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School Democracy in the Kumanovo – Gjilan/Gnjilane – Preshevo - Trgovishte micro region

I. Towards the “School Democracy Research” project

According to Norberto Bobbio’s concept, democracy represents a “form of government characterized by a set of (primary and secondary) rules that establish *who* is authorized to adopt collective decisions and *with* which procedures”¹. Following this notion, one can conclude that the core of modern democracy lies within its procedural character and its transparency. In order to label a society as a democracy in its true sense, one has to delve beyond defining a particular political regime. Democracy encapsulates a widely accepted value system between all factors and active citizens of a particular society. Furthermore, these factors and citizens are aware of their rights and duties. In accordance to the aforementioned procedural mechanism, residents are also prepared to actively participate in decision making.

Most the Balkan countries experienced a rapid and sudden political regime transformation. The educational institutions were caught off guard, and under inertia continued with their previous modus operandi. They were left to adjust to the new value system by themselves. The educational democratic values, however, are not solely based on theoretical concepts, but on experience as well. This practice is brought about through the teachers’ and administrations’ conduct towards the students themselves, assigning their position in decision making of their concern. Studying and practicing democracy begins at an early age.

This is the product of “*The Research of the Degree of School Democracy*” project. The goal of the project was to determine the democratic involvement of the schools i.e. their manner of promoting democratic values and principles. The questionnaire was carefully designed with questions separated into several aspects. These aspects focus on: the mode students are organized into school bodies; students’ participation in class and school program organization; relations between students and school administration; presence of regional/national youth organizations in the schools; relations between the students themselves (essentially, the presence of discrimination); decision making process in the schools and finally, political influences in the schools. This project was carried out in the Kumanovo – Gjilan/Gnjilane – Preshevo – Trgovishte micro region and implemented by **The Center for Intercultural Dialogue** NGO from Kumanovo. Financially, it was funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) as part of the East -West Institute’s Regional and Trans-frontier Cooperation Programme

It is our sincere hope that the schools and Ministry of Education districts will not perceive this publication as a direct critique. This is not the goal we wish to achieve. On the contrary, the publication should serve as a critical analysis of issues that are not as visible during the process of assembling and conducting school plans and programs. These issues, however, continue to be paramount to the educational process in general. In addition, this brochure offers a comparative analysis of challenges that the cities in the micro region face. As such, it can be used as a guide

¹ Bobbio, Norberto, Il Futuro della Democrazia, Turin, Einaudi, 1984

for government organizations or NGOs during broader initiatives transcending national borders. Finally, we hope that the brochure will raise youth awareness about the importance of stating one's opinion, and the need to actively participate in the decision making process (of their concern), not primarily in the school system, but in society as well.

II. Methodological approach of the research

This research takes the pupil as the essential subject. With several socio-demographic characteristics added, this subject is used as a criterion compared to several relations, processes and conditions in the educational system. An obvious fact, re-confirmed by our research is that behind the notion of a pupil - the basic research unit is a complete image of the person as a whole, one who belongs to different social, ethnic and demographic groups. All of these factors determine the subject's perception about the function of school democracy and especially the subject's place in this system as an essential link for its function. The research encompasses the students' individual viewpoints. It confirms the fact that a complete identification of the individual's opinion with that of the group is impossible. This is the reason why there were certain diversions from the general responses, depending on students' socio-demographical characteristics.

The frame of the research enclosed high schools from the Kumanovo – Gjilan/Gnjilane – Preshevo – Trgovishte region. Freshman and junior years were chosen as deliberate samples as representatives of the education process overall. General high schools and well as technical high schools were chosen on purpose, as a sample providing diverse aspects and conditions present in all of the cities that the research considered.

The research took into account several aspects in accordance to the sub-heading of the questionnaire. Namely:

- Participation in representative bodies;
- Professors accountability;
- Communication;
- Regional and national school organizations;
- Students' influence;
- Decision making, and
- School lobbying.

The questionnaire's 29 questions were answered by 500 students on their own accord, with one answer, an exception being questions requiring multiple responses. The questionnaire's appendix contained 10 additional questions, representing independent variables. We used these variables in data analysis, unearthing the many layers of the message contained in the responses' general distribution. Considering the fact that the research encountered qualitative traits in student viewpoints, many of their aspects deviate significantly from the normal distributions. Of the deviations encountered during data analysis, data with contingency coefficients over 0.2 were deemed significant.

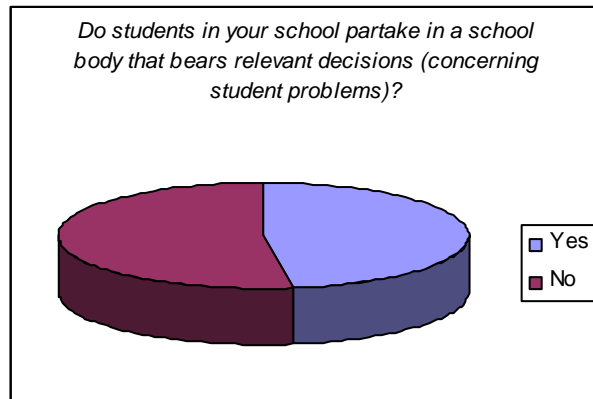
The need for a multifaceted elaboration of the problem stems from the fact that data gathered by the research is not just a collection of coded answers

transformed into numbers or distributions. It is data's configuration that we need to process, in order to discover the meaning it contains, thus justifying this research.

III. Research Results

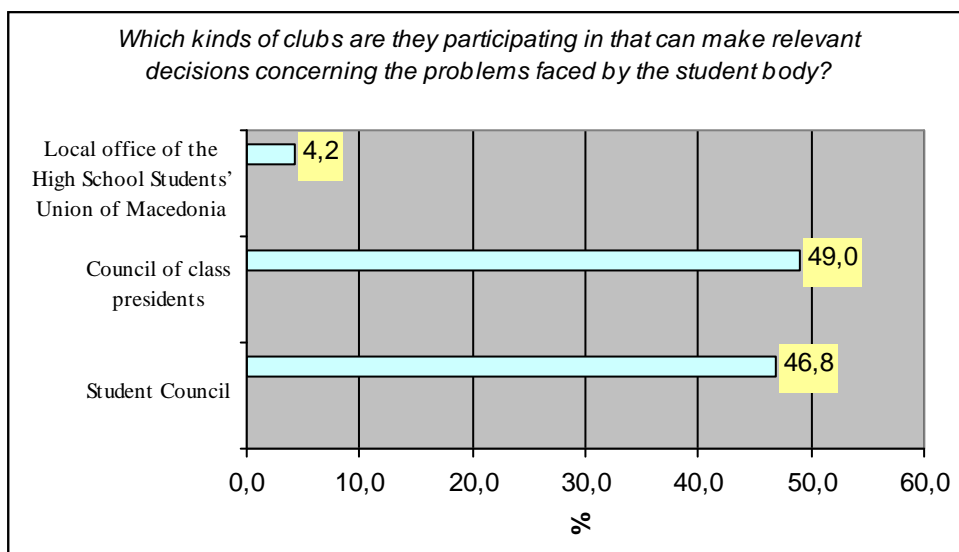
A. Participating in Representative Bodies

1)



The question “*Do students in your school partake in a school body that bears relevant decisions (concerning student problems)?*” received 47.8% “Yes” answers; and 52.2% “No” replies. This distribution emphasizes the fact that there is no sound method for student internal organization aiming to include them in the decision making. With further examination of the student structure, one can add that a greater number of junior year students answered “Yes” to the question (52.0%), compared to freshman year students (43.0% only). Regarding the cities where the research took place, the greatest number of students who answered positively to the question was Gjilan/Gnjilane with 80.2%, followed by Trgovishte with 50.0%, Kumanovo with 43.2%, and Preshevo with 34.8%. There is a large discrepancy between different ethnic groups. Macedonians answered the question “Yes” 36.1% of the time, and “No” 63.9%. Similarly, Serbians answered “Yes” 37.0%, while Albanians replied affirmatively 54.7%, and “No” 45.3%. There were no significant differences according to the schools (general or technical) where the research took place. Subsequent analysis focused on the problem with participation in representative bodies by examining respondents who replied that they are part of a decision making school body.

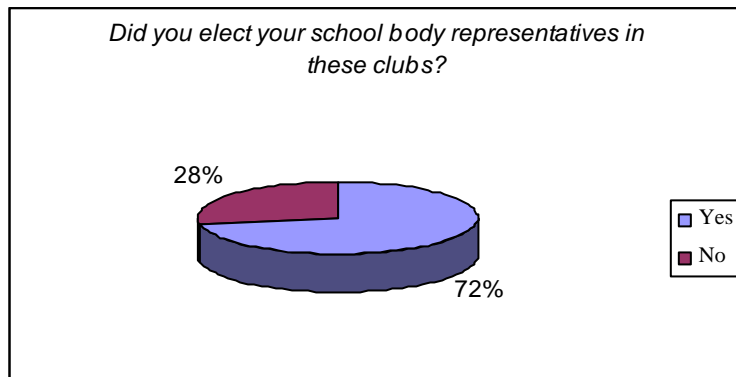
2)



The question “Which of the following student bodies can bring relevant decisions concerning student problems?” received the following answers. 46.8% of the students indicated the school’s Council; 49.0% the class presidents’ Council; and 4.2% assumed that it is the High School Student Union.

