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Citizens in Politics

Political pluralism in the Serb community in Kosovo

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BASIC INFORMATION ON THE RESEARCH

About the OPEN Initiative

The research was conducted within the OPEN initiative. «Democracy, open perspectives of the Serbian community in Kosovo - OPEN» is a new initiative of the Kosovo Open Society Foundation (KFOS), launched in 2020. OPEN is implemented in cooperation with nine civil society organizations operating in the Serb community in Kosovo. The overall goal of the new initiative is to develop an open and dynamic space for discussion within the Serb community, between the Serb and other communities, as well as institutions in Kosovo.

The focus of the initiative will be to assess the impact of civil and political organizations on the democracy and openness of the Serb community in Kosovo. The analytical focus of the initiative will be the democracy and openness of institutions, public policies, and important processes towards the Serb community in Kosovo, as well as the degree of openness of the Serb community towards them. These analyzes will contribute a better insight into the current situation and perspectives of the Serbian community in Kosovo, while at the same time serving as a basis for evidence-based advocacy efforts towards citizens, local and central government institutions, and the international community. The members of the OPEN platform are experienced and proven civil society organizations that will work together to achieve the general and specific objectives of the platform. Among them are the Center for Affirmative Social Action and

the Humanitarian Center Mitrovica - authors of the research before you.

The objectives of the research and the OPEN Initiative

The main objective of the research is to review the existing practices and modalities of political activism in the Kosovo Serb community. In the given context, the notion of political activism was interpreted as a process of citizens' engagement within political entities (parties, movements) or political processes (for example active engagement in the election process, citizen's initiatives, etc) for the purpose of attainment of their needs. In essence that is any process that leads to the interaction of citizens and local and/or central authorities with the aim of improving existing practices, laws, or participation in the decision-making process.

Defined in this way, political activism is an extremely broad concept, since almost every social engagement of citizens towards desired changes essentially has a political character or leads to interaction with political representatives. Therefore, the authors of the report additionally expanded the research topics to include the modalities of civic engagement, primarily through civil society organizations, local civic activism, etc. Thematically, the research addresses the three (3) aspects of this process. The first part of the research deals with the perceptions

of citizens (Serb communities in Kosovo) on political enactments (professionally or through civic activism). The focus of this part of the research was to identify obstacles and opportunities for more active involvement of citizens in decision-making processes at the local and central levels. The second aspect of the research analyzes the prevailing conduct practices of the political representatives of the Serbian community towards the involvement (and consultation) of citizens in decisions that are important for their lives. Finally, the research dealt with a special dynamics of the relationship between citizens and their political representatives that is the relationship and cooperation of civil society organizations with political and government officials.

The basic research method combines the elements of quantitative (surveys and statistical processing) and qualitative (focus groups and interviews) sociological research. References from last years cycle of OPEN surveys and consolidated reports were used, as well as findings from a number of relevant surveys and media reports collected through secondary research (so-called "desk research").

Quantitative research methodology and design

The face-to-face survey was conducted in the period October-November 2021. A total of 500 Serb citizens were questioned throughout Kosovo. The questionnaire consisted of 46 questions and covered a total of 6 areas. The sample was based on a predeveloped quota system reflecting available municipal demographic data. The confidence interval is +/- 5. Distribution by place of residence is as follows:

The sample was composed of a total of 60% men and 39.8% women. The average age of the respondents was 42 years. As for

education background, a total of 5.4% of respondents completed primary school, 47% of respondents finished only secondary school while 45% of respondents completed higher education. In total, 58% of the respondents were employed while 42% are not working or retired. It is important to point out that there are no official statistics on the demographic structure of the target population, ie the Serb population in Kosovo, meaning the representativeness of the sample can be referenced only as conditional.

Municipality:

		V	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Leposavic	110	22.0	22.0	22.0
	Kamenica	10	2.0	2.0	24.0
	Novobrdo	30	6.0	6.0	30.0
	Zubin Potok	50	10.0	10.0	40.0
	Strpce	30	6.0	6.0	46.0
	Zvecan	60	12.0	12.0	58.0
	Gracanica	60	12.0	12.0	70.0
	Ranilug	30	6.0	6.0	76.0
	Partes	10	2.0	2.0	78.0
	Klokot	10	2.0	2.0	80.0
	North Mitrovica	100	20.0	20.0	100.0
Total:		500	100.0	100.0	

Methodology and design of qualitative research

Focus groups

Time:

Survey conducted from November 2021 to January 2022

Research instrument:

Guide for discussion of 7 thematic units

Number of focus groups:

4 (2 north and two south of the Ibar)

Total number of participants: 40

Criteria for selection of participants:

50% higher education,

50% below higher education

30% of rural and

70% of urban population

50/50 ratio of male and female participants

18+ years of age

Interviews

Time:

Survey conducted from November 2021 - January 2022

Research Instrument:

Interview Guide (four modules and 20 questions)

Total number of interviewees:

10 interviewees

Criteria for selection of interlocutors:

participation in the socio-political life of the Serbian community in Kosovo

Interlocutors:**Darko Dimitrijevic,**

Editor-in-Chief of Radio Gorazdevac,

Aleksandar Rapajic,

Program Director of the NGO ACDC,

Goran Avramovic,

Editor-in-Chief of RTV KiM,

other participants requested anonymity.

tolerancije različitog mišljenja.

Socio-political context

The importance of active citizen participation in politics is an axiom of democratic practice. The theory and practice of a democratic society show that it is not enough for a society to have institutions established by democratic processes, but it is necessary that these institutions fulfill their basic purpose, which is to enable citizens dignified, secure, and productive life. Such an accomplishment is possible only if the institutions perform their duties responsibly. The essence of the democratic character of the government lies precisely in the term responsible exercise of power. Responsible governments act openly, consulting citizens and providing them with information on the effects of their work. So this is in essence an ongoing process guided by the principles of rule of law, openness, and good practices in which the authorities are actively working to promote citizen involvement in decision-making processes and citizens are free and encouraged to take part in political processes.

In practice, however, such quality can be found only in advanced democratic

societies, primarily the so-called "Nordic democracies".¹ (Sweden, Norway, Finland, Iceland, Denmark) and some Western countries with a long tradition of democracy², including Ireland, Canada, Australia, etc. In other countries that qualify as democracies, the tendency of the government to reserve as much authority as possible is present, to a greater or lesser extent. Such a tendency is distinguishably observable in the transition societies of Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans countries. More than three decades after the initiation of democratic transition, part of these countries has created a so-called "democratic facade"³. More precisely a system that adopted a legislative framework that normatively guarantees freedom of expression, rule of law, an independent judiciary, etc. albeit, in reality, political elites still rely on informal structures, clientelism, and media control.⁴

In that sense, Kosovo does not differ from other societies, despite certain peculiarities. The same applies to the Serb community in Kosovo, although there are certain specifics regarding the attitude of citizens towards participation in the political process. First of all, the prevalent understanding of politics and the nature of political engagement is the one observing these processes through ethnic conflict with Albanians⁵. At very few points in the history of relations between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo, there was enough peace and cooperation to enable

1 "Nordisk Demokrati" – a term first used by Hal Koch and Alf Ross, Copenhagen, 1949 in a joint publication of the Danish Institute, the Norwegian Office of Cultural Relations and the Swedish National Institute. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/cap-sule-review/1959-07-01/scandinavian-democracy>

2 and without a history of colonialism - Ibid, 33

3 Marko Kmezić- Rule of Law and Democracy in the Western Balkans - on Discrepancies between Policies and Practices, page 3 abstract, January 2020 - [link](#)

4 Ibid – strana 3

5 More about the thesis - Kosovo Serbs on both sides of the river - Divided divisions - <https://www.radiokim.net/vesti/analiza/kosovski-srbi-sa-obe-strane-reke-podele-o-kojima-se-cuti.html>

political engagement of their representatives to focus on the existential issues of citizens, economy, quality of education, social justice.⁶ Instead, the political engagement was almost exclusively defined through position toward the ethnic conflict. Such a character of the political engagement of the Kosovo Serbs inevitably took place under the imperative of harmonized action with Belgrade and the creation of a unified political platform of the Kosovo Serbs. The latter goal, as shown after the 1999 conflict, became unattainable when the Serb community in Kosovo found itself divided into two political and social realities. One in northern Kosovo where a homogeneous Serb community with strong geographical, economic, and political ties to Serbia lives, and another in the heterogeneous Serb community south of the Ibar River, which has come under greater pressure for integration. Despite such differences created by the two objective realities, pressure on Serbs south of the Ibar River to follow positions officially represented by Belgrade and political leaders of Serbs in northern Kosovo has never depressed while any political engagement beyond that framework has been met with public defamation and accusations of betrayal of national interests. For example, some political initiatives and their leaders who, contrary to the recommendations from Belgrade, took part in the Kosovo elections⁷ were declared national traitors who work against the interests of the Serbian community,⁸ although today such participation is the official state policy of the Republic of Serbia.

At this point, we can observe another distinctiveness. Namely, it is precisely the interest of Serbia and Serbs in Kosovo. Such interest has never been strategically defined, but nevertheless often imposed

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Elections organized within the constitutional and legal system of Kosovo – prim.aut

⁸ Free Europe-Stojanović: Betrayal of Serbian deputies- <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/28191101.html>

as a framework of the acceptable political behavior of Kosovo Serbs.



Instead, the national interests are reduced to narrow party interests of the ruling parties in Belgrade and aggressively interpreted as national, (...) while each party taking over the power in Serbia installing its own political nomenclature in Kosovo expected to blindly follow party instructions and policies.⁹

Such a uniform attitude of Serbia and its political elites towards Kosovo Serbs, as well as its substantial institutional interconnection with Belgrade, inevitably resulted in ideological and organizational exclusivity in the political representation of Kosovo Serbs. This is exactly what the results of last year's OPEN 2020 survey conclude. One of the main conclusions of this research¹⁰ indicates the monopoly in the political representation of the Serb community in Kosovo. It is imposed by one political option of the Srpska Lista, which enjoys the full and exclusive support of official Belgrade. With the support of the Belgrade authorities, this party exerts strong pressure on political opponents and their voters within the Serb community in Kosovo, applying all available means, including the one of non-democratic nature. This includes aggressive media defamation of opponents or government critics, discrimination in access to resources (including the electoral process), and even pressures of an existential nature, such as party nepotism in access to public

⁹ The same author - Kosovo Serbs on both sides of the river - Radio KiM <https://www.radiokim.net/vesti/analiza/kosovs-ki-srbi-sa-obe-strane-reke-podele-o-kojima-se-cuti.html>

¹⁰ <https://kfos.org/en/publications/110/karakter-istike-otvorenog-drustva-u-srpskoj-zajednici-na-ko-sovu>, page 121, Kosovo Open Society Foundation

jobs. The authors of the research concluded that "proportions and systematicity of such efforts (.....) is present to the extent that it can be concluded that political pluralism within the Serb community in Kosovo has been methodically suffocated."¹¹ Although manifestations of such a cohort became more evident with the emergence of the

Srpska Lista and the installation of the Serbian Progressive Party (Srpska Napredna Stranka) power in Serbia,¹² such an affiliation, in a more or less noticeable form, has been the modus operandi of Belgrade's attitude towards Kosovo Serbs for decades.

According to the authors of this research, the space and freedom to represent the diverse interests of the Serbian community in Kosovo through open social dialogue are not only drastically reduced, but such an act carries tangible risks to individuals or political groups. The main effect of such pressure is the almost palpable fear that citizens of the Serbian community in Kosovo feel toward their political representatives. Ultimately this fear is translated into overwhelming defeatism and a lack of ambition to achieve change through political association. Therefore, the citizens of the Serbian community in Kosovo are afraid to express a critical opinion while the self-censorship among all social actors has reached the proportions of an epidemic.



The harmfulness of such a state of affairs to the democratic character of the society and its development potentials doesn't need to be elaborated. Political action, like any other form of social engagement, feeds on the diversity of ideas, and their filtration through open social dialogue and other forms of consultative interaction between citizens and political leaders.¹³

Citizen participation in the decision-making process is, therefore, a prerequisite for the sustainable development of society. The referenced findings of the OPEN 2020 survey are thus alarming and warn that the democratic capacity of a Serbian society in Kosovo is depleted due to poor practices of engagement of citizens in the political process.

