

МАССОВЫЕ ОПРОСЫ, ЭКСПЕРИМЕНТЫ, КЕЙС-СТАДИ

RUSSIA IN THE EYES OF SERBIAN STUDENTS (1)

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The paper is based on an empirical research of the attitudes of the student population in Serbia in terms of their opinions about Russia, the scope of their knowledge about that country and the sources on which they base their perception. In a separate stratum, on a representative sample, we studied the attitudes of the students in northern Kosovo to Russia, as well as other factors that were the subject of examination on the total student population in Serbia. In addition to the good general knowledge of Russia which was found, it was confirmed that Serbian students consider the Russian people close to them due to their Slavic origin and Orthodox belief and put Russia in the first place as a country toward which they have the most positive attitude.

Key words: Serbian students, attitudes toward Russia, the 2012 survey, Kosovo and Metohija.

Our study was conducted using the scientific method of testing [1. P.493—521; 2] and the survey technique applied to a two-stage quota sample. The sample included 603 students from four largest state universities (Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš and Kosovska Mitrovica), selected in proportion to the number of their students. The faculties within each university are grouped in four science-related groups (technical and technological, social-humanistic, medical, and science and mathematics — the 1st stage of sampling), within which, in proportion to the number of students studying at the universities covered by these groups, the quota of respondents was selected (the 2nd stage of sampling). 59% of students are female and 41% — male. The average age of the students is 21.

As for the education of their parents, in over 50% of cases the students' mothers and fathers had at least a secondary education. On the other hand, in the total population of Serbia, the percentage of people having a secondary education is 48,5%, college graduates — 5,5%, and university graduates — 7,5% [3. P. 166; 4] The findings indicate that young people whose parents have a low formal education (without an elementary education or just that) rarely decide to study; on the other hand, young people whose parents have received at least a secondary education direct their efforts at continuing their

studies, it is especially true for young people whose parents have college or university degrees. The disproportionate share of children from different social strata in the student population is a regularity which characterizes not only Serbia, but is a frequently found fact suggesting that the educational system, despite the indisputable results of democratization in the sphere of education, is still a powerful mechanism of social selection in modern society [5. P. 574; 6. P. XI—XVI; 7. P. 15—20].

Table 1

The correlation between the number of students and their parents' education level (%)

Education level	Mother	Father
Unfinished elementary school	0,7	0,7
Elementary school	5,9	3,5
High School	52,3	50,5
College	14,7	16,9
University	23,6	24,3
MA/PhD degree	2,8	4,1

In terms of nationality, among the respondents Serbs came first — with 92,1%, followed by Hungarians — 1,3%, Romanians — 0,7%, and Bosnians/Muslims — 0,5%, while 2,2% of the respondents refused to declare their nationality (2). The rest represent various minorities and ethnic communities living in Serbia (3). Religion-wise, 85,8% of the respondents belong to the Orthodox religion, 7,6% are atheists, while 2,2% practice Catholic religion, 0,8% — Islam, 0,2% — Judaism (4). By cross-examining the data we may conclude that the greatest number of atheists is found among the Serbs, $\frac{3}{4}$ of those who identified themselves as such.

Recognizing the fact that Russia is actively involved in solving the Kosovo crisis and is a powerful country fully supporting Serbia's position that Kosovo and Metohija are an integral and sovereign part of Serbia, we found it interesting, focusing on a separate stratum, using the same instrument, method and technique, with identical methods of forming the sample, to examine the attitude of students from the north of Kosovo and Metohija to Russia and make appropriate comparisons for scientific purposes. Thus, we formed a separate stratum of 317 students at the University of Priština temporarily located in Kosovska Mitrovica (5), which is more than a representative number, and the results of that survey were separately examined and processed.

At this point it is important to mention the role of Russia in the resolution of complex political problems during the late Ottoman rule in the Balkans, which often ended in the sufferings of the local Christian population. Since the purpose of the paper does not allow of a broader consideration of these facts, we will mention only a few of them. Thus, in the late XIX century, with an intense diplomatic activity and repeated interventions at the Porte in 1892, Russia was able to overcome the strong reaction of Turkish authorities in combating Albanian pressure on the Serbian population and ensure their safety [10. P.175]. The immediate help that the population in Kosovo and Metohija received from the network of Russian consulates in the area was vitally important, especially in Prizren, formed in 1866, because it was the only institution that provided immediate protection to the Christian people. Among other things, the Russian Consul played a key role in the Kolašin events with his direct efforts, when, thanks to the immediate action, without waiting for diplomatic approval, he managed to prevent mass suffering of the

people in that part of Old Serbia, which was followed by the opening of more consulates in Kosovo and Metohija (see more on this topic in the historical literature, e.g. [11. P. 167]). The perception of Russia as a key foreign actor in solving the Kosovo crisis is illustrated by the fact that Russian troops, after the NATO aggression in 1999, were greeted as liberators in Priština (6).

