties in places they are from – is in power. The results are, in our opinion, rather interesting (Figure no. 2).

Figure no. 2: Satisfaction with work and results of leading political parties



The reason for that is, of course, the fact that more than 90% of the total sample come from the territories of four cantons, that is from the territories where Croats compose majority of population, and that, according to this fact, results on the degree of satisfaction with present government also speak about the relationship in regard to the governing political party in these territories.

<sup>6</sup> 51% of students at the age between 18 and 20 determined exactly for which party to vote at elections, whereas the percentage of such is 47,2% between the age of 21 to 23, and 36,36% at the age of 24 and older.

<sup>7</sup> There is even 73,48% of them.

<sup>8</sup> More precisely, there is 25,5% of these in the total structure.

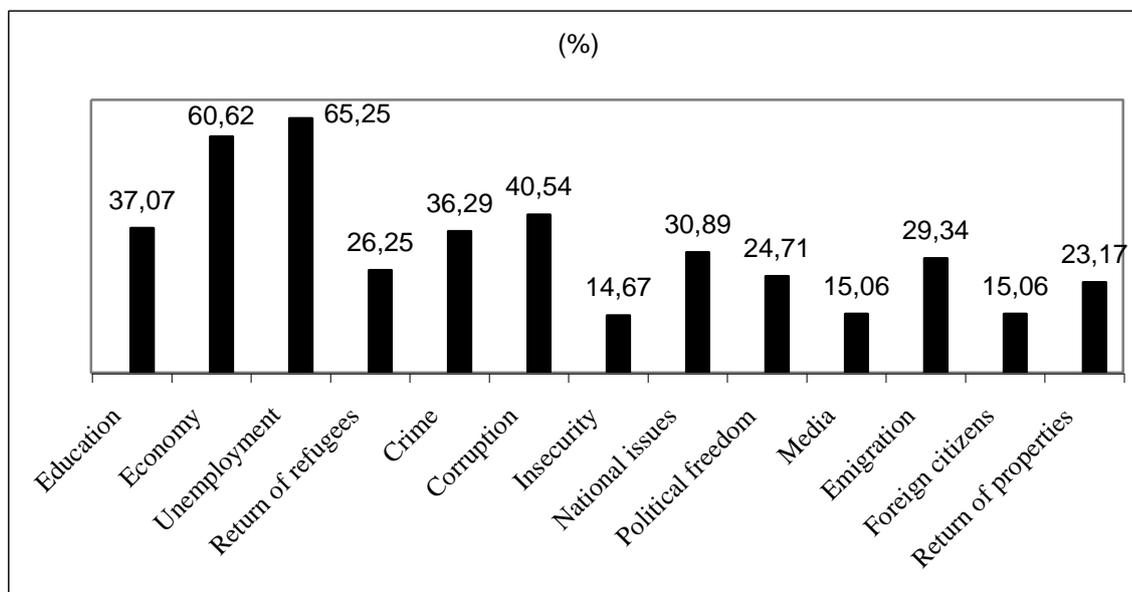
<sup>9</sup> In total sample, there are 26,5% of them.

Namely, according to the presented indicators, it is evident that, in regard to the governing political party in the place they come from and among the students population, there is expressed polarization into two groups. According to the indicators, a conclusion can be made that the same also goes for all the examined strata – for men and women, for different age groups, for almost all faculties included in this research.<sup>10</sup>

#### 4. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PROBLEMS AS PERCEPT BY STUDENT'S POPULATION

Bosnia and Herzegovina, both as a state and as society, has, of course, numerous problems that have not been solved yet. That is understandable, and the reasons should be sought for on more sides – in the war disaster, in the fact that the reasons of the war drama have not been removed yet, in the fact that it is a country in transition from communist society to society of market economy and political democracy, etc. Therefore, it is very interesting to analyze the attitude of young people, especially academic part of them, in relation to the greatest problems of this country. What are those problems in their perception and what significance they give to them. The participants in the research were offered a list of fourteen possible social problems, but also the possibility to rank their meaning according to their importance for B&H. The way and manner in which they did this is very indicative indeed (Figure no. 3).<sup>11</sup>

Figure no. 3: The main problems in B&H



If it is to be judged in accordance with the results, the problem of unemployment and social problems, and connected with them, of course, the matter of general undeveloped economy, is, despite everything, far before all others. Immediately after them is, as the problem of both the state and society, marked corruption, and only then, according to their importance, are emphasized questions of crime in general, education and language, as well as still unresolved national problems. Finally, it is interesting, and in our opinion, it can be treated as an encouraging element in the Bosnia-Herzegovina conditions, to note the fact that the problem of general insecurity of the citizens in B&H is not emphasized as the problem of priority importance. On the contrary.