¹¹ Ibid, page 121 Conclusions

¹² Interview with Goran Avramović, Editor-in-Chief of RTV KiM - quote "public criticism is much more expensive nowadays" - p.2

¹³ Ibid page 118

Research results

Research structure

As we have seen, last year's OPEN 2020 survey dealt more with the consequences than with the causes of political defeatism in the Serb community in Kosovo. In the research in front of you, we tried to build upon that knowledge and determine the causes and proportions of such resignation of citizens with politics. In line with such an objective, the research did not focus on the work of specific political options or individuals. Instead, it aimed to examine the dominant elements of the general perception of respondents, adult citizens from Serb communities throughout Kosovo, towards involvement in political processes observed as a means to meet their goals and interests. The baseline reference for the assessment of citizens' perceptions of political processes and their actors was the Political Perception Scale (POPS) Kacmar / Ferris 1991¹⁴. The scale was adapted to measure three dimensions of the perception of political action, 1) general political behavior, 2) prevailing practices of engaging in politics (so-called go along to get ahead)¹⁵, and 3) perception of the privileged position of political activists. Adaptation of the scale was done on the basis of research needs (deepening of research thesis) but also the need to chronologically monitor some of the most important results from last year's research. The application of this scale in such a manner enabled the derivation of certain conclusions or indicators using comparative analyzes.

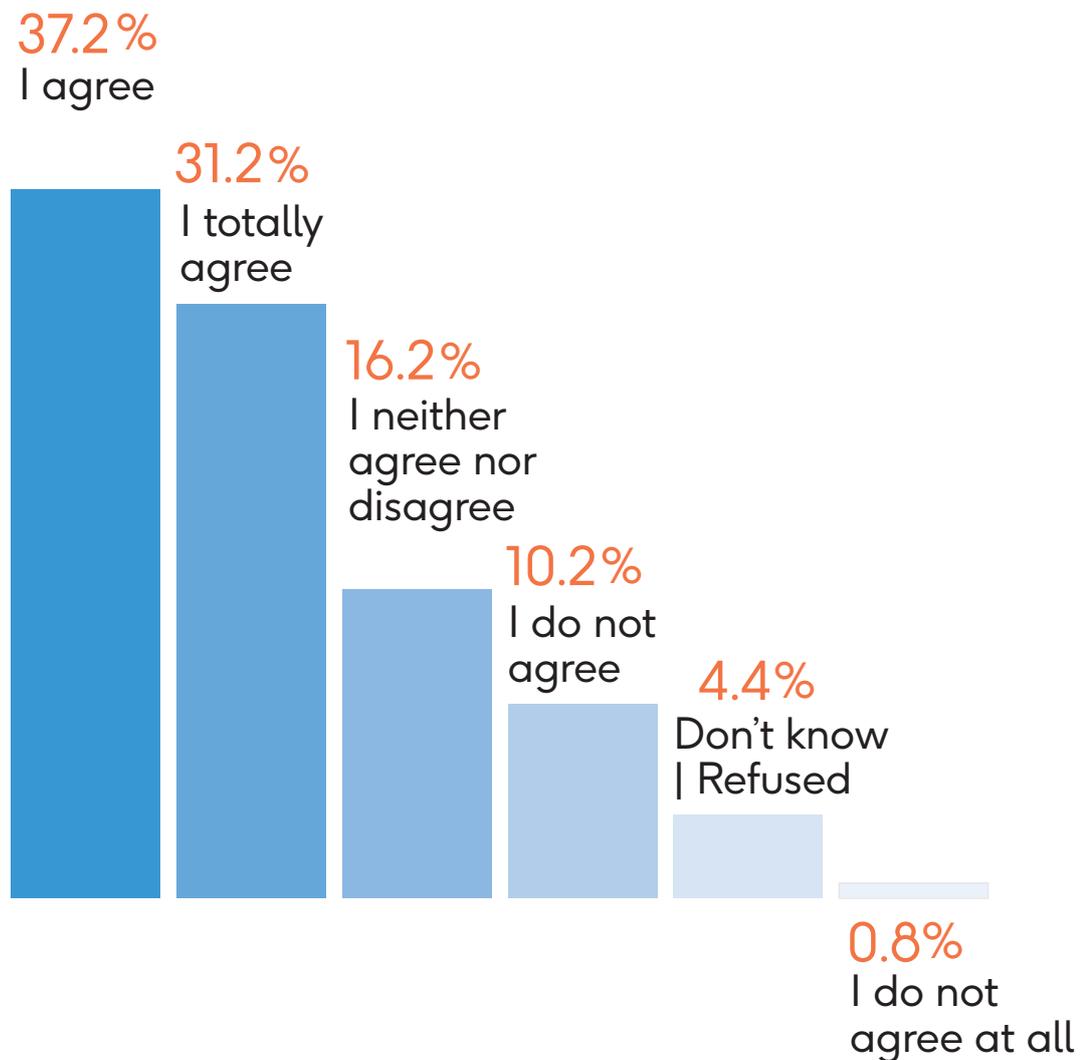
Results: General political behavior

The results of the research confirm the main conclusions from the OPEN 2020 Consolidated Report and demonstrate the deep distrust of the citizens of the Serbian community in Kosovo towards political engagement as well as toward the actors of political processes. Accordingly, in the research on the general perception of political behavior, respondents revealed that in prevailing percentage, 68.4%, consider political action to be an unscrupulous struggle, in which the only way to progress is to "walk over on others" (Chart 1). The colloquial term, "walking over" implies relentlessness in the application of actions detrimental to the interests of competitors (within the same political option or toward opponents). Only 11% of respondents do not agree with the same statement, more precisely one in ten inhabitants of Serb communities in Kosovo.

14 In the original: Perception of Organizational politics scale (POPS) – K. Michele Kacmar/ Gerald R. Ferris

15 In free translation "do not wave to progress" prim.aut

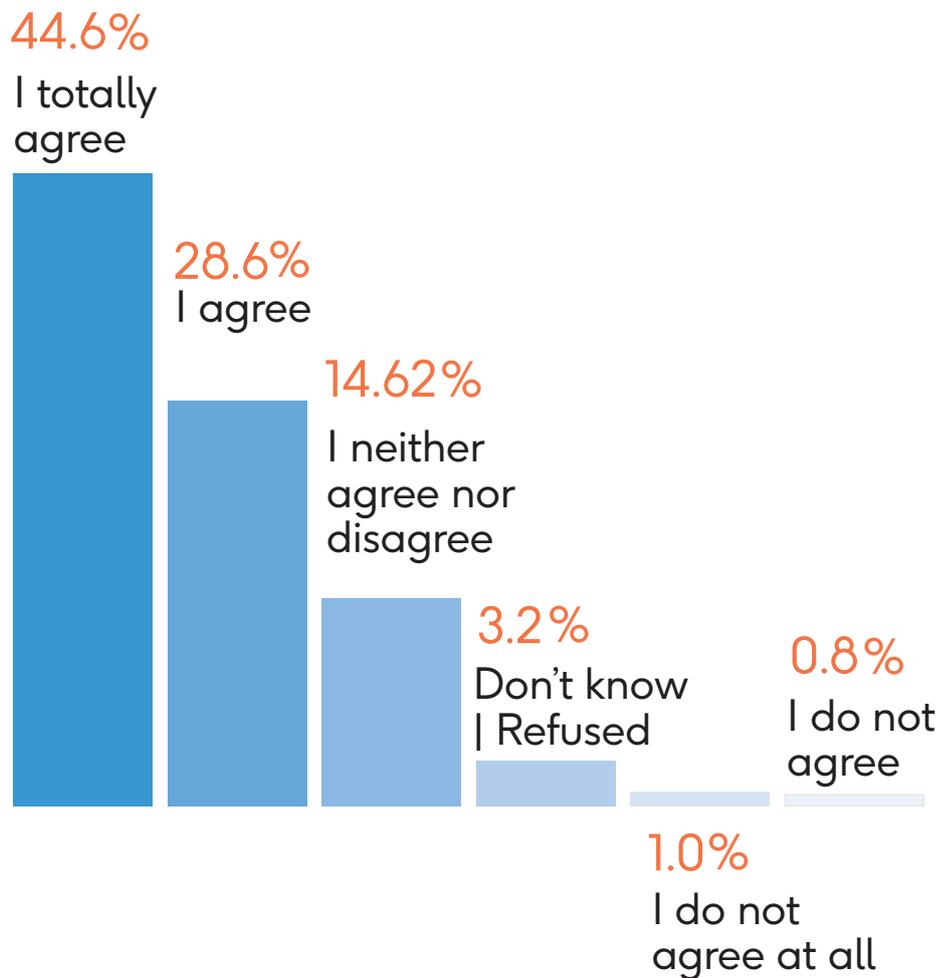
Graph 1. How much do you agree with the following views? People in politics progress by "walking over on others"



What such answers of respondents indicate is a strong persuasion among the respective community that dealing with politics requires a special set of skills and modalities of behavior, those that do not necessarily coincide with the usual norms of social behavior. So, according to their beliefs, not everyone can be involved in politics, but only those who nurture these special "values" or are ready to adapt to them. This conclusion is

supported by the answers of the respondents to the following question, "Do you agree with the statement that one and the same group of people are involved in politics," (Graph 2). As many as 73.2% of respondents, which is more than two-thirds, agree with such a statement, while the percentage of those disagreeing is 9%.

○ **Graph 2.** One and the same group of people are involved in politics



In the qualitative part of the research, i.e. focus groups held in northern Kosovo municipalities, such a perception of citizens is explained by several objective social characteristics of the Serb community in Kosovo, *primarily its lack of intellectual potential, impoverished by 1999 and later significant negative migration trends.*¹⁶



In the same focus group, one respondent said that the “political elite’s changes in parallel with the change of government in Belgrade, but that it is essentially the same group of people who have become addicted to political power and privilege that comes along with it.”¹⁷

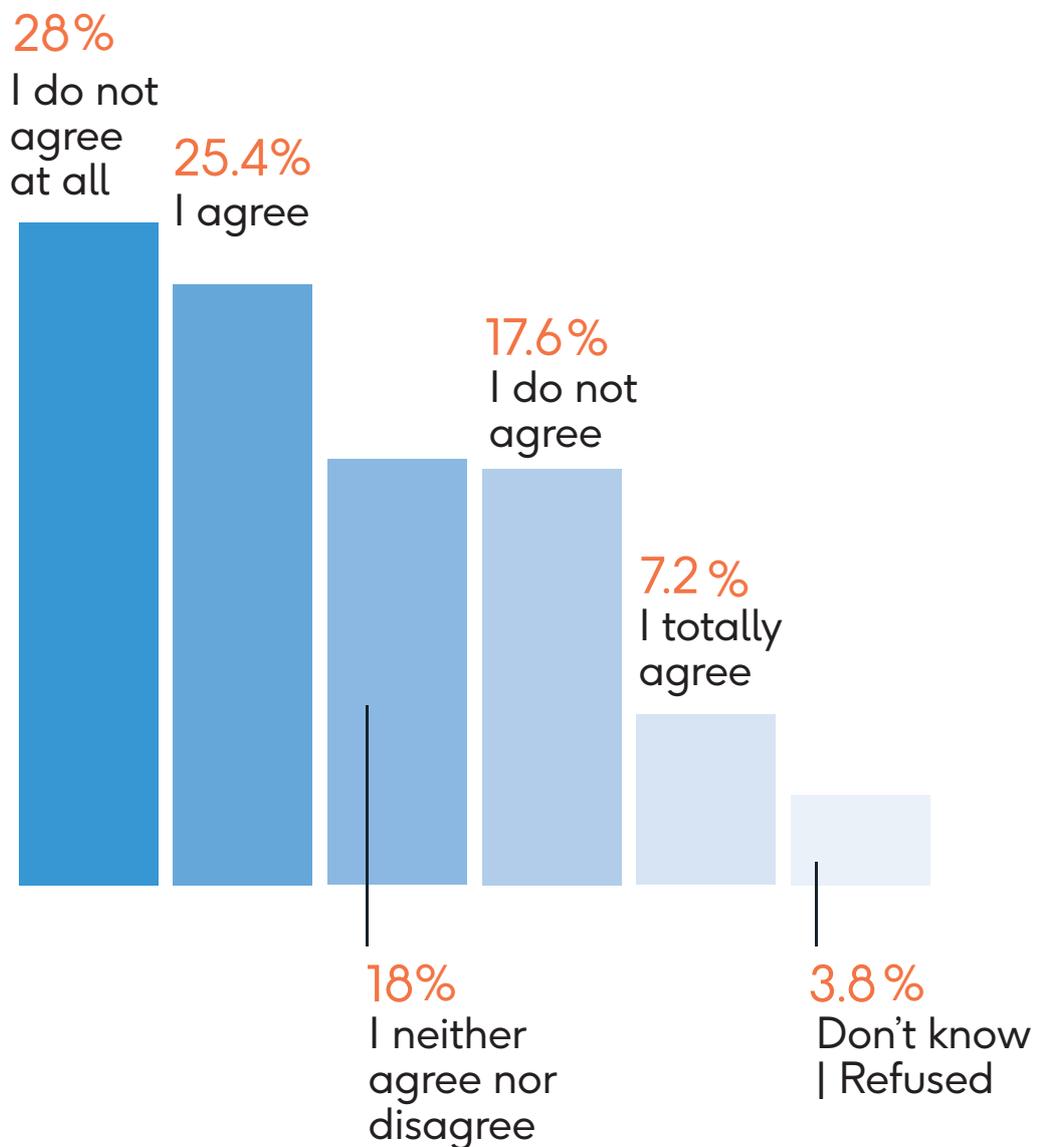
¹⁶ Focus Group North Mitrovica, report. Page 2.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, respondent A.3, report from focus group North Mitrovica

According to the respondent's answers, such exclusivity in the political profession is not necessarily based on the merits of competence, capability, and positive results. Accordingly, almost half of the respondents, adult citizens of the Serb community in Kosovo, disagree with the

statement that politically competent people are involved in politics (45.6%). On the other hand, the percentage of those who deem their political representatives as competent for the positions they are occupying is slightly lower than 33%, or almost one-third of the respondents. (Graph 3).

