



Balkan Public Agenda

Focus Group Study
Republic of Srpska

January 2001
KEY FINDINGS

Realized by
SMMRI Group

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INTRODUCTION

Objectives of the research

The qualitative approach was designed to deliver information needed for developing a questionnaire inquiry to be implemented in all Southeast European countries. The goal of the qualitative research was to monitor the public agenda in the Balkan area.

The results of the focus group-based research are not to be considered representative for the population of a country. They have an intrinsic value and provide an understanding on how people motivate their stand with respect to the situation of the country.

The group interviews were conducted according to the interview guide designed by IMAS in collaboration with IDEA International and with the network of research institutes in all the countries involved in the project. SMMRI qualitative research director Svetlana Logar have moderated the groups.

Recruiting and group composition

Persons belonging to the majority ethnic group and people belonging to Muslims as the major minority ethnic group were invited to attend the focus group sessions.

Participants were selected through quasi random sampling procedure, so that typical members of the population were included. The findings can only be considered as typical for population, but can not be used in any way for the assessments of their quantitative distribution in the population, (proportion of the typical attitudes). Due to quasi random sampling procedure or/and small sample, the sampling error cannot be identified.

Structure of the groups

	Date	Place	No. subjects	Group composition
Group 1	29.01	Banja Luka	8	Urban Age: 20-35 Sex: 5 F, 3 M Occupation: 6 Students, 1 Nurse, 1 Club manager Nationality: Serbian
Group 2	29.01	Banja Luka - neighbouring villages	9	Rural Age: 21-42 Sex: 4 F, 5 M Occupation: 3 Students, 1 Locksmith, 1 Military officer, 2 Workers (1 unemployed) Technician in agriculture (unemployed), 1 Driver (unemployed). Nationality: Serbian
Group 3	29.01	Banja Luka	8	Urban Age: 36-50 Sex: 4 F, 4 M Occupation: 2 Clerks, 1 Accountant, 1 Technician (unemployed), 1 Sociologist, 1 Worker (unemployed), 1 Social Worker, 1 Teacher of geography (unemployed), Nationality: Serbian
Group 4	30.01	Banja Luka	8	Urban Age: 19-57 Sex: 7 F, 1 M Occupation: 1 Precise mechanic (unemployed), 2 Music/ Art teachers, 1 Social worker, 1 Technician (unemployed), 1 Shop assistant (unemployed), 1 Technician in agriculture, 1 Teacher in physical education. Nationality: Muslim

SUMMARY OF THE KEY FINDINGS

- ◆ **The most important problems were found to be the unstable political situation (Relations with Federation, the presents of International community felt as occupying force), and economic crises (poor living standard, unemployment, corruption), provoking the feeling of general insecurity, and uncertainty for the future.**
- ◆ **Muslims emphasized the problems related to the return of the Muslim refugees: Feeling of not being welcomed as they came back; The accommodation problems; Personal emotional troubles.**
- ◆ **Both fundamental problems, political as well as economic, were found to be too complex to be solved in the near future.**
- ◆ **Main causes of economic problems were perceived to be the war, and actual chaos and lawlessness.**
- ◆ **The factors that could accelerate the economic recovery were found in the establishing the rule of laws and fair privatization process.**
- ◆ **The main obstacles was seen in the attitudes of powerful people who abuse the situation for personal benefits.**
- ◆ **The expectations for the year 2001 were rather pessimistic: more economic crises, higher unemployment.**
- ◆ **People rather feel trapped between the manipulations of local politicians and interference of international community, than living in democracy.**

The confidence in political institutions was quite low. Serbs trust most to the Prime minister, and least to international Institutions.

- ◆ **Muslims trust most to international Institutions, while all domestic institutions were perceived as quite aloof and disbelieving.**
- ◆ **Most of the people feel rather helpless, and disillusioned than ready to be engaged in order to change the society.**
- ◆ **In general, people do not trust to media, but rather try to use several sources of information and made their own conclusions.**
- ◆ **The role of civil society organizations NGOs and professional organizations was perceived to be rather marginal.**

- ♦ **The attitudes towards the religious organizations and perception of their importance were rather pragmatic than related to religious values.**

Among the religious organizations the Muslim organizations and Catholic church were perceived to be much more active than the Orthodox ones.

- ♦ **In general, people were shown to be quite unsatisfied with public services. Social assistance, health care, education and military service were evaluated with the lowest grades.**

Low budget was named most often as the main reason for the poor level of the public services.

- ♦ **Quite different opinions and attitudes were found between Serbs and Muslims with relation to the influence the International institutions have on the agenda of Republic of Srpska:**

Serbs feel that complete agenda of Republic of Srpska is under the control of the International institutions, and have a strong negative attitudes towards it.

Muslim feel that the influence of International community is rapidly weakening, and think that more control is needed.

- ♦ **People seem to be quite confused with the role of International community. They feel to be lacking the information, and based their judgments on vague ideas on crises in the region to be just a part of the powerful countries fight for dominance.**
- ♦ **Serbs' attitudes towards European institutions, European Union and Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe were less negative than the attitudes towards American institutions, but still the mistrust was the prevalent feeling.**
- ♦ **Muslims expressed doubts in the intentions of the European Union and Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe as well. Their opinions were that these institutions have the power to do much more towards the improvement of the situation instead of just keeping the status quo.**
- ♦ **The attitudes of Serbs towards NATO were extremely negative. People perceive NATO as occupying force.**
- ♦ **However, the attitudes towards Republic of Srpska to join NATO were different. Two equally present opinions were found: Joining NATO is the only way to protect the country from further conflicts; Joining NATO would mean definite lost of the independence.**