<sup>10</sup> The exceptions are only students at the Faculties of Medicine and Agronomy, where the degree of satisfaction with governing political party is slightly greater – 62,5%.

<sup>11</sup> The participants were given possibility to rank each of offered problems according to the degree of its importance in the way that level '1' meant the problems which were of least, and level '5' the problems that were of utmost importance. In the Figure no. 3, distribution of answers at level '5' is given.

Previous distribution of answers is, more or less, characteristic for all included in the research separate strata. If it can be talked about any specifics at all, they are mostly reduced to the differences among different age groups. Namely, social and economy questions and those of a legal state, which is partly out of our expectations, are more emphasized by younger people, whereas so-called national issues are more emphasized by older parts of students population.<sup>12</sup>

It is certain that, though the importance of problems was differently ranked, that in any case does not mean that those that were given smaller importance degree are insignificant. Contrary to that, this research also directs us to such an estimation. Although, for example, national issue is only in the sixth place according to its importance, that in any case does not mean that it does not occupy an important place in the conscience in this part of social population. It's just the opposite. More than half of research participants are convinced that the national issue of the nation they belong to have not been solved at all, and one third more is of opinion that it has been solved only partially.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, the question connected with national solution of where and in what the key to solution is to be found is also very interesting. According to everything, at least when academic part of young people is in question, it is to be found in a different structure of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. That opinion, namely, is shared by almost three fifths of those included in this research.<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note here that one of the characteristics is that the issue of a different structure in B&H is specially emphasized by the female part of population.<sup>15</sup>

The question what exactly is the direction of changes in the structure of the state of B&H that should be followed still remains unclear. The offered research did not give the answer to that question, but it can be assumed that thinking might be directed towards two value orientations – the first which supports the three-entity structure, and the second which is more inclined towards the European type of decentralization, in which importance of lower levels of state governing, either cantonal or municipal or provincial, is increased. In any case, this type of vagueness should be worth clearing by further researches.

Accordingly, percept problems, which is only logical, stress the issues to which political work in our country should be directed in the first place. Connected with this, it is obvious that there is also consensus within the academic part of the youth. Far ahead of all the others are economic issues again – which means issues of unemployment and social problems. Far behind them are all the others, those from the group of so-called national issues being among them, as well as issues of legal system functioning in connection with corruption and crime as dangerous social wrongs.<sup>16</sup> At that, it is characteristic that economy problems as well as the priority of political work are a bit more often emphasized by women.<sup>17</sup> Theoretically relevant differences, however, are not easily discernible even according to other, in research-included strata.

The question imposes itself here if the existing parties are ready to cope with the majority of problems that are currently in existence in B&H. If it is to be judged in accordance with this research, the young people, especially their academic part, are very skeptic about that (Figure no. 4).

---

<sup>12</sup> For example, social problems, as well as the problems of unemployment, are as top priority emphasized by even 69,23% of students at the age of 18 to 20, 60,87% of those at the age of 21 to 23, and 64,29% of those of 24 and older. On the other hand, national issues of particular nationalities is with the highest level of importance ranked by even 24,86% of those of 24 and older, but only 26,96% of the students at the age between 18 and 20.

<sup>13</sup> 56,37% of the students believe that national issue of the nationality they belong to has not been solved at all, 31,66% of them think it has been solved only partially, and only 4,25% is inclined to believe that it has been solved in a satisfactory way.