Graph 3. In general, competent people are involved in politics



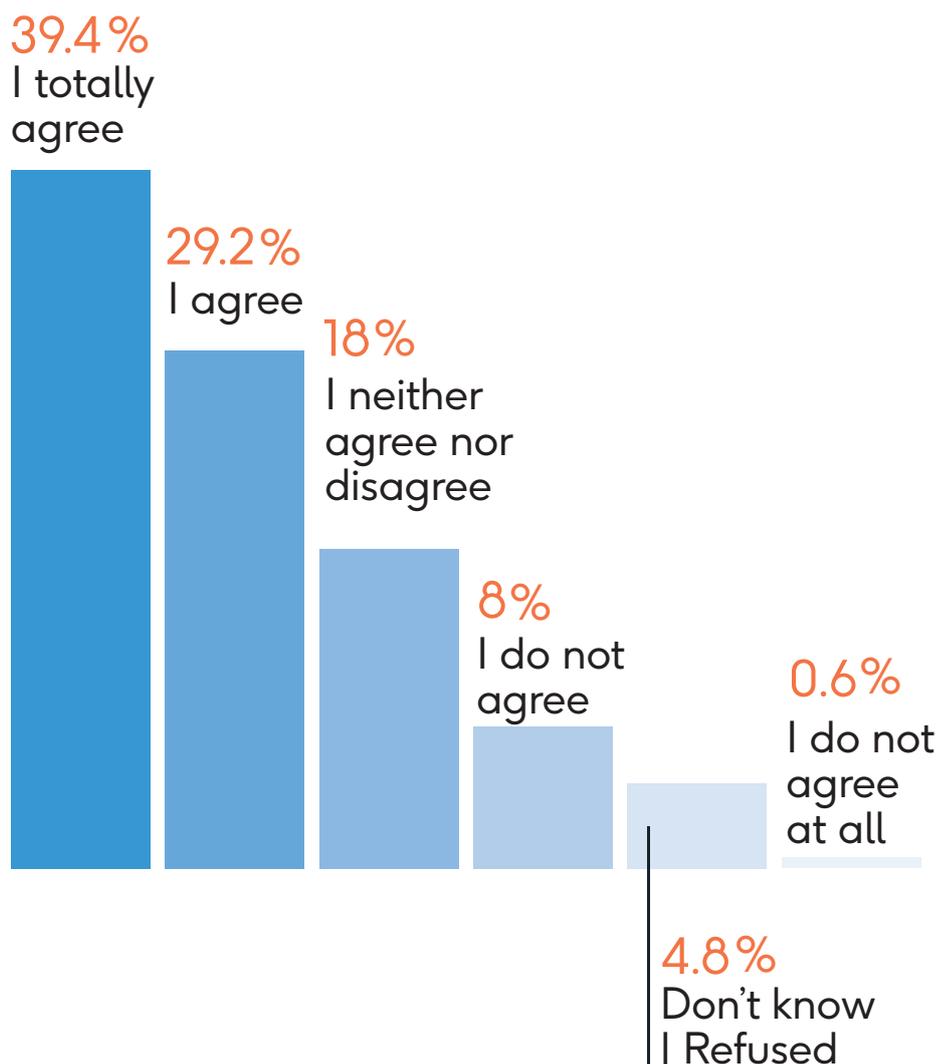
So, what are the characteristics of politicians according to the perception of respondents?

As many as 68.6 percent of respondents claim that politicians manipulate facts in presenting their work (Graph 4 below).



Perhaps the most indicative percentage is of those who disagree with such a statement, which is only slightly larger than the statistical error, 8.6 percent. Among them, only 0.6% are unquestionably convinced that this statement is not true (I do not agree at all).

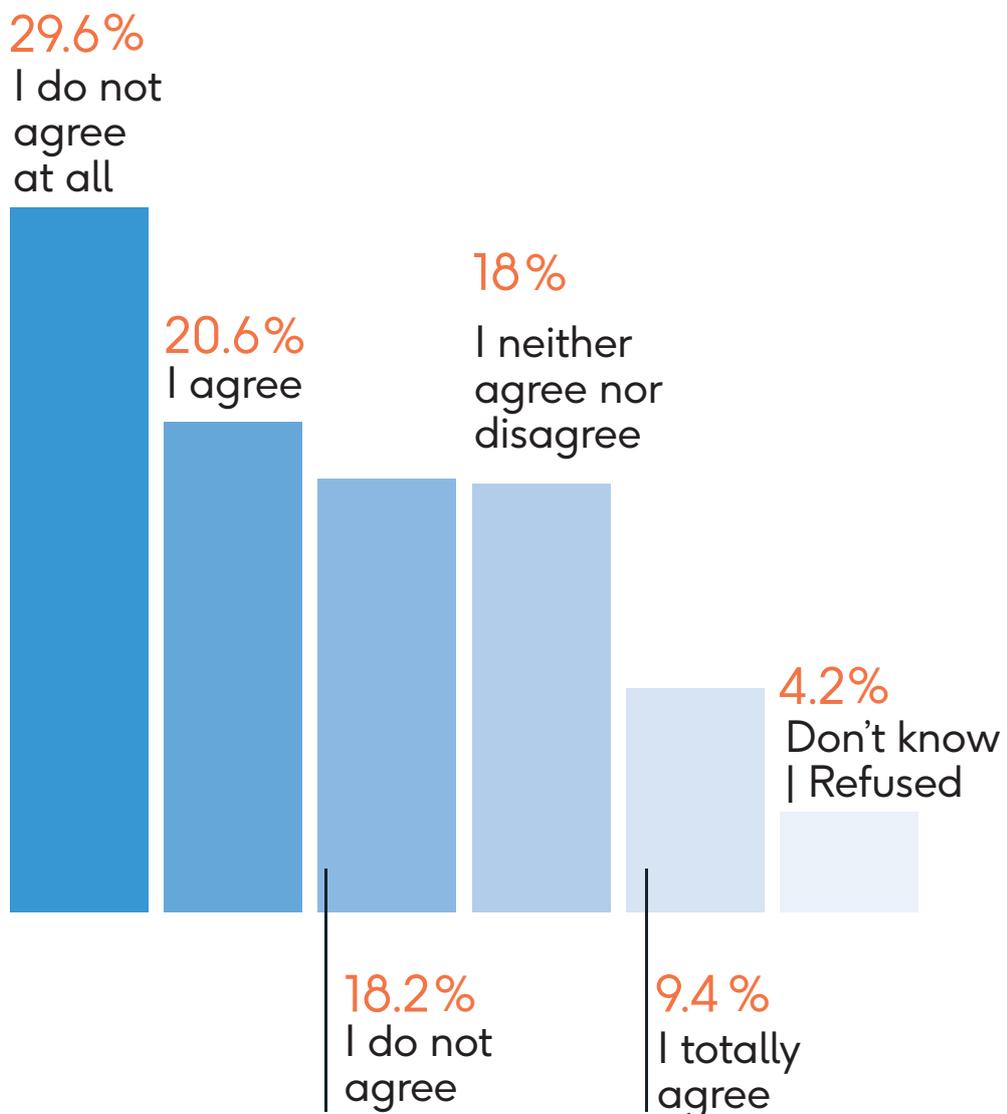
○ Graph 4. Politicians manipulate facts to make their policies looks good



Citizens' perception that politicians should not be trusted is complemented by answers to the next question of the poll, which reads, *Do you agree that politicians mostly tell the truth and try to fulfill promises.* The number of respondents that disagree (or completely

disagree) with such a statement is 47.8% (Graph 5). So almost every other respondent. Exactly 30% of the citizens who took part in the survey answered affirmatively to the same question.

Graph 5. Politicians mostly tell the truth and try to keep promises





Therefore, as a conclusion of this part of the research, we can single out the prevailing belief of respondents, the citizens of the Serb community in Kosovo, that engagement in politics inevitably entails manipulation of truth, facts, election promises.

In a word, although not explicitly, the citizens describe the behavior inherent to political populism in its most rigid form, i.e. demagogical rhetoric. Such perceptions are characteristic of the environment that nurtures a plain image of a society divided into common (honest) people and a corrupt political elite.¹⁸

Of course, in our case, there are nuances but the pattern is obvious. Endemic corruption exists not only in the Serb community but in Kosovo society as a whole and a number of Western Balkan¹⁹ countries. Also, corruption is also not exclusively reserved for the political parties and leaders, although the political association is indeed the fastest way to reach the positions and functions that enable it. Consequently, the citizens predominantly associate corruption with politicians. Referring to this phenomenon in the Serb community in Kosovo, Darko Dimitrijevic, editor-in-chief of Radio Gorazdevac, claims that ever since two decades ago (after 1999) politicians have shown systematic non-transparency in the management of public finances.²⁰ According

to Dimitrijević, *numerous scandals and shady tenders have contributed to making a public official-politician synonymous with corruption in Kosovo.*²¹

So, if one conclusion can be drawn for the first part of the study, that would be that this research confirms the well-known state of affairs; the citizens do not trust their political leaders and suspect that corrupt, manipulative behavior has become a modus operandi of the political profession. In a real context, the citizens of the Serb community in Kosovo believe that engagement in politics is conceivable only by acceptance of the patterns of behavior that are considered “unethical” in every other sphere of their lives.

18 Smith J. 2011 – Political populism in transitional societies. Page 18

19 <https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Kosovo/Kosovo-the-lost-battle-against-corruption-209245>

20 Interview Darko Dimitrijevic - quote “For two decades now, almost everyone who was involved in politics and held public office, left the finances of public institutions aside, away from the public eye.”

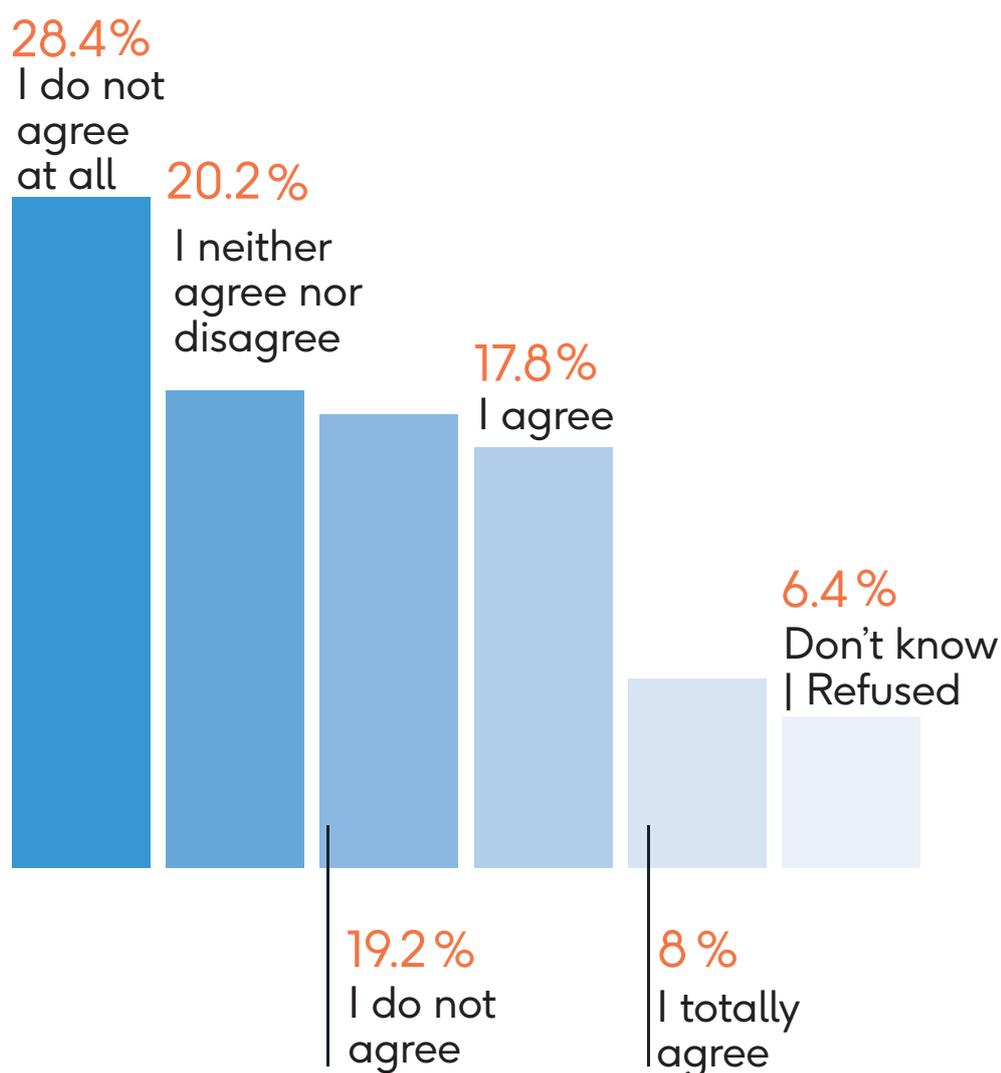
21 Ibid, same question

Results: Predominant political practices

In the continuation of the research, we dealt in more detail with the citizens' perception of exactly those patterns of behavior that are inherent in the political profession. As you will see below, the findings are interesting.