- ♦ **Muslims were unique in the feeling that joining NATO would be the good way to preserve peace in the region.**
- ♦ **In general, people were quite pessimistic towards the possibility of the stability in the region.**
- ♦ **Four main issues were named as the keys of the security: To settle down the relations between ethnic groups; To ban the nationalist parties; To achieve the economic prosperity; To solve the problem of territorial army.**
- ♦ **Most of the people were not involved in the community life in an active way, but were more preoccupied with individual struggle for everyday survival.**
- ♦ **In spite of the feeling of being deep-rooted in the region, people feel rather apathetic than ready to be engaged in improving the community living conditions.**
- ♦ **In general, people were quite pessimistic about the life in the region in the next years. Political and economic crises was expected to continue. The situation was found to be too complex to be resolved in a short time, and the policy of the International community was perceived as rather interfering than helpful.**
- ♦ **Most of the people would leave the country if they would have a chance, motivated by their pessimistic attitudes towards the future life in the region.**
- ♦ **The attitudes towards the SEE countries were determined by the relations with the country in the recent history. The most striking differences in the attitudes between Serbs and Muslims were towards Serbia and Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.**
- ♦ **Mixed attitudes in relations between ethnic groups was present: Rational (Socially desirable) and emotional – ambivalent but rather negative. Tolerance was rather accepted as a compulsory attitude, than as a genuine personal feeling.**
- ♦ **Major hopes as well as worries were related to two topics: Living standard and further conflicts.**

People hopes were related to the very basic conditions of normal life: The peace to be preserved and economic progress to be achieved. Main worries were that none of these will be reached in the region for quite a long time.

KEY FINDINGS

1. ASPIRATIONS, FEARS AND CONCERNS REGARDING THE SITUATION IN REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA

1.1 What is the most important problem, people in the country are facing now days?

- ♦ **The most important issues in the current situation in the country were related to:**
 - **Economy and poor living standard.**
 - **Unstable political situation.**
 - **The International community influencing agenda of the country.**
 - **Decline of moral values.**
 - **Corruption.**
 - **General insecurity, uncertainty of the future.**
 - **Feeling of being isolated from the rest of the world.**
 - **Health insurance.**
 - **Education.**

Illustrative statements:

- *People are in such bad economic situation that they can't afford to even think about spiritual evolvement (F4,G1).*
 - *The fact that we are shut off from the rest of the world (F5, G1).*
 - *The decline of moral values(M7, G1).*
 - *During the war, all the firms were working, the deserters were all working and hiding in those firms, they didn't go to war, and now the firms had closed down (M1,G2).*
 - *The present government doesn't respect the people and their sacrifices, the victims of war, it is the abuse of power and rip off and embezzlements go on and on (M2,G2).*
 - *The biggest problem is old and obsolete industry and technology. Instead of investing the donations and credits into modernizing the firms and industry, people on top are taking it all for themselves (M5,G2).*
 - *Political situation is unstable because the war is still somewhere in the air. We don't have a firm and stable state (M7,G3).*
- ♦ **Muslims emphasized the problems related to the return of the Muslim refugees:**

- **Feeling of not being welcomed as they came back;**
- **The accommodation problems;**
- **Personal emotional troubles.**

- *Another problem is related to repatriation of refugees from Banja Luka (F1,G4).*
- *We are not welcome here, although we were born here. There are still problems, humiliation (F2,G4).*
- *I was glad to hear that some of you have returned, it gives me hope, it's a positive sign (F8,G4).*
- *I was glad to hear that people are getting their flats back. I unfortunately haven't been so lucky (F1,G4).*
- *We have a problem of personal emotional troubles caused by the war (F1,G4).*
- *We all suffer from some kind of traumas (F8,G4).*

1.2 Problems having the greatest change to be solved in the near future

Most of the people had a lot of difficulties to name the problems that could be solved in the near future. The solution of most of the problems were found to be connected with economy and politics, i.e. the problems that were perceived as the hardest to be solved.

The only problems expected to be solved in the near future were related to

- **Isolation from the rest of the world and**
- **The problems of accommodation, and/or return of the property (houses, apartments) for the people return from immigration.**

Illustrative statements:

- *Perhaps we will find it the easiest to establish contact with foreign countries (M6,G1).*
- *The decline of moral values is just a consequence of other problems and will be solved very hard. People's consciousness is the most difficult to change. We are witnessing the formation of new authorities and we all watch the news incessantly waiting for something spectacular to happen. I don't know what the dynamic of changes would be (F4,G1).*
- *We lost everything we had in the past ten years. 50% percent of our problems could be solved but perhaps the government doesn't want to solve them and besides, the people have become apathetic, they don't have a wish to change anything. In comparison to what we've been through, these are not such serious problems (F5,G1).*
- *The return of private property will probably be solved soon. Repatriation will be solved soon (F8).*

1.3 Problems most difficult to solve

- ◆ **The most difficult problems were stated to be :**
 - **Poor economic situation, unemployment;**
 - **Instability of political situation – the possibility of the new conflicts; even another war;**
 - **Corrupted political leaders.**

 - *Economy needs to get improved, everything depends on it(M5,G2).*
 - *If the standard was higher the unemployment problem would be less drastic, those who work could provide for the unemployed. Then there's the problem of low moral values. Without money it's easy for anybody to do lots of unsavory things. Everything boils down to the economic situation (M7,G1).*
 - *We have a problem with members of the international community. They have been here for several years and we live off their credits and donations that our grandchildren will have to pay back. They provide for our budgets but they don't invest in our production, which means that unemployment is still high. Why don't they invest in our factories so that people could get jobs, we are not afraid to work (F3,G1).*
 - *Our authorities got international aid but they did not have an interest in investing that money in economy. They used it for other purposes, to fill the budget of the state (M5, G3).*
 - *They used to for their private cars, flats, things like that (F3, G3)*
 - *We don't need international community to help us, they could just leave us alone. We don't need them (M5,G3).*

2. ECONOMIC ISSUES

- ◆ **Economic issues were felt to be at the bottom of most of the other problems: General insecurity, decline of moral values, corruption.**

- ◆ **Unemployment and low salaries were named as the most serious problems, causing people to struggle for everyday survival, and to feel deeply insecure.**

People were complaining to losing jobs after working for several years in the same company. The situation was found to be especially hard for young people, many of them being illegally employed and working for small salaries.