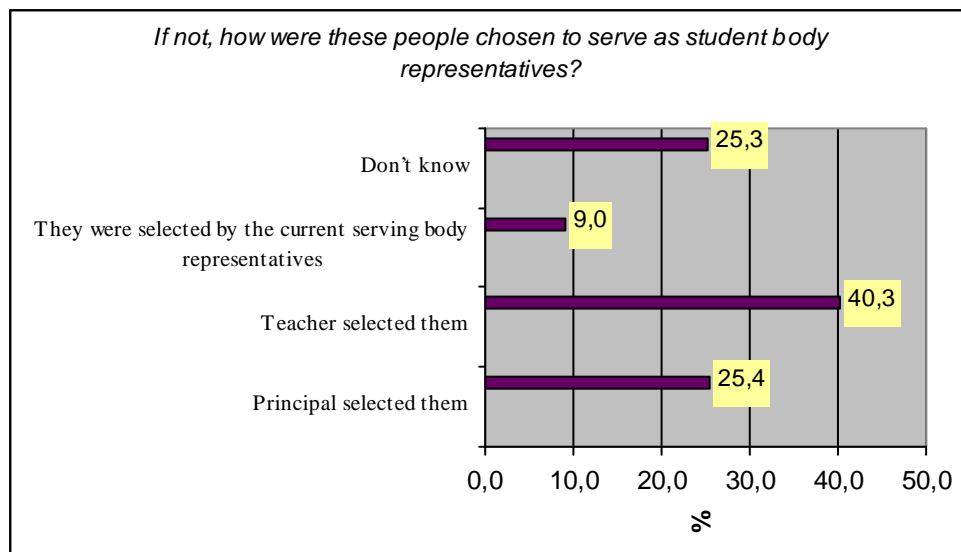
Analyzing the responses, one can conclude that the students believe school internal bodies’ decisions contribute to efficient problem solution. There were general distribution deviations concerning student characteristics. Namely, freshmen (63.1%) consider the class presidents’ Council to have the greatest role in bringing resolutions that concern student problems. On the other hand, juniors (53.1%) consider the school’s Council to be the most significant. It is of importance to note students’ viewpoint regarding the local chapter of the High School Student Union, leading us to conclude that the Unions concentrate their dealings in the countries’ capitals, and not having a developed network in the rest of the cities. According to the type of school they attend, the general high school students’ stance is that the school’s Council is the primary decision maker. Students from the technical schools deem that the class presidents’ Council is the one that brings relevant decisions, followed by the school’s Council and the local union chapter. The High School Student Union chapter is not even registered in the answers of the general high school students. In regards to the cities researched our questionnaire received a varied response. While responses in Kumanovo and Preshevo follow the general distribution, the ones in Gjilan/Gnjilane and Trgovishte put an emphasis on the school Council, followed by the class presidents’ Council. The local union chapter in Trgovishte did not receive a single response leading us to conclude that its activities do not reach smaller cities in Serbia, and are not aware of these students’ problems.

3)



In order to perceive students' answers regarding the election of their representatives in school bodies we asked the following question: *“Do you elect your representatives in the school bodies?”* Most of the responses (72.0%) were affirmative, while 28.0% answered that they do not partake in the representative election. The same general qualification was received when the socio-demographic characteristics were taken into account, rendering deviations from the general distribution inconsequential.

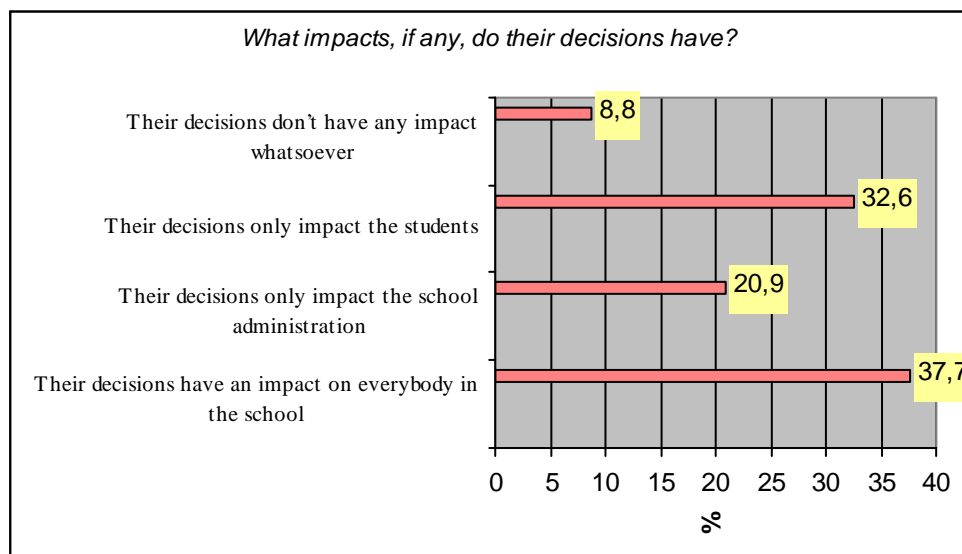
4)



The following question was directed only towards the respondents saying that they did not participate in their representative elections. The question was: *“If you do not, then how did these persons get elected as representatives in the student bodies?”* Out of all responses 40.3% think that the representatives are chosen by the teachers; 25.4% consider that they were chosen by the principal; only 9.0% by incumbent representatives. Surprisingly, 25.0% of the respondents, or one quarter did not know how reps were elected. The socio-demographic traits were influential in determining student answers. Junior students (32.4%) believe that the principal had the greatest influence over the election, followed by the teachers (26.5%). In contrast, 54.5% of freshmen consider that professors exude the greatest influence on the election, followed by the principal (18.2%). The type of school is also important concerning

the responses. Namely, the second response option “teachers choose representatives” at the general high school students is at 52.0% and greater than the technical school student responses at 33.3%. The percentage of junior students (32.4%) that were not aware of the election process is shocking. Moreover, only 18.2% of freshmen were knowledgeable of the way reps are elected. If the responses are divided by cities, the polled from Gjilan/Gnjilane and Preshevo consider the incumbent reps stripped of all influence during the election.

5)



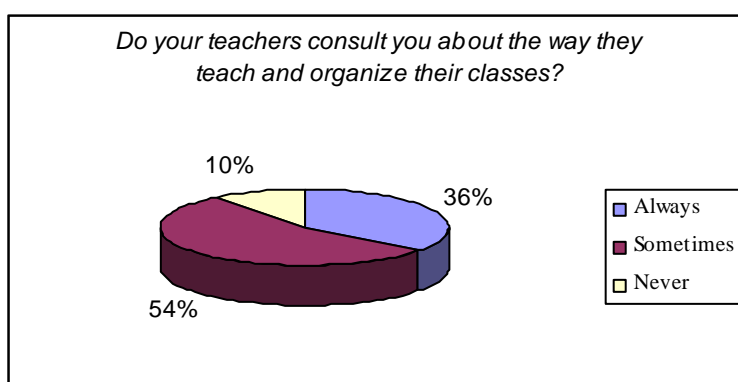
We tried to uncover the influence of representatives' decisions in the school bodies through the following question: “*What kind of influence do representatives' decisions have?*” Instantly noticeable, the respondents think that their representatives' decisions do not have influence over all school subjects. Only 37.7% deemed that the reps' resolutions have school wide authority. 53.5% think that the decisions have authority over some school subjects, 32.6% over students, and 20.9% over school administration. 8.8% of respondents think that the representatives' decisions have no influence. These stances point out the fact that students do not participate sufficiently in the general operation of the school. It also points out the student administration's dominant position over the decision making process. One can notice several deviations concerning ethnical background, the type of school attended and the level of educational of respondents' parents. Macedonian students, as well as the technical school students, believe that their reps' decisions have the greatest authority over themselves (50.0% and 39.7% accordingly). In relation to the students' parents education, the research indicated several trends: increasing the education level of students' parents decreases the student perception that representatives' decisions have authority over all subjects, subsequently raising the perception that reps' decisions have no influence.

The respondents' answers deviate according to the city they live in as well. Almost half of the students in Kumanovo (48.8%) think that their rep decisions only influence the students themselves. The respondents in Preshevo have the highest percentage of responses (12.7% compared to other cities) aimed at the “their decisions

have no influence” modality. Surprisingly, the students from Trgovishte have not chosen this modality once. They think that the decisions have the greatest authority over the school administration (42.1%), then over every subject (36.8%) and over students only with 21.1%.

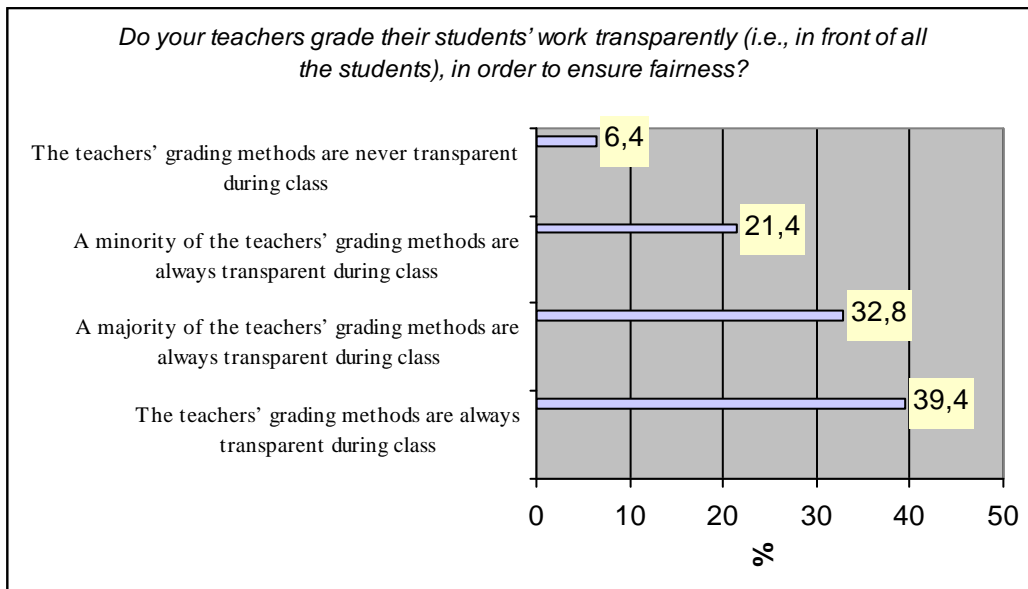
B. Professor Accountability

6)



