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- PERCEPTIONS AND VIEWPOINTS OF THE CITIZENS OF THE REPUBLIC OF
NORTH MACEDONIA IN RELATION TO THE OPERATION OF THE POLICE

***'TOWARDS TRANSPARENT, ACCOUNTABLE AND INCLUSIVE
POLICING IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA'***

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METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

The opinion polling was conducted by the agency Brima from Skopje via a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) using the NIPO platform in the period between November 23rd and November 30th 2021 on a representative sample of 1001 respondents, and with a margin of error of +/- 3%. Brima is held responsible for the methodological accuracy of the polling whereas the questionnaire was drafted by the research team of Centre for European Strategies EUROTHINK in cooperation with Brima. In the course of the research, data from surveys conducted since 2014 onwards were used. These surveys have been conducted by various local agencies as commissioned by EUROTHINK.

SUMMARY – KEY FINDINGS

At the time of the opinion polling, the citizens expressed highest level of confidence in the Army of the Republic of North Macedonia (47%), followed by the President of the Republic of North Macedonia (31%), in the religious communities (30%) as well as in the police (30%). The lowest level of confidence is in the judicature (8%) and in the prosecution (8%). It is to be highlighted that the confidence is highly correlated to the political party affiliation of the public – the opposition supporters have a predominantly negative viewpoint as opposed to the supporters of the ruling political parties. Furthermore, it is to be underlined that in this opinion polling the trust in the police is again higher compared to the other stakeholders within the judiciary-legal system (the judicature and the prosecution remain the most negatively assessed institutions).

As regards the operation of the police in the Republic of North Macedonia, the prevailing viewpoint in the evaluation of all measured aspects is negative. Nevertheless, 30% are of the opinion that the police are professional in their operation; 26% are of the opinion that they are efficient; 22% that they are transparent; 20% that they are accountable; 16% that they consider citizens' opinions and requirements in the decision-making processes pertaining to their operation and the lowest percentage of the respondents are of the opinion that the police are independent from any political, governmental or business related interests (13%).

Characteristics, such as transparency, accountability and inclusivity in the decision-making processes pertaining to the operation of the police, are parameters that are subject to due diligence within the scope of the project. To this end, within the framework of this public polling, these aspects are considered alongside with the contact with the police, the viewpoints as to the internal control of the police, the operation of the police under the COVID-19 pandemic imposed circumstances, as well as the viewpoints regarding the concept of community policing.

Despite the generally negative evaluation of the operation of the police, the citizens that have had a personal contact positively evaluate the professionalism of the police officers and their work. This contradiction creates the impression that the general stance towards the operation of the police is conditioned by other factors (such as the afore-stated political preferences) and not as a viewpoint built upon any personal or specific experience through an immediate contact with the police officers.

The percentage of citizens that had to file a report to the internal control of the police is rather insignificant (1,7%). They are convinced that the internal control of the police does not contribute to reduction in corruption and lack of professionalism within the institution.

In the COVID-19 pandemic imposed conditions, they had to contact the police with reference to pandemic related questions (to request movement permit, to report infringement of safety related measures, etc.). It is rather interesting that once again the vast majority of the citizens that had established a contact with the police with reference to pandemic issues were satisfied with the interaction. Sixty-one percent of the citizens positively evaluated the police as regards their performance of tasks in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Concerning the topic of community policing, as a concept of police operation and organization of the work of the police at a local level, only 9% of all the respondents have ever heard of this concept. These respondents positively evaluate the functioning of the concept of community policing.