First of all, the respondents believe that engagement in politics necessarily requires the prioritization of party interests over community ones. When asked how much they agree with the statement that *politicians do what is good for citizens and not what their boss orders*, 47.6% of respondents, so slightly less than half, claim disagreement with such a statement (Graph 6). Only about a quarter of citizens believe that this is true.

Graph 6. Politicians do what is good for the citizens, not what their superiors (boss) tell them to do



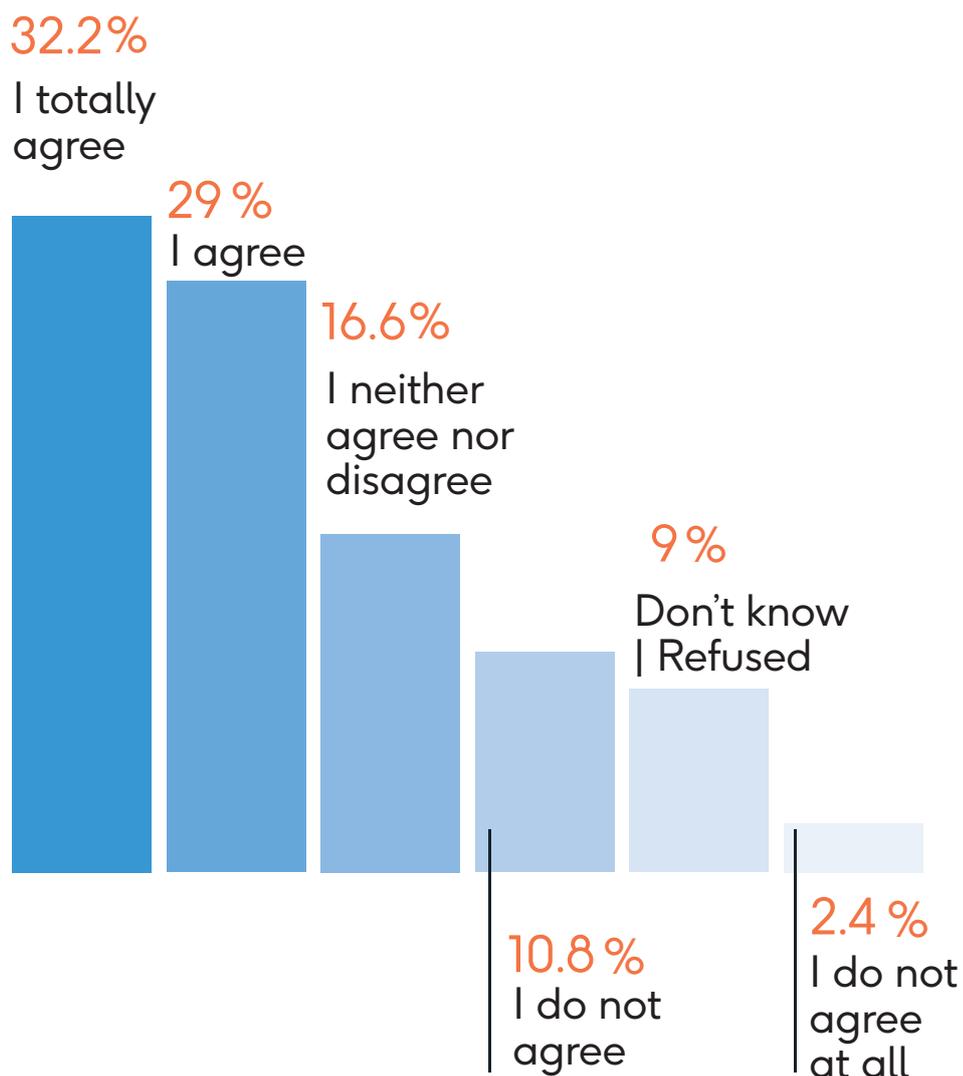


So, according to the respondents' answers, "blind" party loyalty is one of the basic characteristics of the political profession. If we recall that one of the research tasks was to determine the potential of civic participation in political processes as a legitimate means of attainment of community goals and interests,

this perception certainly has a demotivating effect on citizens.

According to the results of the research, it is the indulgence of party interests or the interests of its leaders that citizens see as the fastest way to behave in the party nomenclature. Thus, as many as 61.2% of respondents agree with the statement that the best way to advance in politics is to give in to the will of the party leadership (Graph 7). Only 13.2% of respondents disagree with such a statement.

Graph 7. The best way to advance in politics is to give in to party leadership



The results demonstrate that citizens do not perceive political engagement as a method for the realization of new ideas or different views of citizens' interests. It is because, within its organizational units, political parties, servility, and subordination are actively nurtured while the personal interests of its leaders take precedence over public benefit. This is certainly a demotivating factor for involving citizens in politics, but it is not the only one.

The real proportions of this problem can be understood only if these conclusions are observed in the context of the attitude of political parties towards opponents, which are characterized, as we elaborated earlier in the study, by systemic pressures, public defamation, existential threats (job loss, etc.). In the community context, this means that citizens not only face obstacles in attaining independent community interests by joining existing political initiatives (that prioritize party interest over community ones), but such objectives are difficult to attain through independent political association, for example by creating civic movements or parties whose program differs from the dominant political option in the Serbian community in Kosovo. More precisely, it is possible, but with great personal risks that opposition action brings, i.e. likely being marked in public as a *national traitor*.^{22 23 24 25} Consequently, the space for political activism in the Serb community in Kosovo is essentially limited only within or in accordance with the policy of the ruling political option, which is in the given context, always the political option in power in Belgrade.

22 <https://www.danas.rs/ljudi/nenad-rasovic-na-meti-srpske-liste/>

23 <https://www.republika.rs/vesti/srbija/260175/dilas-ova-rada-pokazala-da-je-izdajnik-sa-kurtijem-gradi-mo-nezavisno-kosovo-prava-srba-nam-nisu-prioritet>

24 <https://www.kosovo-online.com/vesti/politika/rakic-stojanovic-u-bolesnoj-borbi-za-vlast-ugrozio-zivot-sudiji-labanu-17-8-2021>

25 <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/politika/danas-dve-godine-od-spota-kojim-je-oliver-ivanovic-zigosan-kao-izdajnik/>

The roots of such attitudes, according to the interviewees that took part in the qualitative part of the research, is the fact that Serbs in Kosovo are largely seen as the embodiment of the policy of the Republic of Serbia towards Kosovo. Such a political concordat of Kosovo Serbs and the Republic of Serbia is a natural manifestation of broader national, social, ethnic, or cultural ties in this regard.²⁶ However, in the absence of a broader strategic approach, the framework of such cohort is reduced to party programs, while party interests are imposed as national ones. In such an environment, the pluralism of political ideologies is easily and maliciously interpreted as a betrayal of national interests, triggering substantial social pressure upon its conveyors. Some interlocutors from the Serb community in Kosovo claim that this attitude towards political dissidents holds an additional purpose that is to divert the public's attention from criticism of the government's performance on other topics. Correspondingly, Goran Avramović, editor-in-chief of RTV KiM claims *the story of "betrayal and traitors" (.....) is placed in the frontline of public attention in order to cause panic and create a sense of threat in society. Then, probably, follows the need to "disguise" one's own misdemeanors by asserting the highest ideals and patriotism*²⁷. Avramovic adds that *Kosovo Serbs in most of the cases subserviently carried out the orders of the ruling regime from Belgrade. There has been no significant initiative from the field towards Belgrade for a long time. , especially not from the elected (appointed) representatives of the Srpska Lista, which is, in fact, only a local (Kosovo) name for the Srpska Napredna Stranka*.²⁸

Other interviewees that participated in the qualitative part of the research (focus

26 By the same author Kosovo Serbs on Both Sides of the River: Divided Divisions, Radio Kim, October 11, 2021, <https://www.radiokim.net/vesti/analiza/kosovski-srbi-sa-obe-strane-reke-podele-o-kojima-se-cuti.html>

27 Quote from the interview with Goran Avramović -

28 Ibid

groups and interviews) typically confirm such subordinating relationship between Kosovo Serbs and official Belgrade but distinguish between the essence of the idea of joint representation of Kosovo Serbs and the practices that have been developed to achieve this objective. According to Aleksandar Rapajic, program director of NGO ACDC, *the idea of establishing the Srpska Lista is generally good, to ensure that the Serbian community does not skirmish over elections and to ensure greater influence at central institutions* ²⁹. Respondents from focus groups organized in the areas south of the Ibar River believe that *“the uniform representation policy pursued by Belgrade is based on the position and interests of the Serb community in northern Kosovo and in many cases neglects the interests of the Serb community in the south”* (from the Ibar River).³⁰

In conclusion, the research indicates that the current (and to a greater extent historical) patterns and practices of Kosovo’s Serb political representation do not reflect the existing pluralism of interests of the Serbian community, nor objective socio-political conditions to discuss these interests freely, openly, and publicly has been met. In such circumstances, political engagement is largely reduced to one political option and practices indicate that mostly serves the pursuit of individual rather than general interests. This phenomenon was discussed in more detail in the continuation of this publication.

Perceptions of the privileged position of political activists

The circumstances under which the political life of Kosovo Serbs unfolds, that, as we described in the previous part of the research, are manifested by systematic suppression of political pluralism or independent civic activism, have resulted in the mainstreaming of autocratic governance practices in a formally democratic society.