The generally bad situation was further profound by the feeling of the politically powerful people to have abused the war and after war privatization process to become reach and to abuse the unemployment problem to get cheap labor by employing people illegally.

Illustrative statement:

(Male, rural) If we were able to find jobs we would feel better. While I was at war, my boss was earning money. Now I can't put up with going back to work for him. I have two children, I will do my best to save my son from the army service in this country. I will go anywhere abroad, even if I had to live in a tribe, at least I will know where I stand and what the rules are, I will know where the danger comes from, this way I don't know anymore who is my enemy, they are all after me, from the doctors to my boss.

2.1 Causes of economic problems

- ◆ **The main causes of the poor economic situation were perceived to be multifaceted:**
 - **Economy ruined in war;**
 - **People abusing their political power during the war for personal benefit;**
 - **Corruption;**
 - **Politicians abusing financial donations for personal benefits;**
 - **Chaos and lawlessness.**
 - **The politicians instead of experts managing the economy.**

2.2 Obstacles to solving economic problems

- ◆ **The obstacles to efficient solving of the problems in economy were perceived to be internal as well as the external ones.**
 - **The internal obstacles were found to be twofold:**
 - **Politicians in power abusing the chaotic situation in economy for personal benefits,**
 - **People becoming apathetic due to the long-lasting suffering in war.**
 - **The international community giving donations (which were mainly abused by politicians in power for personal benefits) instead of investing money in producing new jobs.**

2.3 The role of international community in solving the economic problems

- ◆ **A lot of reservations were expressed towards the role of international institutions in the economic problems of Republic of Srpska:**
 - **The international community was still felt to be responsible for the war, at least by some of the people.**
 - **There was a lot of reservations with respect to the interest of International community in helping the economy of Republic of Srpska. In general, the**

interest was perceived in dominating the country by making its economy dependent on International community.

- The International community was felt to be meddling in internal affairs of the state instead of helping the country to become politically independent.
- One of the rationale for mistrust was based on the feeling that international community was present long enough and no substantial improvement in economy was felt by the average citizens.

2.4 Factors that could help solving economic problems

◆ **The factors that could accelerate the solution of these problems were found to be complex and quite hard to achieve:**

- **Establishing the rule of law;**
- **Fair privatization process;**
- **Foreign investments that would recover production and provide jobs.**

Establishing the rule of law was found to be the priority factor in helping some basic preconditions of solving the problems in economy:

- The endorsement of the fair privatization process;
- Control of illegal employment;
- Fight against corruption;
- Instigation of foreign investment.

2.5 Expectations for the economic situation in the year 2001

- ◆ **The prevalent feelings towards the economic situation in the next future were more pessimistic than optimistic: Higher unemployment, more economic crises.**
- ◆ **Hopes for the improvement of the living standard were mainly based on the vague idea that government would have to do something if they want to stay in power.**

2.6 The understanding of the market economy

- ◆ **Most of the people showed positive attitude towards the market economy, in spite that they were not quite clear (or at least not able to clearly articulate) on its meaning.**
- ◆ **No matter the rather vague ideas on the market economy, most of the people agreed that it cannot be developed until the economic crises is solved, as well as the economy is monopolized by the politics.**

Illustrative statements:

- *It can't exist without production. We can't even talk about it. We can only talk about smuggling goods (M5, G3).*
- *Market dictates the conditions of demand and supply. People who are employed in private firms get salaries which are dictated by the market, and it is realistic. They complain about their salaries, but their employers give them realistic, market-oriented prices (F4, G1).*
- *Someone has an interest in it (economy as it is), it's all about corruption (M8, G2).*

3. POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

3.1 Perception of democracy

- ♦ **Democracy was mainly understood as freedom of speech, influence in decision making and freedom of information communication.**
- ♦ **People do not feel to be living in a democracy. They feel like having the freedom to express their thoughts, but not having chance to influence changes in the society.**

Some participants stated to be feeling like still living in a one party system, the others to be living in the anarchy.

The general opinion was that the people in power are not interested in listening to the voice of people.

The same feeling was found with both ethnic groups: Serbs and Muslims.

The sense of International community to be interfering with political decisions in the country (like influencing the elections) was an additional factor for people of Serbian nationality to feel not to be living in democracy.

Illustrative statements:

- *If this is democracy and the people voted for Poplashen to be the president, it is not right for the international community to disrespect our wish and replace him just like that. They always do what's in their interest not ours. That's why we lost interest in changes. It will always be the same whoever is our leader. We won't see any difference for a long time (F3, G1).*
- *We still haven't developed democratic way of thinking, so that the president and ministers know that they will be held responsible for their actions. The government should be responsible in front of the Assembly but it's not. We have executive, legislative and judicial power, but when they will be held responsible for what they do I don't know. It's a slow process. The international community caused this war, they took advantage of our*

- unsolved national issues and made us dependent on them. The international community could help us but I wonder whether it's in their interest (M, G2).*
- *You need a strong economic base in order to have democracy. They say in democracy you can speak up your mind, that doesn't mean anything. We can also say the Prime Minister was a thief but it doesn't solve anything (M8, G3).*
 - *The elections come, we think we voted for the best and every time it's even worse and worse. We lose our trust and we don't have wish to take part in the elections although it could be the only way for us to influence things. People are losing faith in changing things through elections. There are a lot of manipulations (F3, G3).*

3.2 Confidence in political institutions and political leaders

- ♦ **In general, low confidence in political institutions was found. People's attitude towards the political institutions was rather negative than positive.**

The institutions were rather evaluated on the scale of the least to the most mistrusting, than on the scale of the least to the most trustworthy.