The second part of the questionnaire focused on professor accountability. Question number one from this part (or number 6 in the general order) was: “*Do your professors ever consult you on the way they teach and organize classes?*” 35.6% answered “Always”; 54.2% responded “Sometimes”, while 10.2% replied “Never”. The affirmative responses are more common with freshmen, out of whom 43.0% answered “Always”, 49.2% responded “Sometimes”, and only 7.8% replied “Never”. In contrast, 27.7% of juniors responded with “Always”, 59.5% replied with the relatively positivistic “Sometimes”, and 12.8% chose “Never”. Differences in the negative responses are especially apparent with the Serbs at 17.0%, Albanians with 8.4% and Macedonians with only 3.3%. There are differences in positive responses according to the type of the school attended. So, 31.7% of the general high school students replied “Always” and 58.3% “Sometimes”, while the technical high school students had 38.2% “Always” and 51.5% “Sometimes” responses. According to this question, 19.9% - the most negative perception is present with the students from Preshevo, followed by Gjilan/Gnjilane (7.3%), Trgovishte (5.3%) and Kumanovo (3.2%).

7)

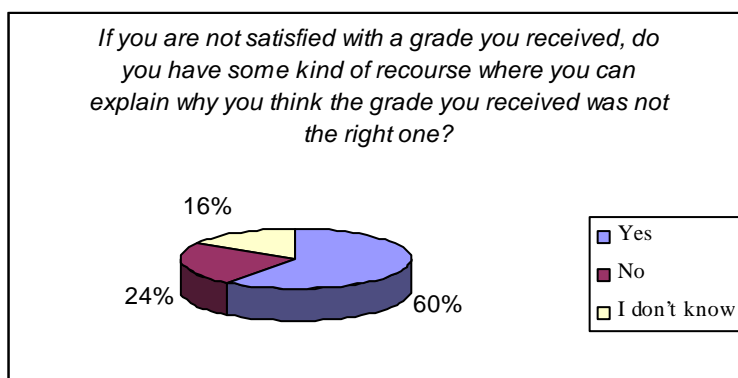


The respondents were also asked to give their opinion concerning *the fairness and transparency of the grading process*. 39.4% stated that “The grading methods used are completely transparent and occur during class”; 32.8% asserted that “Most of the grading methods are transparent”; 21.4% declared that “A small part of the grading methods are truly transparent”, while 6.4% of respondents affirmed that “The grading methods are never transparent.” Analyzing the response structure according to cities, one can notice that 22.0% of students from Kumanovo; 26.3% of students from Trgovishte; 52.1% of students from Gjilan/Gnjilane; as well as 53.0% of students from Preshevo gave the completely positive reply. Furthermore, 46.5% of the students from Kumanovo replied that a most of the grading methods are transparent, while 31.3% of the students from Gjilan/Gnjilane, 25.4% of the ones in Preshevo and only 5.3% of students in Trgovishte agreed with this modality. The structure of the students who stated that a small part of the grading process is transparent is as follows: 47.4% of the ones in Trgovishte; 24.9% in Kumanovo; 17.1% in Preshevo, and 12.5% in Gjilan/Gnjilane. Next, 21.1% of the students in Trgovishte; 6.5% in Kumanovo; 4.4% in Preshevo and 4.2% in Gjilan/Gnjilane chose the negative answer. Freshmen students have a more positive perception concerning grading transparency – 45.0% of the respondents affirmed the completely positive reply. In contrast, this percentage with the junior students is 33.5. The following table contains data regarding the type of school where the research was carried out.

Table 1: *Do your teachers fairly and transparently assess student work (in front the whole class)?*

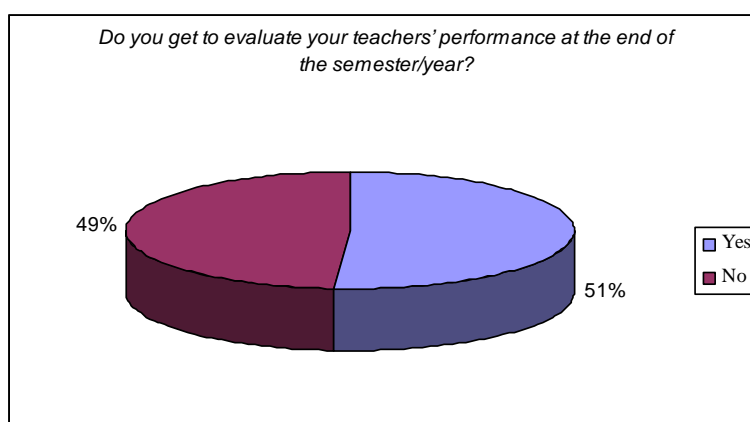
School	“Completely Transparent”	“Most of the methods are transparent”	“A small part of the methods are transparent”	“Not transparent at all”
General High School	37.2%	41.2%	18.6%	3.0%
Technical High School	40.9%	27.2%	23.3%	8.6%

8)



The next question regarded the students' right to appeal given their dissatisfaction with a certain grade. Out of the population, 60% answered positively, 23.6% negatively and 16.4% of the students did not know. **Unusually, the students who live in cities where the grading process was assessed as generally transparent (replied positively or partly positively), think that they have less opportunities to contest the grade they received.** This fact is most pronounced with respondents from Preshevo who gave a positive response in 38.5% of the cases, and the ones from Trgovishte who replied "Yes" 76.3% of the time, even though in the previous question (No. 7) they had an exceptionally small number of positive answers. In addition, **students from the technical high schools have a more positive attitude (64.1%) concerning this question, in comparison to students from the general high schools (53.8%). Weighing this question with the one numbered 7, one can conclude that technical school respondents perceive their school as more transparent during the grading process.** Analyzing the replies according to what year respondents are in, did not demonstrate significant deviations from the general distribution.

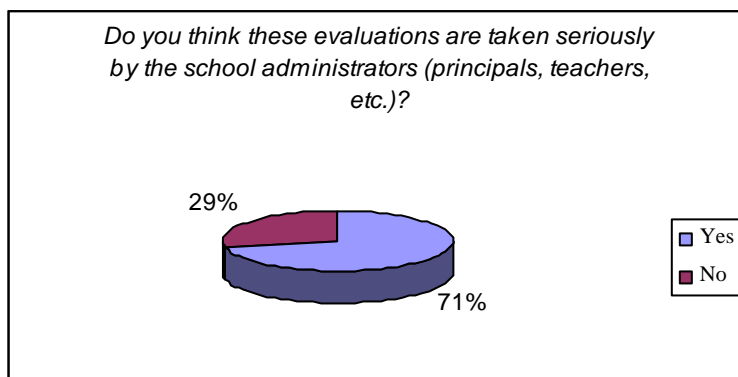
9)



The research wanted to examine if the students can state their opinion about their professors. That is why the following question was posed: "*Do you evaluate your professors' work at the end of the school year?*" Out of the whole population, 51.0% replied "Yes" and 49% answered "No". According to city distribution of replies, Gjilan/Gnjilane with 61.5% scored highest, followed by Kumanovo with 52.4%, Preshevo with 48.6% and Trgovishte with 28.9%. As it was the case with the

previous question, the replies from the technical schools are more positive (56.4% answered “Yes”) compared to the ones from the general high schools (42.7%). Respondents attending their freshman year have a higher percentage of negative answers (48.4%), in contrast to junior students (53.7%).

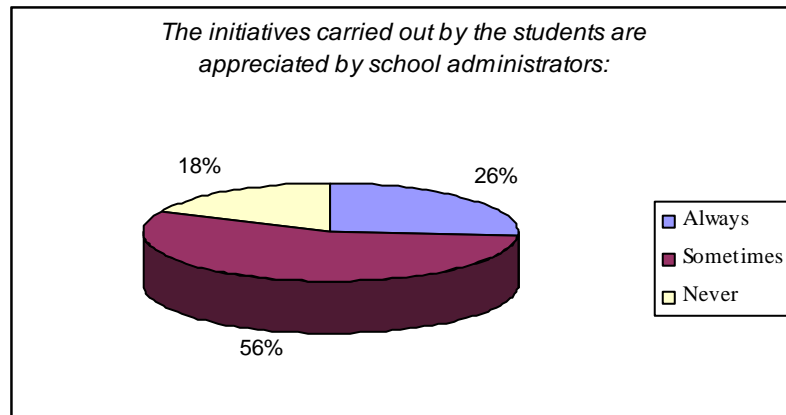
10)



Our research showed interesting results pertaining to teachers’ evaluations, thus we continued with the subsequent question: “*Do you think that school administration should take the teachers’ evaluations seriously?*” The replies we received confirmed our expectations. Most of the students (71.0%) answered affirmatively, balanced with 21.0% of respondents who think that the administration should not put a great emphasis on the evaluations. The analysis of respondents’ traits indicated that the most relevant factors influencing the evaluation’s degree of importance were the domicile, national background, parental education level and their occupation. Sex and year of education as well as other traits did not present vital causes in determining student perceptions and attitudes. Results received in the analysis of this questions showed students who deem that the administration should take evaluations seriously reside in rural areas (53.6%), matched up against 46.4% of respondents who live in urban environments. In line with ethnic background, Albanian respondents’ replies fall within the general distribution, while Macedonian students’ answers are almost balanced. (47.6% answered “Yes”, 52.4% answered “No”). In contrast, the majority of Serbian students (94.7%) think that the administration should take evaluations seriously, while 5.3% who think they should not. In processing this data, one can notice a blatantly obvious connection to the parental level of education. There is a counter proportional relation between parental level of education and the students’ affirmative response. One can deduce that respondents who have parents with a lower level of education have a higher awareness of professor accountability. It is the same with parental occupations. Namely, students whose parents are farmers, factory laborers or unemployed replied that the administration should take evaluations seriously. With respect to cities where the research took place, 100% of respondents in Trgovishte have an affirmative attitude, meaning that the administration should take the evaluations into account. While Gjilan/Gnjilane and Preshevo follow this trend, Kumanovo has an almost balanced base - 57.7% positive and 42.3% negative replies.