In terms of socio-demographic characteristics the difference is that, on average, the students from northern Kosovo and Metohija who are one year older than their peers, with an average age of 22 (about 10% fewer students than in the sample from entire Serbia) assess their financial situation as being above average (28,7%), and many more students qualify it as average (66,9%). Within the stratum, the Serbs are represented with 97,2% — that is a difference of over 5% in comparison to the sample from entire Serbia, the Bosnians/Muslims are represented with 1,3%, which is significantly higher than in the sample from entire Serbia, while the category of Gorani appears in the stratum as statistically significant at 0,9%. It is a small ethnic group that lives at the top of the Šar mountain (at the border between Serbia and Albania) and has always been an ally of Serbia and the Serbs in this region as it also resisted Albanian attempts to assimilate it. An important difference from the pattern characteristic of entire Serbia is the percentage distribution of confessions: the stratum of students from northern Kosovo included 96,5% of Christians, 10,7% higher than in the sample from entire Serbia, while the number of atheists is lower –6% against only 1,6%, Moslems are present with 1,3% (0,5% higher than in the entire Serbia sample), Catholics — with only 0,2% (2% less). The differences in the other characteristics are not of great importance to be particularly emphasized.

Serbian students receive information about Russia mostly through the mass media (newspapers, radio, TV), which is true for 62,2%. Another source of information is books by Russian writers (47,6%) and the Internet (40%). Only 6,4% of Serbian students have visited Russia, while 19,8% have recently received information about Russia from acquaintances.

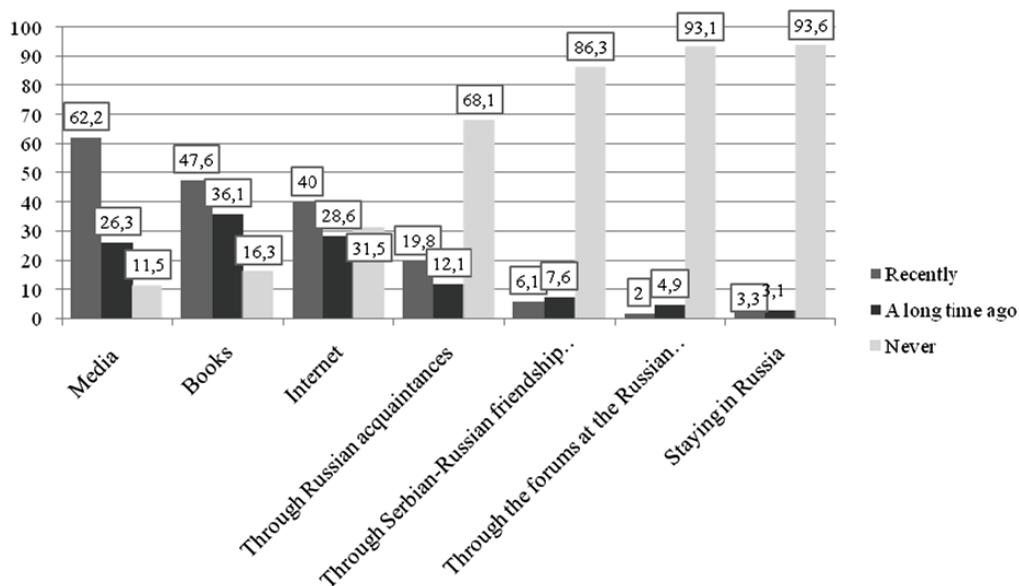


Chart 1. Method and frequency of receiving information about Russia (%)

Interestingly, when it comes to informing the student population, the traditional channels of information about different countries have waned in the modern world of globalization. Only 6,1% of students have recently received some information about Russia through the Serbian-Russian friendship associations (7), versus 86,3% of those who have never had contact with these organizations. The forums at the Russian House in Belgrade have been recently visited by 2% of the students, in the past — by 4,9%, while 93,1% have never visited them. The aforementioned finding is somewhat understandable, since there is a Russian House only in Belgrade, so students from other cities should travel between two and seven hours to attend any of these activities.

However, it is important to point out that Serbian students are, on the one hand, very self-critical in terms of their own knowledge about Russia and, on the other hand, they express a desire to get more information about it. Namely, the level of information about Russia among as many as 61,8% of the respondents refer themselves to ‘the general level’, while a similar number of them declare themselves as ‘expert on Russia’, for he or she has many Russian friends and acquaintances and often travel there (2,9%); 2,6% have little knowledge of it. At the same time, about $\frac{1}{3}$ think that they ‘know plenty’ about that country, but indirectly, through reading books and other sources of information, although they have never visited Russia and have no Russian acquaintances (32,7%). When it comes to better understanding of Russia, about 74% of students would like to travel to Russia: 38,3% have a desire to visit Russia in particular, while 32,5% generally like to travel and would like to travel to Russia as well, 13,8% replied they would like to travel to that country ‘as soon as they can afford it’. Only 3,7% do not consider that visit at all, while 11,6% stated that they ‘do not plan it ever’.