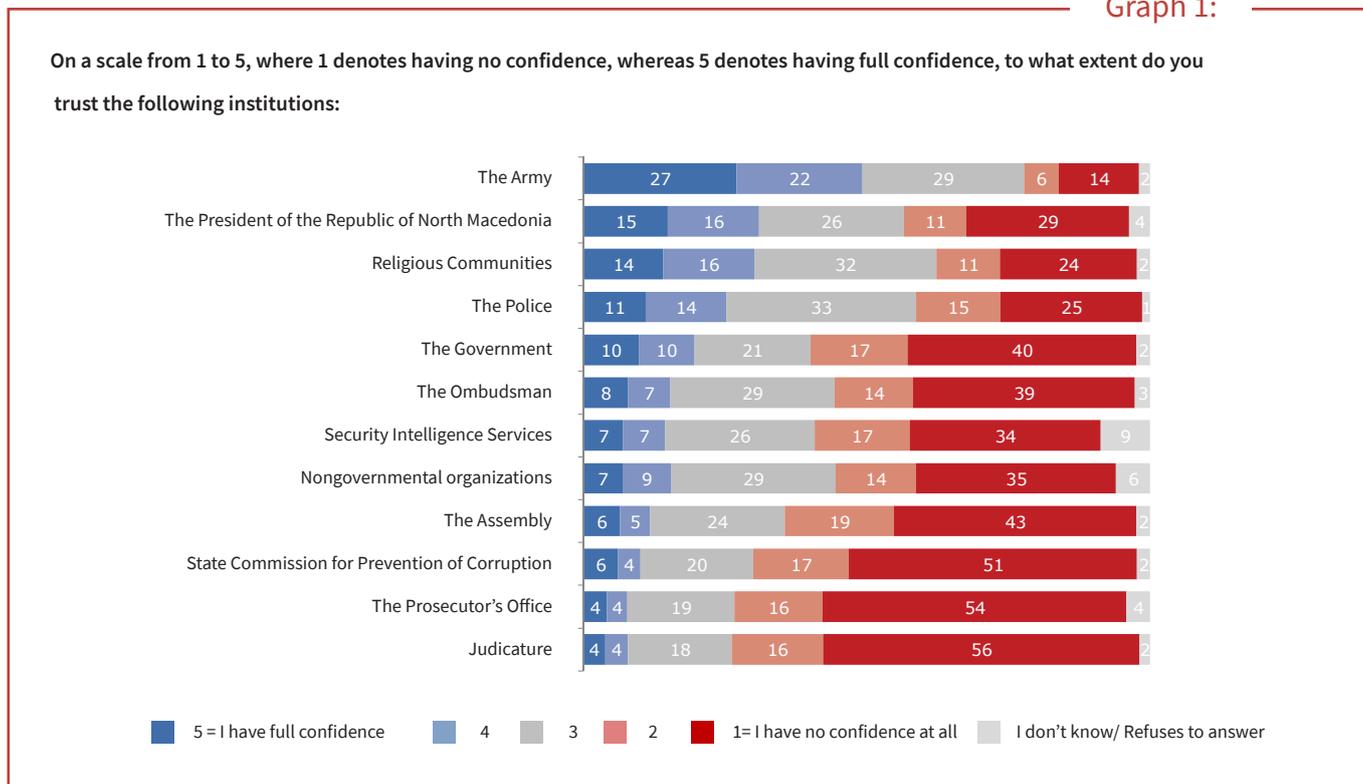
The percentage of the respondents that are familiar with the role and work of the Local Prevention Council within their respective municipalities is even lower and it amounts to 5,4%.

In line with the afore-stated, it may be inferred that the promotion/familiarization of the public with the concept of community policing, and the operation of the Local Prevention Council (LPC) are to be intensified and broadly popularized.

CONFIDENCE IN THE INSTITUTIONS

For the purpose of measuring citizens' confidence in the institutions, a measuring scale ranging from 1 to 5 was used, where 1 denotes having no confidence, whereas 5 denotes having full confidence (Graph 1).

Graph 1:



The citizens have the greatest confidence in the Army of the Republic of North Macedonia (47%, as a sum of answers 5 and 4), followed by the President of the Republic of North Macedonia (31%) and the religious communities (30%). Thirty percent of the citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia have confidence in the police.