C. Communication

11)



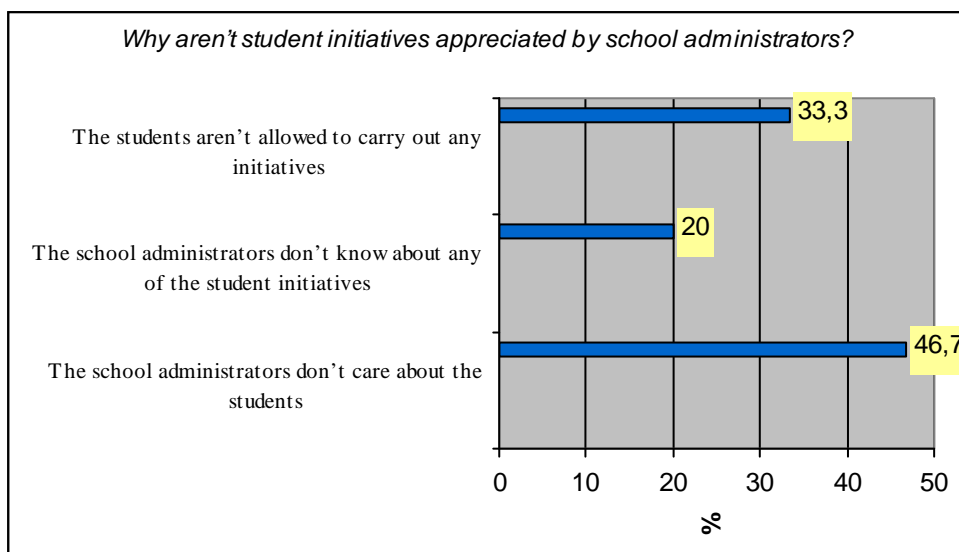
The third part of the questionnaire focused on the relations between students and the school administration. Students responded to the question “*Does school administration appreciate student initiative?*” in the following way: 26.2% answered “Always”, 55.8% “Sometimes”, while 18.0% deem that it “Never” happens. The table below examines the responses by cities:

Table 2: *School administration appreciates student initiative*

City	“Always”	“Sometimes”	“Never”
Kumanovo	22.2%	67.0%	10.8%
Gjilan/Gnjilane	36.5%	42.7%	20.8%
Preshevo	26.0%	50.3%	23.7%
Trgovishte	26.2%	55.8%	18.0%

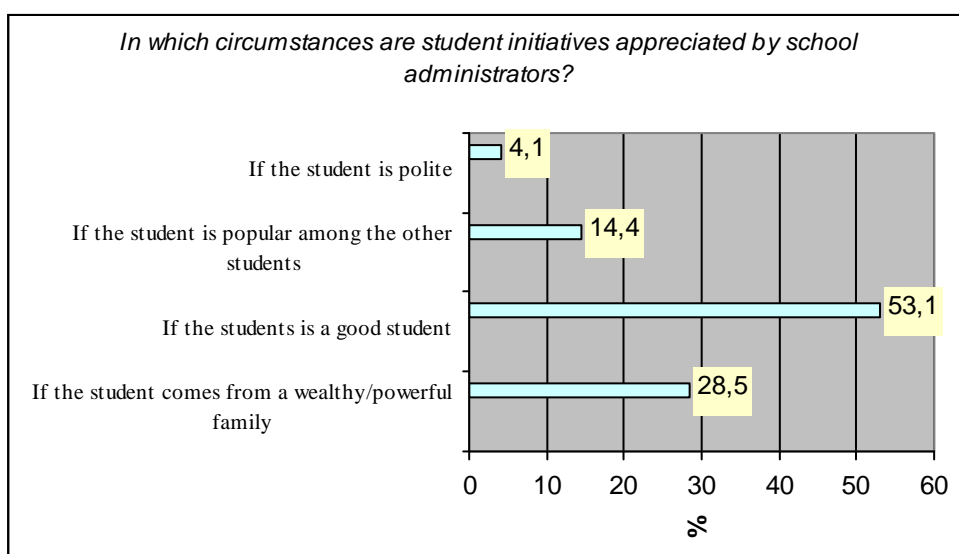
Freshmen students have a higher percentage (31.4%) of positive replies, compared to junior year students (20.7%). Dissecting data according to type of school attended did not present significant deviations from the general distribution.

12)



The questionnaire inquired about “*The reasons behind the inadequate treatment of their initiatives*” further. This question was directed solely towards the students who answered negatively to the previous question. We offered three modalities relating to different negative attributes of the school administration. As the replies point out, the main reason behind (46.7%) the negative attitude is the administration’s insufficient attention to student projects, followed by 33.3% of students who think that they are prohibited from expressing ideas. Finally 20.0% of the responses indicate the fact that the administration is not acquainted with initiatives. Combining different student traits, one can notice diverse opinion tendencies. According to year of schooling and national background, most of the junior students (41.7%) and Macedonian respondents (66.7%) believe that they are not allowed from carrying out initiatives.

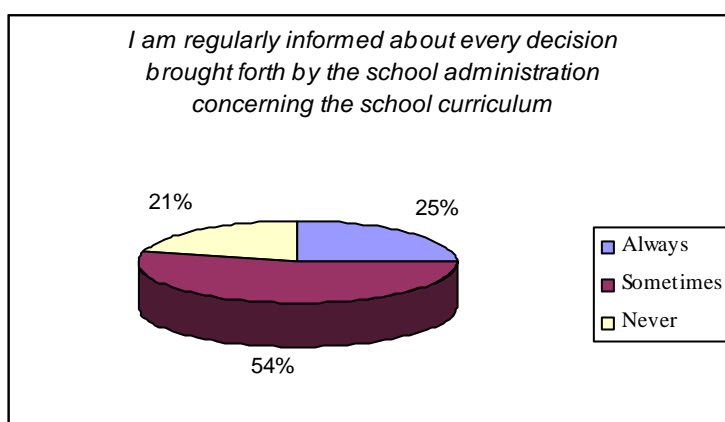
13)



In further analysis of this sensitive issue, we asked the students who answered “Sometimes” and “Never” to question number 11 the following: “*In what circumstances does the school administration appreciate student initiative?*” More

than half respondents (53.1%), consider student grades to be the highest criteria against which initiatives are considered i.e. being a top student. The first modality, in which school administration values initiatives by students who originate from rich/well known families, got 28.5% of the replies. The last modality stated that only popular students' initiatives were appreciated, and it received 14.4% of the responses. Even the socio-demographical attributes confirm the dominance of the modality "if the student has the highest grades", with the same intensity as in the general distribution. On the other hand, this modality's response frequency decreases with the increase in the parental education level. The same conclusion can be made comparing the profession of the students' parents. There, this answer appears more among the students whose parents are "factory workers", "unemployed" or "farmers".

14)



When asked "If they are well informed about school administration's every decision concerning school activities", 24.6% of the students answered "Always", 54.2% "Sometimes", and 21.2% replied "Never". Data examined by cities is in the table below:

Table 3: *I am regularly informed about the school administration's every decision concerning student activities*

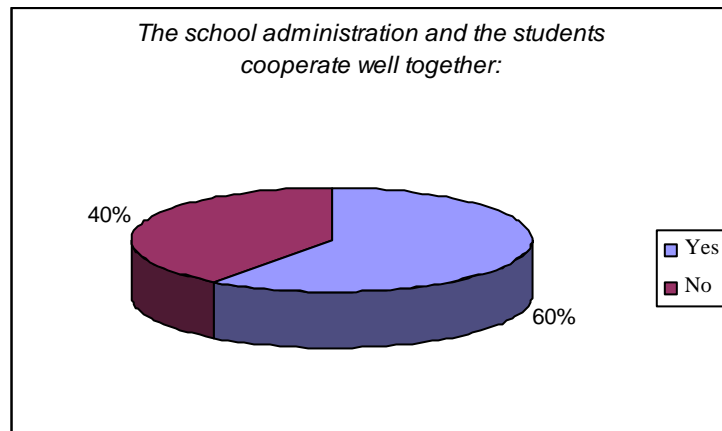
City	"Always"	"Sometimes"	"Never"
Kumanovo	16.8%	62.7%	20.5%
Gjilan/Gnjilane	32.3%	44.8%	22.9%
Preshevo	30.4%	45.9%	23.8%
Trgovishte	15.8%	76.3%	21.2%

According to the year of study, junior students have more negative answers (26.0%) compared to freshmen (16.7%). Examining the responses by school type did not show significant deviations, even though the technical schools had 2.0% lead in the affirmative replies.

