Discrimination in Macedonia's multi-ethnic society: perceptions of inequality among the student population

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Abstract[1]

One of the fundamental problems of the multicultural societies is the feeling of marginalization and even exclusion of minority groups from society, which is closely linked with a motivation for political mobilization and action. Therefore, the goal of the presented research is to find out how the student population from different ethnic origins in the R. Macedonia experience discrimination. More specifically, the paper seeks to identify the prevalence of discrimination, to identify the spheres of life in which such discrimination is most present and the categories of citizens who are privileged or marginalized in our society.

There is awareness of a widespread discrimination in Macedonian society in the most important areas of life. The bases for discrimination are numerous (ethnicity, social status, as well as friends and connections), where political affiliation is the most important factor for privileged treatment in society. The differences in perceptions between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians are in the ranking of the grounds for discrimination. However, party-political affiliation is a factor of impact for which there is the greatest concurrence of opinions and views between the two ethnic groups. When it comes to ethnicity, ethnic Albanians rank it higher than ethnic Macedonians in all areas of life examined that is in line with the main assumption of this research based on the phenomenon of the so-called minority effect.

Key words: perceptions of discrimination, student population, Republic of Macedonia, ethnic discrimination, political discrimination

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[1] The results presented in this paper are part of a larger research project entitled "Perception of identities among the student population in the Republic of Macedonia", carried out by a team of the Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research-Skopje in 2011–2012.

In political science, the issue of perceived inequality on the part of citizens in a society is very often linked with a motive for political mobilization and action. The perception of inequality is linked with the sense that a society is unfair or unjust—a society in which the citizens are (informally) divided into privileged and discriminated. And when the foundation for such division/inequality is permanent (i.e., based on class, racial, ethnic, religious, language background), then political action may seem the only way out, or the most efficient way for overcoming these problems. In the past, social and class cleavages were the dominant basis for inequality and the chief motive for political mobilization (let us remind ourselves of Marxist theory as well as socialist revolutions). Today, however, this basis is mostly found in cultural background, which covers racial, ethnic, religious, language and social groups (Blondel 1995, Kymlicka 2004 [1995]; Smith 1991).[i]

Many authors who are mainly interested in multi-ethnic societies point out that one of the fundamental problems of multi-ethnic/multi-religious/multilingual societies is the feeling of marginalization and even exclusion of minority groups from society. Discrimination is often resulting from hierarchy among groups in society (Horowitz 1985, Sisk 1996) and accompanies various structural requisites for ethnic conflicts such as historical, demographic and geopolitical factors (Brown 1999; Oberschall, 2007). Comparative studies also indicate that the non-neutral relation of the state towards the segments of the divided society is one kind of activator that pushes the groups into open confrontation, and is one of the most common reasons for ethnic conflicts (Gurr and Harf 1994; de Varenes 2004; Wolff 2006). The dissatisfaction, frustrations and revolt that this feeling engenders among the members of important segments of the population are not beneficial for the development of democracy nor for the political stability of the society. Therefore, the familiar models of power-sharing, in particular the consociational (Lijphart 1995 [1977]) and the integrative model (Horowitz 1985), list the politics of affirmative action and equal access to public resources among the most important instruments of managing the multiethnic societies.

To what extent these perceptions of discrimination reflect real inequalities present in a society is a topic that has been the focus of interest of various analysts. Well and Robinson in their research of perceptions of racial and class inequalities in the US and British societies

compare objective situation/indicators with people's perceptions of them, concluding that there could be significant differences (Well and Robinson 1980: 330-331). They say this is due to the fact that individuals have different positions in the social system and their perceptions are influenced by other factors as well. Group interests, values and social myths affect the perceptions of individuals to a large extent. In any case, when there is awareness of discrimination among significant segments of the population, these perceptions are in themselves a reality that cannot be dismissed. When this is the reality in a multicultural society, then the issue acquires other dimensions too. In his famous book on nations and nationalism E. Gelner expresses this in the following way. Most of the time large part of the citizens have reasons to be unsatisfied and perceive the society as unjust and fair. But, when the ones to be blamed for their situation are recognized in the members of the other nation/ethnicity, and the victims are identified among its own nation/ethnicity, than, claims Gelner, nationalism is born (Gelner 2001: 162).