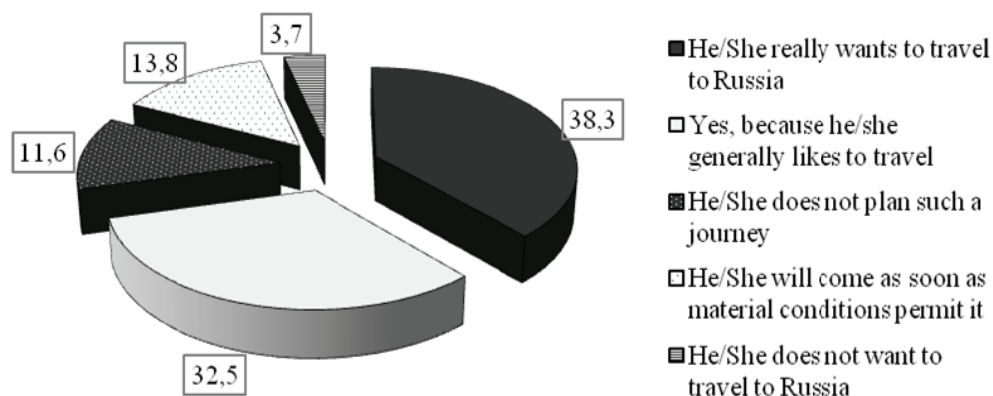


Chart 2. Students' answers to the question whether they would like to travel to Russia (%)

To find out to what extent Serbian students are familiar with Russia in a more objective way, we set up the following three ‘tasks’: 1) to name at least three well-known Russian public figures who are still alive; 2) to name at least three well-known Russian (or Soviet) public figures who are important historical figures; 3) to find out at least three Russian (or Soviet) statesmen (whether they are alive or not). The outcome of the first

task is as follows: the current Russian President, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, was named first among the three by 22,5% of the students, tennis player Maria Sharapova — by 8,2%, followed by Nikita Mikhalkov who was named by 4,9% of the students, football player Andrei Arshavin — by 4,2% and basketball player Andrei Kirilenko — by 3,5%; the current Russian Prime Minister, Dmitry Medvedev, was named first among the three by 3,3% of the students; a smaller number of ‘first places’ belongs to tennis player Anna Kournikova, with 2,6%. If we ignore the fact who the students named first, second and third, it is certain that the person who is most famous among Serbian students is Russian President Vladimir Putin, who was present in the answer to this question in 34,4% of cases, followed by Prime Minister Medvedev with 23,3%, Maria Sharapova with 18,2%, Andrei Arshavin with 10,6%, Andrei Kirilenko with 9,7% and Nikita Mikhalkov with 8,5%. We can conclude that in the eyes of Serbian students Russia, when it comes to contemporaries, is represented by its president, prime minister, top athletes and the most famous Russian film director.

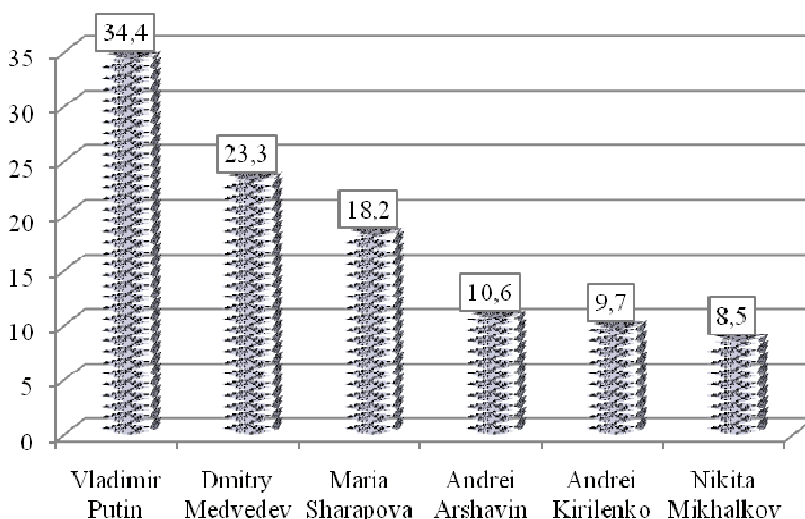


Chart 3. The most famous Russian contemporaries in the eyes of Serbian students (the data summary for the first, second and third persons named in %)

The second question was about the past. The students were asked to list at least three well-known Russian (Soviet) public figures, who are historical figures (no longer alive). The first response to this question was most often the name of Leo Nikolayevich Tolstoy with 23,6%, Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky with 21,9%, Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin with 5,3%, Alexander Sergeyevevich Pushkin with 5,2% and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, who was named first by 2,7% of Serbian students. All this indicates that Serbian students ‘know’ Russia, its culture and history mostly through its literary giants, their historical novels and poetry, and also through the historical actions of Soviet revolutionaries Lenin and Stalin. The findings are not surprising, especially if one bears in mind that the works of the aforementioned writers have been a part of the compulsory reading list in Serbian secondary school for many decades, as well as other Russian writers, and that their presence is significant in the current curriculum of the Serbian Language and Literature taught in gymnasiums and secondary schools in Serbia (8).