An interesting note in this set of questions (focusing on relations between students and school administration), is **the fact that students whose parents have lower levels of education (uncompleted or finished elementary education), or whose profession requires a lower degree of qualifications (farmers, manual**

laborers etc.) have a significantly more optimistic perception concerning the school democratic system. Said otherwise, a higher number of these respondents think that their schools have the necessary candidness level about initiatives, as opposed to students whose parents are with university diplomas, or are more qualified (doctors, professors etc.)²

15)

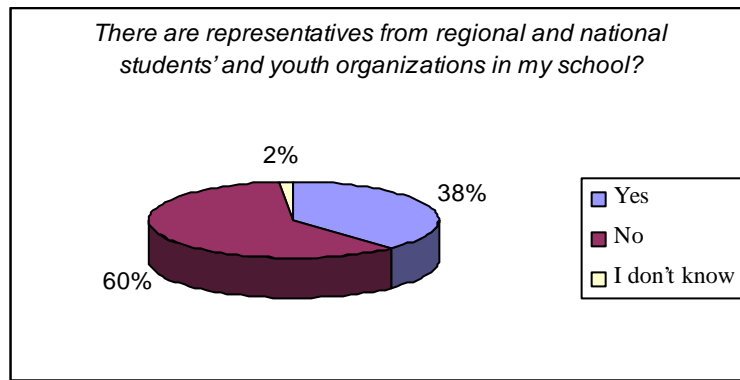


Generally, the majority of respondents have a positive attitude whether “Students and school administration collaborate well”. Out of the whole population 59.8% answered “Yes” with freshmen having a higher percentage at 67.4%, as opposed to junior students with 21.7% positive answers. Technical high schools performed better with 63.8% positive responses. This percentage at the general high schools is 53.8. Schools in Kumanovo got 55.1%, Preshevo 56.9%, Trgovishte 63.2%, and Gjilan/Gnjilane 72.9% of the positive replies. Comparing the student perception involving this question with parental educational level, we came to the same conclusion as in question number 14. Namely, respondents whose parents are farmers or laborers have a higher opinion about the cooperation between themselves and the school administration. If one compares respondents’ positive answers with national backgrounds, where Macedonians’ responses are relatively high at 64.0% (even though in Kumanovo the percentage is lower at 56.0%), then one can conclude that this problem is more present with the Albanian classes in Kumanovo (where the positive reply is less than 50.0%).

D. Regional/national students’ organisations

16)

² This legitimacy is confirmed through the analysis of the level of education, or qualification of both parents

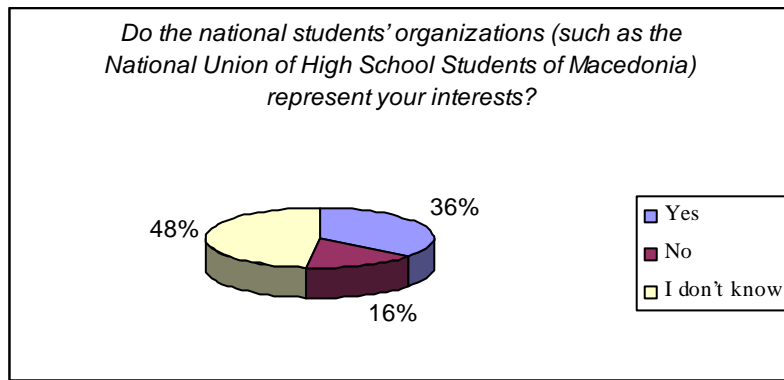


Respondents were asked to give their response to the question of whether their schools had representatives from the regional and national youth organizations. The following table examines the replies:

Table 4. *My school has representatives from regional and national youth organizations.*

City	“Yes”	“No”	“I don’t know”
Kumanovo	35.1%	64.9%	/
Gjilan/Gnjilane	62.5%	36.5%	1.0%
Preshevo	33.1%	62.4%	4.4%
Trgovishte	18.4%	81.6%	/

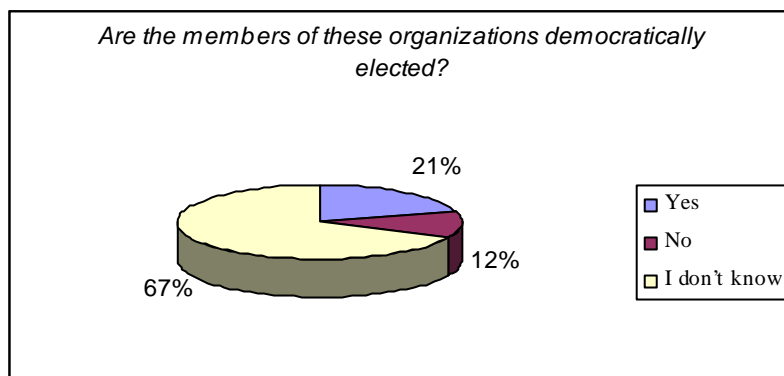
The considerably higher percentage of positive answers in Gjilan/Gnjilane (compared to other cities) can be attributed to the fact that in the last couple of years, in this city (as well as Kosovo in general) the concentration of international organizations dealing with youth has dramatically increased. These organizations work with this age group and implement many projects dealing with youth participation that was supported by the UNMIK administration. In the other cities of the KGPT region, the percentage of positive responses is lower, leading to the conclusion that the international organizations are based in the capitals. Trgovishte’s significant deviation (only 18.4% positive replies) is due to the fact that this is the smallest city encompassed in the research. According to the type of school, representatives from regional and national organizations are more present in the general high schools (42.7%), compared to the technical high schools (35.5%). Albeit the higher representative presence in the general high schools, students from the technical ones still have a more positive perception about the administration’s openness towards new initiatives, and its cooperation in general. This situation leads us to two conclusions: either the general high schools have not introduced effective projects, or initiatives from youth organizations (and the NGO sector on the whole) have not found adequate support with the administration at the general high schools.



An important assumption about actively participating students in the regional and national school organizations is their awareness of the association's functioning at their respective schools. Thus, we asked several questions pertaining to this issue, wanting to get an image of the organizations' position and their role in representing student interests, as well as their function mode.

To the question “*Do national organizations represent your interests*” 47.9% of the students responded “I don't know”, 35.9% answered affirmatively, and 16.1% replied negatively. Examining the answers one can deduce that almost half of the students do not know the dealings of these associations. Thus, students do not have a firm view of the organizations' effectiveness, and are not able to judge their activities and their influence over materializing student interests. On the other hand, we can assume that national student organizations are not open to and connected with the students. More over, these institutions have not proven themselves in practice as a significant form through which students can express and resolve their basic interests and needs. According to ethnic conditions, Albanian student answers do not deviate compared to the general distribution. Serbians students (43.6%) generally have a positive disposition concerning this issue, while Macedonians have the highest percentage of indifference, presented through the “I don't know” modality (73.9%). Examining the responses in regards to cities, Gjilan/Gnjilane and Trgovishte deviate from the general distribution. They generally consider national school organizations to represent their interests while Kumanovo and Preshevo follow the general distribution.

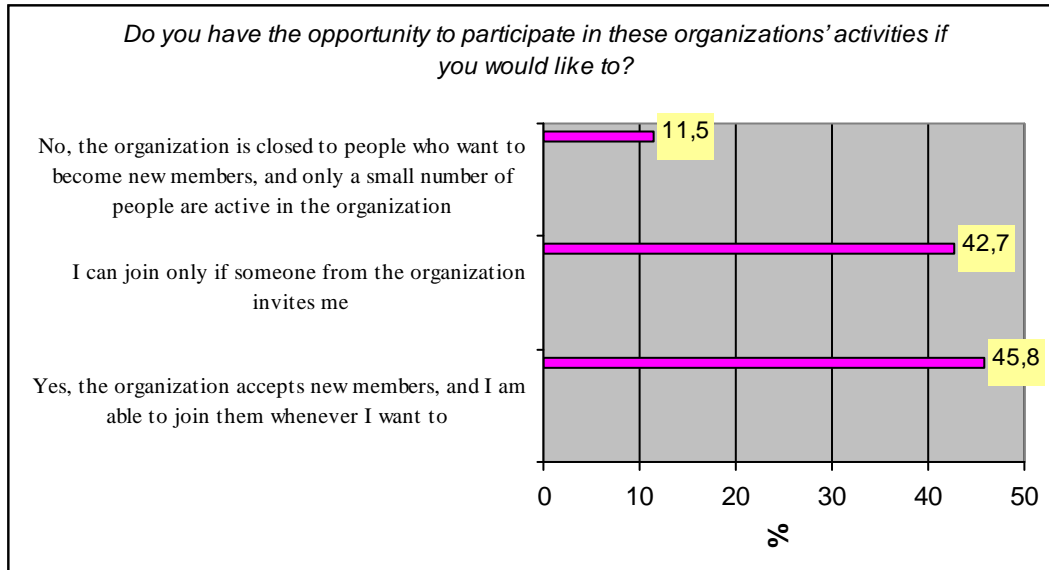
18)



The following question is related to national school associations inquiring “*Are the members of these organizations democratically elected?*” As with the previous

question, most of the polled did not know (67.7%) the way these members were elected, while 20.8% believed that they were democratically chosen, and 11.5% thought that that was not the case. Taking into account the sex distribution, male respondents have a higher percentage (30.5%) of affirmative answers compared to the female ones (16.5%). It is important to note that more respondents whose parents have a lower education level think that the representatives were democratically elected.

