



Balkan Public Agenda

Opinion Leaders – In depth interviews

Serbia

February 2001
KEY FINDINGS

Realized by
SMMRI Group

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INTRODUCTION

Objectives

In the Spring of 2001, a standardised in-depth interview was conducted with local opinion leaders (OLs) in order to obtain an insight into the public agenda in Serbia.

While reading this report, one should bear in mind that it describes attitudes of a highly selected sample of people from higher strata of Serbian society. The OLs are better paid, better informed, have better understanding of the political and economic situation in the country and have easier access to the media, than the general population. Thus, OLs have a higher than average leverage in the shaping of the public opinion.

The interviews were conducted according to the guide designed by IMAS in collaboration with IDEA International. The data were collected by the trained interviewers supervised by Dr. Svetlana Logar, SMMRI Director of Qualitative Research.

The sample

Twenty-two people (19 men and 3 women) were interviewed:

Parliament:

- Member of Parliament
- Member of Parliament

Government:

- Deputy Minister of Education
- Deputy Minister of Health

Ministry of Internal Affairs:

- Ministry of Internal Affairs
- The Deputy head of Division of the Republic
Ministry of Internal Affairs

Ministry of Defense:

- Ministry of Defense
- Army

Media:

- The president of NUNS, the chief editor of VIN
- Director of TV B92

Public sector:

- University of Belgrade
- Sociologist
- Public utility company “Parking service”

Private sector:

- Europlakat
- Private doctor (ophthalmologist)

NGO sector:

- Director of European movement
- CESID

Foreign representative: – British Embassy
 – Broadcast Media Consultant, IREX – International
 Research Exchanges Board – USA

Judiciary: – The president of the District court,
 Belgrade
 – The judge

Presidential circle: – Counselor of president of FRY
 - Counselor of president of FRY

Participants were selected through a non-random sampling procedure, forming a quota sample. The findings can only be considered as typical for the population, but can not be used for the assessment of their quantitative distribution in the population, (proportion of the typical attitudes). Due to the imperfection of the sampling procedure and/or the sample size, the sampling error cannot be identified.

Summary of the key findings:

- ♦ **All OLs interviewed believe that Serbian society is confronted with many urgent problems.**
- ♦ **The most important problems the country is facing are: the Kosovo , South Serbia and Montenegro crises, political transition and stability , economy, poverty, near collapse of the health care, social security and the welfare systems, compliance with the International community, change of the Constitution, corruption and human rights.**
- ♦ **The problems are seen as interconnected, the economic and the political problems are perceived to be the most pressing.**
- ♦ **Feeble and ineffectual economy and the Kosovo problem are seen as the most difficult to be solved.**
- ♦ **Unresolved economic and political problems from the past still haunt the Serbian society: inefficient growth of the communist economy resulted in poverty that fueled radical political solutions and ethnic intolerance. It has culminated in the Milosevic's regime, its political and financial scandals, wars, international sanctions and more poverty.**
- ♦ **Breaking this vicious circle of poor economy and regretful politics is the greatest challenge of the Serbian society today.**
- ♦ **In spite of the recent changes in the country, political situation is still unbalanced: no tangible improvements in the quality of life of the general population are on the horizon. Consequently, support for the much needed reform may start to wane. There is too much squabble within the ruling coalition, legislation is still lagging behind. The present levers of power are still burdened with former Milosevic's men.**
- ♦ **Political crises in Kosovo, Southern Serbia and Montenegro are often perceived as one and the same.**
- ♦ **NATO and the USA in particular, are perceived interchangeably as both the part of the problem and the part of the solution.**
- ♦ **The West has not recovered its integrity lost during the 1999 bombing campaign. In view of the most recent developments in Southern Serbia and Kosovo it will be especially hard for NATO to (re)gain its trustworthiness.**
- ♦ **There is no uniformity of OLs responses regarding compliance with the International community.**