Our analysis is focused on inequalities perceived in society among an important segment of the general population in the Republic of Macedonia, i.e. the student population. Inequality or discrimination is understood as the inability of all citizens to realize their rights and/or as inaccessibility (reduced access) to public goods and services for all categories of citizens under equal conditions. The goal of the research is to find out how the respondents experience discrimination in the Republic of Macedonia. More specifically, the research seeks to identify the prevalence of discrimination, to identify the spheres of life in which such discrimination is most present and the categories of citizens who are privileged or marginalized in our society.

A survey was therefore carried out in 2011 with students at state universities in the Republic of Macedonia using a sample of 451 respondents. The institutions from which the respondents were selected were determined prior to the survey, as well as the year of their studies, thus gaining a relatively homogeneous population. Students in the area of social sciences from the second and third years of their studies were surveyed from three state universities in the Republic of Macedonia: the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius– Skopje (UKIM); Goce Delcev University – Stip (UGD); and the Tetovo State University (DUT). The ethnic background of the students was first controlled, ensuring the sample was composed of 234 ethnic Macedonians (54.8%) and 201 ethnic Albanians (46.2%). The other socio-demographic

characteristics of the respondents covered by the sample were as follows: *gender* 34.5% male and 65.5% female; *university*: UKIM 192 (44.1%), UGD 137 (31.5%), DUT 106 (24.4%); and *social position*: very low 2.7%, low 11.3%, middle 77.4%, high 8.2%, very high 0.4%.

The main assumption of this research is based on the phenomenon of the so-called minority effect (Laponce, 2004), according to which the members of minority groups have a tendency to attach greater meaning to the traits specific of the minority, as they are especially important for the identity of their group, including their treatment in society by the ethnic majority.

We researched the cognitive map of inequalities through seven items that refer to several areas/spheres of great importance in the daily lives of citizens: employment, professional advancement, business development, the conduct of the police and the judiciary towards the citizens, and the accessibility of and treatment provided in public healthcare and education. The reasons or the grounds for inequality were defined as separate modalities: the citizens' ethnicity, members of wealthier classes, political (party) affiliation and friends/family connections. We started from the premise that affiliation to certain social groups can be grounds for privileged/better or worse treatment compared to the citizens who are not members of that social group. While the first two modalities are standard and are frequently found in sociological as well as political science literature (usually as racial and class inequalities), when it comes to the following two modalities they are an expression of our social reality and as such were used in other research carried out in the Republic of Macedonia (for example, see the "National Human Development Report 2001, Social Exclusion and Human Insecurity in Macedonia" and "Discrimination in Macedonia on Ethnic Grounds" – research report, MCIC, March 2011). When it comes to the fourth modality, a methodological remark should be made that in this case this is not a social group, but the category of citizens who have *(influential) friends and connections* is mediated through some of the abovementioned categories (wealthier citizens or those who belong to the privileged ethnic group, etc.). We still chose this modality, however: firstly because of the widespread practice in Macedonian society for "things to be done through friends and connections"; and secondly because individuals and their families can enjoy this position not only through affiliation to certain social groups but by other means as well

(influential relatives, a profession that brings a privileged social status, etc.). In political terms this phenomena is known as nepotism and it is frequently referred to in the media as such.

All of the questions offered the respondents the option of excluding discrimination, i.e. the option to state that there is no discrimination in a certain area. To the items referring to employment, professional advancement and business development, an additional modality was added, viz. the candidate's professional qualities. Working on the premise that in our society there are numerous bases for inequality, the respondents had the opportunity to grade the offered answers from 1 to 5, where 1 is the highest and 5 is the lowest grade, or in cases where four grounds for discrimination are mentioned, from 1 to 4, where 1 is the highest and 4 is the lowest grade.