The lowest observable level of confidence is in the judicature (8%) and in the Prosecutor's Office (8%). With reference to the police, this level of confidence is predetermined by the political party affiliation. Namely, 43% of the VMRO-DPMNE supporters do not have any confidence in the police as opposed to 7% of the SDSM supporters. In aggregate (mark 1+2), it indicates that one half (52%) of the VMRO-DPMNE supporters have no confidence in the police as opposed to the 22% of the SDSM supporters.

As regards the Albanian political party block, mark '3' prevails (neither Yes nor No).

The level of confidence (an aggregate of answers 4+5) is as follows:

50% of the SDSM supporters, 45% of the DUI supporters, 18% of the Alliance of Albanians supporters, 16% of the BESA supporters, and 14% of the VMRO-DPMNE supporters.

NOTES ON THE OPERATION OF THE POLICE

The afore-stated topics and the overview of the public polling derived results serve as a foundation for a more in-depth set of questions regarding the operation of the police.

This set of questions is aimed at the citizens' perception of the operation of the police, i.e. its professionalism, transparency, independence and autonomy, efficiency, accountability and working in the interest of the citizens (Graph 2).

Graph 2:

Now I shall read to you several statements regarding the operation of the police and I would ask you to tell me to what extent you agree with them.

The scale ranges from 1 to 5, where 1 denotes that you do not agree at all, whereas 5 denotes that you fully agree with the statement:

T2_1: The police in North Macedonia are professional in their operation.

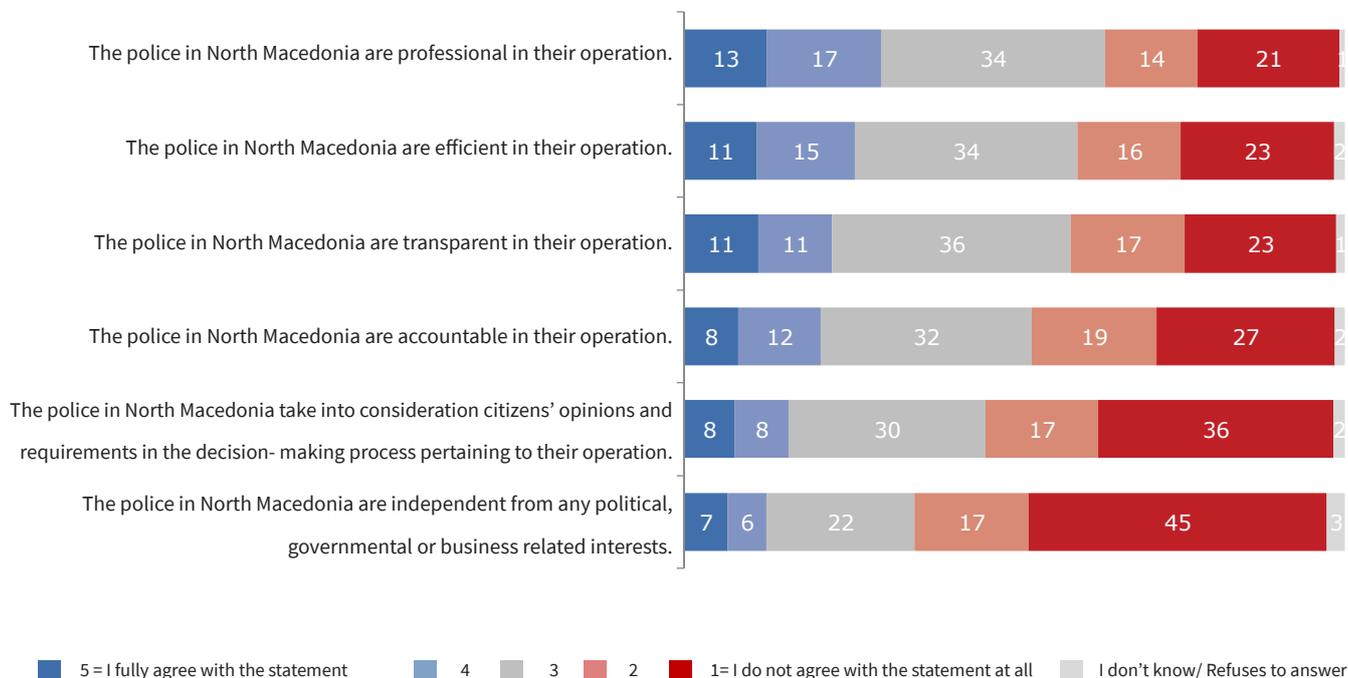
T2_2: The police in North Macedonia are transparent in their operation.