- ♦ **The legacy of Milosevic's regime is seen as one of the biggest obstacles on the road to recovery. It has destroyed the economy and the moral fabric of the society.**
- ♦ **There is an universal agreement among the OLs that the institutions of the future Serbian society should closely resemble those of the West and that the political change should occur through democratic legislature. However there is no clear vision about and the dynamics of the change, no widely accepted priority list of reforms.**
- ♦ **There is no coming back. None of the OLs interviewed sees reversal to Milosevic's politics or any of its components as a solution for Serbia today.**
- ♦ **The OLs believe that some of the most burning issues will be resolved soon by the electorate and the Parliament.**
- ♦ **None of the OLs interviewed suggests non-peaceful solution to any of the burning issues that face Serbia today.**
- ♦ **The economic problems, and the Kosovo crisis are seen as the most difficult and the least likely to be solved soon.**
- ♦ **Constitutional crisis between Serbia and Montenegro will be solved peacefully in the nearest future, regardless of the outcome of the Montenegro elections and/or the referendum.**
- ♦ **Generally, the OLs interviewed support the new government and have an optimistic outlook for the future.**
- ♦ **Issues regarding NGOs, religion, public services and human rights are given a lower priority. Most respondents see them only as minor. Professional organization are perceived as almost non existent and inconsequential.**
- ♦ **The main obstacles for the economic turnaround are seen in the persistent political crises, lack of full cooperation with The Hague Tribunal, slow and tedious ownership transformation, inadequate legislation. This disheartens foreign investors and international monetary organizations.**
 - ♦ **The president of FRY, Kostunica is the most trusted politician in Serbia.**
 - ♦ **The NGOs are seen as very important. They were very instrumental in breaking of Milosevic's regime.**
 - ♦ **Not much importance was given to religious and professional organizations.**

- ♦ **The OLS are quite unhappy with public services giving them very low grades.**
- ♦ **Poverty and corruption are believed to be the main reasons for such pitiful state of affairs.**
- ♦ **International institutions, especially those of European origin are welcome in Serbia. They can provide invaluable assistance on the road to recovery.**
- ♦
- ♦ **Key for the security in the region is mutual dialog and respect among the neighboring countries, European integration , economic prosperity.**

- ♦ **Overall, the OLS are quite optimistic about the future of the region. The improvement will be slow but steady.**
- ♦ **Many Serbian OLS have seriously considered the option of moving abroad, mostly because economic and/or political reasons.**
- ♦ **The attitudes towards SEE countries is polarized: Slovenia and Greece are seen in a very positive light; in a sharp contrast to Albania, Macedonia, Croatia, and Bosnia. The OLS do not think much of Bulgaria and Romania either, but their attitudes were less emotionally charged. The attitude towards Turkey us definitively changing: more positive things are being emphasized.**
- ♦ **Relation with minority groups is seen mostly as satisfactory with the unfortunate exception of Serbian- Albanian relations.**
- ♦ **Most worries and hopes for the future relate to the speed of economic recovery. The OLS fear that people may have unrealistic expectations about the swiftness of the change. Social unrest may only slow down the desired economic turnaround. Joining EU is seen as the most valuable objective within our reach.**

KEY FINDINGS

1. THE MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEMS FACING THE COUNTRY

1.1 What are the most important problems our country is facing today?

◆ **The burning issues the country is facing relate to:**

- **Politics:**

- Tensions between Montenegro and Serbia,
- Kosovo crisis,
- South Serbia crisis
- Compliance with the International community
- Forthcoming change of the Constitution

- **Economy:**

- Privatization
- Unemployment
- Recession
- Poverty
- No clear guidance for the future

- **Public services**

- Social security
- Welfare
- Pension funds
- Health care

1.2 Please rank the most important problems relative to their gravity.

1.3. And why?

Economy, Kosovo and South Serbia and Montenegro crisis are considered to be the most serious problems and the most difficult to solve.

Illustrative statements:

- *The problem is status of our country, we don't know what will happen with Montenegro and the South of Serbia.*
- *Undefined issue of the territories, private property and economic issues.*
- *I am most pessimistic regarding...Kosovo and Montenegro. Those problems will be very difficult to solve. We will be facing them fore a very long period of time.*

- *The first problem is poverty, the second is Kosovo and the third relationship with Montenegro.*

1.4. What problems are the most likely to be solved in the next few years?

1.5. And why?

1.6. How can that problem be solved?

1.7. Who can solve it?

As problems most likely to be solved the OL's refer to:

- relationship between Serbia and Montenegro
- change of the Constitution
- change of the political and legal system
- return to international community.

