

Democracy and Democratic Values in Bulgaria: The Outlook of the Students of Economics

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Summary

The present article there analyzes the results of an opinion poll, conducted among students of economics from UNWE, Sofia and the Economic University in Varna, concerning the attitude, dispositions and perceptions of democracy as a type of political system and fundamental democratic values. The authors seek to test two main hypotheses: (1) support for democracy as a type of political system and the democratic values among students, irrespective of gender and the university they study at; (2) a high degree of students' awareness of the content of the fundamental democratic values, particularly of those, connected with economics.

The results, connected with the evaluation of the democracy in Bulgaria, its efficiency, its main characteristics, the role of the civil society, the interaction between state and civil society, understanding of equality etc., are subject to interpretation.

The authors offer evaluations and conclusions, connected with the attitudes of

the students of economics, as well as opinions of the need for additional research.

Keywords: democracy, democratic values, student orientations

JEL: A13, D72, J17, Z13

Introduction

The orientations of the social awareness of democracy and democratic values reflect the nature of the democratic practices, while at the same time being prerequisites for support for/or rejection of the democratic political system. In this sense their study and examination at the level of perceptions, attitudes and evaluations is a very important theoretical and practical problem.

In the recent decades a number of representational international surveys of the attitude of Bulgarians to democracy and its values have been conducted, such as the four waves of the European study of values (European Values Study) – 1990, 1999, 2008 and 2017, which include Bulgaria and the World Value Survey – 1997/98 and 2006. National representational surveys have also been conducted, the latest of which is the research of *Social Attitudes to Democracy*

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To the best of our knowledge, up to now in Bulgaria no studies of the attitudes and evaluations of the students of economics have been conducted.

The article which we present is an attempt to analyze the above-stated problem.

Relevance of the problem subject to research

The problem of the need for creating a more sophisticated social structure and the enhancement of the economic welfare is directly connected with the problems of values and their change. Concerning the latter, Georgi Fotev points out: "However much information we may have, however advanced and progressive knowledge is, however well the interest may have been identified and calculated, man and society are lost without tested values and reliable value fundamentals in their life" (Fotev 2009:9). The establishment of strategies of social development requires answers and a solution to the problem the nature of change, and this means clarity concerning the reconsideration of objectives. Beyond each sum total of objectives there always are definite values which are an inseparable part of the transformation processes in society. The systematic study of the processes of transformation in European societies is based on the idea of the defining function of values in relation to the other factors, setting the parameters of the conditions for cohabitation of people.

Particularly important, in the various studies of values during the last decades of the 20th century are the ideas of Ronald Inglehart – founder of the World Value Study (WVS) and long standing president of the World Value Study Association (WVSA). The theory of the change in political values in the developed industrial countries was initially presented in

his book *The Quiet Revolution* (1977) and was further developed in numerous articles and his next study *Cultural Changes in Developed Industrial Countries* (1990). He studies the interdependence between the changes in the value orientations and the socio-political changes in the modern world. He reconsiders the modernization theory and identifies the most essential factors, stimulating change in values and the degree of their impact on the new forms of political and civil participation. According to Inglehart, the changes in the political orientations and conduct are indicators of deeper changes, occurring at the level of the value priorities of society with the main condition for the establishment of the effective democracy being the increasing desire of wide social strata of the population for active participation in the political life.

At the basis of the concept of the existence of two main types of values – materialistic and post-materialistic – lies a definite anthropological model. Inglehart initially offers a scale of four indicators for determining the dominant topical dispositions of the respondents. The materialistic indicators are the preservation of order in the state and struggle against the price rise, while the post-materialistic indicators are the extension of people's ability to influence the important governmental decisions and the defense of the freedom of speech. The first study along this scheme took place in six west European countries (1970) and resulted in identifying interesting objective relations, among which can be distinguished the reorientation of younger generation towards the post-materialistic values. A significant drawback is the limited number of indicators stimulating excessive sensitivity to the momentous vacillations of the social and economic conditions of life

in the various countries. To overcome this problem and make the methodology more sustainable, Inglehart offers to include eight more indicators. What was added to the materialistic ones is: reaching a higher level of economic development; guaranteeing a reliable defense ability, stable economy; combating crime. The post-materialistic indicators also include: establishment of conditions enhancing the ability of people to independently make decisions (in the professional sphere, according to place of residence etc.); caring for the beauty and planning of towns and cities; surmounting the social alienation and a desire to create a more humane society; change in the mindset and enhancing the significance of ideas at the expense of finances. This far more sustainable 12-indicator set of criteria was initially implemented in 1973 in nine European countries and the USA, and was subsequently used in the studies of Eurobarometer.