T2_3: The police in North Macedonia are efficient in their operation.

T2_4: The police in North Macedonia are independent from any political, governmental or business related interests.

T2_5: The police in North Macedonia are accountable in their operation.

T2_6: The police in North Macedonia take into consideration citizens' opinions and requirements in the decision-making process pertaining to their operation.



The positive opinion on the operation of the police is within the range of 30% as regards the statement that the police in North Macedonia are professional in their operation and up to 13% as to the fact that they are independent from any political, government or business related interests.

As opposed to the afore-stated, a negative opinion prevails pertaining to all measured aspects of the operation of the police – ranging from 35% of the respondents that deem the police unprofessional to 62% of the respondents that deem the police dependent on political, government and business related interests.

The subsequent part showcases a descriptive brief regarding each of the measured aspects (aggregate of answers 4 and 5 = agreeing with the statement, on one hand, and/or 1+2 disagreeing with the statement, on the other hand).

On the issue of **PROFESSIONALISM** of the police

The percentage of unprofessionalism of the police is higher among the Macedonians (41%) compared to the ethnic Albanians (25%). This opinion is also shared by the supporters of VMRO-DPMNE (57%), supporters of Levica (46%) as opposed to the opinion of the supporters of SDSM (17%); and 40% of urban residents as opposed to 29% of rural residents. The respondents of the Polog region deem the police unprofessional to a lesser degree (23%) as opposed to the respondents from the other regions (ranging from 32 to 48%).

As regards the belief in professionalism of the police, the structure is as follows: 51% of SDSM supporters, 67% of DUI supporters and 40% of BESA supporters.

On the issue of **EFFICIENCY** of the police

Macedonians, to a higher degree are of the opinion that the police are efficient in their operation – expressed by 44% as opposed to 29% of the ethnic Albanians. Forty-seven percent of citizens with higher education are convinced that the police are inefficient as opposed to the opinion shared by the respondents of secondary or lower school education. Inefficiency of the police is claimed by 58% of VMRO-DPMNE and Levica supporters, as opposed to 21% of SDSM supporters. A lesser percentage of respondents from the Polog region are of the opinion that the police are inefficient (27%) as opposed to the opinion from the other regions (ranging from 33 to 52%).

The agreement with the efficiency of the police is higher among the SDSM and DUI supporters. i.e. 48% and 57% respectively.

On the issue of **TRANSPARENCY** of the police

As regards the transparency of the operation of the police, the prevailing viewpoint of the public is negative (40%) as opposed to the positive one (22%). Once again, the political affiliation predetermines the forming of the public opinion – namely, 59% of the VMRO-DPMNE supporters and 66% of the Levica supporters claim that there is no transparency in the operation of the police, as opposed to the rather low percentage among the DUI supporters (8%) and among the SDSM supporters (16%). The agreement with the transparency of the police is higher among the SDSM and DUI supporters. i.e. 47% and 36% respectively.

On the issue of **ACCOUNTABILITY** of the police

Forty-six percent of the respondents are of the opinion that the police are not accountable in their operation as opposed to twenty percent that are of the opinion that the police are accountable. Lack of accountability is claimed by 69% of the VMRO-DPMNE supporters, 76% of the Levica supporters, 43% of the supporters of the Alliance of Albanians and 52% of the urban respondents. The agreement with the accountability of the police is higher among the SDSM and DUI supporters. i.e. 43% and 51% respectively.