The prevalence of discrimination in Macedonian society

The statistical processing of the data collected with the survey shows that among the student population there is a widespread perception of inequality in various areas. Ethnicity, together with affiliation to a wealthier classes, and above all party-political affiliation are the main reasons the students believe they are privileged or underprivileged in their daily lives. Due to these reasons, a relatively small number of the respondents chose the modalities which exclude discrimination. When it comes to employment, only 11.2% of the respondents answered that finding work depends most of all on "the citizens' professional qualities" (they ranked it first). For business development, this percentage is 19%, while for professional advancement the percentage is somewhat higher at 28% (as the first ranked answer). For the other questions regarding the conduct of the judiciary and the police towards citizens and the provision and accessibility of healthcare and education, around 20% of the respondents believed that the police treat all citizens equally, while around 26% of the students in our sample have this opinion about the judiciary and healthcare. When it comes to education, as many as 52% of the respondents said that all citizens have equal access to state education, which means that education is perceived as an area where there is least discrimination.

Which factors are most important for the discrimination of citizens? Below we will present the survey results through the mean values of rankings.

Table 1. Ranking of the factors which impact employment, professional advancement and business development (mean values)

Factors of influence	Employment	Professional advancement	Business development
Political/party affiliation	2.05	2.34	2.48
Ethnicity	3.1	3.33	3.64
Affiliation to wealthier classes	3.2	3.28	2.62
Friends/family connections	2.98	3.11	3.1
Professional qualities of the candidate	3.67	2.95	3.13

* The ranking was from 1 to 5, where 1 is the highest and 5 is the lowest rank.

The analysis of the table with the mean values of rankings highlights the following: party-political affiliation is the highest ranking factor in all three cases, and its impact is most pronounced when it comes to employment. When it comes to the *professional qualities of the candidate,* a modality that practically excludes discrimination, it has the lowest ranking for employment and the highest for professional advancement. Ethnicity is ranked low, especially when it comes to professional advancement and business development (according to the mean values of the ranks of individual factors of impact in both instances—professional advancement and business development—it is ranked last, fifth).

Table 2. Ranking of the factors which impact on the conduct of the police and the judiciary towards the citizens and the accessibility and provision of healthcare and education (mean values)

Factors of impact	Police	Judiciary	Healthcare	Education
Political/party affiliation	**2.38**	**2.14**	2.84	2.47
Ethnicity	2.6	2.88	2.91	2.68
Affiliation to wealthier classes	2.61	2.44	**2.17**	2.47
Friends/family connections	2.44	2.55	2.08	**2.39**

*The ranking was from 1 to 4, where 1 was the highest and 4 the lowest grade. The question was answered only by the respondents who for the preceding/eliminating question said that the corresponding institution does not treat all citizens equally.

Several general conclusions can be drawn from the table above. First, party-political affiliation is the highest ranked factor when it comes to the conduct of the police and the judiciary towards the citizens, while in healthcare and education, friends and connections are ranked first. Second, the impact of all suggested factors is important for the discrimination of citizens, which can be seen from the minor differences in the mean rankings (healthcare is the exception, where the influence of the first ranked factor (friends and connections) is significantly greater). Third, ethnicity is not a very important factor and thus shares the second and third place with affiliation to wealthier classes when it comes to the conduct of the police, while in the three remaining items, according to the mean values, ethnicity is ranked last.

Categories of citizens who have privileged treatment in society

The statistical processing of data enabled us to separate the percentage of respondents who have ranked individual factors of impact (or social affiliation) as first, or, in other words,

consider them as most important for discrimination in society. In the analysis we will comment on the cases where more than one fourth of the respondents (more than 25%) have ranked a certain factor as first.

Table 3. Percentage of respondents who ranked a certain factor first

Factors of impact	Employment	Professional advancement	Business development	Conduct of police	Conduct of judiciary	Healthcare	Education
Party affiliation	**56.8%**	**42.7%**	**33.6%**	**26.6%**	**37.5%**	17.5%	**28.9%**
Ethnicity	15.1%	12.3%	11.0%	**29.6%**	19.9%	13.9%	18.8%
Affiliation to wealthier classes	6.2%	7.6%	**26.4%**	15.5%	19.6%	**31.4%**	23.9%
Friends/Family connections	10.2%	9.4%	10.4%	**27.5%**	22.8%	**36.9%**	**28.0%**

Party-political affiliation is the most important factor of discrimination in five of the seven areas. An especially high percentage of respondents share this perception when it comes to employment (56.8%) and professional advancement (42.7%), while the other factors are considered of only marginal importance in these areas. In the remaining three areas (the conduct of the judiciary, business development and education), the greatest percentage of respondents believe that party affiliation is most important for discrimination, although this percentage is relatively smaller compared to the two previous areas (employment and professional advancement). That is why the importance of the other factors of impact is more pronounced here.