A complete division of opinions on this subject were found between Serbs and Muslims:

- **Majority of the Serbs trust the most the Prime minister Ivanic, and least the International community.**

Serbs perceive Ivanic to be honest (not corrupted), and respectable by international community, serious and firm politician.

The International community was perceived to be responsible for the war as well as for most of the after-war political instability.

Younger participants mentioned the Mayor of Banja Luka as the politician they trust the most.

The trust to Mayor was rather based on the fact that his position was not so much exposed to be influenced by international community.

Illustrative statement:

- *I don't trust anybody from the list we saw, because since the war we've had a lot of leaders appearing and we all wanted them to be successful but in the end we were disappointed. The international community has the last word in it. If we pass the law we think are suitable for our country, there will be somebody from the international community, Petric for example, who will declare it invalid. Next example is the fact that they replaced our president (F3, G1).*

- **Muslims trust only the International community. All the other institutions were perceived as quite aloof and disbelieving.**

Muslims believe that the International community is keeping peace and was perceived as the main source of hope for better future.

Muslims trust the least to nationalistic parties, and even the opinions that nationalistic parties should be banned were expressed.

The fact that president of Republic of Srpska was coming from political party (SDS) that was perceived to be nationalistic was the main rationale for deep mistrust in his role as the president in protecting the interests of the Muslims in Republic of Srpska.

The attitudes towards the Prime minister were more positive than towards the President, which was mainly based on his credibility as the expert in economy.

The political attitude of the Prime minister was evaluated more positively than the attitude of the President, but doubts were expressed in his acting to be independent of the influences of SDS political party.

- ♦ **In spite the low credibility people gave to political institutions, people showed readiness to give some time to the new elected government before judging their achievements.**

3.3 Readiness for personal engagement in order to influence the changes in society

- ♦ **In general people do not feel ready to be more directly engaged in order to change the society, except by voting.**

Most of the people stated to feel tired and disillusioned.

Most of the people found joining the political parties to be the only efficient way of engagement in changing society. However, low trust in political parties made them reluctant to be engaged in this way.

Most of the Muslims feel threatened and find it wiser to keep silent.

Some of the Muslims, however, were engaged in the international community program for reconciliation. They were much more enthusiastic in the possibility

of the citizens to be engaged in bringing changes in the society, especially in the relations between conflicting ethnic groups.

- *Politics is a skill which means you talk a lot and say nothing. I am quite incapable of doing that. My skillfulness and professional abilities wouldn't be appreciated, the only thing that matters would be party membership (F4, G1).*
- *People don't have the time to get engaged in ways of changing things. I do have a wish but I don't know the right way to do it. People work hard and they can't afford to contemplate about changes (M7, G1).*

4. CIVIL SOCIETY

4.1 Sources of information and their credibility

- ♦ **The general mistrust was found to be prevalent in the all sources of information as well.**

The main sources of information were TV and newspapers. However, most of the people do not trust to any particular media, but rather try to get the information from different sources and find truth by making their own conclusions.

People with strong nationalistic attitudes were more decisive in their choice of the source of information they trust. The choice was mainly based on definite national profile of the source of information (TV channel, radio station, newspaper).

Muslims had more positive attitudes towards the credibility of information programs on independent media. They found the informative programs to be much improving and becoming less biased (less pro Serbian).

Illustrative statements:

There was so many misinformation in the past years that we can't trust anybody. Even independent papers are actually very dependent. They serve the political interests (M7, G3).

Now we can relatively trust what we hear in the news. During the war, the news on radio television of Republic of Srpska were really terribly biased (F8, G4).

We have independent media which we should trust (F4, G4).

In the news they want to create a picture that this is an independent state, far away from Bosnia. They include biased details. I wanted to react once, to pick up the phone and report them to international representatives, but I gave it up (F3, G4).

4.2 The role of NGOs

- ♦ **The role of civil society organizations was found to be margin. In general, people were rather sporadically aware of their presence.**
- **People were mainly vaguely informed on the activities of non governmental organizations. The NGOs activities were associated to humanitarian aid and education.**

The attitudes towards their activities were mainly positive, but people felt to be missing more information.

Some suspicions were expressed again in the transparency of the interests of these organizations to be present in Republic of Srpska.

4.3 The role of professional organizations

- ♦ **The professional organizations were perceived to be almost non existent, or marginalized.**

4.4 The role of Religious organizations

- ♦ **The attitudes towards the religious organizations and perception of their importance were rather pragmatic than related to religious values.**

Among the religious organizations the Muslim organizations and Catholic church were perceived to be much more active than the Orthodox ones.

Muslims found the Muslim organizations, like Caritas and Merhamet, to be of extreme importance by providing people with basic humanitarian aid (food, medicines).

Serbs found the Orthodox church not to be active enough, especially in comparison to the activities of Catholic church.

Different kind of sects were stated to be very active, and people showed a lot of wariness towards their intentions.

5. PUBLIC SERVICES

- ♦ **In general, people were shown to be quite unsatisfied with public services. Social assistance, health care, education and military service were evaluated with the lowest grades.**

- Older people were more concerned with low quality of health care and education than younger ones.
- People from rural area were more concern with the problems of electricity and water than people from urban area.
- Muslims gave lowest scores to social assistance and health care.