All of them can be solved through democratic legislature and elections. Thus, the OL's believe that some of the most pressing problems of Yugoslavia today can be solved in the Parliament by people representatives. There is an almost universal agreement that the constitutional crisis between Serbia and Montenegro will be resolved peacefully, regardless of the outcome of the elections and the referendum in Montenegro.

Illustrative statements:

- The problem between Serbia and Montenegro will be solved soon because we have elections in Montenegro.*
- The elections will take place and it will force political leaders to make their position clear.*
- By the change of power in our country, this has become a technical issue. By the end of year we will return to all relevant international forums and institutions.*

However, it should be noted that few OLs think that economy is most likely to get well soon. They believe that foreign investments and favorable arrangements with the international monetary institutions will very soon substantially improve local economy. On the whole, foreign assistance is seen as a prerequisite for economic recovery.

Illustrative statements:

- *Solutions for economic issues are the most possible to achieve in the next couple of years. With minimal help of international institutions we will easily come out of the crisis because we have the resources.*
- *European Union will prevent economic collapse of Yugoslavia.*
- *In order to restart the economy we should get foreign loans... then, the companies and their management should establish business.*

1.8. What problems are the least likely to be solved in the next few years?

1.9. And why?

1.10. What would be an appropriate solution for this problem?

1.11. Who can solve it?

Economic problems, and the Kosovo problem were perceived by most of the people as the most difficult to be resolved. Most OLs think that solution of those problems can not be achieved by the Serbian people alone. International community is heavily involved in the Kosovo crisis and its approach does not necessarily coincide with the interest of Serbian people. There is no dialog with the Albanians, none of the parties involved is ready to soften its negotiating position. Foreign investment is seen as the only solution for economic recovery. That, again, does not depend only on the goodwill of Serbian people. Proposed solutions for Kosovo are: territorial division or political autonomy for the Albanians. Today, Serbs and Albanians can not be solved without the International community.

Illustrative statements:

-I think the most difficult problem is Kosovo, and Southern Seerbia. It is because we have an international protectorate in Kosovo, and we don't know how it will be solved, but certainly it can't be solved in six months.

-Solution for the economy is foreign investment, programs for the whole region, but in my opinion, we can not be isolated from other newly created country.

-We can solve the Kosovo problem together with the Albanians, but only in agreement with the international community.

2. ECONOMIC ISSUES

2.1 What are the main economic problems our that country is facing now?

The main economic problems of Serbia today are believed to be: destruction of the economy, lack of adequate infrastructure, dysfunction and the paralysis of the large industrial systems, lack of money and foreign investment, unemployment, corruption, production standstill, poverty, no market economy, idle and obsolete technology, lack of the banking system.

2.2 What are their causes?

As main causes for this situation the OLs quote the 50 year old legacy of communist economy and completely inapt economic policy during the last 10 years. The economy is exhausted by long years of isolation, economic sanctions, recent wars, and the NATO destruction

2.3. What are the main obstacles for their solution?

According to the OLs, the main hindrance of economic recovery stems from lack of investment, outdated technology, and bad relations with international monetary institutions.

2.4 What are the factors that could help solving economic problems?

Economic problems can be solved with foreign financial assistance, local expertise, recruitment of local resources, privatization, and adequate changes of the political system.

2.5. Are they internal or external?

Both internal (the government) and external (international monetary organizations) are perceived as being instrumental in bringing about a necessary economic turnaround.

2.6. How would you rate the involvement of international monetary institutions in Serbian economy?

The role of international monetary institutions is generally seen as positive. They are relatively few concerns regarding the austerity measures, and the financial discipline that may be a prerequisite for any substantial foreign aid.

2.7. What international monetary institutions could play the most important role in our economy?

The World Bank, International Monetary Fund, European Bank for Development and Reconstruction, also the governments of large and financially developed countries such as USA and Great Britain. These institutions and governments should play a crucial role, since they will bring money that can move the economy ahead and break the vicious cycle of poverty, unemployment and political instability. More financial assistance and less political pressure is expected from the European Union than from the USA.