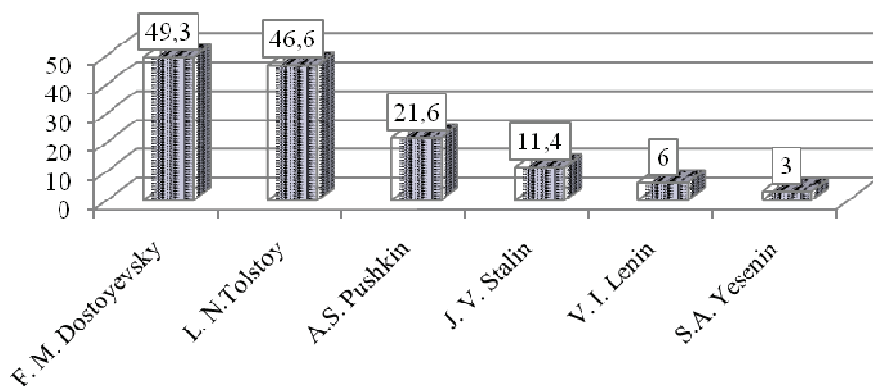


Chart 4. Russia's most famous historical figures according to Serbian students (the data summary for the first, second and third person named in %)

The students were also asked to name three Russian or Soviet statesmen (regardless of whether they are alive or not). The most common answer in the first place was President Vladimir Putin (35,2%), followed by Stalin (16,3%), Dmitry Medvedev (6%), Lenin and Boris Yeltsin (2,5%). In the second place the students also mentioned Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev (2,9%); in the third place — Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev (2,3%). Considering students' answers to this third question, regardless the order of naming, one can say that they are far more familiar with current Russian statesmen, President Putin (57,3%), Prime Minister Medvedev (40%) and know the main Soviet statesmen — revolutionaries Lenin and Stalin.

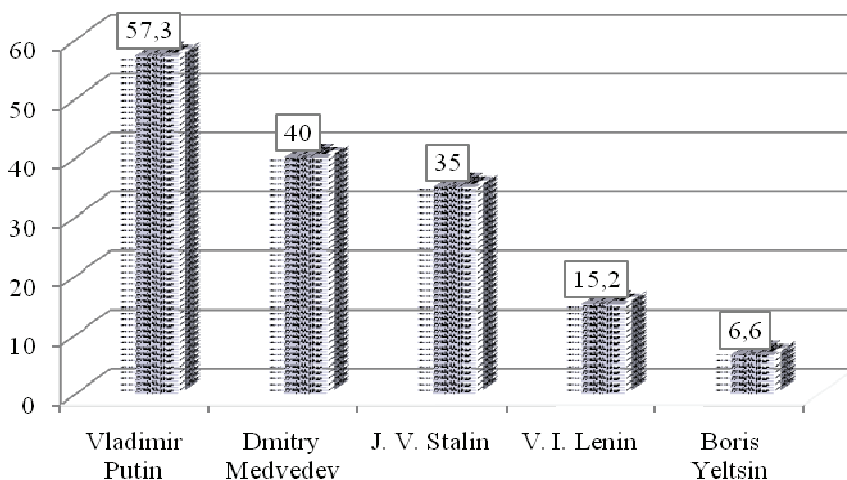


Chart 5. The most famous Russian statesman according to Serbian students (the data summary for the first, second and third person named in %)

The choice of languages to be taught in the public school system in Yugoslavia and then Serbia “was dependent on numerous factors, the most influential of which have been in relation to the political and cultural influence of the country whose language would be selected and offered in schools” [12. P. 45]. In the late 1950s and 1990s, not

in equal proportions, the most common foreign languages in our school system were English and Russian [12. P.46]. A little more than $\frac{1}{4}$ of students, 28,9%, said they had “previously learned Russian”, 4,5% “were learning it currently”, while 33,6% expressed a desire to learn the Russian language (33% do not want to learn it).