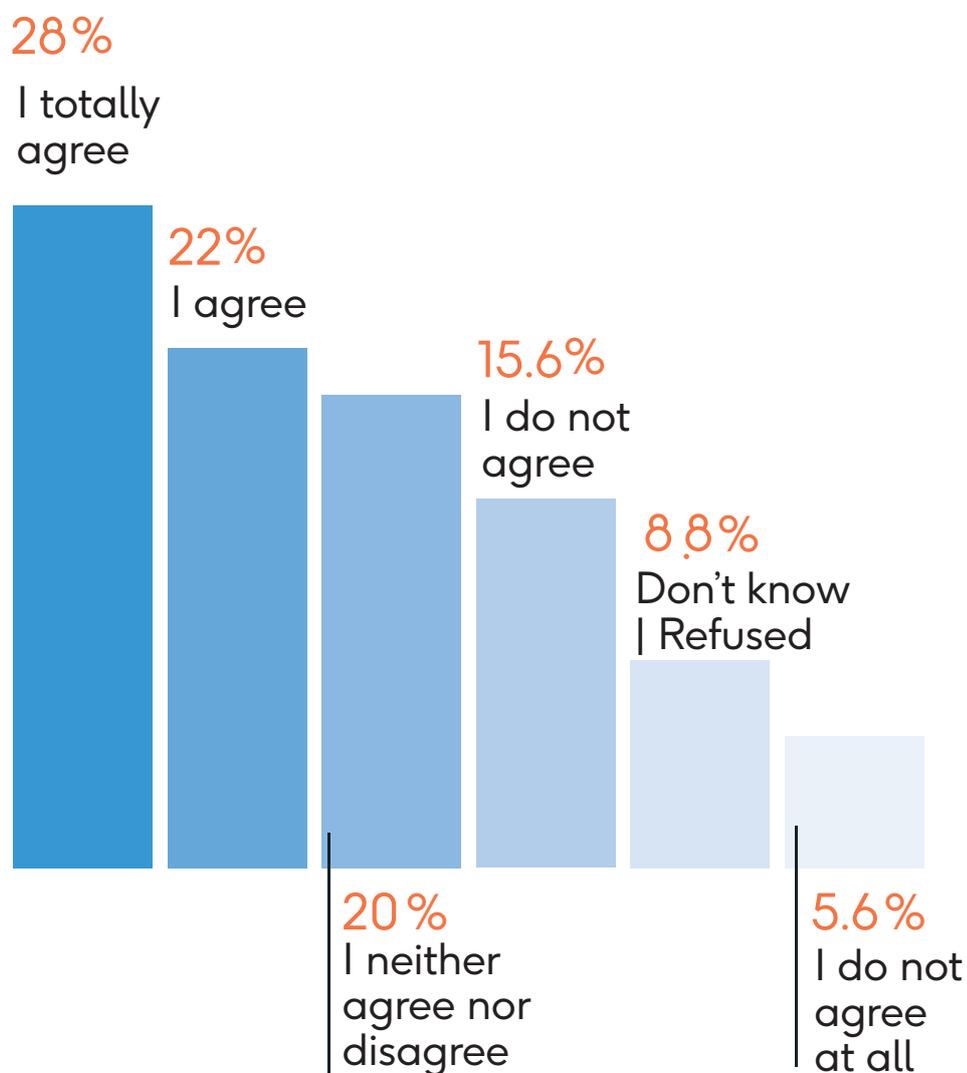
Such an almost contradictory relationship between reality and the formal legal system is manifested, for example, through a formally democratic electoral process, in which citizens are forced to vote for one political option or adoption of legislation that by the letter of the law guarantees freedom of political association but usually leads to aggressive media defamation or another kind of pressures against the opponents.

In a sense, this represents a simulation of democracy. Such a simulation featured the political life in the Serb community in Kosovo for decades and by now met all prerequisites to become a modus operandi of political engagement. If it is not already. And the results of this research indisputably testify to that. To that argument, only one in five respondents (21.2%) disagrees with the statement that it is easier to remain silent than to fight against the system (Graph 8 - below). Almost 30% of respondents (I do not know or do not want to answer) did not want to refute the same claim, and as many as 50% of the surveyed citizens of the Serb community in Kosovo agree with that statement.

²⁹ Quote from an interview with Aleksandar Rapajic

³⁰ Report from the focus group Gračanica, 21.01.2022.

Graph 8. It is easier to remain silent than to fight against the system



In the qualitative part of the research, the respondents pointed out that the pattern of suppression of public criticism has existed to a greater or lesser extent since the end of the 1999 conflict. However, according to Goran Avramović, editor-in-chief of RTV KiM, the nuances in the consequences of criticisms exist. There is a trend of deterioration of pressure against public criticisms that culminated with the appearance of the Srpska Lista. Avramović concludes; public

*criticism is much more expensive nowadays.*³¹

The same source indirectly indicates that the pattern of behavior of political leaders in the Serbian community mostly followed the dominant trends of the same freedoms in Serbian society in Serbia. Thus, Avramović claims: *My impression is that the Kosovo Serbs were the freest to criticize during the time of Zoran Đinđić as the Prime Minister of Serbia and that the situation after his death constantly and progressively deteriorated.*³²

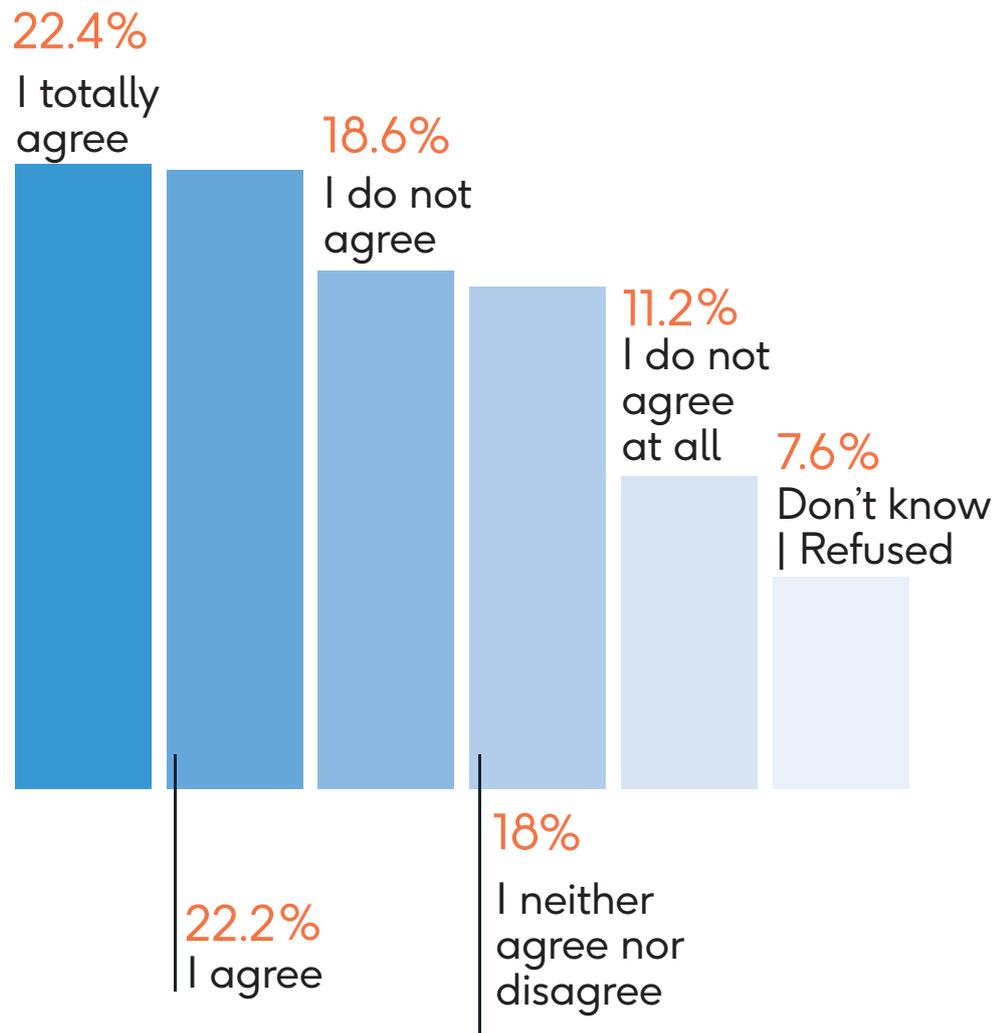
31 Interview with Goran Avramovic - Editor-in-Chief of RTV KiM. Page 2

32 Ibid

The reaffirmation of the argument that citizens perceive independent political action and public expression of political views as a threat/risk to their own security, comes with the next question in the survey. As much as 44% of the respondents agreed with the

statement "it is safer to think what tells you than with your own head" (Graph 9 – below -cumulatively agree and completely agree). On contrary, just under 30% of respondents claim to disagree.

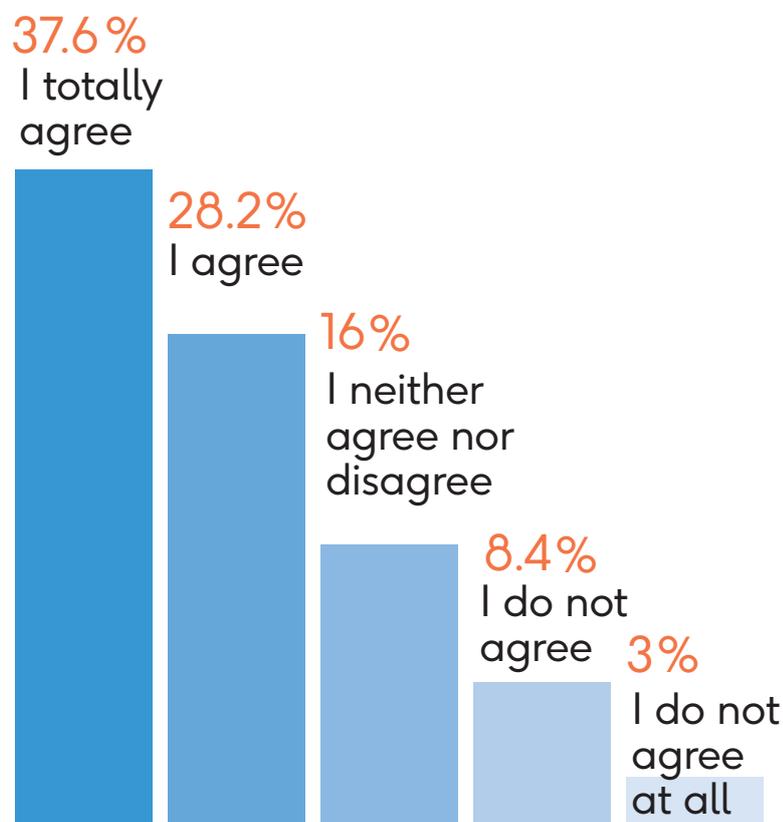
Graph 9. it is safer to think what tells you than with your own head



Therefore, the results of this research show that the citizens of the Serb community in Kosovo not only reveal a general lack of motivation to actively participate in political processes in their community but also consider political servility as a generally accepted model of

behavior, a model that enables interested individuals to achieve personal interests and goals. Almost two-thirds of the respondents, more precisely 65.8%, nourish such beliefs, (Graph 10) and just over 10% of the respondents do not agree with such views.

Graph 10. It is much easier to succeed in life if you have good relations with politicians



OO

If socio-economic affirmations of the individual is preconditioned or/and subjected to the will of politicians, this abolishes one of the basic principles of a democratic society which is equality in society (equal opportunities). This further means that citizens believe that public resources are available only to a privileged group of people

and that its distribution is not defined by fair, predictable legal procedures, but by the processes which favor political associates and politically like-minded people.

In other words, the respondents indicate omnipresent corruption and nepotism in the distribution of public resources (including jobs). Of course, this conclusion states the obvious. Countless relevant international reports confirm this, some referring to the high level of corruption in Kosovo, as endemic.³³ The European Union's Kosovo Progress

33 Ambassador Delawie's Remarks at AmCham Discussion on Fighting Corruption and Business Ethics, October 2017
<https://xk.usembassy.gov/ambassador-delawies-remarks-amcham-discussion-fighting-corruption-business-ethics/>

Report for 2021 even makes a reference to northern Kosovo pinpointing corruption as of its major challenges.³⁴