Ronald Inglehart substantiated his theory of radical change in the values of modern society, in other words, substituting the materialistic values for post-materialistic ones, by formulating two hypotheses, provisionally called *hypothesis for inadequacy* and *hypothesis for socialization*. According to the hypothesis for inadequacy, it can be expected that the continual periods of economic growth and enhancing people's welfare will provoke a prevalence of the post-materialistic interests, whereas the periods of economic decline will bring about a diminishment of their significance. This hypothesis stems from the assumption that the values of the individual reflect the social and economic environment. The socialization hypothesis focuses on the fact that the interaction between the social and economic factors and the individual value priorities of each person are not the result

of immediate regulation and adjustment. According to this hypothesis, the basic values of the individual (social and political) are a product of the early socialization. The empirical studies stemming from Inglehart's methodology up to the end of the 80's of the 20th century indicate that there occurs a fundamental reorientation from materialistic to post-materialistic values (Inglehart 1990:98) as a result of the considerable enhancement of welfare and the stable economic growth. In the simultaneous study of the different generations a differentiation between generations and a considerable value reorientation to the post-materialistic values in younger generations is observed, which serves to confirm the hypothesis for inadequacy. However, in the study of one and the same generation during the time of its aging a materialistic reorientation is not observed, which confirms the hypothesis for socialization (Inglehart 1990:93) concerning the dependence of the axiological orientations of the individual on the dominating conditions in the period of its formation.

Inglehart's ideas are subject to a succession of critical remarks and accusations of *ethnocentrism*, ignoring the value systems of the underdeveloped societies, overexposing of group values at the expense of those valid for all people. Part of the critics think that it is not a matter of replacement of the materialistic values with post-materialistic ones, but rather of a replacement of one type of materialism with orientation towards labour and profession with another one – the so called consumerism which is becoming a behavioral model for a large part of younger generations in the highly developed societies. Generalizations are made, connected with the development of the modernity crisis and the increasingly problematic nature of the

thesis of reorientation to the post-materialistic values. Doubts are expressed as to whether Inglehart's approach leads to the creation of an exhaustive model of the national political culture and could serve to describe the state of the political system, or whether it is a sociological measuring instrument for analysis of the general cultural attitudes in society (Tanev 2012: 200). However, there is no denial of the significance of Inglehart's concept as a basis for the formation of a dynamic idea of the specific nature and the trend of development of cultural interests. The analysis of the data of the *five waves* of the European Value Study serves to definitely prove the applicability and efficiency of Inglehart's methodology.

All of the stated above serves to motivate our research interest in identification and analysis of the attitude of the students of economics towards democracy and rather its values. The choice of students' participation is by far not accidental, but is moreover connected with two main reasons: the first one being that it is a challenge to analyze the attitudes and orientations of would-be economists concerning formally political problems, because their evaluations, orientations and their degree of being informed will not be theoretically distorted but would rather be marked by the professional orientation and interests of respondents; the second reason is connected with the long standing professional teaching experience of the authors of the study in the two biggest economic universities in Bulgaria – UNWE – Sofia and the Economic University in Varna.

Exposition

Description of the study

This empirical study was conducted in the period from October to December 2021 with the participation of students from the two

Bulgarian economic universities – UNWE – Sofia and the University of Economy in Varna. The questionnaire method was applied for collecting empirical information. The questionnaire card consists of two question groups: sociodemographic (sociographic) and questions designed to identify the attitude (perceptions, dispositions and evaluations) towards the democratic processes in Bulgaria.

The sociological sample consists of an aggregate of 342 students, distributed in two target groups – 186 students from UNWE and 156 from the EU – Varna. The respondents from UNWE are from three professional streams and their corresponding subjects - Economics (specialty of International Economic Relations and Economic Sociology and Psychology), Political Sciences (specialties of International Relations, European Politics and Economics, and Political Sciences), Sociology, and Anthropology, and Culture Sciences (specialty of Sociology) and Social Communications and Information Sciences (specialty of Media and Economics and Media and Journalism) of the University of National and World Economy, Sofia and the students from the Faculty of Management (specialties of Management, Public Administration, International Economic Relations, Marketing, Digital Media and PR, Tourism), Economic Faculty (specialties of Economics and Trade, Industrial Business and Entrepreneurship, faculty of Finance and Accounting (specialty of Finance, Accounting and Auditing, Accounting and Finances) of the Economic University in Varna.

This is a non-representational sample, formed on the *those who volunteered to participate* and *the accessibility to units* principles, which determines the non-representational character of the empirical study as well. Despite this, the data analysis allows for the main objective of the study to be reached and for relevant conclusions and

recommendations to be drawn and made, relating both to the number of students participating in the study and the time period in which the latter took place.

The aim of this empirical study is to identify and determine the attitude (perceptions, dispositions and evaluations) of the students towards the problems of democracy and the demographic values (political, social and economic) in the modern Bulgarian society.

Two research hypotheses were checked out for the achievement of this aim:

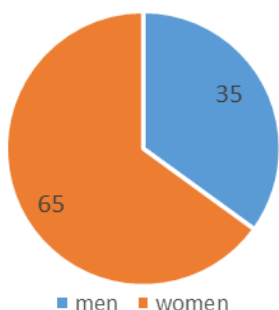
Hypothesis 1. Support for democracy as a type of political system and the democratic values, established in Bulgaria, on the part of the students regardless of their gender and university in which they study.

Hypothesis 2. A high degree of awareness on the part of the students of the character of the main democratic values, particularly those related to the economy.

Student profile

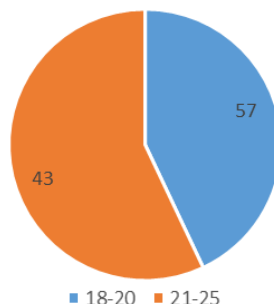
The profile of the students was made according to the following sociodemographic characteristics: gender, age, the territorial principle, secondary education completed.