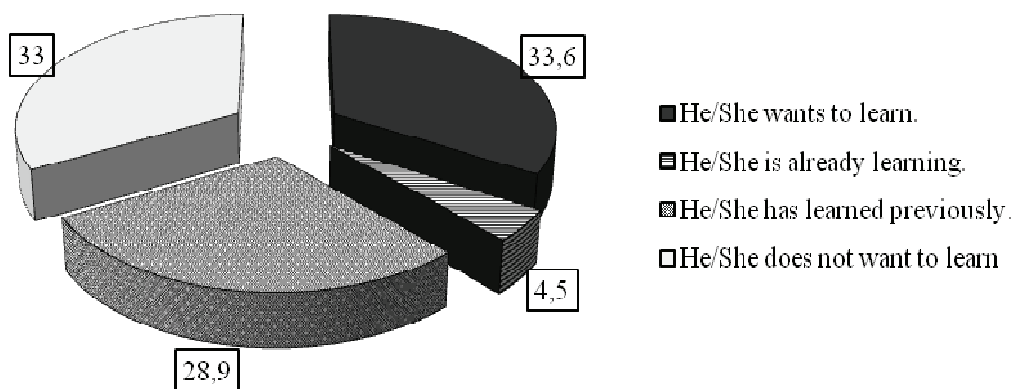


Chart 6. Students' attitudes toward learning Russian

The expressed interest in learning Russian, besides the strengthening of the Russian-Serbian relations on the political and economic level over the past four years, can certainly be explained by the fact that the students in Serbia found out about the Russian language and culture through its best writers and poets who for the present student generation were on the obligatory reading list in schools, as already noted. Unfortunately, after the political changes in Serbia in 2000, some colleges have rushed to abolish the teaching of Russian (9), and in primary and secondary schools Russian was replaced by English, German and to a lesser extent French and even Spanish and Italian, which has been repeatedly lamented by Russian Ambassador Alexander Konuzin [13; 14]. For their part, students show more wisdom than the new political class in Serbia, and, therefore, the awareness of the importance of Russian culture, science, political and military power, the closeness of the Serbians and the Russians in terms of their Slavic origin and Orthodox faith is reflected in such a significant percentage of students (more than $\frac{1}{3}$) interested in learning Russian. There is no doubt that in this respect greater efforts and persistence of the official cultural representatives of Russia in Serbia have to be exerted, which will find a fertile soil among the student population. Inter-university cooperation would certainly be of great help if it includes student exchanges and summer camps for learning the Russian language in Russia etc.

Within our survey the students were also asked about their associations when Russia is mentioned and whether one of the 17 listed associations represented their associations with Russia. The students were allowed to record their own associations, but they did so in a statistically insignificant number of cases. The chart below gives an overview of the positive responses.

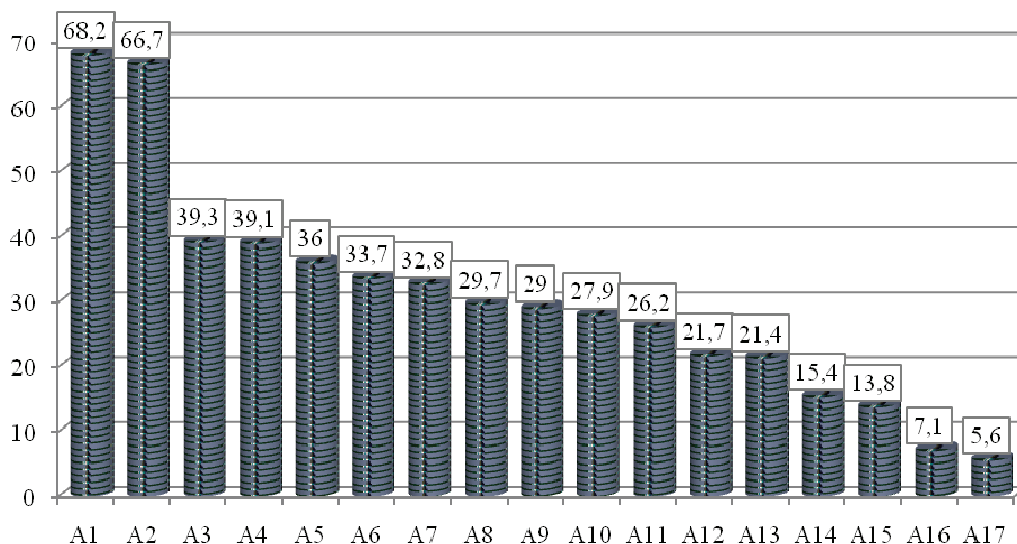


Chart 7. The students' associations when Russia is mentioned (%):

1. The biggest country in the world (spatially)
2. A nation close to Serbian nation in terms of its Slavic origin and Orthodox faith
3. The only country capable of rivaling the USA politically and militarily
4. A country with famous cultural tradition
5. A country which has achieved great results in the development of science
6. A country of highly patriotic people
7. A country which is most friendly-oriented to Serbia
8. A country with beautiful nature
9. A great tourist destination
10. A country of great athletes
11. A country we have an extensive economic cooperation with and which helps us economically
12. The first socialist country
13. Without Russia Kosovo and Metohija would have been lost for Serbia long ago
14. A country with complex ethno-political relations with the former USSR countries
15. A country which is constantly involved in political conflicts
16. A country with distinctive cuisine
17. A powerful country which, like other powerful countries, only creates problems in the Balkans

It can be clearly seen from the chart that students have predominantly positive associations with Russia, two of which particularly stand out: it is the biggest country in the world (68,2%, which can be treated as a value-neutral attitude), and that it is a nation close to Serbian nation in terms of its Slavic origin and Orthodox faith (66,7%). The latter association most certainly has positive value connotations, especially if one takes into account the number of surveyed Serbian students who declared themselves as Orthodox (85,8%), with over $\frac{3}{4}$ of students-believers found in another study conducted in 2010 at the University of Belgrade [15. P. 94]. In many cases students chose from the available associations with Russia that it is the only country that can compete with the U.S. militarily and politically (39,3%), that they are impressed by its glorious cultural traditions and enormous scientific achievements. One of the associations which was chosen by more than $\frac{1}{3}$ of Serbian students is Russian patriotism, which is again a significantly positive connotation when one keeps in mind that the research among the Belgrade students shows that 64,1% of them declare themselves as patriots [16. P. 864]. 32,8% of students believe that Russia is “a country which is most friendly-oriented to

Serbia”, while over $\frac{1}{5}$ of them believe that without Russia Kosovo and Metohija would have been lost for Serbia long ago. A positive attitude of Serbian students to Russia is confirmed by the fact that only 5,6% think that Russia is “a powerful country which, like other powerful countries, only creates problems in the Balkans”.

When the responses within the stratum of students from the north of Kosovo and Metohija are analyzed separately, some similarities and differences are revealed.