On the issue whether the police **CONSIDERS THE OPINIONS AND REQUIREMENTS OF THE CITIZENS** in the adoption of decisions as regards their operation

A negative viewpoint of 53% prevails over the positive one of 16%. The negative viewpoint is predominant among the Macedonian respondents, respondents with a secondary education diploma, VMRO-DPMNE supporters (71%) and among Levica supporters (66%). However, it is lower among the SDSM and DUI supporters, 27 and 14% respectively.

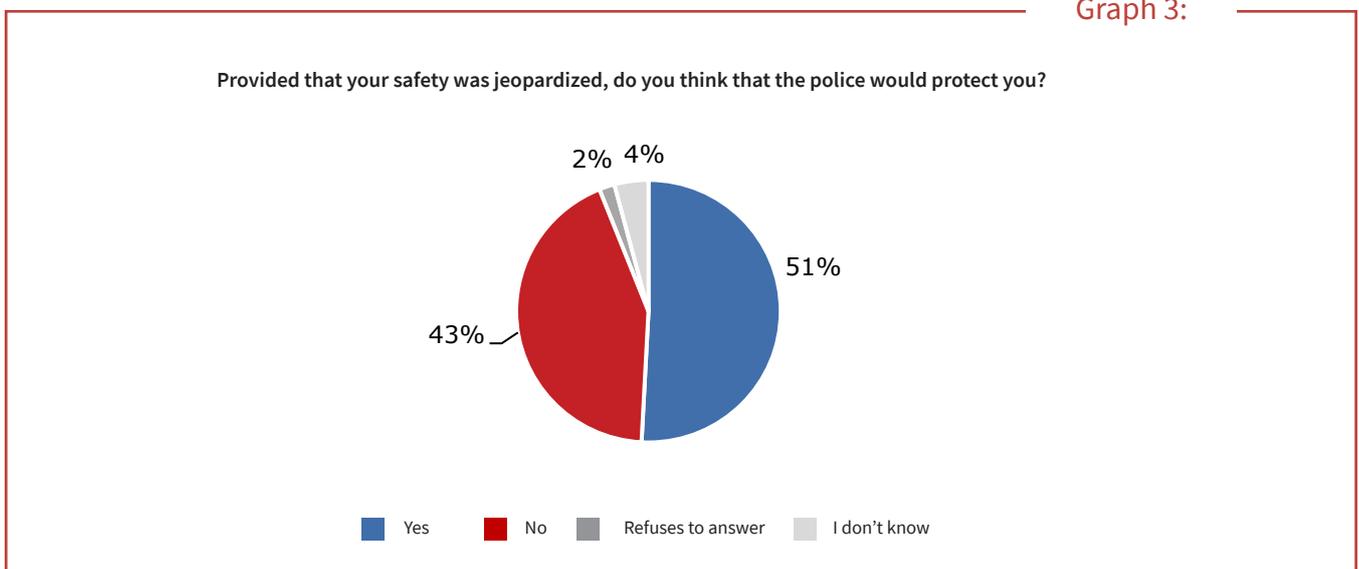
On the issue of **INDEPENDENCE AND AUTONOMY OF THE POLICE AGAINST ANY POLITICAL, GOVERNMENT OR BUSINESS RELATED INTERESTS**

As regard this aspect, the predominant viewpoint among the public is negative. Namely, 62% are of the opinion that the police are not independent in their operation and are under the influence of political, government and business related interests, whereas only 13% deem the police independent.

With reference to the negative viewpoint, the structure is as follows: 66% are among the elderly respondents; 73% are from the Vardar region; 87% are VMRO-DPMNE supporters, 76% are supporters of the Alliance of Albanians and 70% are supporters of Levica. A lesser percentage is evident among the SDSM supporters, represented by 33%, and among the DUI supporters, represented by 21%.

To the contrary, 40% of the SDSM supporters and 23% of the DUI supporters have a positive viewpoint (that the police are independent from any political, government or business related interests). Half of the respondents (51%) state that the police would protect them provided that their safety was jeopardized, as opposed to 43% of the respondents who do not believe that they would be protected. (Graph 3).