2.9. What will happen to economy this year?

The first 6 months will be very difficult, the overall situation will start to improve gradually. In a short run, urgent political problems such as Kosovo and Montenegro will consume government resources, it will not have enough energy to deal with burning economic matters. Unfortunately, most citizens have unrealistic expectations that economy may improve overnight. Unfulfilled expectations may lead to social unrest. Transition will not be welcome by everyone.

2.10. Will it get better or worse?

The OLs believe that the economy will get slightly better, that there will be a higher standard of living, and that we will soon witness the improvement in social services.

2.11. Try to be specific: what will get better, what will get worse?

There will be an overall improvement, but many people will lose their jobs. Improvements, if any, will be slight and plodding.

Illustrative examples:

-It is so bad now, it has to get better.

-I think it is going to be little better, because it cannot get worse, as we are at the bottom.

- I think nothing can be worse than before. The only thing worse could be a new war, which I doubt.

-I have high expectations since the regime was replaced. I know the changes can't happen overnight but there will be foreign investments and it will get better since it can't get any worse.

3. POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

3.1 What is the role people have in the decision making in our country and/or our local community?

There is no clear conviction that ordinary people can influence decision making. There is still a general disbelief in the transparency of the political process. Opinions about certain political institutions are based on personal likes and dislikes directed towards the people who are presently in the office. The power, trustworthiness and the prestige of a political institution depends mostly on the personal reputation of a man who is heading this institution. Political institutions are not valued by the constitutional power that is invested in them. Political institutions *per se* do not give power to politicians. On the contrary, those politicians who are generally regarded as honest and capable give power and credibility to the office they occupy.

3.2 What political institutions do you trust the most?

Vojislav Kostunica, the Federal President of Yugoslavia, is the most popular and the most trusted politician of Serbia today. His personal reputation keeps his office in highest esteem. Zoran Djindjic, the Serbian Prime minister, is the second most trusted political leader.

3.3 What political institutions do you trust the least?

Zoran Djindjic (the Prime minister of Serbia) Zoran Zizic (the Prime minister of Yugoslavia) and Milan Milutinovic (Serbian President) are people with most personal dislikes in our sample of Serbian OLs. In general, the OLs do not trust political parties, army, police, and local authorities.

3.4 What political institution has the highest impact on everyday life of ordinary citizens?

Most of the OLs interviewed, agree that the Government of Serbia and the Serbian Parliament have the highest impact on every day life of ordinary citizens. The Federal Government, which is a marriage of convenience between Milosevic's bitter enemies from Serbia (Vojislav Kostunica and Zoran Djindjic) and his former allies from Montenegro (Predrag Bulatovic and Zoran Zizic), basically has no influence on everyday life in the politically and economically divided federation.

3.5 How would you rate political/administrative/legal institutions such as: the Federal President, Federal Parliament, Federal Government, the Mayor, Local Government, political parties?

The office of the Federal President is given highest mark, political parties the lowest. Generally, the OLs are rather reserved when they judge the political institutions. There is an overall dissatisfaction and mistrust in politics in Serbia. This is in sharp contrast with uncritical support and admiration that is given to certain political leaders (Milosevic, Draskovic and Seselj in the past; Kostunica today).

Illustrative statements:

- I don't trust the mayor, the local government, the local assembly at all. I have had bad experience with them. I trust only the Federal president

-The individuals cannot do much unless they occupy top positions.

-I don't trust political institutions.

-I trust Vojislav Kostunica. He is very active. It is sufficient to see that the lights in his office are on whole day and whole night.

4. CIVIL SOCIETY

4.1 What is your main source of information?

The OLs quote non-state owned media, satellite TV, newspapers and personal contacts as their main source of information. They prefer to gather information from many different sources since one can not rely solely on a single source.

4.2 What is the most credible source?

The media that were resisting and criticizing Milosevic's regime in the past are seen as the most credible source of information. Dailies like 'Danas' and 'Glas javnosti, radio and TV station 'B92' and the weekly magazine 'Vreme' have established independence and credibility in spite of constant harassment by Milosevic's police and magistrates. After the fall of Milosevic's regime in October of 2000, other media have also gained their freedom. There is no the state-controlled media in Serbia today, but some of the OLs are not happy with the present situation as well. Political inclinations still have a large influence on media.