In only one case (the conduct of the police towards the citizens) is ethnicity the first ranked factor for the highest percentage of respondents (29.6%), while the citizens' social status, according to these data, has greater significance for business development (26.4%), but above all

in healthcare (31.4%). Friends and family connections are especially important in healthcare (36.9%), in education (28.0%), and in the conduct of the police towards the citizens (27.5%).

The gathered data highlights two general conclusions. The first is that according to the perceptions of the surveyed population, discrimination is a widespread occurrence in our society in many areas of life, where certain areas are more sensitive to discrimination (e.g. employment) compared to others (e.g. education). The second is that party-political affiliation is the most important reason for inequalities in Macedonian society. Its impact is much greater than the citizens' social status or their ethnicity, which leads us to the conclusion that, according to the respondents' perceptions, those who are close to the ruling political structures are the most privileged category of citizens in Macedonian society. These conclusions are based on the answers of all respondents in our survey.

Before we move to the second level of analysis, we will briefly present the main findings of the research on ethnic discrimination in the R. Macedonia conducted by MCIC.[ii] According to it, majority of the citizens think that there is discrimination in the country, most frequently based on political grounds and followed by discrimination on ethnic grounds. The ethnic discrimination is most widespread in the fields of working relations, employment, public sector services (public administration, health system, police and education), but also in the private services (coffee bars, night clubs etc.). Ethnic Albanians perceive the ethnic discrimination especially widespread in the fields of agriculture, culture, police, payment of taxes, and distribution of the state budget.

Researchers conclude that the perceived discrimination (67,7%) on an ethnic ground is twice as big in comparison to the actually experienced one (as a victim or as a witness), which is reported by 31,9% of the respondents. However these numbers confirm again that the discrimination in Macedonian society is very present. At the same time, it confirms that the perception of a certain phenomenon is intermediated by a number of factors.

At the end, according to the answers of the respondents, discrimination has become more frequent in the last five years.

The conclusions of the research conducted by MCIC in big part are in line with our own research, which is visible from the data presented below.

The influence of the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics on their perception of inequalities

The second level of analysis was undertaken to determine which independent variables influence the respondents' perceptions. Having in mind the subject and the goal of our project, the first supposition was that it would be their ethnicity as well as the educational environment (the university), while gender would not have a strong influence on the positions and opinions of the student population in our sample.

Respondents' ethnicity and the perception of inequalities

With the use of a t-test, statistically significant differences were found in 22 of the possible 31 comparisons of perceptions between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. Their statistical significance is between $P < 0.001$ and $P < 0.000$.

Table 4. Comparisons of perceptions of discrimination between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians

Importance of:	Ethnicity and mean values		t test	Statistic significance
Ethnicity for employment	Macedonians	3.30	3.61	P < 0.00
	Albanians	2.80		
Friends/family for employment	Macedonians	2.82	-2.60	P < 0.01
	Albanians	3.24		
Ethnicity for professional advancement	Macedonians	3.62	5.12	P < 0.00
	Albanians	2.89		
Professional qualities for professional advancement	Macedonians	2.74	-3.22	P < 0.00
	Albanians	3.26		
Political affiliation for business development	Macedonians	2.83	2.75	P < 0.01
	Albanians	2.23		
Ethnicity for business development	Macedonians	3.92	4.98	P < 0.00
	Albanians	3.22		

