
Scientific Research

Building Understanding, Appreciating Religious and Social Diversity

Press Release

29 November 2013

Majority of citizens of B-H supports a process of reconciliation and trust-building

This study examines attitudes towards reconciliation and trust-building across Bosnia-Herzegovina. The survey covered respondents in 13 cities across the country: Sarajevo, Mostar, Banja Luka, Stolac, Jajce, Tuzla, Srebrenica, Livno, Bijeljina, Brčko, Trebinje, Bihać and Teslić. In recent months, public discussion and media coverage have depicted rising divisions in political and public life in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Because a different sense of perspective appears in our findings, the Edinburgh – CEIR study is releasing these early results from our survey.

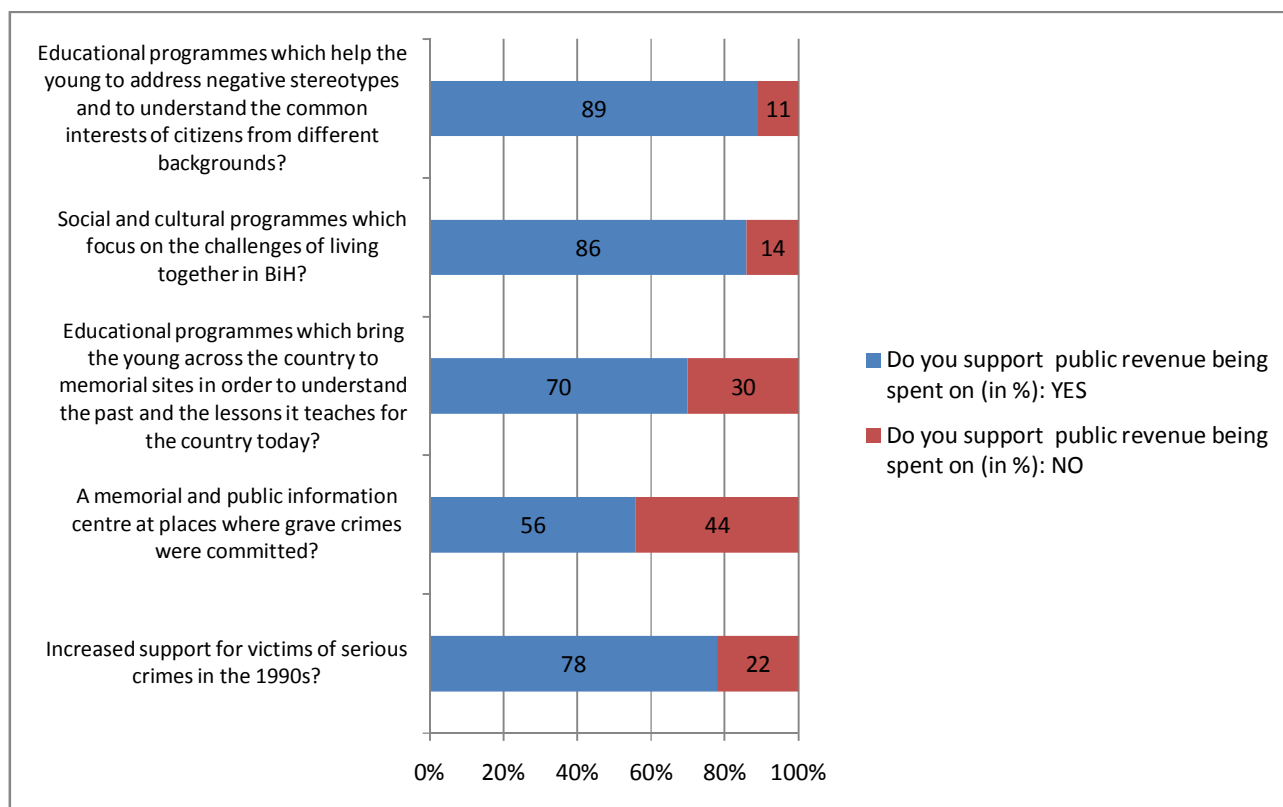
The survey was conducted in May 2013, and with 2606 written questionnaires this is possibly the largest survey correlating attitudes to reconciliation with social background since the war in the 1990s – and certainly the most deliberate in covering a diverse range of localities and regions. The survey confirms the emphatic support for a wide-ranging social reconciliation process found in a preceding pilot survey, which comprised 616 responses from a balance of the constituent peoples in Sarajevo, Mostar, Banja Luka and Bugojno. When the fuller survey results are published in December 2013, this will provide the most solid document available to date for assessing attitudes to reconciliation processes in the country.