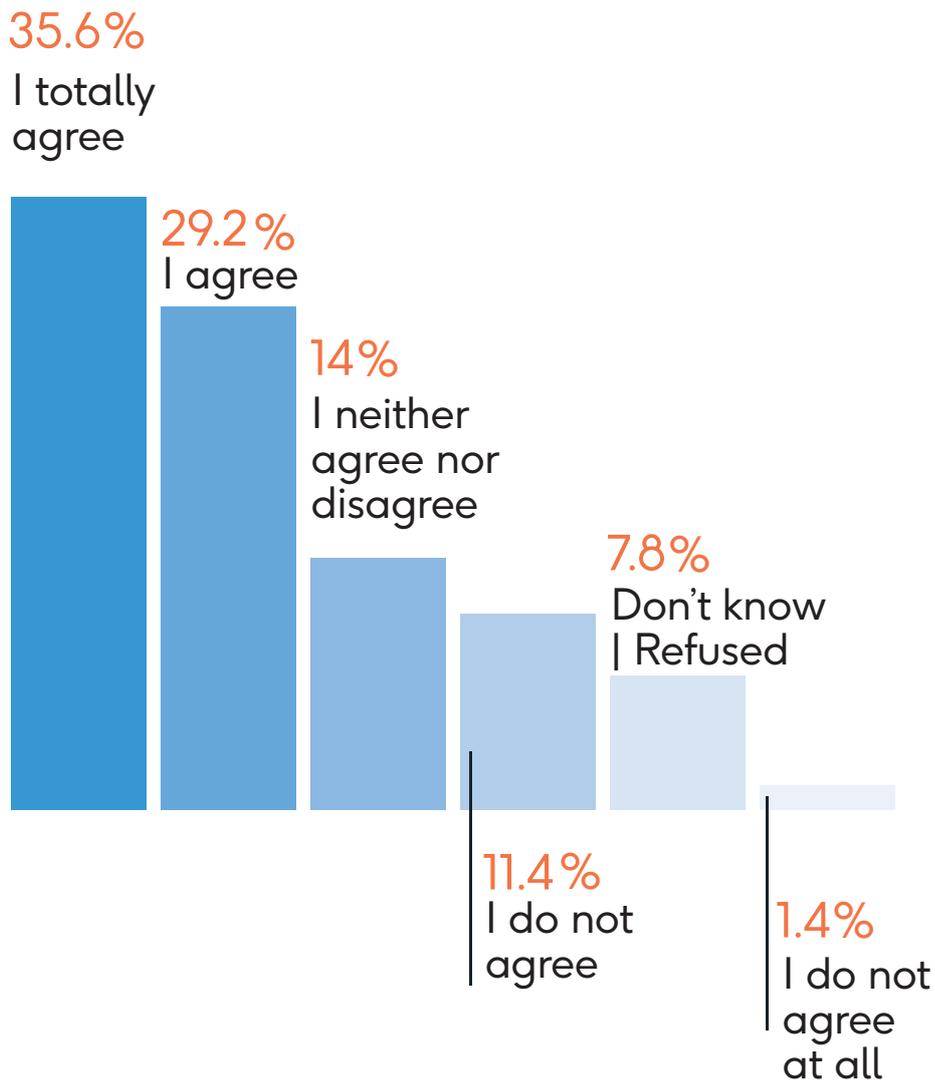
One aspect of political practices in the Serb community often subjected to citizen complaints is the redistribution of jobs in public enterprises, both those operating within the legal and administrative system of the Republic of Serbia and those in Kosovo's

public institutions. In both cases, there is a deep-rooted practice of assigning these jobs on a partisan basis.³⁵ The results of this year's survey show that as many as 64.8% of respondents from the Serb community in Kosovo believe that political loyalty is the sole merit upon which these positions are distributed. Only 12% of respondents disagree with the same statement.

34 EU Progress Report for Kosovo https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/kosovo-report-2021_en, page 5, executive summary.

35 <https://kfos.org/en/publications/110/karakteristike-otvorenog-drustva-u-srpskoj-zajednici-na-kosovu>, page 119, Freedom of Political Association

O Graph 11. The only way to get a job in a state institution or promotion is political loyalty



The data indicate a deep-rooted belief among the citizens of the Serb community in Kosovo that a job in the public sector, overwhelmingly considered as a synonym of financial security of individuals and their families, can be obtained by sole means of party loyalty.

The consolidated report OPEN 2020³⁶ argues the phenomenon of redistribution of public functions within the party nomenclature as a practice that surpasses the local context and is observable worldwide. The report does not reach a definite conclusion as to whether this practice is illegal but indicates that its proportions in the Serb community in Kosovo are so immense and widespread that they exceed acceptable democratic standards³⁷, even have turned into one of the basic mechanisms for influencing the voters.

In the qualitative part of the research, the participants pointed out another devastating consequence of this practice. That is the prioritization of loyalty over competency merits in the distribution of public functions and jobs. According to Darko Dimitrijevic, editor-in-chief of Radio Gorazdevac, such a practice not only affects the development capacity of society but also has a strong impact on migration trends. It intensifies the departure of young and educated people from the Serb community and further impoverishes its social potential.³⁸

The practice of party redistribution of public resources strongly affects all community stakeholders including the private sector. Whether this is privileged access to business support programs, public procurement tenders, or some other form of clientelisms, there are many ways for entrepreneurs to achieve certain privileges through "good relations" with politicians. At the expense of its competition. The survey confirms this perception. According to survey results almost two-thirds of respondents, 65.6% believe that

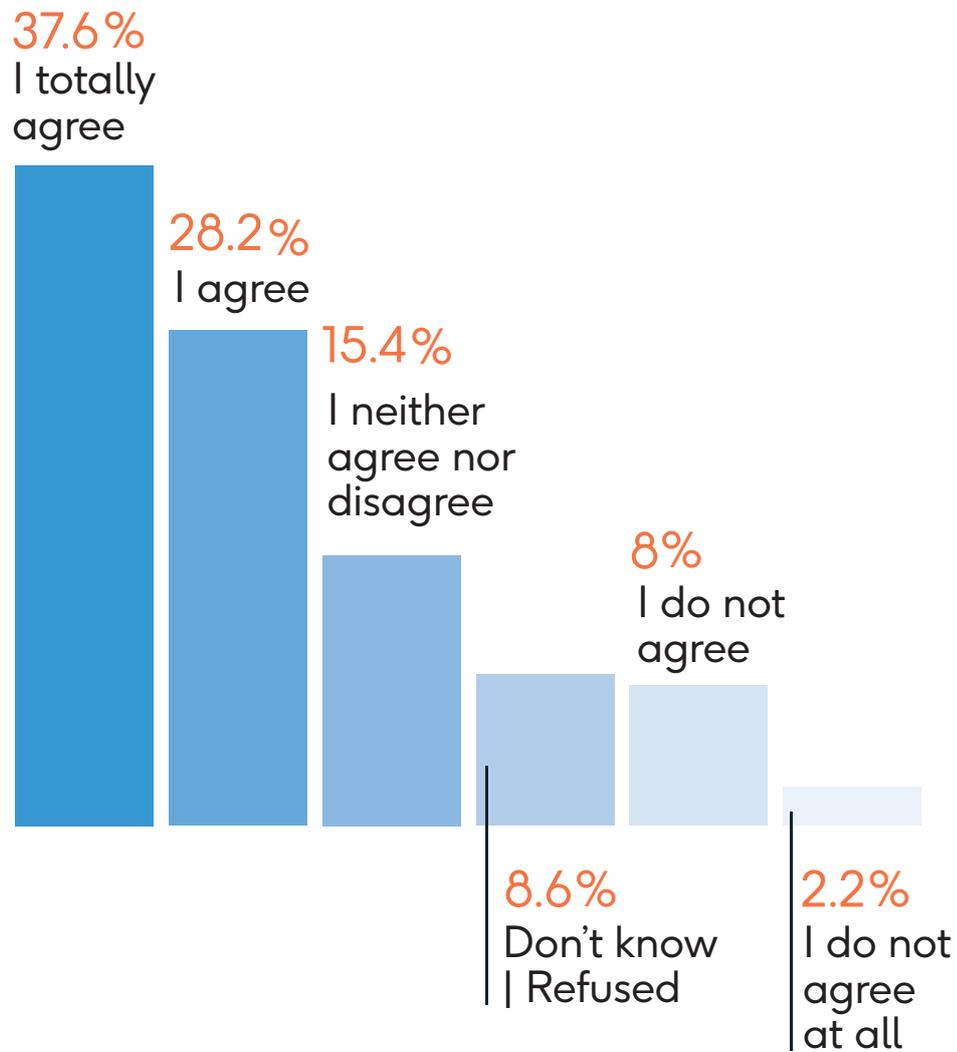
it is useful for private businesses to have good relations with politicians, and only 10.2% of citizens of the Serb community in Kosovo who participated in this study disagree.

³⁶ Ibid, page 119

³⁷ Ibid, page 120

³⁸ Interview Darko Dimitrijevic, quote "the consequences of party employment are the departure of young people, corruption, nepotism, poverty, property sales and leaving Kosovo"

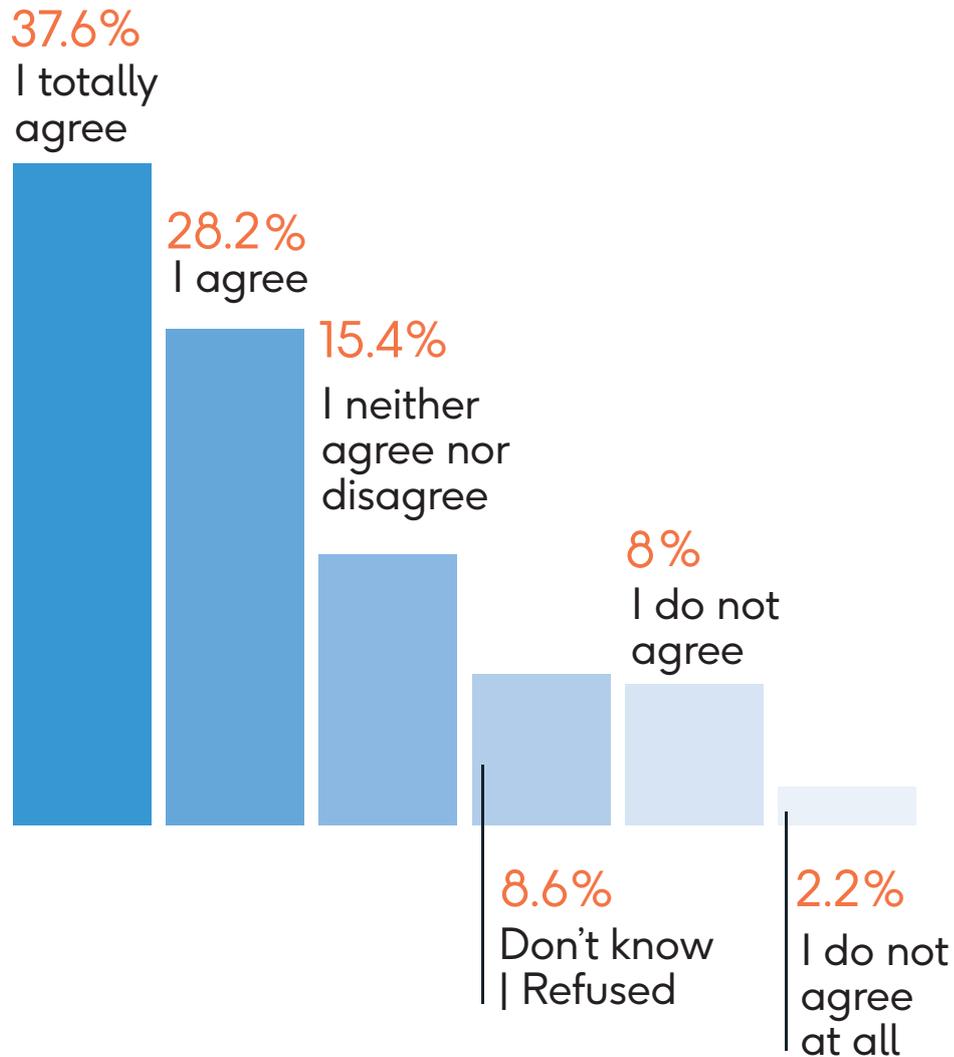
Graph 12. Good relations with politicians are good for private business



In general, the dominant perception of citizens is that political engagement grants privileges of all kinds, including the acquisition

of material gain. By far the largest number of respondents agree with this statement (as many as 70%- Graph 13).

○ Graph 13. Politics is a lucrative occupation



Interpreting such results, one of the respondents in the qualitative part of the research said *that the profession of*



“politician” is very lucrative, citizens can see that politicians are earning quite well and live well, often much more luxuriously than their basic income allows,

they also can see abuse and nepotism, I must admit that I agree with that opinion.³⁹

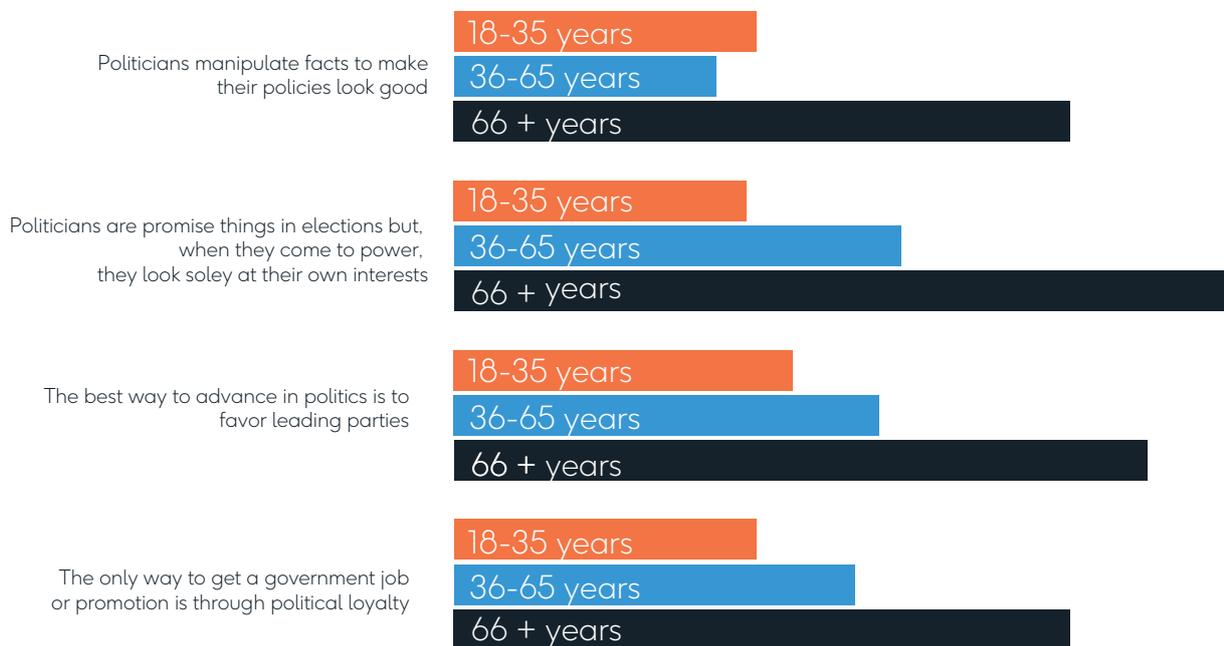
In general conclusion, the survey generally indicates a strong dissatisfaction of citizens with the work of their political representatives. Through correlation of the statistical data, it is determined that such a belief is equally present among citizens regardless of their place of residence (north or south of the Ibar River), level of education, or employment

³⁹ Interview with Aleksandar Rapajić, Program Director of NGO ACDC

status. However, by correlating the data based on the age of the respondents, we found the trend of increasing support for political representatives of the Serbian community with the increase in the age of the respondents. Graph 14 (below) shows that

the number of respondents in the population over 65 who have a positive opinion on certain indicators of responsible political performance is almost twice as high as in the younger population (18 to 35).