The data in pie chart 1 indicate that the gender structure of the number of respondent students consists of 35% men and 65% women. The proportion according to gender is uneven with a prevalence of women by 30%.



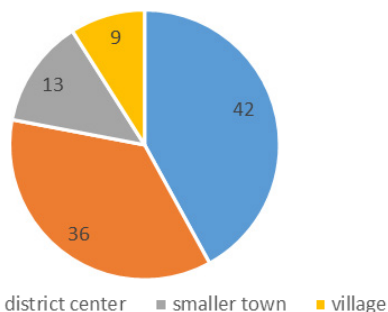
Pie chart 1. Proportion of respondents according to gender

Pie chart 2 shows the proportion of students according to age. The data analysis indicates that 57% of all respondent students are in the age bracket between 18 and 20 – mainly in their first and second year of university education, whereas 43 % are in the age bracket between 21 and 25 in their third and fourth year of university education.



Pie chart 2. Proportion of respondents according to age

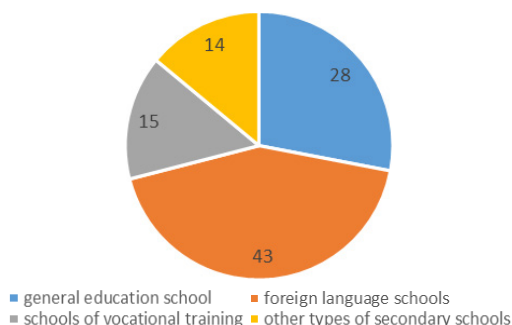
The proportion of students according to the territorial principle is shown in pie chart 3. It illustrates that 42% of the respondent students who come to study in both universities are from Sofia, 36 % are from regional centers, 13 % are from a smaller town and 9% are from a village.



Pie chart 3. Proportion of respondents according to the territorial criterion

It becomes clear from the data in Pie chart 4 that, based on the type of the completed secondary education, the respondent students are distributed as follows: 28% have graduated from a general secondary education school,

43 % - a language school, 15 % - vocational training secondary school and 14 % - another type of secondary school in Bulgaria.



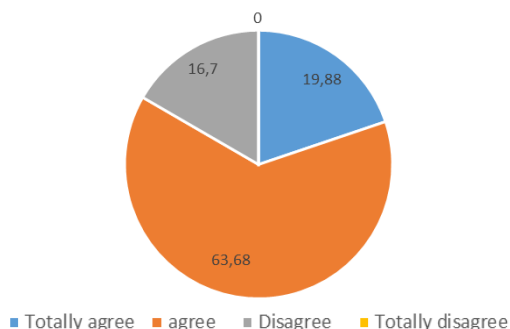
Pie chart 4. Proportion of respondents according to the type of completed secondary education

Attitude of the students to democracy and democratic values

In order to identify the attitude of the respondent students from UNWE and EU – Varna towards democracy as a type of political system and form of government, the following three questions have been included in the questionnaire.

To the first question *To what extent do you agree with the statement that democracy can have its shortcomings, but is better than any other form of government?* the biggest is the share of respondents who answer that they agree with this statement (64%). Every fifth one of them has answered that they *totally agree*, and in both gender groups the agreement gravitates with a small difference of 3% in favour of female respondents. Those who expressed disagreement are nearly 17% and are by 3% less than those who *totally agree* with the statement about democracy being the better form of government compared to any other one. See Pie chart 5.

The results of the present survey confirm the conclusion, made by Alpha Research in their survey of the democratic processes, cited above, that traditionally, the percentage of those who have a positive attitude towards democracy is higher, including young people (in the 18-38 age bracket) and those with higher education.¹



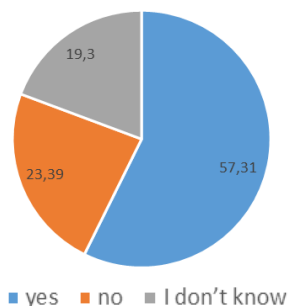
Pie chart 5. Proportions of positions concerning the question: How much do you agree with the statement that democracy may have its disadvantages, but it is better than every other form of government?

Of even greater interest are the answers to the second question *Do you agree with the statement that Democracy is the best form of government?* (See Pie chart 6) A little more than half of the respondents express their total support of democracy (57.3%), which shows that they have good knowledge of the mechanisms of the democratic government and the specific character of the non-democratic forms of government. In this respect the positive attitude of male respondents exceeds the one, expressed by the female respondents, by 10 % (64% and 54% respectively). The possible explanation could boil down to the bigger interest of young men in politics and the problems of government, as well as to the more categorically stated idea of their own role in the political process, most

¹ Social attitudes towards democracy in 2021. <https://osis.bg/?p=3968&fbclid=IwAR0lqei3toLk2FyCn4Rd3MCuTOb8T4bPfQcVh1G2m4gge6ef0ZkTNcdULoQ> [18.12.2021]

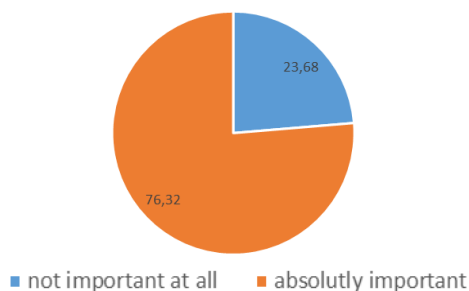
probably a result of the *macho* view of the gender representation in politics.