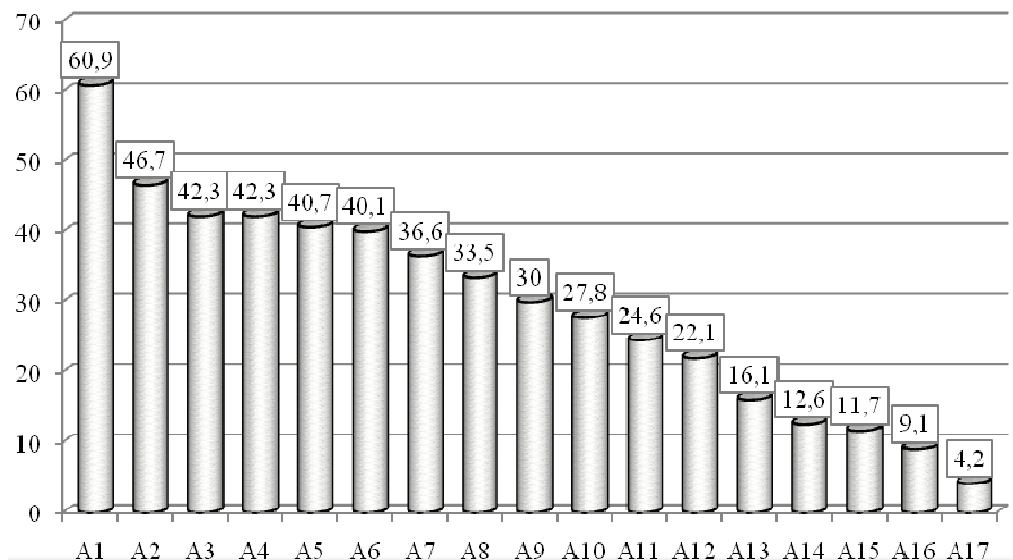


Chart 8. Students' associations with Russia — the data on the level of the stratum of Kosovo and Metohija (%):

1. The biggest country in the world (spatially)
2. A nation close to Serbian nation in terms of its Slavic origin and Orthodox faith
3. A country of highly patriotic people
4. Without Russia Kosovo and Metohija would have been lost for Serbia long ago
5. The only country capable of rivaling the USA politically and militarily
6. A country which is most friendly-oriented to Serbia
7. A country with famous cultural tradition
8. A country we have an extensive economic cooperation with and which helps us economically
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13. The first socialist country
14. A country which is constantly involved in political conflicts
15. A country with complex ethno-political relations with the former USSR countries
16. A country with distinctive cuisine
17. A powerful country which, like other powerful countries, only creates problems in the Balkans

In this case as well, the first association is that Russia is the largest country in the world (60,9%), the second one — it is a nation close to the Serbian nation (46,7%, which is 20% less than in the sample representing the entire student population of Serbia). The association that the Russians are great patriots is third among the students in the north of Kosovo, as well as in the entire student population, but with a higher percentage of those who think so — 42,3%. With the same percentage and in the third place comes the attitude of the students from northern Kosovo and Metohija that without Russia Ko-

sovo and Metohija would have been lost for Serbia long ago. Compared with the result from the total sample (21, 4%), this attitude is in the fourth place according to frequency and is also a tribute to Russia for its policy of supporting Serbia on the issue of Kosovo and Metohija. This conclusion is confirmed by the following two attitudes accepted by the students from the north of Kosovo and Metohija: that Russia is the only country “capable of competing with the USA politically and militarily” (40,7%), and that Russia is “a country which is the most friendly-oriented to Serbia” (40,1%). Within this stratum as well, the least frequent association is of Russia being “a powerful country which, like other powerful countries, only creates problems in the Balkans” (just 4,2%), confirming the general conclusion of a very positive attitude of Serbian students towards Russia, particularly prominent with the student population studying in the northern part of Kosovska Mitrovica and other municipalities in northern Kosovo and Metohija.

Overall, among 24 states listed Russia was most often mentioned as a country, to which respondents have a positive attitude. In fact, almost every other student (45,2%) claims to have a positive attitude towards Russia, followed by Switzerland with 32,8%, Spain — 29,9%, Japan — 24,9%, China — 19,4%, Italy — 19,8% and Cuba with 19%. The United States is at the bottom of the list with only 7% of students who have a positive attitude to it, and Albania is in the very last place — only 1% of students in Serbia have a positive attitude to it.