4.3 Please give us some specific examples.

Illustrative statements:

-I could not read Politika for many years. It was simply disgusting. Now, even Politika is getting better.

-I know how media behaved before October 5th, and how they behave now. They behave in the same way; they only protect another side.

- The press is divided: some support Kostunica some support Djindjic.

4.4 How would you rate the role of the NGOs in Serbia?

The role of NGOs in Serbia is seen as very positive. The NGOs have also earned their reputation during the difficult years of Milosevic's oppression. The NGOs are perceived as very active and very important for the whole Serbian society. They have come through a very difficult period and deserve a more visible role in the society. Most of the NGOs have proved themselves as vital and tough: they were instrumental in Milosevic's fall from power.

4.5 How would you rate the role of the professional organizations?

Most OLs see professional organizations as rather unimportant, poorly organized and inconsequential. Professional organizations in Serbia have a long way to go before they

will become a key player in shaping public opinion and the legislature.

4.6 How would you rate the role of religious communities?

The role of the religious organizations and religious communities is also poorly defined and they do not exert any substantial influence on Serbian society today. Most OLs do not have any attitude –neither negative nor positive- towards religious groups: they are seen as unimportant and without any substantial influence.

Illustrative examples:

- I don't know much about it since I am an atheist; I think they need to have a more active role in peace initiatives, and I don't see they do.

-There are no real religious organizations in Serbia.

5. PUBLIC SERVICES

In general, the OLs are quite discontent with the quality of public services. All public services were judged to be of poor quality and completely inadequate. Table 1 below summarizes the actual grades given by the OLs interviewed.

Grades percentages

Grades	Health	Education	Social assistance	Transport	Heating	Electricity	Water supply	Military
1	4.5	5.0	4.8	9.5	9.1	13.6	0.0	27.3
2	22.7	20.0	23.8	33.3	0.0	13.6	4.8	18.2
3	27.3	20.0	14.3	14.3	18.2	13.6	4.8	13.6
4	18.2	35.0	9.5	14.3	4.5	0.0	0.0	9.1
5	22.7	10.0	23.8	19.0	45.5	27.3	38.1	4.5
6	0.0	10.0	23.8	4.8	4.5	9.1	9.5	13.6
7	4.5	0.0	0.0	4.8	13.6	18.2	19.0	4.5
8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.5	19.0	4.5
9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.5	0.0	0.0	4.5
10	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.8	0.0
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Public transportation, social assistance and health care were rated even worse than other public services. Military has received few favorable opinions simply because it has survived in spite of all calamities and completely inadequate financial support. Main reasons for miserable state of public services are poverty and corruption. Little resources that are available are not used in the most efficient manner. Education was hit very hard by the economic crisis. Teachers have meager salaries and have lost motivation and self-respect. Majority of OLs do not see privatization of public services is not seen as a solution. There are many concerns regarding possible abuse and efficiency of privatized health care, education and the utilities. It is a responsibility of the Serbian Government to solve those problems.

Illustrative statements:

-Whatever amount of money comes into the budget it disappears for private needs; the money has been stolen. We are the most corrupted country in the world.

-I was recently at the main hospital in Belgrade, the Clinical Center. It stinks.

-Public services could get better once there is a general improvement in standard of living.

6. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

6.1. The role of international institutions (European Union, Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, and NATO)

The OLs believe that the presence of International institutions in the country is rather inevitable. Effective cooperation with international institutions, especially with international monetary organizations, is a prerequisite for economic and political reforms in Serbia. European initiatives (EU, Stability pact) are judged more positively than the political agenda of the USA and NATO. NATO was perceived as an American Institution. There is a wide spread dislike of NATO among Serbian OLs. Nevertheless, a certain proportion of them do believe that joining NATO could solve many things for Serbia today. Most of the OLs think that joining NATO would not only be quite unpopular but will also bring many negative consequences for Serbia.