The following information is among the most important:

- 77% say they believe a reconciliation process designed to found relationships on trust and honesty in BiH would be important.
- Teachers and figures who represent all and not any one single national group were the most highly rated potential participants in a reconciliation process (72% and 76.8% deemed them either important or very important to the process).
- Though respondents were far less positive about the potential role to be played by politicians (51.9% indicated they were important), they were also strongly in favour of a process in which politicians seriously engaged with the opinions of ordinary people (76.8%).
- Support for activities which promote understanding and appreciation of diversity was strong (77.8%).
- When the full study is published, it will be seen that this figure represents the state of opinion across the country, with a small variation upwards and downwards city-by-city.

Support for public expenditure on activities which build understanding between citizens and amongst schoolchildren was strong across the population:

Do you support public revenue being spent on (in %):



These results are a reminder that an overwhelming majority of citizens across Bosnia and Herzegovina – from all the constituent peoples, from the most religious to the least religious, of all ages and professions – take the need for a reconciliation process seriously. Many members of this diverse sample of the population are disappointed in the performance of the country’s elites. A majority claimed economic progress is more immediately important than social or political change. Nevertheless, they believe a country-wide reconciliation process to be important enough to be worth public sacrifices, and they believe that a wide range of participants are important to make this process work.

In any survey it will be possible to identify differences across the population, and the researchers in this project have looked at differences across geographical location, according to religious and non-religious identifications, gender, national group, economic prosperity, wartime experience, age, education, and perceptions about living as part of a ‘majority’ or as part of a ‘minority’ in their locality. However, the sample in both of these surveys is not divided by national or by religious identity, nor by other differences of background. Indeed, all constituent peoples include a comparable range of responses to questions about the priorities for reconciliation, and what the survey suggests is slightly different tendencies amongst different parts of the population and in different locations. It is not the case that poorer citizens are more negative about reconciliation activities than wealthier citizens, neither is it the case that less educated respondents are more negative than more educated respondents. It is not accurate to say that citizens in smaller, relatively mono-national cities are more intransigent than citizens in larger cities with a traditionally more mixed population.