Graph 14. Percentage of respondents by age who disagree (or completely disagree) with the following statements



Consequently, the study reveals that negative perceptions of political enactments, although prevailing across all respondents age groups, are particularly pronounced among the younger population, respondents aged 18 to 35 years. For example, research shows that as many as 54% of young people (18-35 years old) believe that it is easier to remain silent than to fight against the system, while only 25% of respondents over the age of 65 agree with such statement. Similarly, almost half of young people aged 18 to 35 in Kosovo, (49.7%), believe that, when it comes to the expression of political views, it is safer to

think what others tell you than to speak for themselves.

The participants of the qualitative part of the research had different views on the noticeable defeatism and indifference of young people in the Serbian community in Kosovo. According to some focus groups findings, such a passivity of young people is a consequence of various types of pressure, blackmail, and threats that accompany every attempt of young people to act independently.⁴⁰ On the other hand, Aleksandar Rapajić, the Program Director of ACDC claims “that these findings are not entirely true and that political activisms

⁴⁰ Interview Darko Dimitrijevic, quote “They are passive due to examples of numerous pressures, blackmail and threats of dismissal them or the closest family members if they resent the Srpska Lista “

within the Serb community in Kosovo are very common and many are engaged in it, including young people, who in noticeable numbers occupied public offices lately.⁴¹

However, such a voice remained isolated against the accord of other participants in focus groups and interviews. The vast majority of them agree that the passiveness of the younger population in the Serbian community for engagement in fulfillment of their goals and interests through political action is a prevailing pattern of behavior.⁴²

Special focus: The relationship between civil society organizations (CSOs) and political leaders

Civil society organizations, as representatives of citizens and their interests, play an active and multi-layered role in the socio-political dynamics of democratic societies. Primarily it is a role in strengthening the quality and promoting democracy⁴³, monitoring of institutional and political representatives in the application of legal and democratic principles, as well as the growing role in creating public policies. In all these capacities, civil society inevitably operates in the political arena so it is increasingly referred to as an integral part of the process of governing society. Thus, some authors argue that both the political and civil sectors are equally important for the democratic consolidation of society⁴⁴ and that their intertwined relations

are an unavoidable consequence of such a division of social roles.

The participation of the civil sector in the political life of a society is the subject of ongoing discussions in academic circles where the views of the two schools of thought have not yet converged, one that believes civil society in fulfilling its social role must create and nurture close relations with political representatives of citizens⁴⁵ and the second one that advocates such a relationship must be kept at sufficient distance granting the civil sector necessary independence in its work on consolidation of democracy.⁴⁶ The dilemma has not been resolved to this day. However, if civic engagement is observed as one form of social movement, it can generate features resembling oppositional activism, especially if CSOs resort to the wider mobilization of society and criticism of government policies. From such a perspective, autonomy in CSO operations is essential.

Exactly such character of civil society organizations is prevalent in transition democracies including Western Balkans, ie societies where democratic practices have not fully taken root and state institutions are not inclined to apply participatory methods of decision-making and policy formulation. In such societies, the work of the civil society is often perceived as a threat by authorities, thus they resort to various means in its obstruction.⁴⁷ In Kosovo however, there are significant differences in political leaders-CSO relations between Albanian and Serb communities. Civil society organizations operating in the Albanian community to some extent managed to induce affirmative

41 Interview with Aleksandar Rapajic

42 Focus group - northern Kosovo - respondents' response 8 – page 4

43 Anders Uhlin, 2009 - [Civil Society Elites: Comparing Elite Composition, Reproduction, Integration and Contestation in European Civil Societies](#);

44 Linz & Stepan, 1996

45 Linz, 1996; Morlino, 1998

46 Katz & Mair, 1995; Kitschelt, 2000

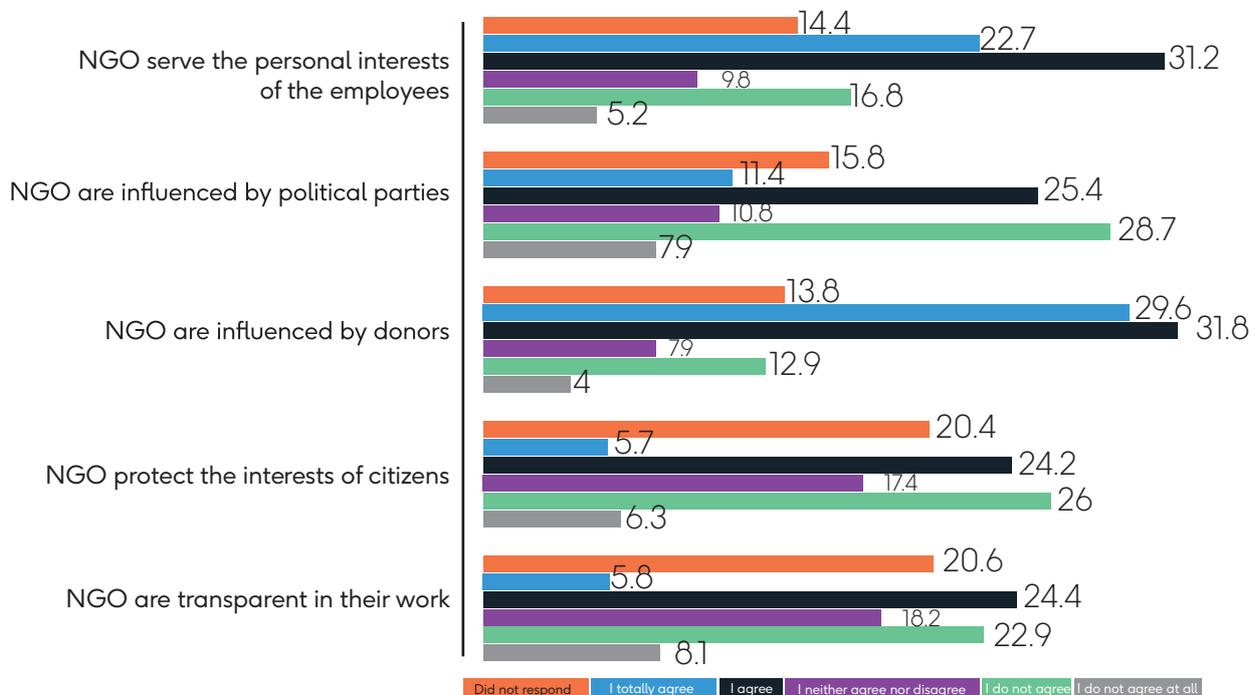
47 Censorship - "Foreign Mercenaries" Campaign- <https://www.cenzolovka.rs/tag/kampanja-strani-placenici/page/2/>

treatment by the authorities⁴⁸ and although still being far from an ideal situation, the civic sector is increasingly seen as a productive and contributing partner in the decision-making process. On the other hand, the civil sector operating in the Serb community in Kosovo has never managed to impose itself as a credible partner to authorities, both at the local and central levels. There are several reasons for this, ranging from the lack of adequate human resources required to formulate solutions to the difficult problems CSO are addressing, the lack of

representativeness in the eyes of the community, all the way to the stereotypical perceptions of the civil sector by political representatives and citizens and society in whole.⁴⁹ The OPEN 2020 survey alert a fundamental deficiency of the Serbian civil sector in Kosovo, which is a low trust it enjoys in a community whose interests it seeks to protect. Graph 15 illustrates this finding:

48 Adrian Kastrati, Civil Society Development and its impact on democratization process in Kosovo, introduction, page 5
 49 OPEN 2020 Consolidated Report - Freedoms of Association - Civil Sector in the Serb Community in Kosovo, Chapter II, page 98, introduction.

Graph 15. Citizens' views on the integrity of civil society organizations working in Serb communities in Kosovo OPEN 2020





Not only do significant number of citizens reveal reservations about the genuine commitment of CSOs to protect the interests of the community, but they also believe that other social actors hold great leverage over the civil society agenda. As the survey data reveal, more than one-third of the respondents (37%) believe that political parties noticeably control the work of CSOs. The similar proportions of citizens demonstrate distrust in the independence of CSOs toward donor agencies and their agenda.

The responders in qualitative part of the study, the experts familiar with civic-political dynamics claim that in the given circumstances the relationship between CSOs operating in Serb communities in Kosovo and their political representatives does not unfold under predictable patterns. According to the conclusion from one of several focus groups realized within this research⁵⁰ there is no structural, targeted effort of political parties to control CSOs. However, the dynamics of this relationship vary depending on individual inclinations and personal preferences of individual CSO leaders towards certain political options or their skillfulness in maintaining the appearance of uncompromisable guardian of citizen's *interests without any meaningful and explicitly defined criticisms of the government*⁵¹.

Exactly this role, a community watchdog, rooted in the nature of the role of CSOs as a corrective factor in society, is one of the basic criteria for the classification of CSOs operating in the Serbian community in Kosovo.

According to one of the distinguished leaders of civil society (request for anonymity), only a small portion of CSO is critical toward the authorities. The patterns of criticisms and opposition suppression in the political spectrum within the Serbian community are however replicated against other social actors, media, and civil society. As him/her stipulated, *CSOs are (only) somewhat free to criticize the government, much more at the central level, and much more on issues that political representatives of the Serb community do not perceive as important/sensitive. "Criticism of a general kind usually does not provoke a reaction. However, when criticism is directed to particular individual or/and particular actions of political leaders, it is more likely to provoke some sort of repressive reaction, e.g. press release against individuals"*⁵²

So, faced with inevitable pressures if opt for criticism, a huge number of CSOs from the Serbian community resort for "*apolitical actions*"⁵³, a term used to describe the tactics of refraining from criticisms of the government as well as shifting the programmatic focus on light social issues. Such a strategy enables them more laidback operations within the local community, but in some cases even a preferential access to access to funds (grants). Such a attitude also contributes to a greater implementation potency of CSOs (programs that require public-civil partnership), or in some situations provides a status of direct implementation partner of the local or central government. As one of the focus group participants illustrated, "*it is*

50 Focus Group Northern Kosovo - report - Humanitarian Center Mitrovica

51 Focus group report, statement of the participants on the question: Do NGOs act as critics of the government - Humanitarian Center Mitrovica, January 2022

52 Interview with civic leader - PD2

53 Interview with civic leader - PD2

much more profitable for non-governmental organizations to be the services of political parties than their critics.”⁵⁴

On the other hand, although scarce, a number of civil society organizations act as a genuine watchdog of the political representatives in the Serbian community in Kosovo, aiming protection of public interests, regardless of political interference or repression. These organizations suffer various forms of pressure, including public defamation campaigns (via press releases from the Srpska Lista^{55 56}), denied access to public information, disadvantageous status to the funds distributed in the process where public officials or the political representatives hold a vote or saying. Since the vast of CSOs act as non-profit associations, the impact of such practices on CSOs is significant, especially on those organizations that persist in independent roles. To remediate this deficit, these organizations often resort to “soft adaptation measures” such as various forms of self-censorship,⁵⁷ adjustment of the programmatic focus on “safer topics” or even alleviation of public criticism of the government enactments. In a way, the current practices are such that should CSOs wishes to perform their social role with integrity (that entails prioritization the interests of citizens over political elites), they inevitably face obstacles in generating the required support (funds, cooperation with local institutions, etc.) A kind of paradox before CSOs.