It is noteworthy, however, that nearly one fourth (23.4%) of the respondents do not agree with the statement about democracy as the best form of government, without any difference in the opinion of both genders. Along with this expressed disagreement it must be noted that nearly one fifth (19.3%) have answered with *I don't know*, which means that they are unable to define their own attitude towards democracy and the democratic processes in Bulgaria. The indicated percentage of answers, based on *lack of knowledge* does not differ much from the analogous ones in other such polls, but this undoubtedly raises concerns in as much as the democratic process in any country is impossible without the citizens forming and expressing categorical positions on important issues concerning their cohabitation. The considerably lower percentage of male respondents who answered in this way (14%) compared to the one of female respondents (22%) is noteworthy, which provides additional argumentation in support of the assumption of representatives of men being more categorical and definite in their own position concerning significant political issues. **See Pie chart 6**



Pie chart 6. Proportions of the opinions in regard of the question: Do you agree with the statement that *Democracy is the best form of government?*

The data, shown in pie chart 7, presents the proportion of the answers to the third question, concerning democracy: *How important is it for you to live in a democratic country?* More than three thirds are the respondents who answered that it is *absolutely important* for them to live in a democratic country. It is noteworthy, however, that for nearly one fourth of the respondent students it is not important at all to live in a democratic country – 27% of men and 22% of women. The reason for such an answer is connected with the fact that young people do not have their own experience of living in a non-democratic country (most probably their position is based on the interpretations of other people's experience whose significance is not particularly important for a large part of young people). Moreover there is no doubt that the expectations of Bulgarian citizens concerning *the ideal democracy* also depend on the context, as in more backward democracies, such as the Bulgarian one, the exactingness of people is higher due to the fact that they are more strongly aware of the consequences of the *non-working* democracy. The opinions about the real functioning of democracy in most countries are usually low in so much as democracy cannot meet people's expectations of what its specifics must really be. By all means, we cannot ignore one of the main problems of Bulgarian society – the inadequately developed democratic (civil) culture (Blagoeva–Taneva 2002:139-140). The value criteria are extremely important to understand the specifics of democracy, but they must become more concrete and form sensible and realistic expectations in citizens concerning the capacities of the democratic institutions.



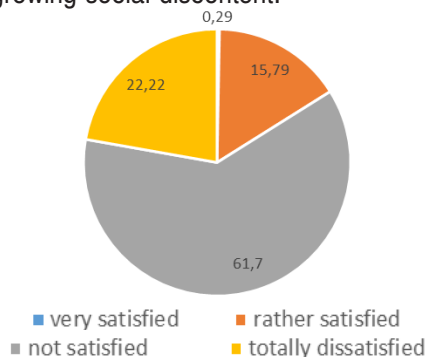
Pie chart 7. Proportions of the positions concerning the question of *How important is it for you to live in a democratic country?*

For the purpose of analyzing the expectations and assessments of the respondent students concerning how democracy practically functions in Bulgaria, the following questions have been included.

To the question *Are you satisfied with the way in which democracy is developing in Bulgaria?* a mere 15.8% of the respondents have answered with *rather satisfied*, whereas *very satisfied* has been given by only one female respondent. As a whole, the degree of satisfaction is considerably higher with female respondents – every fifth one of them has given a positive answer, whereas in the case of male respondents – nearly every tenth one of them. At the other end are those who are dissatisfied with the development of democracy in Bulgaria, who, according to the data analysis in the survey, constitute 83.9% of the respondents, of which 22.2% are totally dissatisfied and 61.7% are not very satisfied. This is expressed by both genders, with male respondents having a prevalence over female ones by nearly 25%. This considerable difference serves to point out the higher degree of criticism in men concerning the efficiency and effectiveness of democracy in our country. (See Pie chart 8)

The reasons for the negative assessment of the quality of democracy could be due to

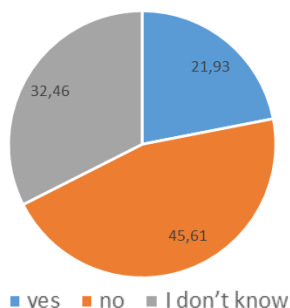
the critical economic processes in Bulgaria on the one hand, the inconsistent economic and social policies for overcoming the consequences of the world financial and economic crisis of 2008 and the Covid 19 pandemic of 2020, as well as for regulating the social inequalities, growing at a fast rate. On the other hand, this is due to the loss of legitimacy of the political institutions and subjects, which has become a permanent trend during the last several decades, causing a growing social discontent.



Pie chart 8. Proportions of positions concerning the question: *Are you satisfied with the way in which democracy is developing in Bulgaria?*

The statement that *Democracy is not good for a country like Bulgaria* received the approval of 21.93% of the respondents– see Pie chart 9. It is noteworthy that this percentage is by 6% more prevalent than the answer of the students who were *rather satisfied* with the way in which democracy is developing in Bulgaria. The possible explanation of this difference can again be connected with the higher degree of determination of the two alternatives in the answers to the question and the need for more knowledge of the specifics of democracy in order for such determination to be formed. An additional argumentation for proving such a hypothesis is the comparatively high percentage of the respondents who

chose the answer *I don't know* - about one third of the respondents, with female ones who opt for this answer are by 14% more than male ones. It is also noteworthy that nearly half of the respondents (45.6%) do not agree with the statement that democracy is not good for a country like Bulgaria. Conversely, in their opinion democracy is good for a country like Bulgaria.