Graph 3:



Similarly, as regards this hypothetical question, the political party affiliation has an influence on the opinion forming. Hence, 69% of the SDSM supporters, 72% of the DUI supporters, 54% of the Levica supporters, and to a lesser extent, 37% of the VMRO-DPMNE supporters believe that they would be protected by the police in case their safety was jeopardized. To the contrary, 61% the VMRO-DPMNE supporters do not believe that they would be protected by the police.

Cumulative in brief:

Political party affiliation is a very strong discriminatory factor in the forming of public opinion regarding the operation of the police – a negative attitude prevails among the opposition supporters, as opposed to the attitude of the ruling parties supporters. Ethnicity, religious belonging, age structure and degree of education are indisputably minor discriminatory factors concerning the measuring aspects of the operation of the police of the Republic of North Macedonia.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH THE POLICE OF THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

In the subsequent section of the survey, the respondents were asked a set of questions regarding their personal experience with the police. Namely, 14% of the respondents have had contact with the police of the Republic of North Macedonia, out of which, one half (7%) initiated by the respondents themselves, whereas the other half (7%) initiated by the police (Graph 4).

The respondents (14% of the total number) who have had contact with the police were additionally asked whether the police officers were professional in their operation. Almost two-thirds, i.e. 71% of the surveyed respondents (which is actually 10% of all respondents) stated that the police officers were professional in their operation.

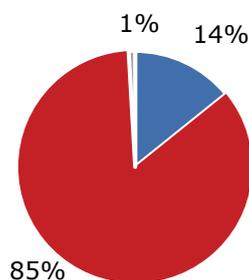
Graph 4:

T4: Have you had any contact with the police within the last 24 months?

T4a: Provided that the answer is YES, have you or the police initiated the contact?

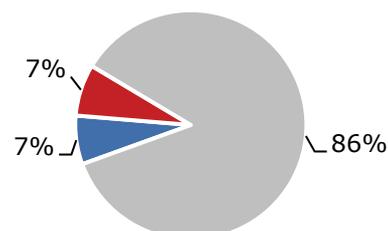
T4b: Were the police officers professional in their operation?

Have you had contact with the police within the last 24 months?



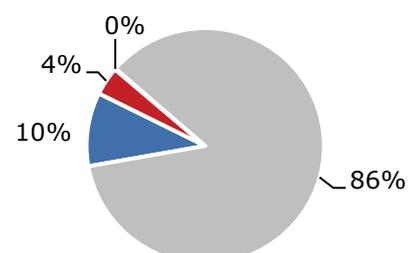
■ Yes
■ No
■ Refuses to answer

Have you or the police initiated the contact?



■ I
■ The police
■ Not asked

Were the police officers professional in their operation?

