



(Post)Secular Turn: Religious, Moral and Socio-Political Values of the Student Population in Serbia

Centre for Religious Studies of the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, Belgrade

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INTRODUCTION

The goal of the research was to examine religious, moral and socio-political values of the student population in Serbia. Young intellectuals are the cornerstone of every kind of political, economic and social development of a country, and that is why it is of extreme importance to understand the problems they are facing, as well as their system of general values. The problem of the youth and youth studies in general have been somehow overlooked in Serbian social theory for the last decades.

To begin with, this research has shown the kind of impact religiousness has on the common value system in Serbia. The research team came to a general conclusion that we are witnessing a sort of religious renaissance among Serbian youth, namely, the process of desecularization. Bearing in mind that science is becoming more interested in the processes of desecularization and retraditionalization in post-socialist societies of South-Eastern Europe, the aim of this research was to consider the role of religion and religious values in the development and dissemination of democratic attitudes and values among university students. This study is supposed to provide an interpretation of empirical results and thus provides a better insight into the processes of (de)secularization, modernization and democratization in Serbia. The research itself was conducted in three phases.

Phase 1: Determining the Methodology

Considering our goal to examine values of as large portion of the Serbian student population as possible, we opted for a questionnaire-based approach, and for a survey that was quite long and exhaustive. Research into religious, moral and socio-political values of the student population in Serbia was conducted on a proportional quota sample of 1056 third-year students. The sample included third-year students from Serbia.



The questionnaire was designed to encompass widest possible set of values expressed by the students. Our goal was to check the results of previous research of both general population and students/young people in general. The questionnaire was mainly based on revised questions from the European Values Study (EVS). The questionnaire comprised 68 questions divided into different areas. The first set of questions covered general socio-demographic data (e.g. gender, age,

faculty/college, place of residence/abode, ethnic affiliation). The second set involved personal aims/values, such as leisure time or things important in respondents' lives. The third set was to examine the level of general social security the respondent felt (confidence in institutions, confidence in other people, control over one's life in the respondent's opinion etc.). The next set of questions involved general values of society, and the fifth set examined moral values and/or opinions about important issues (euthanasia, abortion, genetic engineering). One part of the questionnaire examined religious values (faith in God, going to church and the like), and was followed by questions which examined students' attitudes toward the relationship of religion and society, or religion and politics. The aim of the last set was to examine political values, attitudes toward democracy and some liberal values, as well as attitudes toward the process of the EU integration.

Phase 2: Data Analysis

Data was processed using SPSS software. The database contains 394 variables, 170 nominal measurement scale. At this point, we gathered a team of 11 researchers, who worked on analyzing the data. The final outcome of this cooperation between experts in the fields of anthropology, sociology, philosophy and theory of culture, was a total of 10 scientific articles.

Phase 3: Disseminating Project Results

It should also be noted that the Programme Director, Mirko Blagojević, wrote an article for the daily newspaper "Politika", entitled *Students, from atheists to believers*, while Tijana Bajović, the Project Manager, wrote an article named *Students without national distance*. The goal of the articles was to present the results of the research to the wider public.



On December 11, 2013, a conference was organized, entitled *(Post)Secular Turn: Religious, Moral and Socio-Political Values of the Student Population in Serbia*. The conference consisted of two sessions. The first session, titled *Serbian students' religious and moral values*, with Mrs. Jelena Jablanov Maksimović MA as a chair, included two key lectures from the researchers: one from the Programme Director, Mr. Mirko Blagojević and the other one from Mrs. Dragana

Radisavljević-Ćiparizović from the University of Belgrade.

Mirko Blagojević in his lecture *Contemporary Religiousness of University Students and Desecularization of Serbian Society* dealt with religious values of university students and the possible desecularization of Serbian society. He posed important questions, such as whether we are indeed witnessing a sort of religious revival in Serbia. The data he analyzed showed that students do hold high religious values even though there are considerably more formal, nominal believers, than religious practitioners.

Dragana Radisavljević Ćiparizović, in her lecture titled *Religiousness of Students in Serbia and their Attitude Toward the EU*, discussed about the relation of the students' religiousness and their attitude toward the EU and the European integration process.

The discussion that followed included Prof. Zorica Kuburić from the University of Novi Sad, the official reviewer of the publication and Dragan Todorović PhD, from the University of Niš.

The second session was entitled *Students' Socio-Political Values* (Chair: Professor Aleksandar Prnjat, The Alfa University, Belgrade). The first lecturer, Jerina Vasić, a PhD candidate from the Department of Sociology at the University of Belgrade spoke about *Religious and National Identity of Young Intellectuals in Serbia*.



Tijana Bajović, a PhD candidate in Theory of Culture at the Faculty of Political Sciences from Belgrade, presented a lecture on political culture and socio-political values of the student population in Serbia (*Post-Conflict Democracy: Political Culture of Students in Serbia*). A lively discussion ensued, with the leading word from Prof. Jovo Bakić, from the University of Belgrade.



One of the most important parts of the research was publishing a book consisting of ten research reports from our researchers. The proceedings consist of three thematic wholes. The first one concerns contemporary religiousness among university students and the process of (de)secularization of Serbian society. The second one deals with the relationship between religious values, on the one hand, and financial status, national identity and socio-political values on the other. Finally, the third part comprises papers focused on socio-political values, attitudes toward democracy and capitalism, nationalism and ethnocentrism of young Serbian intellectuals.

RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

The Programme Director, Mirko Blagojević, representing the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, started official cooperation with the State University of Belgorod, Russia. A research based on our methodology and questionnaire will be conducted among students in Russia, and in the near future, results will be compared between the two countries. Mrs. Marie Hamoneau, a graduate student from Paris, France is writing a MA thesis on the view on the wars in the Balkans among the youth population in the countries once involved in the conflict. Mrs. Hamoneau will be using our research result in her thesis.



The results of this research should open discussions and encourage future research into whether the trends of desecularization and alleged retraditionalization in Serbia can be viewed in terms of *post-secularity*. Specifically, increased religiousness does not necessarily hinder the processes of modernization and democratization. As Jürgen Habermas noted, we are now witnessing the development of post-secular societies, societies in which the importance of religion is growing, and it

happens in an environment which is, paradoxically, becoming increasingly secularized. In his theory, Habermas envisages the possibility for bridging the gap between religious values and the processes of modernization and democratization. Religious values and attitudes do not necessarily imply the retraditionalization of political and social institutions and organizations. There is a question which is still open for discussion: *Is Serbian society one of those in which religion serves/can serve as a kind of moral compass, which does not conservatize or hinder, but rather encourages democratization?*