Pie chart 9. Proportion of the positions concerning the question: *Do you agree with the statement that Democracy is not good for a country like Bulgaria?*

The results, obtained by the group of questions, serve to generalize that the larger part of the students of economics like democracy, but it is still not a rationalized value. Regardless of its fundamental importance in the modern world, traditionally no differentiation is made between the effective democracy and the so-called *electoral* (formal) democracy. The effective democracy is more difficult to create and establish. The efficient functioning of democracy suggests not only the presence of economic stability and welfare, which unfortunately have not yet been attained in our country, but also the creation and establishment of habits of active political participation and personal independence. In order for young people not to feel unjustified disappointment, they must know what is sensible to expect from the institutions of the democratic society, so as to

gain a higher degree of awareness concerning the specific value parameters of democracy and to form a critical attitude towards those who are responsible for the normal and efficient functioning of these institutions.

The question of the characteristic features which young people ascribe to democracy particularly important is the research into the expectations and opinions of it. – See Table 1.

Table 1. Proportions of the answers to the question: Which of the indicated items characterizes democracy?

(Answers on a scale of 1 *not essential at all* to 10 *very essential*)

Ascribed characteristics	1 (%)	from 2 to 5 (%)	from 6 to 9 (%)	10 (%)
The government takes from the rich to help the poor	29.24	37.13	23.68	9.94
Free elections	0.88	7.89	30.13	61.11
People receive support from the state	1.75	25.73	52.93	19.59
Civil rights	0.58	6.72	21.34	70.76
Flourishing economy	1.17	23.68	38.6	36.55
Referendums	2.05	14.62	27.47	54.97
Equal rights (by gender)	3.51	9.36	34.75	52.05

Source: Author's estimation

According to the students' opinion, the characteristics, estimated to be the most essential for democracy are civil rights, free elections, referendums and equal rights (by gender). From the viewpoint of young people, the protection of the fundamental civil rights continues to appear as the biggest achievement of the democratic transition period in Bulgaria. More than 70% of the respondents award civil rights the highest

grade of 10, which shows that they consider them to be a very fundamental characteristic of democracy as a type of political system and form of government. None of the respondent students award grade 1, that *it is not at all important*, whereas 6% position their choice within the range from 2 to 5.

Over 60% of the respondents award the same grade of 10 for the free elections as another fundamental characteristic of democracy. Approximately 9% are those who consider the elections as not so fundamental for democracy and award different grades within the range between 1 and 5.

The statement of free elections as one of the most essential characteristics of democracy is confirmed by the proportional distribution of the answers to the question: *Can there be democracy, if people do not want to vote?* Despite the fact that every fifth of the respondents answered with *undecided*, almost 70% are those who deny the possibility of the existence of democracy provided that people do not want to vote. This is the opinion of around 53% of the male respondents and 73% of the female ones.

The third characteristic of democracy, considered to be very important, are the referendums. Some 55% of the respondents rate it with the maximal grading, whereas the answers of more than 82% are positioned within the range between 6 and 10. Around 17% are those who hesitate and grade it from 1 to 5.

The fourth characteristic of democracy, rated as the most substantial, are the equal rights. More than a half (52%) award the maximal grade of 10, whereas around 13 % are those who do not consider the equal

rights (according to gender) to be such a substantial characteristic of democracy in our times. There are, of course, other ratings (6-9). The equal rights (by gender) were positively estimated with grades ranging between 6 and 10 by 84.80% of the respondents, whereas 52.05% chose the maximum grade of 10. Impressive is the relatively lower percentage (12.87%) of hesitation concerning how essential for democracy are the equal rights (by gender).

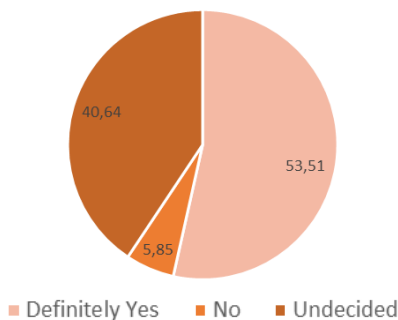
The assessment results of the respondents concerning the last two fundamental characteristics of democracy, illustrated in Table 1, are close - *the flourishing economy* and *people receive assistance from the state*. *The flourishing economy* is considered as substantial characteristic by three fourths (75.15%) of the respondents (ratings on a scale of 6 to 10). A little more than one third assess *the flourishing economy* as a very substantial characteristic of democracy today. It is important to emphasize, however, that one fourth of the respondent students do not associate democracy with *a flourishing economy*, which can be explained with an inadequate degree of receiving information, with a lack of theoretical and practical preparation and with a low interest in the understanding of purely economic concepts and their practical significance.

As far as the characteristic *people receive assistance from the state* is concerned, every fifth respondent grades it as a very substantial one. It is noteworthy that the prevailing part of the respondents, nearly three fourths of them, consider it to be a very important characteristic of democracy (on a scale of 2-9), whereas

it is not an important characteristic at all for only 2% of them.