The attitude of political representatives of the Serbian community towards civil society organizations is defined by the very nature of their engagement. Those CSOs that nurture

a critical attitude towards those in power are seen as a “necessary evil” or as one of the opposition political leaders described it illustratively in an interview within this research as an “undesirable social burden”⁵⁸. The default treatment of organizations with critical attitudes is to ignore their work and demands and refrain from cooperation. In situations when such criticism receives greater media and societal attention, it is addressed by acts of public discredit of their work, media defamation, press releases of political parties, and similar.⁵⁹



On the other side of the civic spectrum in Kosovo Serb community, there are a large number of organizations that nurture close ties to political parties, close personal relations with political leaders, and in some cases act as their service providers, especially in programs that require public-civil partnership or request for such cooperation comes from donors. Such organizations can count not only on support from the authorities but also direct financial support through the local development program.⁶⁰

Another specific role that the civic sector plays in the Serb community in Kosovo and which largely dictates the dynamics and character of relations with political representatives is the participation of civic leaders in the part of public dialogue that requires the participation

54 Focus group quote northern Kosovo - page 3 of the Report - HMC

55 <https://www.kosovo-online.com/vesti/politika/srpska-lista-lokalni-samozvani-analiticari-ne-poseduju-elementarno-poznavanje>

56 <https://www.kosovo-online.com/vesti/politika/srpska-lista-sramno-sto-se-lincu-protiv-ivana-todosijevica-prikljucila-i-srpska-nvo>

57 Interview with a civilian leader (at the request of the respondent without giving a name) - PD 24. Page 3

58 Interview with opposition political leader from northern Kosovo - request for anonymity.

59 ibid

60 Report from the focus group Gracanica

of political/institutional representatives.

The essential element of the communication strategy of the Srpska Lista is to participate exclusively in strictly controlled media and the public environment i.e. evade the participation in the public debates in which the critical opinion is represented. Such a strategy leaves a big gap in public dialogue in Kosovo society. The noticeable tendency is to address this gap replacing the elected political representatives of the Serb community, with civic leaders and prominent activities. By that civic leader assume a very responsible role in representing the interests of the Serb community and take part in a wide range of discussion and sometimes highly technical and complex issues, that requires expert input or institutional insight. In most cases, such expertise is not at the disposal of the civic sector, consequently leading to the underrepresentation of genuine community interests. Such a role imposed over civic leaders also contributes to the deepening of animosity with political and institutional representatives but also creates the illusion of pluralism in social dialogue. This 'mimicry' of pluralism certainly annuls the essential purpose of dialogue and does not produce the effects that would be achieved with the participation of elected representatives of the Serbian community, i.e. actors with a mandate to make decisions.

Of course, this does not mean that civic leaders should not participate in social dialogue. On the contrary, they play a significant role in this process by acting as a corrective factor in government. But not as its alternative⁶¹. Another consequence of such a trend was alerted in an interview with the leader of one of the most prominent organizations in the Kosovo Serb community.⁶² According to him/her; *in the absence of political opposition as well as the responsibility of political representatives from the Serb community, CSOs that are publicly critical become*

perceived as political opposition or as those who aspire to be politically engaged. In the absence of (inclusive⁶³) social dialogue, any criticism, no matter how constructive, is perceived as an attack, and any activity that touches the sensitive topics is perceived as a provocation carried out with a specific agenda.

So, in conclusion, there is a large gap between political and civic representatives of the Kosovo Serb community which in some situations translates into open animosities that leave little or no attention to the genuine interests of citizens. In the given social context of Serbs in Kosovo, featured by countless problems in almost every area of socio-political life, these animosities are ultimately irresponsible and undermine the overall potential of society to thrive and advance.

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ Author's remark

Conclusions

The profession of “politician” is fully discredited. The results of the research show that citizens associate the profession of “politician” with unethical patterns of behavior. More precisely, political engagement is perceived as a system of values in which manipulation of the interests of citizens, manipulation of truth, nepotism, or clientelism are common and implied occurrences. Such forms of behavior are embedded to the extent that citizens see them as a prerequisite for a successful political carrier. It is important to note that citizens in this respect do not differentiate between particular political options but indicate that such models of political behavior in the Kosovo Serb community have existed in a more or less distinctive form since 1999. Hence the dominant feeling among citizens is that nothing has changed on the political level for decades, that the same people are involved in politics, or even when certain changes occur, the new political elite quickly adopt identical patterns of behavior and political enactments. The result of such actions is the current state in which the profession of “politician” in the folklore milieu is perceived as a “dishonorable” occupation while refraining from political actions is often presented as a positive (moral) manner/value. It is not necessary to emphasize how destructive this practice is for developmental potentials of one society.

Diversity is dangerous. One of the most striking conclusions of the research is that the respondents and focus group/interviews participants, many of whom are professionally and academically distinguished, were not able to name a moment in the political history of Kosovo Serbs in which there was true freedom of public expression and consequent

pluralism in the political representation of their interests. Of course, some respondents made differences between the general social atmosphere in certain periods,⁶⁴ but in essence, all agree that in the last few decades there has always been strong social and political pressure on those who think differently from the “ruling party” in Belgrade. The cause of this phenomenon, as we have stated, is rooted in the lack of defined national interests of Serbs and the Serbian community in politics towards Kosovo. This leads to its equalization with the interests of political parties in power in the Republic of Serbia. Under such circumstances, political parties tend to nominate their policies as a national interest and declare any criticism of such an approach or as a betrayal of national interests. According to the respondents, such forms of behavior, although present for decades, culminated with the appearance of the Srpska Lista, i.e. with Serbian Progressive Party (Srpska Napredna Stranka) gaining a leading seat in Serbia. At that point, the practices of suppression of political pluralism in the Serbian community acquire the character of a systematic effort. Intolerance for different opinions today, as research shows, does not exist only in the political arena but is actively limited in other areas of public action, media, civic initiatives, etc.

Abuse of public resources. The research shows that a large number of citizens believe that public resources are available only to a selected privileged group of people and that its distribution is not based on the accounting principles and predictable legal procedures, but rather by favoring politically like-minded individuals. In such circumstances, the luring

⁶⁴ Ibid, quote - “it seems to me that it was much easier to criticize during the government of (Zoran) Djindjic”.

motive of citizens to get involved in political processes becomes such advantaged access to resources (public funds, public sector affairs). Consequently, the involvement of citizens in political processes is not motivated by the goals of social advancement through change or pluralism of ideas, but quite the opposite – indulgence of the existing elite for the sake of personal gain. Of course, this perception is reinforced by the obvious efforts to suppress any political pluralism and opposition activities, which additionally demotivates a large number of citizens to seek a political engagement in collision with the interests of the ruling party.

Simulation of democracy. The attitude of elected political leaders and their accountability towards the interests of citizens is almost a taboo topic in Serbian society in Kosovo. Any public criticism, a request for information (transparency), ie a request for public accountability, is, to put it mildly, seen as an encroachment on the privileges of politicians and is met with the resigned public condemnation or other forms of pressure against its holders. This further leads to their public defamation and quite likely labeling as a traitor to national interests. There are practically no public debates, in which different interests are represented. The proactive approach of political and institutional leaders towards the involvement of citizens in the decision-making process has been reduced to sheer formalism, (basic legal obligations). The affirmative approach of politicians towards the citizens is limited to the election process, which is on the other hand, dominated by populist slogans, aggressive defamation of opponents, and various and increasingly creative forms of pressure against the voters. Thus, viewed from a broader context, undergoing is one structural effort to simulate democratic principles and processes. Such an attitude, although gained intensity and diversification after the exponents of the Srpska Napredna Stranka came to power, has existed since 1999

(and even earlier). Long enough to become the default pattern of political action, by the day less and less recognized as illegal or illegitimate.

Self-censorship as a modus operandi.

According to the research, civil society, which operates within the Serb community in Kosovo, mostly observes political processes from the angle of a passive observer. Very few organizations and individuals are presented with the accrued integrity to perform their role of "guardian of the public interest"⁶⁵, and even fewer manage to resist pressure from political representatives of the community and maintain the necessary programmatic focus or avoid self-censorship. Self-censorship, not only of civil organizations but also of other social actors (media, civic representatives, etc.), is one of the main consequences of the atmosphere of fear that currently prevails in the Serb community in Kosovo. The social criticism that targets the essence of the problem is not sufficiently present, so it seems that society as a whole does not have enough potential to bring about the desired changes.

OO This is exactly the general conclusion of the research.

The lack of political pluralism and the culture of political engagement of citizens in Serb communities in Kosovo has reached alarming proportions and is present to the extent that it has a strong impact on the community's potential to fight for the improvement of living conditions and prospects in Kosovo. Currently, the interests of the Serbian community are represented by a political group that subordinates the citizen's interests in favor of the interests of one, currently leading, a political party in Serbia. With full control of public resources, support of Belgrade and the

⁶⁵ A much better-known term in Eng.

"watchdogs role" prim.aut.

mainstream media from Serbia, this political group systematically suppresses any attempt at the independent political organization in the Serbian community, refraining from no methods to achieve/maintain its dominance. As a result of such pressures, Kosovo Serbs are absolutely intimidated and otherwise demotivated to fight for their interests and goals in the political arena. Without space to actively engage in politics, citizens are forced to merely witness various corruption scandals, nepotistic and clientelist practices in the distribution of public resources that privileges party loyalty before the merits of competency and education. The consequences of such a situation are multifold, starting from the increasing migration of young people from Kosovo in search of work, all the way to the reduced potency of a Serbian society in Kosovo to identify their true interests and defend them through political engagement. One of the most illustrative descriptions of such a situation was given by one of the respondents in the qualitative part of the research, who said: *There has been no significant initiative from the field to Belgrade for a long time*⁶⁶ thus implying the complete political passivity of the Kosovo Serbs.

66 Goran Avramović interview



Recommendations

Political apathy, as one of the most conspicuous conclusions of this research, poses a great threat to the overall potential to achieve democratic and social progress of the Serbian community in Kosovo. Remediation of this problem requires wide social mobilization of all societal actors, including political parties, media, civil society organizations, etc. A holistic approach, that takes into account all the genuine causes and manifestations of this problem is required. The authors of this report suggest that the media and CSOs must expand/divert their programmatic focuses on initiatives contributing the deconstructing the harmful perception that engagement in politics is dangerous and contrary to socio-ethical norms. To this end, it is necessary to:

OO Promote political activism as an effective means to meet the goals and needs of the community. The essential message to convey to citizens is that political engagement is possible beyond political party grasps and includes a diversity of local and social activism that contributes to a better life for the individual and the community as a whole.

OO Promoting political pluralism through inclusive and open social dialogue in which different interests and views are presented.

OO Targeted awareness-raising campaigns should motivate young people to actively participate in the social life of the community.

OO Systematically and with greater solidarity defend the principle of freedom of public expression in cases of public defamation campaigns, threats to individuals, or other forms of pressure against participants in public dialogue.

OO Structurally strengthen the internal capacities of CSOs and the media in combating self-censorship.

OO Active participation of media and CSOs in the monitoring of election processes at the local and parliamentary levels. Equality of electoral conditions for all actors, freedom of choice, the secrecy of the ballots, are just some of the elements of a free and democratic electoral process that need to be addressed.

OO Targeted programs to strengthen civic resilience⁶⁷ increase the general social capacity to fight corruption and clientelism, especially in its most destructive manifestations such as youth employment and similar.

OOO

Political parties and political representatives of the Serb community in Kosovo must make efforts to achieve substantial changes in society, by promoting accountability in the exercise of public powers. In addition, it is necessary that:

OO Holders of political and public functions in the Serbian community encourage and apply the existing legal mechanisms and good practices of citizen participation in public life and the decision-making process with an affirmative approach.

OO Actively act toward strengthening the public partnership (citizens and holders of political and institutional functions) in achieving socially responsible goals.

OO Political entities acting in opposition should not refrain from the application of all available legal mechanisms to protect the freedom of political association and

⁶⁷ ree translation of the term - Civic Resilience. Prim.aut.

protect their members and voters from public defamation campaigns and other forms of pressure.

OO Political organizations must encourage and actively work on the inclusion of young people in the political life of the Serbian community.

OO Active participation of political representatives in public dialogue and promotion of the principle of tolerance of different opinions.



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