Grades percentages

Grades	Health	Education	Social Assistance	Transport	Electricity	Water	Military
1	17.6	8.8	26.5	5.9	17.6	17.6	11.8
2			14.7		5.9	5.9	5.9
3	8.8	5.9	23.5	5.9	2.9	5.9	
4	14.7	11.8	23.5	8.8	5.9	2.9	8.8
5	38.2	26.5	8.8	17.6	8.8	2.9	5.9
6	8.8	20.6	2.9	14.7	11.8	11.8	17.6
7	8.8	14.7		8.8	11.8	8.8	11.8
8	2.9	5.9		17.6	5.9	14.7	
9				8.8	8.8	11.8	20.6
10		5.9		11.8	17.6	17.6	17.6
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Mean grades

GROUP	Health	Education	Social assistance	Transportation	Heating	Electricity	Water	Military services
1	5.87	5.37	3.12	7.00	7.00	6.50	5.37	5.62
2	4.37	5.75	2.75	6.12	3.00	3.50	4.37	6.00
3	3.11	4.77	1.88	4.11	5.33	5.22	7.11	3.88
4	4.11	5.66	3.55	8.22	7.33	8.77	8.33	4.33
Total	4.3235	5.38	2.82	6.35	5.78	6.05	6.38	4.91

- ♦ **The low budget was named as the main source of most of the problems in public services, with exception of education and military issues which were (in addition to money shortage), strongly connected with the complexity of the political situation in the country.**
- ♦ **The problems with health care were mainly explained by the shortage of money in public health services (lack of the basic medical facilities) and illegal private medical practice, too expensive for most of the citizens.**

Illustrative statements:

- *After the war all health institutions have become almost private. The doctors are on strike, the equipment is out of order and the doctors treat patients privately in their illegal private surgeries. You need loads of money to get health care(M1, G2).*

- ♦ **Social assistance was generally found to be inadequate. All kind of assistance were found to be too slow and too little. The shortage of money, but also some bed organization and abuse of humanitarian aid were named as the main reasons for low quality of this public service.**

- ♦ **The problems in education the people were most concerned with were the problems dealing actually with relations between the ethnic groups. Both Serbs and Muslims felt to be disadvantaged in their own way.**
 - Serbs, especially the younger ones, thought the school program dealing with history and literature was changed by International community so that it became biased in offensive way for Serbian nationality (Like removing the facts on Jasenovac concentration camp in World War Two from History, or removing Njegos's works from literature).
 - Muslims, on the other side, have been feeling the Serbs to have privileged positions in education, the teachers as well as the students.

- ♦ The point of consent was that the quality of education has become quite low mainly due to the shortage of money.

Illustrative statements:

- *They decided to leave out Njegos from the reading list as it was deemed his books very provocative towards other nationalities (M6, G1).*
- *It is again happening because of the international community. It didn't use to be that way before(F3,G1).*
- *Teachers are not motivated to work, their salaries are low. They should do their best to prepare us for life or further education. I myself didn't get the appropriate grounding for my further education(M7,G1).*

- ♦ **The foreign solders were perceived as a threat to freedom, the Army of Republic of Srpska to be disorganized and undisciplined.**

Illustrative statements:

- *The war is still too fresh in people's minds and there is still the possibility of some conflicts. We have foreign soldiers, they are a threat to our freedom. We need the army but it's a burden at the same time (M5, G2).*
- *It used to be an honor to be a soldier 50 years ago. It was a test of maturity. Now, the army has become somehow undisciplined. We have obligatory army service but I don't know how much good that would do(M7, G1).*
- *In the past, the army meant security, protection, stability. Now I don't have that feeling again, I don't feel we have the army at all regardless of their organization. I don't have the feeling that there is our army which will protect us (F3, G1).*

- ♦ **Privatization was not found to be a good way of problem solving. Right to the contrary it was felt just as another burden to citizens low budget, at least before the crises in economy was resolved, and people's living standard raised appropriately.**

6. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

6.1 The influence of International institutions

- ♦ **Quite different opinions and attitudes were found between Serbs and Muslims with relation to the influence the International institutions have on the agenda of Republic of Srpska:**
 - **Serbs feel that complete agenda of Republic of Srpska is under the control of the International institutions, and have a strong negative attitudes towards it.**
 - **Muslim feel that the influence of International community is rapidly weakening, and think that more control is needed.**

According to the citizens of Serbian nationality the International community interests is to keep the instability in the region in order to get the control.

Serbs feel kind of trapped between the feeling of being subjugated by International community, and being dependant on their help at the same time.

Muslim give credits to International community for helping the return of the refugees, and are concerned with the possibility of the International community to loose the interest in the region.

Illustrative statements:

- *They will always keep the situation insecure, with a possibility of further conflicts breaking out. Why wasn't Brcko problem solved after Dayton? They will keep the whole region as a potential trouble spot (M5, G2).*
- *I see some changes there. America did its best to influence the events here in order to be on par with Europe as the other center of power. I don't know whether it's trust or something else, but I see that the European Union is trying to change that now, I mean their relations with president Kostunica. He focused on Europe, he didn't want to talk to Americans. They are trying to break out from American influence. America is to blame for what happened here. I don't think that its in Europe's interest to have this region as a constant trouble spot (M5, G2).*
- *Their influence is weaker and weaker. They will have to turn to other trouble spots (F2, G4).*

- *I'd say that their economic support is getting smaller (F8, G4).*
- *The international community made it clear that if SDS won the elections there will be no donations. SDS was elected again, so that's that (F3, G4).*
- *They think they have improved the situation here, they secured peace, that's the key issue, they helped the return of refugees (F9, G4).*