The statement that *the government takes from the rich to gives to the poor* as a substantial characteristic of democracy is supported by one third (33.62%) of the respondents, which means that the redistributive functions of the state in a financial (material aspect) play and important role for the normal democratic process in Bulgaria. According to every tenth respondent (9.94%), this statement is *very substantial*, whereas for nearly 30% - *it is not substantial at all*. The answers within the range of 1 to 5, i.e. *it is rather an insubstantial* characteristic, are more than 66%.

The statement that *the government takes from the rich to gives to the poor*, analyzed above, is in correlation with the following questions, relating to the social state and its fundamental characteristics. To the question ***Must there be a social state in a democratic country?*** a little more than half of the respondent students are of the opinion that the state must be social in a democratic country. This opinion is supported to a greater degree by the female respondents (56%), whereas the support of male respondents is 48%. Approximately 6% of the respondents reject the statement of a relation between democracy and the social state. The result, according to which about 40% of the respondents is *undecided* is not to be overlooked. In all probability at the basis of this answer lies the lack of knowledge and the specific unawareness of the nature of the social state as a factor for regulating the social inequality and for guaranteeing sustainability of the democratic development as a whole. (See Pie chart 10)

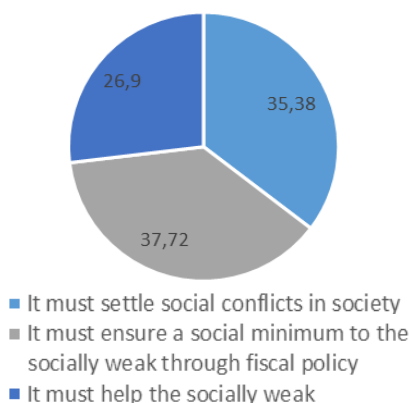


Pie chart 10. Proportions of the positions concerning the question: *Must there be a social state in democracy?*

To the question *In your opinion which is the main characteristics of the social state?* nearly 40% answer *to ensure a social minimum to the socially weak through fiscal policy*, around 30% are of the opinion that the social state must *assist the socially weak*, and for more than 35% it must *resolve the social conflicts in society*. There is not any substantial difference in the expressed opinion of male and female respondents on the above question. See Pie chart 11.

For 37.72% of the respondents the main characteristic of the social state is that *through fiscal policy it is to guarantee a social minimum for the socially weak people*. For 26.90% such a characteristic simply boils down to *helping the socially weak*. At first glance the two answers have considerable differences in the positions of the representatives of both genders. However, if we consider the two answers as an expression of different formulations (albeit they may not be fully realized and terminologically precise) of the idea of the social state as a mechanism of redistributing the social benefits in accordance with the principle of social justice and in the interest of all citizens to lead a decent life, we have found out that 64.01% of the respondents opted for

the two answers in question – 61.66% of them being male respondents and 67.27% - women, i.e. there is not such a big difference in the choice of the representatives of the two genders. For 35.38% of the respondents the main characteristic of the social state is *to settle the social conflicts in society*.



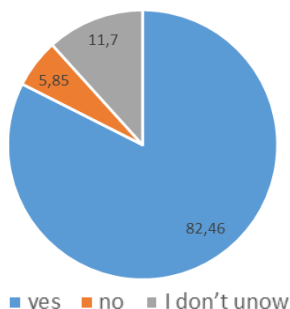
Pie chart 11. Proportion of the positions concerning the question: *In your opinion which is the main characteristic of the social state?*

In the Bulgarian society at the beginning of the transition period were established the expectations that democratization means above all prosperity and well-being (in the process of the transition period these expectations were naturally transformed into disappointment). The meaning of politics in the democratic is pluralistic societies is not directly associated with individual prosperity, yet the circumstance is taken into account that the prosperity in question turns out to be illusory outside the sphere of politics. The standpoints of a large part of the students, participating in the present research, are definitely oriented to the theory of the dependence of the quality of democracy on people's economic wellbeing and social justice in society. This brings their standpoint closer to the popular theory that the economic

development is beneficial for the development of democracy, since it provokes and stimulates considerable social and political changes. The economic development is by all means a favorable factor for the development of democracy in so much as it changes people's behavior (independent and critical thinking and new values) and stimulates the formation of an educated and active middle class. The good/effective democracy therefore means not only economic resources, but also the establishment of the habits to actively participate in politics and the development of the civil society.

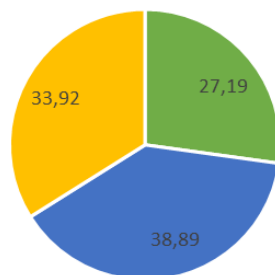
In the political theory of modern times the concept of *civil society* is inseparable from the theory of democracy. It is traditionally defined as an autonomous and self-regulating sphere, independent of the state. The civil society is usually considered to be a network of non-governmental organizations and institutions which are strong enough to counterweigh the state and prevent it from exercising unconditional domination over the citizens, without naturally preventing the state from being an arbiter of the common interests and a warrantor of peace and tranquility. The civil society encompasses the dynamic space outside the family, market and state, created by the voluntary individual and collective actions, organizations and institutions which publically protect common interests, goals and values. To the forefront comes the public nature of the actions of citizens, while their ability to influence the formation of policies is a reference point of the extent to which the civil society succeeds in becoming involved in the public priorities and upholds them. This serves to explain the very big support for the theory of the existence of an interrelation

between the quality of democracy and the active character of the civil society. To the question about their opinion of the statement ***Democracy cannot exist without an active civil society***, nearly 83% of the respondents give an affirmative answer, whereas those who disagree are a mere 6%, and every tenth respondent admits that they don't know and cannot answer the question. See Pie chart 12.