Illustrative statements:

- There are always conditions for obtaining loans. They refer to monetary policy, stability of local currency, budget restrictions, and they also influence political setting.*
 - They ask for some legal regulations, which will guarantee long term political and economic stability.*
 - WE can not enter the world without the World Bank. The same applies to IMF.*
 - ♦ *- I don't think that NATO can contribute at all, the memory of NATO bombardment is still very fresh.*
 - ♦ *-NATO is a military force and military forces do not solve problems in our country.*
-I am against all military organizations so I do not agree that we should join NATO.
 - ♦ *- Stability Pact is an international organization created by EU. It is an interesting initiative than can bring the whole region together.*
- I am fed up with NATO and so is the majority of our people.*

6.3 The key security in the region

The key to regional security lies in good relations among the neighboring countries. Long-lasting peace can be achieved through mutual recognition of borders and European integration. United Europe and its initiatives can bring stability to the region. Political agreement should be accompanied with economic development.

Illustrative statements:

- The key is the very countries comprising this region.*
- European integration and the United Europe.*

-Ambitious programs such as 'Greater Croatia', 'Greater Serbia' and 'Greater Albania' must be abandoned.

-Economic improvement is the key to regional stability. When people have to loose they are not interested in things like nationalism, tradition.

7. INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS AND FEELINGS

7.1 Attitudes towards the SEE countries

The attitudes towards South Eastern European countries are quite diverse. The OLs are quite opinionated regarding Greece, Albania, Turkey and the former Yugoslav republics. Some responses were very emotional and many stereotypes were used. Bulgaria and Romania do not elicit many specific emotionally charged responses. Western values (economic prosperity, democracy) are used as the main criteria for success. At the same time, Western involvement in country's affairs is not welcome. Slovenia and Greece are observed as most successful; Albania, Macedonia and Bosnia as the least successful countries in the region.

Croatia

Negative attitude still prevails. There is a lot mixed feelings, strong negative emotions.

Illustrative statements:

Positive: tourism, victory, the sea, culture, trying to overcome its totalitarian past, potentially good neighbors

Negative: Xenophobic society, indoctrinated people, not very nice, instability, ethnic tension, instigators of the civil war that destroyed Yugoslavia, petty mentality, no real democracy, petty bourgeois nationalism, unstable, bad economy, expensive country, huge internal problems, slow economic recovery

Slovenia

Slovenia is seen as a regional leader. Serbian OLs have a very good opinion on Slovenia. Very few negative attitudes. Many see Slovenia as a model.

Illustrative statements:

Positive: Economic prosperity, democracy, EU, work ethics, ambitious, stability, the most beautiful country, diligent people, very pragmatic, the best example of economic transition, more able than we thought, highly developed, separated from Balkan problems, European orientation, I like them, well developed, successful, stable

economy, beautiful countryside, the most developed and the most democratic, already in Europe, professional

Negative: Police state, claustrophobic

Macedonia

Negative attitudes prevail. Macedonia is burdened with difficulties, international presence did not solve any of them. Macedonia has a long way to go before reaching stability.

Illustrative statements:

Positive: I love that country, they are friendly, brotherhood

Negative: Instability, poverty, low level of education, relatively behind, controlled by others, ethnic problems, tragic country, very difficult strategic position, poverty, an example of how can you end up very bad although you have cooperated with the West from the very beginning, vanishing, pale, imperiled, dependant, big problems with Albanians, a powder keg, a fear of disintegration, a country that makes me worry,

Bosnia & Herzegovina

There are too many unsolved problems in Bosnia and the country will fall apart minutes after the last NATO soldier leaves. There is no bright future for Bosnia unless the international community tries a different approach to the problem.

Illustrative statements:

Positive: Multiethnic dream that neighboring countries want to dispel, I love that country, possible cooperation

Negative: Instability, multiethnic society, no future, many problems, war, foreign protectorate, untenable without foreign military presence, nationalism, separatism, horror, the country where anything can happen, no identity, total chaos

Bulgaria

Mainly negative attitudes. Bulgaria is often seen as very much alike Romania: a former communist country in its uphill battle to political stability and economic prosperity.