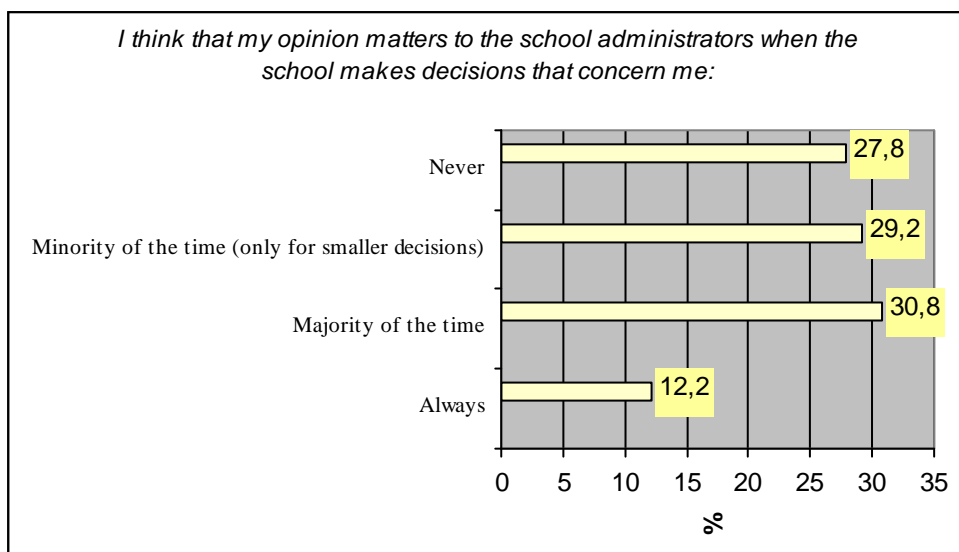
19)



Finally, the polled were asked a question delving on their opportunity in gaining an active part in these associations. The question was: “*Given your desire, would you participate in these organizations' activities?*” Most of the polled answered positively (45.8%) and added that the organization is open to new members and they can participate if they wanted to. It is almost an equal number percentage wise (42.7%) of respondents who deem that they can partake only if the organization extends an invitation. Lastly, one cannot overlook the number of students (11.5%) who believe that the associations are closed to new constituents and exist as a small group of members who can play a part. The results show a positive tendency in student attitudes towards organizations' openness to new members. It is important to investigate the response structure in regards to student traits. In relation to sex, year of study and national background, a certain deviation appears with male students (54.2%), freshmen (50.5%) and Serbian students (51.3%), including respondents from Gjilan/Gnjilane (50.0%), as well as Trgovishte (100%) who believe that they can join organizations only if invited.

E. Your Influence

20)

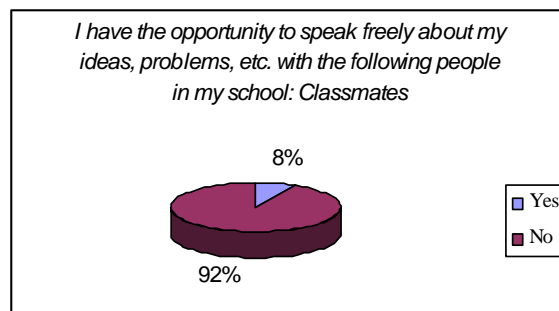
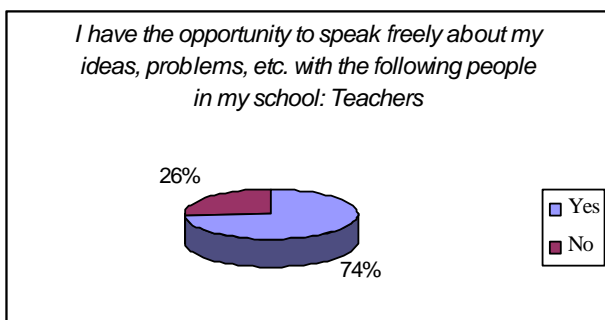
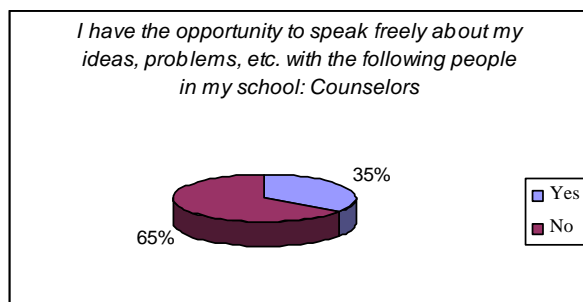
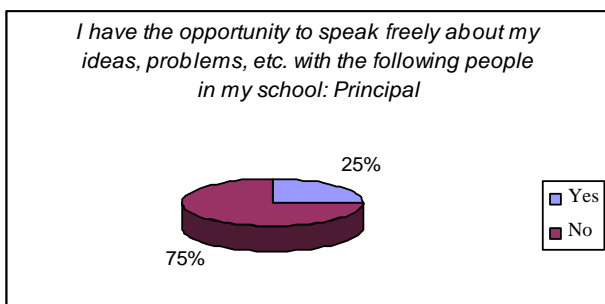


The first inquiry into students influence over the school administration’s decision making process portrayed upsetting results. Thus, to the question “*I think the school administration considers my opinion and viewpoint during the decision making process that affects me*”, only 12.2% of the polled answered affirmatively; 23.7% responded “Sometimes”; 29.2% replied “Sometimes, but for less important decisions only”; and 27.8% answered negatively. According to cities, this relation is presented in the table below:

Table 5: *I think the school administration considers my opinion and viewpoint during the decision making process that affects me.*

City	“Always”	“Sometimes”	„...Less important decisions only”	“Never”
Kumanovo	11.9%	29.7%	30.3%	28.1%
Gjilan/Gnjilane	15.6%	39.6%	21.9%	22.9%
Preshevo	12.2%	28.7%	25.4%	33.7%
Trgovishte	5.3%	23.7%	60.5%	10.5%

The difference in responses is also depends to the sex of the polled. So, female (29.1%) had a higher percentage of negative answers, compared to male respondents (26.1%). There is also a divergent response structure between freshmen and junior students. Juniors had 35.5% negative responses, while freshmen had 20.5%. The analysis of type of school attended did not reveal a significant deviation, even though technical schools had a small percentage advantage concerning affirmative replies. Again, one can notice the principle where students whose parents have a higher qualification level (education and type of profession), have more negative responses. This leads us to remark the importance of the social environment in determining students ability to speak up and affect the decision making process in their environment.



The polled were asked to delve on the subsequent statement: “*I can openly talk about my ideas or problems with the following subjects from my school...*” The following results were obtained there:

Table 6. *I can openly talk about my ideas or problems with the following subjects from my school:*

Subjects in Schools	“Yes”	“No”	Total
Principal	24.8%	75.2%	100.0%
Counselor	35.0%	65.0%	100.0%
Teacher	73.6%	26.4%	100.0%

Students’ reliance on their teachers is the dominant position at 73.6%. Counselors (35.0% approval) are the next subject that students trust. Considering the time spent with each subject, this preference arrangement is to be expected. Hence, students spend the highest amount of time with their professors where a degree of closeness is attained, making the teachers most aware of their problems. Next on the list are the counselors whose duty is to nurture communication with students and understand their needs better. Last on the list, with 24.8%, is the principal, who, at the top of school hierarchy, is most detached from day to day communication with students.

When cities are concerned, there is a deviation in relation to student openness towards counselors at their school.

Table 7. *I can freely talk about my ideas or problems with the counselors at my school (according to cities):*

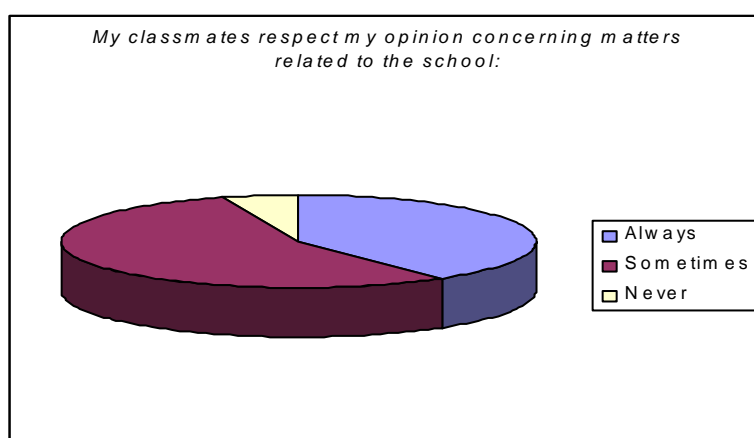
City	“Yes”	“No”	Total
Kumanovo	41.1%	58.9%	100.0%

Gjilan/Gnjilane	39.6%	60.4%	100.0%
Preshevo	17.7%	82.3%	100.0%
Trgovishte	76.3%	23.7%	100.0%

One can conclude that respondents from Trgovishte have a positive perception towards the cooperation and communication with the counselors (76.3%). Almost half of the polled in Kumanovo (41.1%) feel that they have an open collaboration with their counselors. Gjilan/Gnjilane at 39.6% fared similarly. Replies in Preshevo, however portray a different image where only 17.7% of respondents feel that they can candidly speak with their counselors.