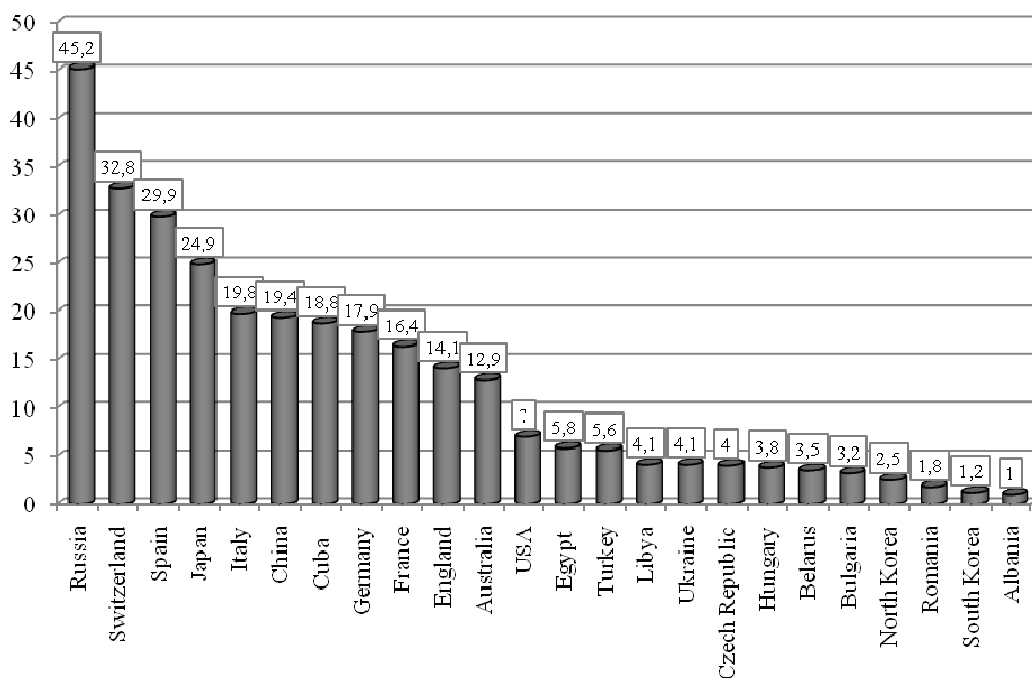


Chart 9. Countries towards which students express a positive attitude (the entire sample, in %)

When it comes to students from northern Kosovo and Metohija, over $\frac{3}{4}$ of them (75,9%,) have the most positive attitude towards Russia, the second country is Spain

(38,3%) — among other things, due to the fact that Spain did not recognize the so-called ‘independence’, like third-placed China (29,4%). The next country is Switzerland with 23,4%, Japan — 20,6%, France and Italy with 15,8%. At the bottom of the list of 24 listed states is the United States, to which only 5,7% of the students in northern Kosovo and Metohija have a positive attitude. It is surprising that among the students of northern Kosovo and Metohija there is over half a percent more of those who have a generally positive attitude towards Albania (1,6%) than in the entire sample of Serbian student population.

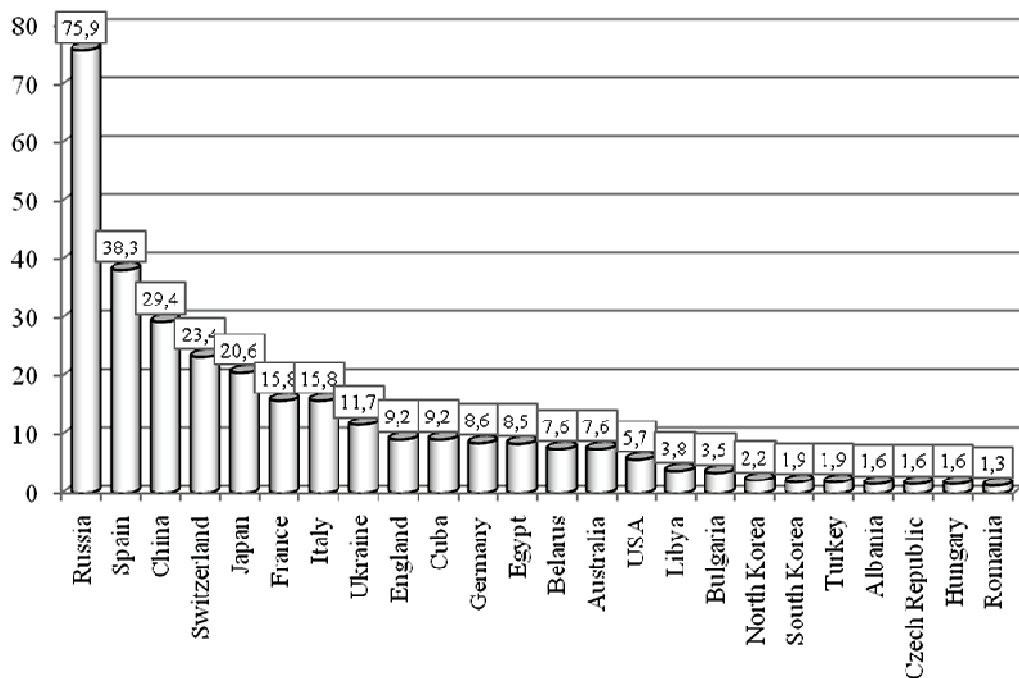


Chart 10. Countries to which students express a positive attitude —
The data on the level of the stratum in Kosovo and Metohija (%)