Affiliation to wealthier classes for business development	Macedonians	2.40	-3.82	$P < 0.00$
	Albanians	2.93		
Professional qualities for business development	Macedonians	2.98	-2.88	$P < 0.00$
	Albanians	3.42		
Ethnicity for the conduct of the police	Macedonians	3.00	7.96	$P < 0.00$
	Albanians	2.02		
Affiliation to wealthier classes for the conduct of the police	Macedonians	2.43	-4.00	$P < 0.00$
	Albanians	2.84		
Friends/family for conduct of the police	Macedonians	2.18	-5.29	$P < 0.00$
	Albanians	2.81		
Ethnicity for the conduct of the judiciary	Macedonians	3.13	4.80	$P < 0.05$
	Albanians	2.53		
Affiliation to wealthier classes for the conduct of the judiciary	Macedonians	2.33	-2.24	$P < 0.02$
	Albanians	2.58		
Friends/Family for the conduct of the judiciary	Macedonians	2.37	-3.42	$P < 0.01$
	Albanians	2.78		
Political affiliation for getting healthcare services	Macedonians	3.02	3.14	$P < 0.00$
	Albanians	2.62		
Ethnicity for getting healthcare services	Macedonians	3.13	4.91	$P < 0.00$
	Albanians	2.56		
Affiliation to wealthier classes for getting healthcare services	Macedonians	2.03	-2.68	$P < 0.01$
	Albanians	2.35		
Friends/family for getting healthcare services	Macedonians	1.83	-5.32	$P < 0.00$
	Albanians	2.44		
Political affiliation for state education	Macedonians	2.87	4.28	$P < 0.00$
	Albanians	2.23		
Ethnicity for state education	Macedonians	2.88	2.08	$P < 0.04$
	Albanians	2.56		
Affiliation to wealthier classes for state education	Macedonians	2.24	-2.43	$P < 0.01$
	Albanians	2.62		
Friends/family for state education	Macedonians	2.05	-3.65	$P < 0.00$
	Albanians	2.59		

Analysis/comparison of the mean values of rankings leads to the following more general conclusions. First, in all seven items ethnic Albanians attributed greater importance to ethnicity as grounds for discrimination than ethnic Macedonians. Second, when it comes to political affiliation as grounds for discrimination, there are differences in three items: business development, healthcare and education, where ethnic Albanians give a higher ranking to political affiliation as a reason for discrimination than ethnic Macedonians. Third, ethnic Macedonians rank higher the affiliation to wealthier classes as a factor of discrimination in the following five areas: business development, the conduct of the police and the judiciary towards the citizens, in getting healthcare services and in state education. Fourth, ethnic Macedonians give greater importance to friends and connections as a basis for discrimination than ethnic Albanians in the following five areas: employment, the conduct of the police and the judiciary towards the citizens, healthcare and state education.

The university environment and the perception of inequalities

The second independent variable that influences the respondents' perception is the university at which they study. Most of the authors who have written about political socialization consider education a very important agent whose influence in that process is ranked (relatively) high. We defined this variable as the university environment, bearing in mind not only the socialization that is carried out in the process of education (even more in our case of social sciences faculties) as well as the broader environment in which these institutions are located, i.e., the area where the students live. At the Goce Delcev University, the dominant ethnic group among the students is comprised of Macedonians, while the seat of the university is in a town and region with a predominantly ethnic Macedonian population. At the State University in Tetovo, the student structure is predominantly ethnic Albanian, while the university is located in a municipality with a dominant Albanian population, which is also the seat of the most important political parties of the ethnic Albanians in the Republic of Macedonia. At the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius there are students from both ethnic communities, and Skopje as the state

capital is exposed to large-scale migration from all parts of Macedonia and in this sense is exposed to various cultural influences.

The statistical data processing showed that out of a possible 31 comparisons, there were statistically significant differences in 17 cases between the mean values for perceptions of inequalities at the level of the three universities. Analysis of the resulting tables leads the following general conclusions. First, in all cases the statistically significant difference is linked to the universities in Stip and Tetovo, while the mean values of the responses of the respondents from the Skopje-based University in most cases shows a statistically significant difference from the mean values in only one of the previously mentioned universities. Thus, according to the mean values in all 17 cases, the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius is somewhere in the middle. The second important conclusion is that the differences between the rankings of various affiliations as a basis for discrimination in fact reproduce the picture that emerged from intersecting the data from the general distribution with the respondents' ethnicity. Namely, the respondents from Tetovo University ascribed greater significance to ethnicity as a ground for discrimination with respect to the general distribution, while for the respondents from the University of Stip this is true for the affiliation to wealthier strata and having friends and connections. Third, in relation to discrimination, the views on access to education are the most homogenous. In this sphere there are practically no statistically significant differences between the universities.