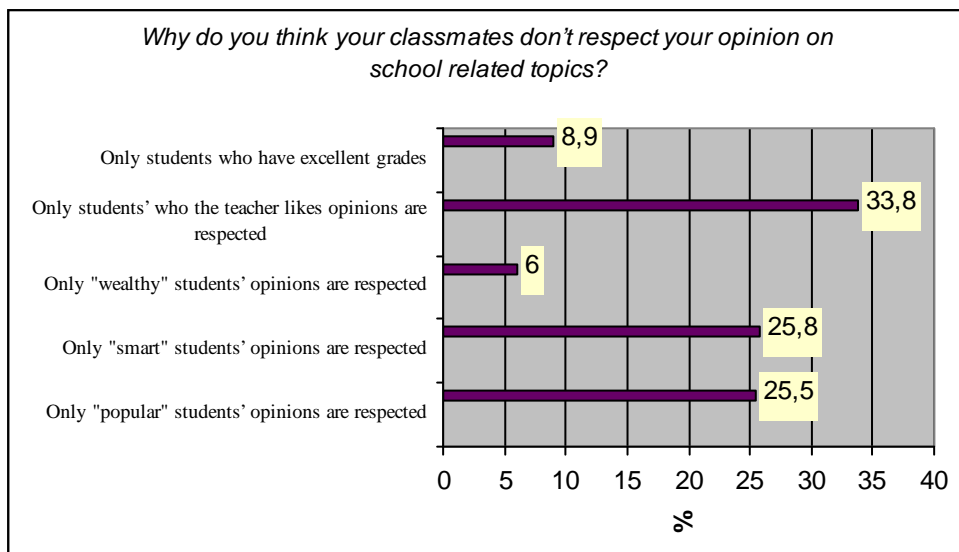
F. Decision Making

22)



The sixth part of the questionnaire focused on the relations between students and the decision making process in the school bodies. The aim of this section was to determine whether discrimination between students exists. So the first question was: “*My classmates respect my opinion concerning matters related to the school*”. The responses were along the following distribution: “Always” – 39.6%; “Sometimes” – 55.2%; and “Never” with 5.2%. According to the response distribution according to polled cities Kumanovo diverges with 33.0% of positive replies, in contrast to the other cities which have almost equal percentages (around 43.0% “Always” replies). There were no significant deviations in regards to the sex of the students, or the place where they live (city or village). Freshmen had the higher number of affirmative responses (34.7%), as well as students from the general high schools (with 44.2%), in contrast with students from technical high schools, with 36.5% of positive answers. In accordance with parental education level and profession, as determined with the previous group questions, one cannot notice a certain trend. On the contrary, affirmative responses are slightly more represented with students whose parents have a higher education degree, or a better paying job. This leads us to conclude that there is discrimination between students based on their social background.

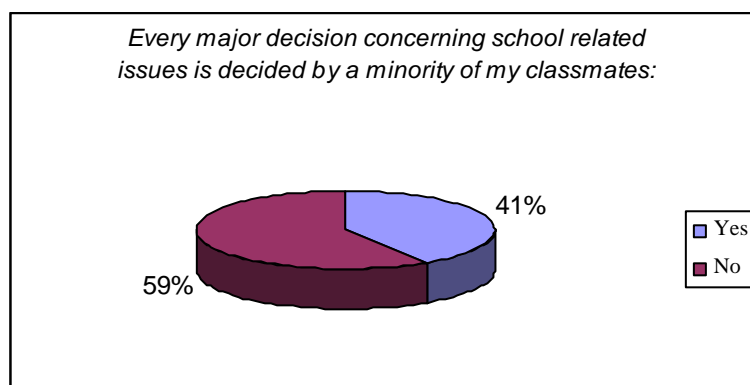
23)



Examining relations between students, including their cooperation, represents another dimension for the school decision making research. When asked “*Why do you think that your classmates do not respect your opinion sufficiently/they never do?*” we received the responses given above.

Out of the total results, one can deduce that the students who are popular with teachers (33.8%) have esteemed opinions. Following are the replies that students whose opinion matters are the “smart” ones (25.8%) and the “popular” ones (25.5%). Interestingly, 8.9% of students value the opinions of their classmates who are excellent pupils. Male respondents diverge from the general distribution, with their most frequent answer being those “smart” students’ opinion matters (33.6%). Furthermore, the type of school attended has an effect as well. Namely, the modality that dominates with students from general high schools is that excellent pupils’ opinions are valued highest (16.2%). This response is on the opposite end of the spectrum at the technical schools with 4.7%. When analyzing the replies according to cities, one is able to perceive a divergence in Gjilan/Gnjilane and Trgovishte. So, 45.5% of respondents in Gjilan/Gnjilane settled on the second modality stating that only “smart” students’ opinions are respected. Majority of students in Trgovishte (52.4%) deem that only “popular” students’ opinions matter.

24)

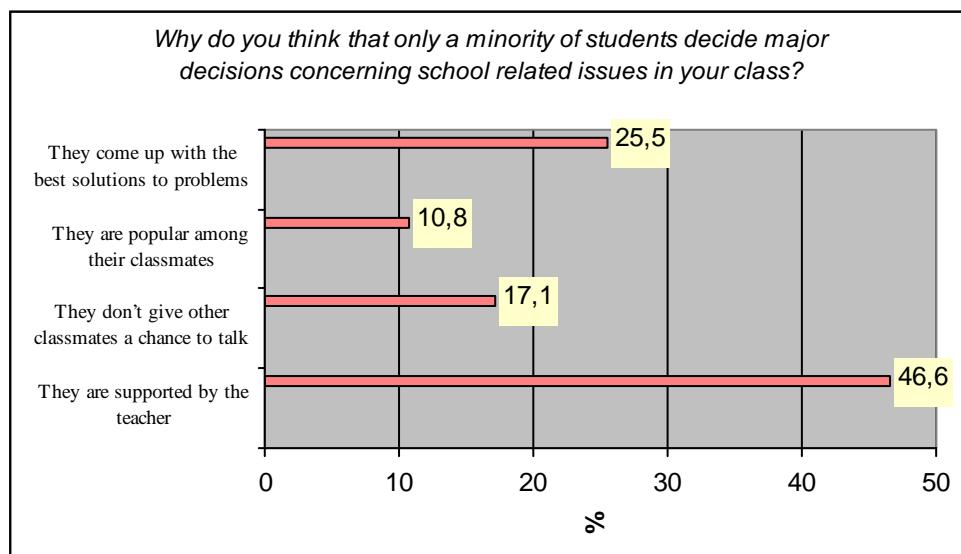


Responding to the statement that “*Every decision regarding school is generated by a handful of students*”, 40.8% answered “Yes”, in comparison to 59.2% who answered “No”. Put side by side, more students from technical schools (43.2%) responded positively, than their peers from the general high schools (37.2%). Similarly, more freshmen answered affirmatively (44.2%) than juniors (37.2%).

Based on cities, Preshevo has the lowest percentage of positive responses (28.7%), followed by Trgovishte with 42.1%, Kumanovo with 44.3% and Gjilan/Gnjilane with 56.3%. It is astonishing for Gjilan/Gnjilane to have the highest percentage, since respondents from this city had the highest number of affirmative replies in the questions concerning the presence of youth representatives in their schools, the ones who ought to advocate their interests. **This image should alarm those organizations pointing out the fact they are not inclusive or transparent enough.**

There is a small difference in positive replies between urban (38.8%) and rural (43.2%) respondents. The sex variable did not portray any disparities. One can make the same comment as in question number 22, with the disproportion in this one even greater. Namely, the lower the parental social status (education degree and profession), the higher the opinion frequency that decision-making is brought about by a small number of students, leaving others excluded. For example, 76.9% of students whose father has not finished elementary education answered this question affirmatively. On the other hand, 33.3% of students whose father has graduated from college have the same opinion. The same difference in positive responses can be noticed with the mother’s education, as well as the profession of both parents. **The results of this question (including results from Q22 to Q25), show that social status discrimination is present between classmates, and it influences the way students organize.**

25)



It is possible that relations between students represent one of the most sensitive indicators for creating an adequate school climate and the execution of school democracy. In order to portray a complete image of this problem, we asked the students who think that only a handful of students are involved in making relevant decisions, to give reasons for the condition. To the question “*Why do you think that only several students decide upon school matters?*” 46.6% responded that they are supported by the teachers, while only 25.5% deem that those students provide the best solutions to the problems. The other replies are as follows: 17.1% think that other students are not given a chance to express their opinion and 10.8% deem that the several students who are the decision makers are “popular” among their peers. As it can be seen from the results, many answers depend on the students’ socio-demographic characteristics. Including the independent variables, the biggest differences in modalities appeared on the basis of ethnic background, parental education level and profession, as well as the type of school respondents attend.

Table 8. *Why do you think that only several students decide upon most school matters?*

Nationality	They are supported by the teachers	Other students are not given a chance to express their viewpoint	They are popular among the peers	They always provide best solutions for the problems	Total
Macedonian	55.6%	29.6%	14.8%	/	100.0%
Albanian	50.4%	14.1%	10.7%	24.8%	100.0%
Serbian	30.8%	19.2%	7.7%	42.3%	100.0%
Roma	100.0%	/	/	/	100.0%
Turkish	50.0%	/	50.0%	/	100.0%

Even in this case, the respondents’ nationality had an influence over modality preference. Looking at the table, one can notice a divergence with the polled Macedonians and Serbians. Macedonians do not believe that the select few provide the best solutions for problems. On the contrary, more than half (55.6%) deem they make decisions due to the fact that those students are supported by the teachers. Serbian respondents paint a different picture with the majority of them (42.3%) stating that the handful of students do offer the best solutions. Furthermore, taking parental education level into account, one can notice that students whose parents have a higher education degree have chosen the modality “teacher support” the least. Cross referencing parental profession with the modalities confirms the product of our previous combination of parental education and the results. To be precise, if we focus on the first modality (“supported by the teachers”, which dominated the general distribution), one can see a trend where this modality leading student responses whose parents are farmers, factory workers or are unemployed.

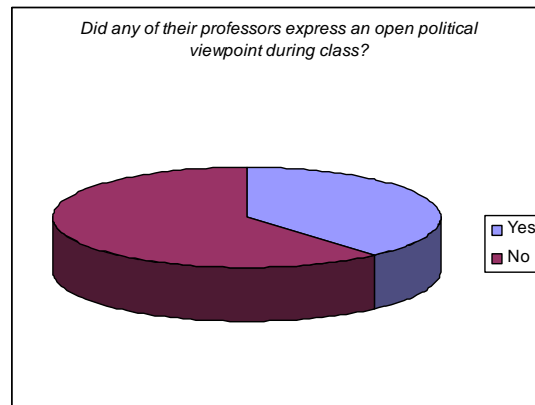
According to the type of school attended, general high school students deemed (33.8%) that the select few really do provide the best solutions. The table below portrays the responses in regards to the city where the polled took place.