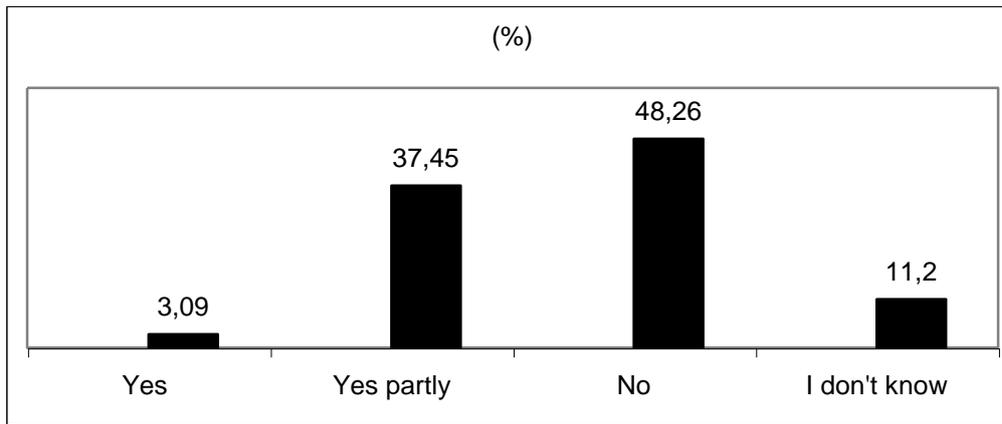
<sup>14</sup> Even 57,95% of them agree that the national issue in B&H can be solved through a different structure of the state. 19,49% think, however, that it is possible to be done through the changes in election regulations, and additional 10,76% share opinion that it is possible to be done by means of the game rules which would install institute of national parties as a principle of political organization in B&H.

<sup>15</sup> Such conviction is shared by 62,35% of women and 50,68% of men.

<sup>16</sup> The conviction that the political work should be directed towards economy problems is shared by 66,01% of all those included in the research; 43,24% of them are of opinion that it should be the national problem of particular nationalities, 42,08% that it is the problem of language and education, 36,29% that those are problems of corruption and crime, 28,19% that it is a question of getting closer to Europe, and so on.

<sup>17</sup> 66,02% of women and 57,78% of men are of opinion that they are problems of priority.

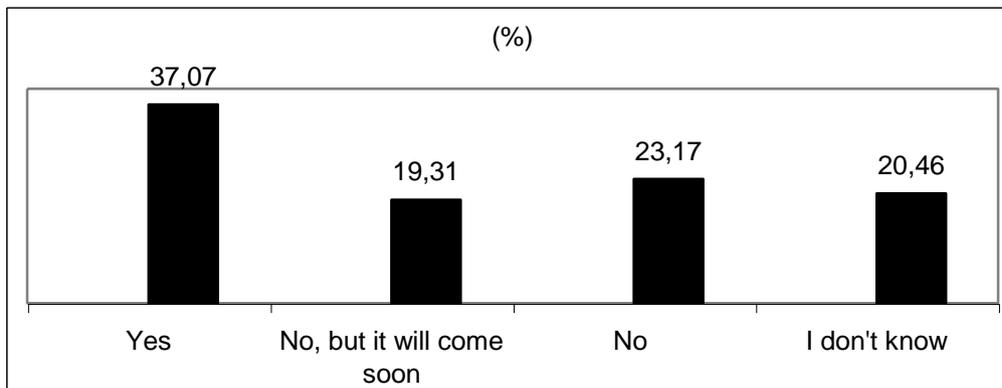
**Figure no. 4: Do political parties can successfully deal with problems in B&H?**



It is evident, according to the indicators presented, that they are not able to do that, or at least they are not able to do that in necessary scope. To be sure, the differences can be identified in relation to the type of lining up with particular values. Female students are, for example, far more stern in their estimation than their male colleagues, and a different degree of critical opinion is also evident in different study groups.<sup>18</sup>

If, in relation to the ability of existing political parties, the above mentioned factor of conviction is predominant, then it is also logical to assume that the same population might be inclined to the necessity of constitution of one or more parties of European provenience – a party that will foster European system of values, but that will also be able to become a starting engine for getting closer to European integrations. This research has proved such assumptions as well. Almost two fifths of those included in it, namely, share the opinion that the time has already come for such an orientation, and an additional fifth think that it will come soon enough. If we add to this the same number of those who are in the state of peculiarly shaken belief, it is quite certain to estimate encouragingly the political conscience of those from who we are to expect political engagement and participation in leading the country in relatively not so distant future (Figure no. 5).