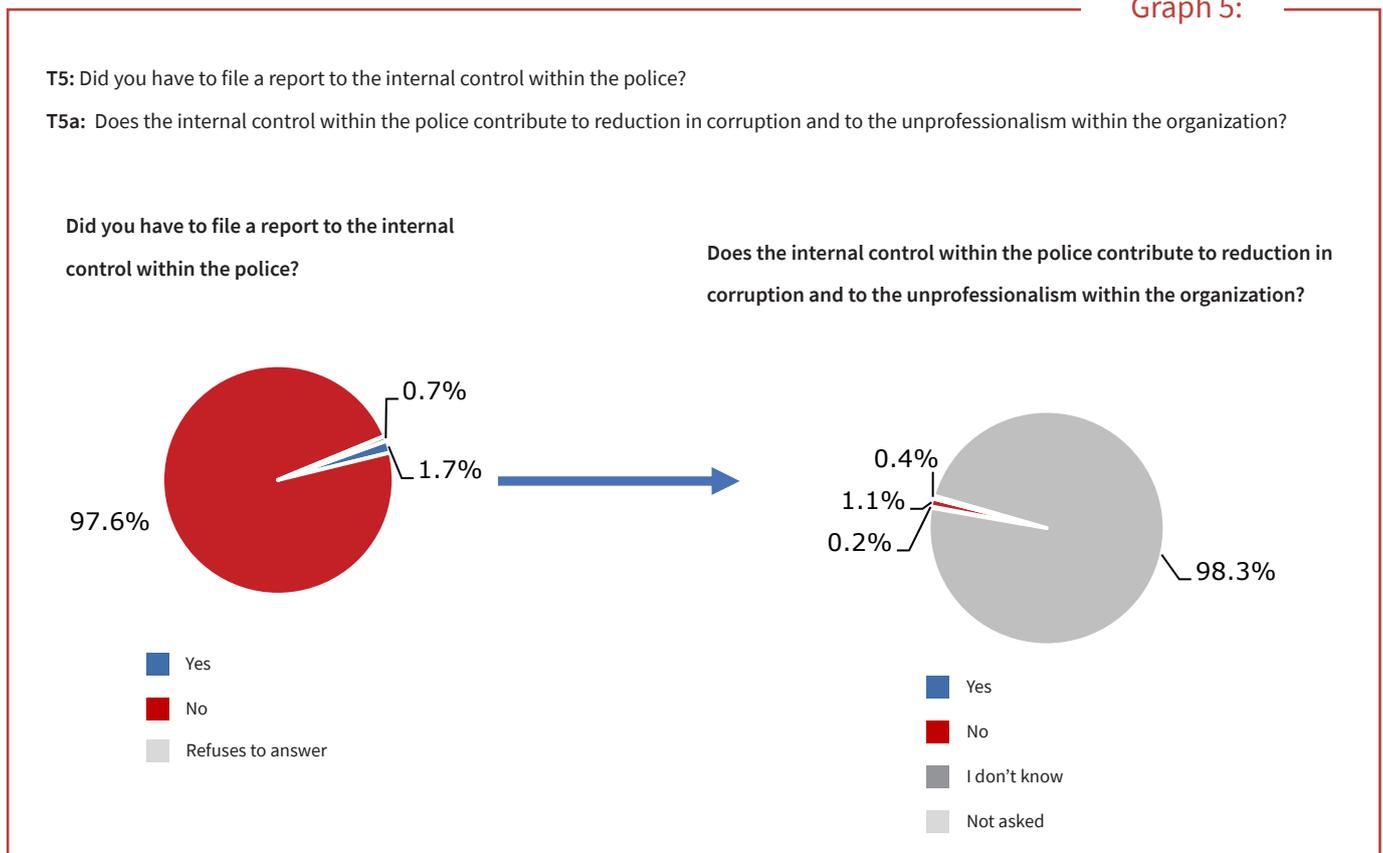


■ Yes
■ No
■ I don't know
■ Not asked

It is interesting to highlight that in the case of respondents with personal experience with the police, their attitude towards the professionalism of the police officers is positive, i.e. different from the generally negative attitude on the professionalism expressed as per the previous questions. This poses a dilemma whether the formulated general attitude to the operation of the police is modeled/-profiled/determined by other factors, and not based on one's personal experience.

Only 1,7% of all respondents (i.e. 17 respondents) have filed a report to the internal control of the police. These respondents were additionally asked whether they believed that the internal control within the police contributed to reduction in corruption in unprofessionalism within the organization. Eleven of them were of the opinion that the internal control did not contribute to reduction in corruption and to unprofessionalism within the organization. Generally, this is to be acknowledged only as an indicator in view of the low statistical mass as a foundation for broader generalization (Graph 5).