Table 9: *Why do you think that only several students decide upon most school matters? :*

City	They are supported by the teachers	Other students are not given a chance to express their viewpoint	They are popular among the peers	They always provide best solutions for the problems	Total
Kumanovo	57.5%	7.5%	12.5%	22.5%	100.0%
Gjilan/Gnjilane	39.4%	16.9%	9.9%	33.8%	100.0%
Preshevo	46.9%	30.6%	8.2%	14.3%	100.0%
Trgovishte	47.7%	11.4%	13.6%	27.3%	100.0%

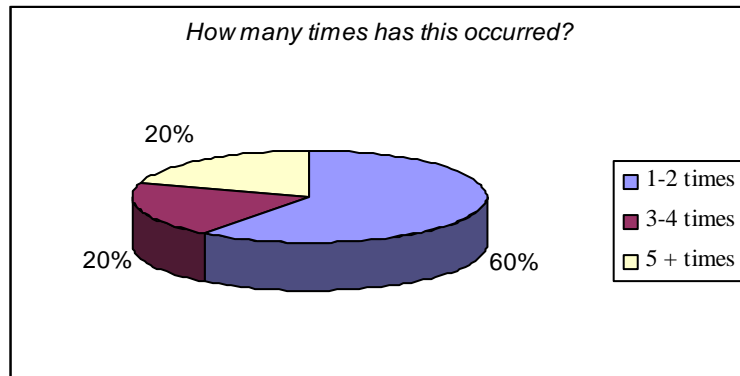
G. Lobbying in the school

26)



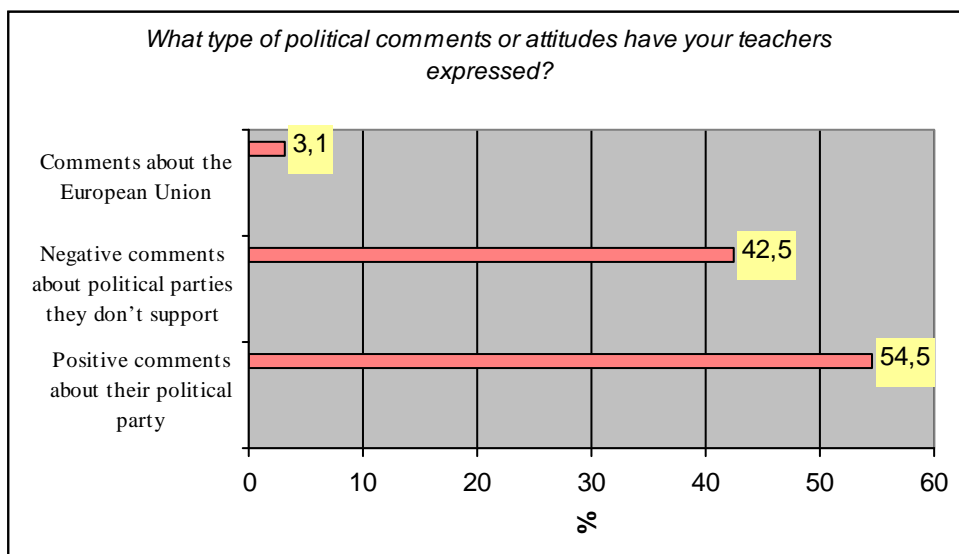
The last part of the questionnaire focused on the possible existence of political lobbying, from professors and third parties. We asked the following question: “*Did any of their professors express an open political viewpoint during class?*” 38.6% of the respondents answered “Yes”. Freshmen students comprised 33.3%, while juniors had a significantly larger percentage at 44.2%. This should not come as surprising, as most of junior and senior students are of legal voting age, rendering them more susceptible to political lobbying. Comparing the type of schools, a considerably larger proportion (47.7%) of general high school students noticed political lobbying, where as 32.6% of technical high school respondents answered “Yes”. The city analysis concluded that the highest percentage of respondents who observed political influences during class were the ones from Gjilan/Gnjilane (53.1%), followed by Preshevo (42.5%). These percentages help in illustrating the political tensions in these two cities. Kumanovo had 32.4% of positive replies, concluding with Trgovishte which only had 13.2% affirmative answers.

27)



Despite the general inference that teachers did express open political stance during class, we wanted to investigate the frequency with which it happens, and the type of comments professors convey. The number of respondents stating that it happened once or twice (60.1%) dominates, followed by the polled who believe that this occurred on five or more instances (20.2%). Last are the middle ground respondents who think that this occurred three to four times (19.7%). Two reference groups represent a mild decrease in the trend where professors express political stances during class. Those two groups are Albanians and the high school students. The dominating modality in both of these groups' responses is that it happened once or twice, with the modality of happening five or more times occurring the least.

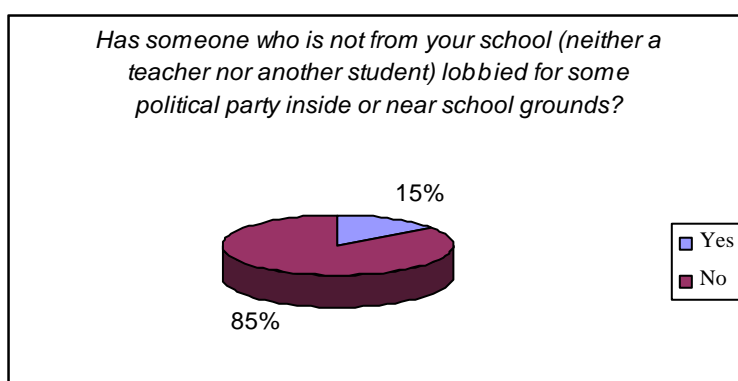
28)



Another dimension in dissecting this problem was "the type of political comments that teachers express during class." The responses were almost balanced, meaning that 54.4% of the polled responded that professors most frequently give positive comments about the political party they belong to. Moreover, 42.5% of respondents believe that their professors express negative remarks about the parties they themselves do not support. There is a small percentage (3.1%) stating that the teachers' remarks concerning the European Union are usually positive or negative.

According to sex, males have the most answers (55.7%) about teachers' negative comments. In comparison, female respondents follow the tendency of the general distribution. There was a deviation in the type of school attended, where the high school answers are divided in relation to teachers' positive (48.4%) and negative (49.5%) comments. One can see that in technical school students' answers the majority is comprised by the positive (60.2%), compared to the negative (35.7%) remarks. The city variable usually follows the general distribution, noticing that Kumanovo has the highest percentage (5.0%) of EU comments, while these comments are completely absent in Trgovishte (0.0%).

29)



The final poll question was: “*Has someone, who is not part of the school (not a student, nor a teacher), ever lobbied for a political party within the school grounds?*” This question received 15.2% affirmative replies. Slightly more junior students (16.5%) evidenced third party political lobbying, than 14.0% freshmen. There is a large difference according to the type of school. So, 11.6% of technical high school students noticed third party lobbying in the school area, compared to a considerably higher percentage at the general high school students (20.6%). As with question number 25, Gjilan/Gnjilane had the highest number of positive answers, where every fourth student indicated third party lobbying within the school grounds.

Table 10. *Has someone, who is not part of the school (not a student, nor a teacher), ever lobbied for a political party within the school grounds?*

City	Yes	No
Kumanovo	12.4%	87.6%
Gjilan/Gnjilane	25.0%	75.0%
Preshevo	14.4%	85.6%
Trgovishte	7.9%	92.1%

IV. Conclusions

The research and results received can conclude that student perception depends on their socio-demographic characteristics. One can summarize the data analysis in the following general admissions:

- **Lack of a defined student representation model.** There is little trust on student unions (4.2% only), and a greater belief in inter-school bodies. The local high school union chapter (as a relevant high school decision making body) does not figure in Trgovishte's responses.
- **Transparent youth organizations are non existent.** Concentrated in capitals, absent school infrastructure and insufficiently inclusive concerning activities and accepting new members (most respondents declared a lack of knowledge if these organizations represent their interests, or if the members were democratically elected).
- **Absence of precise cooperation form between professors/school administration and students, and the existence of uneven treatment concerning students' initiatives.**
- **Incidental evaluation of teachers' work** (49.0% responded that they do not have the opportunity to evaluate the professor), and where present it does not create awareness of evaluation's importance with students.
- **Visible and troublesome discrimination between students,** where only certain students' opinions are valued (mostly "poplar" students). Furthermore, a select few perform the class decision making, supported by the teachers, not because they render finest solutions.
- **The students are exposed to political influences in and out of the teaching process,** by the teachers, as well as third parties.

Recommendations:

- ✓ Defining student organization models, mode of collaboration with the administration and pre-determined duties and authorities during the decision making process.
- ✓ Higher teacher/administration accessibility and flexibility towards student initiatives, aiming to increase student participation in introducing and changing rules in the school environment by supporting the right to choose.
- ✓ Creating an accessible, transparent and mutually supportive environment where students are included in the school mission, as a part of the decision making chain.
- ✓ Strengthening the civil society and encouraging school and NGO sector partnerships.
- ✓ Generating and maintaining formal and informal meetings between principals and students; as cooperation models between school administration and students.

- ✓ Frequent evaluation of current school conditions, creating a policy and a system of assessment and evaluation.
- ✓ Overcoming student inequality/discrimination through prejudice/stereotype trainings and ways to surpass them.
- ✓ Creating better communication, team work and joint action, with a goal of constructing positive energy for mutual support, cooperation and aid.
- ✓ Greater control of appropriate institutions in eliminating political influences over students.