6.2 The role of International institutions (European Union, Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe and NATO)

- ♦ **People seem to be quite confused with the role of International community. They feel to be lacking the information, and based their judgments on vague ideas on crises in the region to be just a part of the powerful countries fight for dominance, or even based on hatred towards the Serbs as the nation.**
- **The attitudes towards European institutions, European Union and Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe were less negative than the attitudes towards American institutions, but still the mistrust was the prevalent feeling.**

Illustrative statements:

- *Yes, but we need to define what international community is. The pact of Stability could be a bit more promising because it's European, not American. (F4, G1)*
 - *I think that all evil comes from America, they are very deviant people. The English are under their influence. (F4, G1)*
 - *They are practically occupying forces. (F3, G1)*
 - *I wonder what interest they have in this region. What are they doing here? (M5, G3)*
 - *The question is what they mean by "stability", what their idea of stability is. (F3, G3)*
 - *Our state is temporary, just like ex Yugoslavia was. It couldn't survive. It was a country made on someone else's land, Slovenia and Croatia were under Austrian rule. This whole region is just a temporary creation. (M8, G3)*
- **Some people perceive American and European interests to be in conflict, and European institutions not to be powerful enough to free themselves of American dominance.**

Illustrative statements:

- *I don't know whether it's trust or something else, but I see that the European Union is trying to change that now, I mean their relations with president Kostunica. He focused on Europe, he didn't want to talk to Americans. They are trying to break out from American influence. America is to blame for*

what happened here. I don't think that its in Europe's interest to have this region as a constant trouble spot. (M5, G2)

- *America has the dominance. I trust European Union more than America. (F4, G2)*
- *All the countries in the Pact (for Stability) are in the same position as us. The question is whether we can resist foreign influence on our own. (M5, G2)*
- **Muslims expressed doubts in the intentions of the European Union and Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe as well. Their opinions were that these institutions have the power to do much more towards the improvement of the situation instead of just keeping the status quo.**
 - *They can do a lot, but the problem is how much they are willing not only to do something but to control the situation (F8, G4) .*
- **The attitudes of Serbs towards NATO were extremely negative. People perceive NATO as occupying force.**

However, the attitudes towards Republic of Srpska to join NATO were different. Two equally present opinions were found:

- **Joining NATO is the only way to protect the country from further conflicts;**
- **Joining NATO would mean definite lost of the independence.**

Illustrative statements:

- *It's the old story- "if you can't defeat them, join them". It is the only way out, regardless of what I think. (M7, G3)*
- *It would be protection from further attacks. (F3, G3)*
- *It would be official capitulation, a catastrophe. (M5, G3)*
- *I heard it will happen in about 5 years and I think it's bad. I don't want us to be in a position to be against our brothers in Serbia because we are members of NATO. (M2, G1)*
- *We will have no other choice but to join them. (F1, G1)*
- *It's a bad idea. They bombed us three years ago and now we are supposed to join them?(F8, G1)*
- *It has to do with Serbian rebellious mentality. I'd prefer if we were to become part of Bosnia, unitary Bosnia. We used to live together with Moslems and Croats. (M7, G1)*
- *That's completely out of the question. (F4, G1)*
- *I can still accept people from different nationalities as long as they are normal and we don't talk about politics. (M7, G1)*

Muslims were unique in the feeling that joining NATO would be the good way to preserve peace in the region.

6.3 The key security in the region

- ♦ **In general, people were quite pessimistic towards the possibility of the stability in the region.**

Four main issues were named as the keys of the security:

- **To settle down the relations between ethnic groups**
- **To ban the nationalist parties**
- **To achieve the economic prosperity**
- **To solve the problem of territorial army**

The relations between ethnic groups were generally evaluated to be far from being settled. A lot of doubts in the possibility of the relations between different nationalities to be settled down were expressed. Complete separation as one of the key of the security in the region was mentioned by some of the people of Serbian nationality.

Illustrative statements:

- *Complete separation, three different states, Moslem, Croatian and Serbian. (F8, G1)*
- *Isolation from Moslems and Croats. (M2, G1)*
- *We should be separate and still have connections. (F3, G1)*
- *Serbia is like an ugly duckling. Everybody is attacking us, blaming us. (M7, G1)*

Some people believed that only economic prosperity could bring people together again.

Two opposite attitudes were found with relation to the issue of the army:

- Only the strong army can be a guarantee of the security
- The complete demilitarization is the best guarantee of the security in the region.

Muslims believed that demilitarization and banning the nationalist parties are the keys of the security in the region.

Illustrative statements:

- *To ban the army, nationalist parties and prevent all possible armed conflicts. (F1, G4)*
- *I wish we could be like Switzerland, a neutral country. People are still armed, we are still in danger of possible conflicts. (F1, G4)*

- *If we have the army, it should have equal number of soldiers from all ethnic minorities. (F8, G8)*

7. INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS AND FEELINGS

7.1 Perceptions of the peoples lives in South Eastern Europe in the next years

- ♦ **In general, people were quite pessimistic about the life in the region in the next years.**

Political and economic crises was expected to continue. The situation was found to be too complex to be resolved in a short time, and the policy of the International community was perceived as rather interfering than helpful.

Illustrative statements:

- *The whole region will never be calm; it's at the crossroads. (M7, G1)*
- *We'll still be one big experiment. (M2, G1)*
- *Unstable regions are easier to control. It's easier to place your goods, even smuggled goods on that market. It was not like that during the Tito`s rule, it was much better. (M7, G1)*
- *The life of vassals. (M2, G2)*
- *I don't expect many changes. (F3, G2)*
- *It's still early to tell. It will take time. (F4, G2)*
- *We hope for the better, but we are rather skeptical. It will be a long process. (F3, G3)*
- *It will not be any better. (F2, G4)*
- *If the younger people leave, it will be even worse. (F5, G4)*

7.2 Belonging to the community and readiness to leave the region

- ♦ **Most of the participants feel to belong to their community in a much wither meaning of belonging to the culture, tradition, their roots being there.**

In this sense the Muslims have the same feeling as Serbs.