Thus, our analysis on the level of the total sample and within the stratum from northern Kosovo and Metohija has shown that the students in Serbia have good general knowledge of Russia, are well-informed about Russian culture, science, sports and politics. Undoubtedly, the most prominent figures for them are Russia’s President and Prime Minister, Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev, athletes (Sharapova, Arshavin, Kirilenko, Kuznetsova, Davydenko, Kournikova) and artists (Nikita Mikhalkov). If one takes into consideration that Serbian students learn about Russia mostly from the novels of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy and from Pushkin's poetry, it becomes clear how much weight, apart from official and diplomatic efforts, a country's sports and culture contributes to its’ prestige abroad. The research shows that there is a significant channel, belonging to one civilization we would say, of achieving closeness between two countries and their people — their Slavic origin and Orthodox religion. A more organized approach to learning the Russian language in Serbia, the creation of summer camps, for example, in which

Serbian students would learn Russian, its intensified promotion in Serbia, realization of inter-university cooperation etc., would certainly be welcomed by Serbian students who put Russia in the first place among the countries toward which they have a positive attitude (it is particularly evident among students in northern Kosovo and Metohija where the majority of students believe that without Russia Kosovo and Metohija would have been lost for Serbia long ago).

NOTES

- (1) This paper is the result of the joint research within the projects ‘Kosovo and Metohija between National Identity and European Integration’ (47023) and ‘Sustainability of the Identity of Serbs and National Minorities in the Border Municipalities of Eastern and Southeastern Serbia’ (179013).
- (2) According to the census of 2002 in Serbia, 82,9% of the population identified themselves as members of the Serbian ethnic group, 3,9% — as Hungarians, 1,4% — as Romanians and 1,8% — as Bosnians [8. P. 13].
- (3) The lack of ethnic Albanians in the structure of the sample results from the fact that the research was carried out in Serbia, including the northern part of Kosovo and Metohija (to the north of the Ibar river) which is ethnically predominantly Serbian and at its center — the northern part of Kosovska Mitrovica as a divided city — the University of Priština was relocated.
- (4) The structure of the sample in terms of religion is somewhat different from that identified in the census, especially when it comes to minority groups. Namely, in Serbia 85% of the population declared themselves as Orthodox, while 5,58% — as Catholic, 3,2% — as Moslems and 0,01 — as followers of Judaism. According to the same source, 0,5% of the population explicitly declared themselves as atheists [9. P.12].
- (5) The seat of the University of Priština was relocated after the NATO aggression in 1999 from Priština to Kosovska Mitrovica, since being a state university of the Republic of Serbia it was forced out from Priština. Moreover, the Serbs completely moved out of Priština, where the number of the Serbs from over 30000 before the bombing was reduced to only 34 people in 2012. Since the Serbian people centered in four northernmost municipalities of Kosovo and Metohija it is logical that the university moved to the northern part of Kosovska Mitrovica, which is, like Nicosia (Cyprus) for example, a divided city, where the dividing line is the Ibar river. To the North of the Ibar river there is a strong Serbian ethnic majority. On the other hand, since the Republic of Serbia does not recognize the unilaterally proclaimed ‘independence of Kosovo’ or the ‘institutions’ of that quasi-state, the name of the university was retained: the University of Priština, but a closer explanation was added — temporarily located in Kosovska Mitrovica, which shows the intention of returning to the city from which it was expelled.
- (6) Therefore, their rapid withdrawal caused disappointment among the Serbs and, consequently, led to the situation where Russia, although a permanent Security Council member, does not have its own sector within KFOR in Kosovo. If there was such a sector and if it was in the north of Kosovo it would be important in geopolitical terms, as it would facilitate the situation and strengthen the Serbian positions.
- (7) Here we write in the plural form, because in Serbia there are several such associations that are active, but oppose each other.
- (8) For example, the ‘pearls’ of Russian literature, such as the novels “Anna Karenina”, “The Brothers Karamazov”, “Crime and Punishment”, “The Master and Margarita”, the plays “Uncle Vanya”, “The Auditor”, the novel in verse “Eugene Onegin”, the poem by the same

author “The Gypsies” are a part of the compulsory reading list in Serbian secondary schools. Also it should be noted that the works of not only these writers (Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Bulgakov, Chekhov and Pushkin) are almost all translated into Serbian, but some major works by other famous Russian and Soviet poets and novelists, such as Sholokhov, Turgenev, Mayakovsky, Lermontov, Pasternak, Ilf and Petrov, Aitmatov, Brodsky, etc. have also been translated and published.

- (9) For example, the Faculty of Political Science in Belgrade, which has a department for the study of international political relations preparing future Serbian diplomats!

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РОССИЯ ГЛАЗАМИ СЕРБСКИХ СТУДЕНТОВ

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В статье представлены результаты эмпирического исследования взглядов студенчества Сербии, в частности восприятия студентами России с точки зрения имеющихся у них знаний и ассоциаций и источников их формирования. На примере особой социально-демографической группы, представленной репрезентативной выборкой, авторами рассмотрено отношение студентов, которые учатся в вузах на севере Косово и Метохии, к России, а также иные факты, явившиеся предметом социологического изучения на общесербской студенческой выборке. Результаты опроса подтвердили, что у студенчества Сербии имеются вполне хорошие общие знания о России, что оно считает российский народ близким сербскому по причине общего славянского происхождения и православного вероисповедания и ставит Россию на первое место среди всех прочих стран по степени позитивности ее восприятия.

Ключевые слова: сербское студенчество, отношение к России, опрос 2012 г., Косово и Метохия.