Pie chart 12. Proportions of the positions concerning the question: Do you agree with the statement that *Democracy cannot exist without an active civil society*?

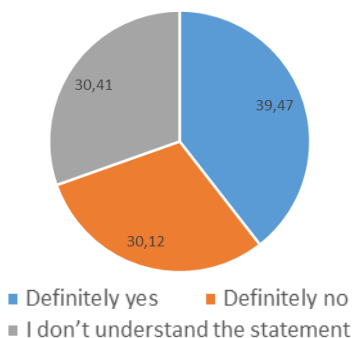
Concerning the question ***What, in your opinion, is the role of the civil society?***, the respondents associate the effective democracy not only with guarantees for equality before the law and holding free and honest elections, but also with incentives for active civil participation. Nearly 40% of the respondents are of the opinion that the civil society must be a *corrective of the state* (supported by half of the male respondents and one third of the female ones), according to one third of the respondents, its role is to protect the private interests of the citizens, and for more than one fourth its aim is to assist the state. See Pie chart 13.



■ Assist the state
■ To be a corrective of the state
■ To protect the private interests of citizens

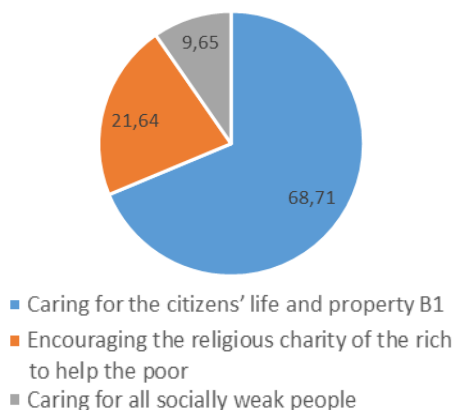
Pie chart 13. Proportion of the positions concerning the question: *What, in your opinion, is the role of the civil society?*

The definite and categorical association of democracy with the existence of an active civil society, according to a large part of the respondents, would lead to the formation of negative attitudes towards the unequal partnership between the citizens and the state, as well as to rejection of the policy of patronization on the part of the representatives of the government and the state. Concerning the question *Do you accept the idea of the paternalistic role of the state in the society?*, 40% of the respondents consider the idea as something quite normal, with the percentage of male respondents who opted for this answer being 47%, and the female ones – 35%. Less than one third of the respondents definitely do not accept such a statement, and just as many answer with *I do not understand the statement*. *I don't understand the statement* is the answer of 30.41%, but in this case this is the answer of 13.45% of men and a much higher percentage of women – 39.46% (probably this would account for the lower percentage of women who gave categorical answers to the question) - see Pie chart 14.



Pie chart 14. Proportion of the positions concerning the question: *Do you accept the idea of the paternalistic role of the state in society?*

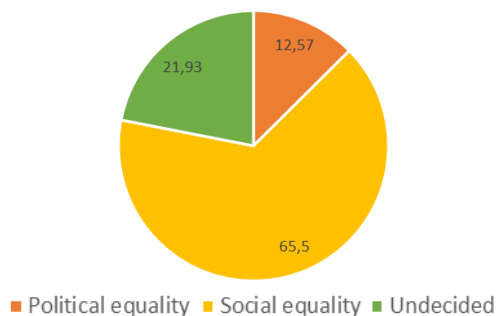
As for the way in which *the paternalism of the state* is understood, nearly 70% of the respondents are of the opinion that *this is caring for citizens' life and property*, whereas every fifth of the respondents understands it as *encouraging the religious charity of the rich to help the poor*, and for every tenth of the respondents this is *caring for all socially weak*. In the last two answers a difference of about 10% is observed between male and female respondents in favour of the female ones. See Pie chart 15.



Pie chart 15. Proportions of the positions concerning the question: *In your opinion paternalism must be understood as ...*

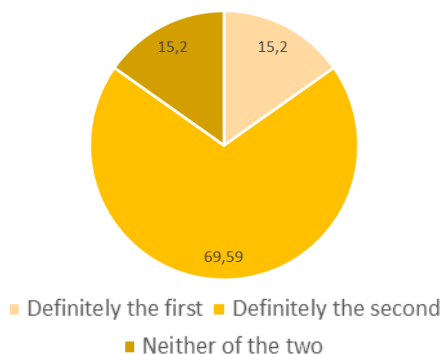
The positions of young people concerning the concept of paternalism and the paternalistic role of the state can be regarded as one of the symptoms of a *crisis* of the European values. It is known that as *a fruit of the Enlightenment*, Europe, in its deep nature, is an *anti-paternalistic project*, in so much as *people best know what makes them happy and their own decisions are the only way to happiness* (Smilov 2019:179). It is only natural that in this case it is not about rejecting the anti-paternalistic European values, but rather about inadequately estimating personal autonomy and independence as fundamental values of modern Europe. It is about allowing for a restriction of personal freedom with the aim of establishing a patronizing attitude on the part of the stronger. The acceptance of the paternalistic role of the state helps to establish unequal and unfair partnership and stimulates the advent and rise of populism, apathy in citizens and a deprecating attitude towards the efforts, which everyone must put in, in order to protect the values in which they believe.