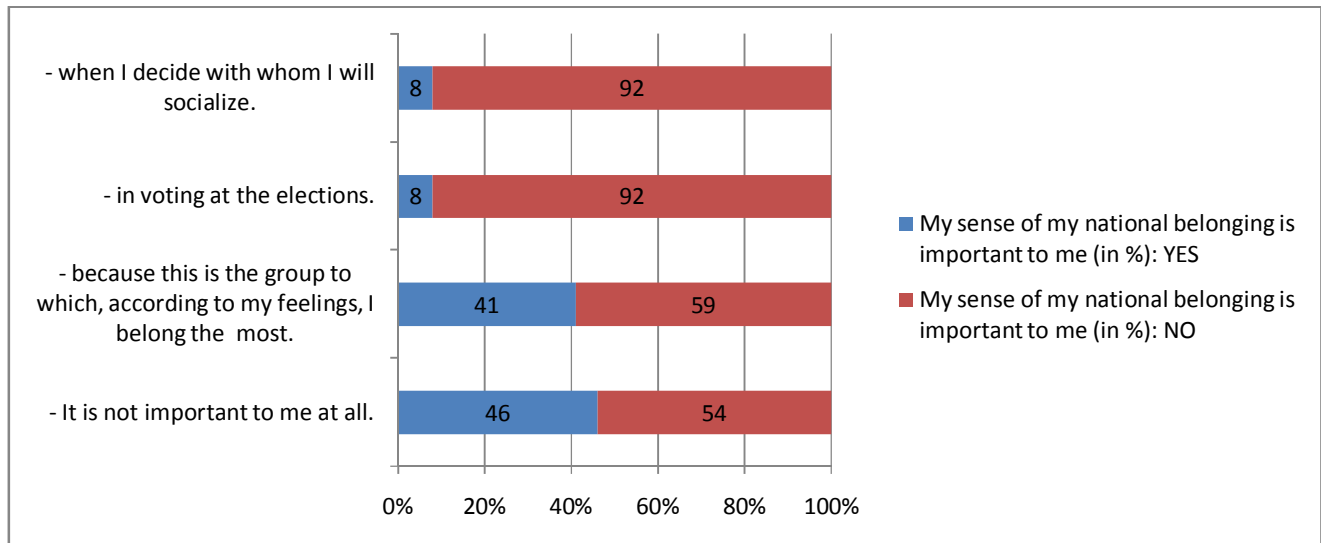
- This survey reconfirmed the exceptional strength of support for reconciliation amongst religious respondents found in the pilot survey. It was also able to identify ways in which respondents who described themselves as non-religious display strong commitments to reconciliation activities, particularly those promoting civic understanding.
- This survey reconfirmed the exceptional strength of support for reconciliation activities amongst veterans of the war.
- Pensioners proved to be one of the strongest sources of support for reconciliation activities in this survey.
- The survey also shows that, though attitudes towards reconciliation proved generally favourable, groups of respondents have a higher than average degree of scepticism or feel less strong commitment about the need for reconciliation.
 - The survey shows that social change is widely seen as a less immediate need than economic or political change.
 - While many respondents indicate that their city should protect both the rights of minorities and their memorial sites, the numbers who indicate that there is a need for a reconciliation process on a local level are much lower than the numbers who see reconciliation on a national level as important.
 - The fuller results will show opinion in some cities to be more emphatic about the importance of reconciliation activities, and some less convinced. They indicate that respondents with higher incomes tended on average to be more favourable to reconciliation in principle, but that having a stable expectation about job prospects correlated

more strongly with positive attitudes to reconciliation. One of the most emphatically positive groups of respondents proved to be pensioners on relatively low incomes.

The survey was designed so that individuals would state their own national and religious or non-religious identification, and would state what importance they attributed to their identities in their life.

- The overwhelming majority of respondents (92.7%) chose to describe themselves as identifying with one of the three constituent peoples.
- Approximately 8 per cent of the sample indicated that they would take national identity into account in making decisions about friendships and their personal life. The proportion of respondents who chose to describe their identity by an alternative to one of the three constituent peoples, who identify with a national minority, or who preferred not to answer, was similarly small: 7.3%. These groups are neither distinctively religious nor distinctively a-religious.

My sense of my national belonging is important to me (in %):



A poll which undercuts common assumptions about popular opinion can help to change public understanding quickly. This survey builds on wide public consultation and feedback following the team's first survey. Questions have been formulated and reformulated to address different interpretations of public attitudes that arose in consultation exercises. A new phase of public interpretative discussion across the country will begin with the publication of the next, fuller report on the results of this survey, due to be released in December 2013.

This early release of first results is a striking reminder of two problems:

- public discussion too easily sidelines the strength of public resistance to divisive politics, which was clearly detected in our study
- in that discussion, it is easy to see reflected claims about the fears of parties representing or contesting the interests of the constituent peoples, and far harder to see represented the large public support for deliberate national efforts to build understanding, to address the past and to create a wide public basis for trust and conversation across the country's diverse population.

This is a second study done jointly by University of Edinburgh and CEIR on the attitudes towards reconciliation in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The results of the first study can be found here: <http://relwar.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/edinburg-engweb2.pdf>

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