However, most of the people are not involved in the community life in an active way. People are more occupied with individual struggle for everyday survival. Community is rather divided on the reach and poor, as well as Muslims and Serbs.

- ♦ **In spite of the feeling of being deep-rooted in the region, people feel rather apathetic than ready to be engaged in improving the community living conditions.**
- ♦ **Most of the people would leave the country if they would have a chance, motivated by their pessimistic attitudes towards the future life in the region.**

Illustrative statements:

- *I'm not thinking about leaving but this is a very insecure region. I would like to have a foreign residence permit just in case my kids need to leave. I wouldn't like them to go through what I had to. (F4, G1)*
- *I feel I belong here, I have a house here, this is my hometown. (F1, G1)*
- *I would stay if the standard of living improved, but if I had a chance I'd leave. (F8, G1)*
- *I was wounded in the war and I know that a lot of people took advantage of us. I would leave only to spare my children from the same destiny. (M2, G2)*
- *it was my choice to stay here. I am thinking of leaving now because of the bad economic situation. We are all sorry we hadn't left before, that would have given us a chance to return here now as decent people who have accomplished something. Those who left were spared all the things we went through, they didn't have so many traumas as we did. Perhaps we should leave because of our children; they don't really stand a chance here. (F3, G3)*
- *I've always felt aversion towards the idea of living abroad, but now I'm thinking of it more and more. (M8, G3)*

- *I feel sorry that I hadn't left before. Now I feel that my roots are here, this is the only place where I can exercise my rights. When I left Banja Luka I didn't feel any regret, I thought I will never feel any homesickness, but I did miss Vrbas and my hometown. I want to be buried here. My ancestors' graves are here. I want my daughter to leave as soon as possible. (F2, G4)*
- *I would leave this very minute, because of living and working conditions. (F1, G4)*
- *Our children don't really have any future here. They went through hell when they were best age. (F2, G4)*

7.3 Attitudes towards the SEE countries

- ♦ **There was a lot of agreement in the attitudes towards the SEE countries within and between the ethnic groups, except for FRY, Federation (Bosnia & Herzegovina) and Greece, for which the opposite attitudes between the two ethnic groups were found.**

In general, the more indifferent feelings towards the country, the more consent between the two ethnic groups. The more positive attitudes with one ethnic group, the more negative ones with the other.

Croatia

The attitudes of Serbian nationality were negative, Muslims attitudes were more divided, but rather negative than positive.

Serbs: *Identified with Catholicism and anti Serbian attitude; “The Storm” military action”; Stronger state than RS; More unified.*

Muslims: *Nationalism (“Unlike Serbs, they are perfidious nationalist”), corruption; But also: Poverty, nostalgia, same position as Bosnia.*

Slovenia

Complete agreement between all groups, positive attitudes:

West, democracy, civilized people, Order, work, discipline.

Macedonia

Muslims were rather indifferent, Serbs more positive – sympathizing:

Poverty, same situation as in Republic of Srpska, economic and national issues not resolved, state without identity.

Federation (Bosnia & Herzegovina)

Opposite attitudes – Serbs feel Federation as a separate state they were in the conflict with, Muslims feel it as a homeland.

Serbs: *Mosques, there is still hatred, we still cannot be impartial in our judgment, they think even worse of us than we of them.*

Muslims: *It’s a homeland, we are citizens of Bosnia & Herzegovina no matter that here we hear that we are citizens of Republic of Srpska.*

FRY – Serbia

Opposite attitudes – Serbs feels it as a Mother country, Muslims have distinct feelings towards Serbia and Montenegro, attitudes towards Serbia being strongly negative.

Serbs: *It’s in our hearts, we belong there, country that had to pay for everything, our roots are there.*

Muslims: *All the problems came from Serbia, I have nothing in common with Serbia, it is a foreign country for us, they just wanted a greater Serbia.*

Contrary to the negative feelings towards FRY, the attitudes towards the former Yugoslavia were very positive. Most of the Muslims expressed a sorrow that former Yugoslavia broke apart.

Bulgaria

Mainly negative attitudes with both ethnic groups.

Serbs: First associations were the recollection of Bulgaria to be the occupying force in World wars. *We have always been in war with them.*

Muslims: *Poverty, prostitution, similar to Macedonia.*

Romania

Indifferent attitudes – some sympathizing: *Poverty, even more poor than us, undeveloped country, Causcesku and Milosevic had similar destiny.*

Greece

Different attitudes with Serbs and Muslims. Serbs' attitudes highly positive, Muslims' attitudes rather negative.

Serbs: *A friendly country. Help and support. It showed greatest understanding for our problems.*

Muslims: *They are biased. They had a lot to do with our problems. They are orthodox.*

Turkey

Serbs attitudes were negative, Muslims rather indifferent.