In the context of the above-said, we should not be surprised by the answers to the question: ***Which equality is better – the social or the political?*** For 65.50% (59.66% of the male respondents and 68.61% of the female respondents) social equality is more just and fair. Only 12.57% of the respondents estimate political equality as more just and fair. More than one fifth of them (21.93%) are undecided – 15.97% of the male respondents and 25.11% of the female respondents. See Pie chart 16.



Pie chart 16. Proportions of the positions concerning the question: *Which equality is more just in your opinion – social equality or political equality?*

The categorical preference of the students for the social equality is also reaffirmed by their choice from two statements which are traditionally considered to be polarized in the conservatism-liberalism dichotomy. The first one *God has created people unequal, different, and no one has the right to try to make them equal* (conservatism) is supported by 15% of the respondents, and just as many cannot make a categorical choice. The second statement *God has created people equal, endowing them with reason and we should treat them as reasonable beings* (liberalism) is the categorical preference of 70% of the respondents. See Pie chart 17.



Pie chart 17. Proportions of the positions concerning the question: *Which of the two statements do you accept: 1. God created people unequal and so no one has the right to*

make them equal; 2) God created people equal, endowing them with reason and so we must treat them as rational beings?

The obtained results of the understanding of equality among the students are not surprising because of two facts at least: on the one hand, the modern and latest political history of Bulgaria demonstrates support of liberal ideas as a whole, and the attitudes of young people are a product of a continual socialization in which family and traditions play a role; on the other hand, young people are more inclined to support liberal ideas and practices.

Conclusion

The analysis of the results of the authors' empirical study for examining of the attitudes, dispositions and estimations of the students of economics from the two biggest economic universities in Bulgaria have given grounds to formulate the following inferences:

First. The students demonstrate definite support of democracy as a type of political system, as well as the fundamental democratic values. In this sense to a great extent Hypothesis 1, formulated by us, is confirmed. At the same time there is the clearly stated position of dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy in Bulgaria, which is an optimistic element in the understanding of young people as a critical corrective of the government. A positive result of the research is that the students associate democracy not only with procedural characteristics (elections, equality before the law), but also with civil participation and involvement.

Second. The results of the opinion poll indicate that among the students, democracy is not a sufficiently realized value, because they do not discriminate between effective democracy and formal democracy and this

serves to explain some contradictions in the understanding and assessment of the respondents concerning fundamental values and characteristics of democracy. For instance, the contradiction between the high percentage (83%) of those who positively assess the role of the civil society and the comparatively high percentage (40%) of those who openly state that they totally accept the idea of the paternalistic role of the state. Surprising is the high percentage of students (30.41%) who do not understand the meaning of the concept of paternalism.

Third. There is a prevalence of the materialistic values (according to Inglehart's terminology) such as economic prosperity, material security and prior importance is attributed as a whole to the economic aspects when characterizing democracy and democratic values. Here the explanation can be sought in two directions. On the one hand, it is natural (as Inglehart points out) to observe a growth of materialistic values in times of crisis, since people are inclined to attribute greater subjective importance to the needs which they find difficult to satisfy. On the other hand, the basic values are the result of the conditions of socialization of the people, with the family having a leading role. Values are *learned* in the family and the ones learned in the primary socialization are leading regardless of the man's current economic status. The respondents are a product of a realized primary socialization in a critical period of the social and economic development of Bulgaria and it is only natural that they should prefer the materialistic values. Another possible explanation is connected with the students' profile and their choice of a university. Our respondents are taught in economic universities and receive primarily economic knowledge. This inevitably

defines (in the sense of economize) their understanding of the political.

Fourth. The last two inferences confirm the formulated Hypothesis 2 about the degree of the students being informed with regard to the instructive characteristics of democracy with an emphasis on economic knowledge. The majority of the respondents share the theory of the dependence of democracy on economic prosperity and social justice.

Fifth. What we did not expect and were surprised about as a result of the opinion poll are the considerable differences in the answers of male and female respondents concerning some of the questions asked: in the understanding of paternalism, the role of the social state, in the preferences for equality (political, social), as well as in the more categorically stated answers of male respondents. In each of the identified differences we have suggested possible interpretations and explanations. This problem, however, is very interesting and needs to be examined further.

The analyzed results of the authors' empirical study and the conclusions made therein are valid only for the group of respondent students from UNWE and EU-Varna. These conclusions cannot be generalized for all students from the respective universities, even less so concerning the Bulgarian student community as a whole. Despite its non-representational character, the survey, on the one hand, allowed for the identification of the attitude – dispositions, opinions and assessments of students from the two leading economic universities in Bulgaria, concerning democracy and the ongoing democratic processes in Bulgaria during the period of the survey (October-November 2021). On the other hand, on the basis of social empirical data, specific conclusions have

been made. Moreover, some of the obtained results have to be compared to those of the representational survey of democracy, done in 2021 by Alpha Research and quoted in the article. The developed authors' methodology allows it to be used for conducting other such surveys, dedicated to democracy in Bulgaria, its development and sustainability in time.

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