**Figure no. 5: Is it time to create one real European political party in B&H?**



To be honest, however, the truth is that the above-mentioned type of conviction – and before all the type explicitly expressed in the form that it has to be done as of today – is differently distributed in different faculties. It is most immanent, for example, for the students at the Civil Engineering Faculty, then Faculty of Law and that of Economy, whereas it is least immanent for the students of Agronomy Faculty. Is this the matter of mental structure of the students themselves, or it is the matter of some intervening variable – for example, a form of wok of the University teachers? This has remained unresolved. But there is no controversy in thinking that clearing of this type of dilemma will also be very interesting in the sense of a research.

<sup>18</sup> 54,44% of female students and 44,97% of male students agree with the estimation that existing parties are not capable of coping with any greater problems that are currently in existence in B&H. Yet, tendency towards such conviction is most marked with the students at Mechanical Engineering Faculty (80%), as well as those at Faculty for Medicine (60%), whereas it is least marked with the students at Agronomy Faculty and Civil Engineering Faculty (40%).

## CONCLUSION

If it is possible to estimate social processes on the basis of the conducted research, even now days we can speak about relatively emphasized state of apathy among young people. After all, the data from this research also indicate this. But, they also point to the conclusion that, in relation to the period from a few years ago, positive trends are unquestionable. That is shown by the data on participation in the election process in B&H, but also data connected with the questions that the student's population see as most important ones in this country. Namely, issues from the group of so-called national problems are pushed into the back, and in the first place on the list of priorities are questions of life – economy, before all, as well as the questions of unemployment and social problems, and questions of corruption and crime. Student's population at the University in Mostar extremely highly values social and economy problems as most important ones in the country. The young are markedly aware of a very difficult economy situation in which the country is. Of somewhat less importance are the questions of national character, i.e. national issues of a particular nation they belong to. Also, the students highly value the problems of corruption and crime, which tells us that the young look at their social surroundings as burdened with problems of crime and corruption, which leads to the conclusion on doubts regarding functioning of the legal state.

On the other side, students population, that is, the part of it that know which parties are in power in local surroundings where they come from, give very low grades to the results and work of those parties. Those data show the perception of the existing political parties. It is well known, namely, that the parties are in their greater part profiled nationally, so that the data on critical evaluation of those parties can be treated as positive trend in the political culture of the young people. For example, 44,9% of the young people are not satisfied with the parties work on the local level, and only 10,67% of them think that the solution to certain problems in B&H can be found through voting for the parties with national sign in front. On the other hand, there is a worrying fact that only 3,09% of the students population are of opinion that existing parties, on the Federation level, are able to cope totally with the problems in the state. This reflects mistrust of young people in the parties system in general.

Although it is strongly visible in the Figure no. 3 that students give more importance to socio-economy problems than to national, 56,37% of them think that national issue of the nation they belong to has not been solved at all in B&H, 31,66% of them think that it has been solved partially, and only 4,25% of them is of the opinion that national issue of the nation they belong to has been solved completely in B&H. To be sure, this research has not given the answer to the question why students in such large numbers think that the national problem of the nation they belong to has not been solved at all in B&H. In future, it would certainly be very interesting to conduct a research that would give the answer to this question, since in this case we cannot know if these results of answers to this question are product of some subjective feeling, or it is the result of objective facing the problems of realization of their own national identity connected with the problems of coexistence.

It can be said that the conviction of young students population moves towards the thesis that in political organization, too, corrections should be made, and that, in other words said, it should move from national to civil and toward European principles of political organization. There is certain optimism regarding the possibilities and necessities for forming parties of pro-European orientation, which speaks of positive trends in social values of student's population. Those parties are one of the most certain ways towards building civil society in B&H.

## REFERENCES

1. Early Warning System Bosnia and Herzegovina, Report 2000., 2001., 2002.
2. Human Development Report Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1998., UNDP, Sarajevo 1998.
3. Human Development Report Bosnia and Herzegovina, 200 Young population, UNDP., Sarajevo, 2000.