Serbs: *Different culture, unfriendly country, they should not be trusted, NATO.*

Muslims: *Smugglers, women have no rights, indifferent.*

Table 7.3 Attributes associated to the perception of SEE countries

Country	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Slovenia	Order, work, discipline	West, civilization, order, work, different mentality	Closer to Europe, developed, different mentality, Germanic culture	West, democracy, civilized people
Croatia	Holidays, Catholicism, anti Serbs, the knife	They have state, stronger than us, Vatican, have more supported than we do, eternal conflict with Serbs	They oppose the Balkan union more than others, they sold their country	Corruption, poverty, sea, nostalgia, nationalism
FRY	Belgrade, support, mother country, impoverished country, had to pay for everything, disaster	The most beautiful country in the world, the strongest country	It's in our hart, we belong there, our national spirits and roots, mother country	Serbia and Montenegro Serbia: great Serbia, problems with Kosovo, foreign country Montenegro: stepchild of Serbia, sea
Macedonia	Ohrid lake, nothing, supported NATO, like us small and weak	They are finished, I wouldn't like to live there	It's not really a state, worse economic position than ours	Poverty
Bosnia & Herzegovina	The flag, the mosques	Same as us, a prison, poor as us, unsolved problems with Croats	We don't associate with them, even worse than us, there is still some hatred, we can't be impartial	Homeland, our country,
Bulgaria	Pirate CDs, weak, inconsistent	Occupying force from the World War I, expelled all Turks	We have been always in war with them	Poverty, prostitution, similar to Macedonia
Romania	Gymnastics, Chaucescu	Poor and undeveloped, friendly country, Milosevic and Chauscesku are similar	Insignificant to us as Bulgaria, more poor than us	Poverty
Greece	The sea, friendly country	Help and support, friendly country	It showed the greatest understanding of our problems, they are afraid of Turks	Civilization, biased, orthodox
Turkey	Unfriendly, one of the reasons for problems, dirty	They shouldn't be trusted	Black hole, different culture, low level	Smugglers, indifferent

7.4 Perception of the relations between the ethnic groups

- ◆ **More tensions than tolerance was found in personal feelings between the ethnic groups.**

Tolerance was rather accepted as a compulsory attitude, than as a genuine personal feeling.

In general, the most common opinions were that the relations were improving, but also that they were far from being normal.

The tensions were found to be very complex, and intolerance to be mutual.

Muslims feel to be unwelcome in Republic of Srpska, and deprived of equal rights.

The most intolerance was shown by some of the people from rural area.

Illustrative statements:

- *It's a pity they are returning to normal. Look at the Croats, they are not making up with us. We should expel them all. (M2, G2)*
- *There shouldn't have been any wars, I don't have negative opinion of anybody. (M9, G2)*
- *It's still not good; the memories of war are still vivid. But people start to think about economic issues more than who belongs to what nationality. (M5, G2)*
- *It will stay like that unless some other politicians turn us against each other again. (F4, G2)*
- *I haven't noticed any intolerance, I have a contact with different nationalities. In the Federation it's a bit different, I have a house over there and I often travel to the Federation, the intolerance is more evident. They always make sure you realize that you are not welcome. (F1, G3)*
- *Over here people have suppressed that national intolerance in favor of economic progress. (F3, G3)*
- *It depends on who has the control of that particular area. If a town is dominated by Moslems, and it was populated by Croats, the Serbs are isolated and the other way around. (F, G4)1*
- *In Banja Luka Serbs and Moslems were closer in mentality. The Croats were always distant, closed, unsociable. (F9, G4)*
- *We are not welcome in Sarajevo or Zenica. They think we didn't take the guns and fight for their cause. (F5, G4)*
- *We all love Banja Luka. We feel good here. (F3, G4)*
- *Even Muslims call us Serbian chetnicks because we returned to live here. (F9, G4)*

8. FINAL COMMENTS

8.1 Most significant fears and hopes with respect to the future of the country

- ♦ **Major hopes as well as worries were related to two topics: Living standard and further conflicts.**

People hopes were related to the very basic conditions of normal life: the peace to be preserved and economic progress to be achieved. Main worries were that none of these will be reached in the region for quite a long time.

Illustrative statements:

- *We all hope for the better standard. We hope there will be no more wars. (F4, G1)*
- *I hope I will be able to find a job, have a family and have a normal life. I would like to finish my studies and find a job in my field, preferably in my country. I have just a spark of hope, I don't know whether that spark will become a flame. If necessary I will leave the country; my profession is appreciated abroad. It's not easy to live under illusions. (M7, G1)*
- *I'm finishing my studies at the moment. What will I do when I graduate? I don't have any savings, money. We've sacrificed enough so far. (F3, G1)*
- *The government inherited a lot of problems they can't solve all of them in such a short period of time. I don't trust them very much but we shall see. They don't have a magic wand. Perhaps we will feel some progress if they invest in economy or pay more attention to tax paying. In principle we don't trust anybody but it's in human nature to keep hoping. (F3, G3)*
- *My worry is that my children won't have a future. (M2, G2)*
- *We still fear possible wars and conflicts. (F3, G2)*
- *I hope to be able to find a job. (F4, G2)*
- *I wouldn't like to leave and live abroad because the conditions are nowhere better than here, we only have to solve a few problems and I think it's worth fighting for them. (M5, G2)*
- *There are too many weapons around. (F3, G4)*
- *My bare survival, that's what I worry about. (F6, G4)*
- *The fear of second rate citizens. (F8, G4)*
- *Economic issues. (F5, G4)*
- *We had a hope, that's why we returned. I could have stayed in Montenegro but I wanted to return. I'm sorry I didn't go abroad because of my children but I never thought the war would last this long. (F6, G4)*

Table 8.1 Major fears and hopes

	Fears	Hopes
Group 1	The economic and political situation to be the same, or worse	Better standard, to finish school, getting job, to be able to start the family and normal life
Group 2	More war and conflicts, the children not to have future	To preserve peace, living standard to improve, getting job
Group 3	More war and conflicts, the children not to have future	Progress in the economy, foreign investment
Group 4	More clashes, More economic crises, To be a second rate citizens	Hope for better relations between the ethnic groups, better living standard