Illustrative statements:

Positive: New democracy, some recent improvements, friendly, determined, trying to join Europe, good will for cooperation

Negative: unsuccessful economic reform, I don't like them, not very clean, lazy uneducated, political problems, tragic country ,agricultural country that imports tomatoes from Spain, bad case of transition, undeveloped, bad economy, difficult situation

Romania

A country with similar problems as Serbia but with a small impact on Serbian affairs.

Illustrative statements:

Positive: friendly, trying to join Europe

Negative: Same as Bulgaria, not very clean, lazy, political and economic problems, ethic problems with Hungarians, poor country, bad trade, undeveloped, bad economy, tragic country, slow progress

Greece

Highly esteemed. Very positive attitudes, *prosperity, a model country for the region.*

Illustrative statements:

Positive: Success, EU, good choice, something else, stability, tourism, orthodox church, developed country, clever people, tourism, passionate, leading country in the Balkans, continuous growth, the most positive example in the whole region, friendly, we should cooperate with them more

Negative: tensions with neighbors, NATO country, not diligent, a whole country is one big village, cheaters, indecisive

Turkey

Mostly positive attitude in spite of a long history of ethnic tension with the Turks. Turkish drive for modernization and European integration is highly valued.

Illustrative statements:

Positive: Successful country, economic development, good politics, relative stability, pleasant, I wish we lived as they do, getting better every day, great improvement, will have an increasingly important role in the region, same as Greece, will never be a part of Europe

Negative: Most stubborn and narrow-minded nation in the world, dirt, inherited ethnic tension with the Greeks

Albania

Very negative attitude, with one or two exceptions.

Illustrative statements:

Positive: democracy at its beginnings, good intentions, we should stop thinking of Albania as a hostile country

Negative: Poverty, conflicts, instability, unpleasant people, chaos, a primitive tribe, very poor, everything went wrong there, I feel sorry for them, dreaming of Greater Albania, big internal problems, surrealist country, no sovereignty on its territory, creating problems for the whole region, many unsolved problems, permanent source of problems

7.2. Perception of the people's lives in South Eastern Europe in the near future

Serbian OLs have a rather optimistic outlook for the near future. The whole region is heading towards better. Recent changes in Serbia have eliminated a 'black whole' in the middle of the region. The recovery will be slow but sustained.

Illustrative statements:

-It will be a difficult and slow process of economic recovery and improvement of living standards.

-Everything is going to move ahead. However, it will be a long and hard road

-It will take some time for the economy to recover, but politically I am an absolute optimist.

-The integration process will start.

-It will be much better than during the last 10 years.

7.3. Readiness to leave the region

Surprisingly, many Serbian OLs have thought of leaving the region. They quote 2 main reasons for leaving the country: poor economy and the perpetual political crisis.

Illustrative statements:

-Of course, I have thought about leaving the country like so many people of my generation.

-Yes I moved out of the country and I came back.

-I thought about it very often, but I never left.

7.4 Perception of the relations between the ethnic groups

Relations between diverse ethnic groups in Serbia are perceived as improving and non-threatening in the northern part of Serbia where Serbs, Slovaks, Hungarians, Romanians and many others live peacefully together as neighbors. The opposite situation is in the South: tensions between Serbs and Albanians are extremely high, there is a constant bloodshed and no clear perspective for the future.

Illustrative statements:

- There are certain improvements in the North and a huge gap between Albanians and Serbs in the South.
- The relationship between Serbs and Albanians is certainly very bad, but there is no tension with Hungarians. Romany (Gypsy) population is well integrated although they are not satisfied with their status.

8. FINAL COMMENTS

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

- ♦ **Most worries and hopes for the future relate to the speed of economic recovery and the potential military conflict because of Kosovo. The OLs fear that people may have unrealistic expectations about the swiftness of the change. Social unrest may only slow down the desired economic turnaround. Joining EU is seen as the most valuable objective within our reach.**

Illustrative statements:

- *The main fear is that, due to bad economic situation, the door could open again for those who have ruled Serbia for the last 10 years.*
- *I fear that the Socialists and the Radicals may return to power*
- *I fear poverty. The country is so exhausted. Any new crisis may trigger a catastrophe.*