Respondents' gender and perceptions of inequality

Gender was not an important factor impacting the distribution of opinions about discrimination in Macedonian society. Of a possible 31 comparisons, only in 6 cases were there statistically significant differences between male and female respondents.

Conclusion

According to the research results, there is awareness of a widespread discrimination in Macedonian society in the most important areas of life, although with varying intensity. According to the respondents' perceptions, the most vulnerable area when it comes to discrimination is employment, while education is the area least susceptible to inequalities. The bases for discrimination are numerous (ethnicity, social status, as well as friends and connections), where political affiliation is the most important factor for privileged treatment in society. These conclusions derive from the statistical processing of the data received from the entire surveyed population.

To what can the respondents' differences in perception be attributed? Of the three researched features of the respondents (gender, university and ethnicity), ethnicity was shown to be the most sensitive feature when it comes to different perceptions of inequalities. There are many indications that the distribution for the variable university environment is largely due to the respondents' ethnicity.

What are the differences in perceptions between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians? The differences are in the ranking of the grounds for discrimination. Party-political affiliation is a factor of impact for which there is the greatest concurrence of opinions and views between the two ethnic groups (there are no statistically significant differences in as many as 4 of the 7 offered areas of life). When it comes to ethnicity, ethnic Albanians rank it higher than ethnic Macedonians in all seven areas of life. For ethnic Macedonians, on the other hand, apart from political affiliation, the affiliation to wealthier classes and having friends and connections are also very important bases for a privileged status in society.

These are important facts for a democratic society that is also a multicultural one with the typical features of a divided society. The great importance that ethnic Albanians ascribe to discrimination on ethnic grounds in all areas of life supports Blondel's thesis that when all divisions in a society coincide with ethnic divisions it has a reinforcing effect on ethnic tensions in society. These perceptions in a certain social group consolidate a feeling of marginalization and social exclusion which is certainly not conducive to developing democracy. The abovementioned research by MCIC and UNDP, as well as many others,[iii] points to the fact that

these perceptions are long-term. This means that in a lengthier period of time there is a reproduction of perceptions amongst an important section of the Macedonian population that an individual's social standing and status in society is determined by his/her ethnicity. Even though ethnicity is not a dominant factor of influence, it is certainly a continuously present factor which in certain unfavourable contexts (economic, political, regional) can generate situations of conflict. The second important conclusion is that, according to the respondents' perception, there is widespread discrimination in society on various grounds, which basically means a perception of insufficient functionality of democracy, which makes society unjust and unfair for most of the citizens, in turn making the citizens frustrated, angry and dissatisfied. This can lead to a spillover of the problem of inequalities in the area of interethnic relations (*the Others are to blame)*, especially if it is stimulated by the interests of the political elites. The second important consequence is that citizens, in our case the youth, could cultivate a culture of *sauve qui peut*, i.e., striving to become part of the privileged circle at any cost, which is an important precondition for the reproduction of the same (undemocratic) relations in society. Of course, there is always an alternative possibility, and that is the mobilization (of youth) to overcome this situation, although this is the least likely option bearing in mind the present situation.

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[i] The consequences of the 2008 economic crisis will create fertile ground for social movements with anti-capitalist and anti-global agendas (Occupy, Indignados). This will encourage discussions in academic circles (mostly in the new left) that the primary divisions/conflicts in modern society are economic (not cultural) and that the solution for them will be sought in radical changes of the social system. It seems that such predictions are exaggerated.

[ii] The research is financed by the OSCE. The survey was conducted in 2010 on a nationally representative sample.

[iii] The MCIC even speaks of deterioration of the situation in the last five years. Of course, it is impossible to make direct comparisons between these three studies because of the different samples (the two mentioned are with a national representative sample), as well as the whole concept of research, applied instruments, etc.

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