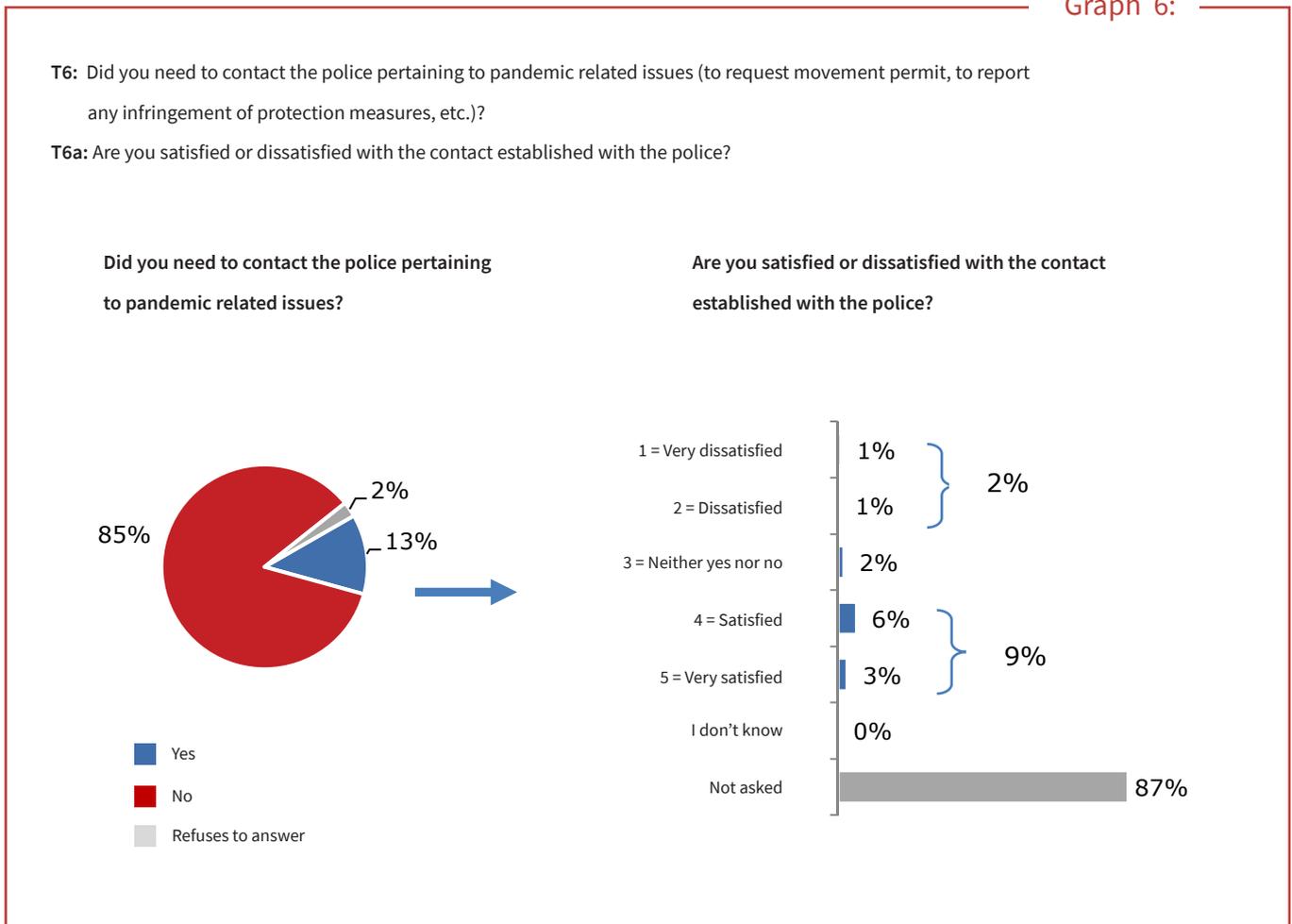
Graph 5:



Within the context of 'personal experience', in the period when the COVID-19 pandemic is still active, the respondents were asked if they had contacted the police pertaining to pandemic related issues (whether they had requested movement permit, reporting any infringement of protection measures, etc.).

Thirteen percent of the respondents have contacted the police pertaining to pandemic related issues. The percentage of established contact with the police is higher among the middle-aged citizens (aged 35 to 54). The ratio of contact with the police is approximately the same in all regions, as well as in terms of ethnicity (Graph 6).

Graph 6:

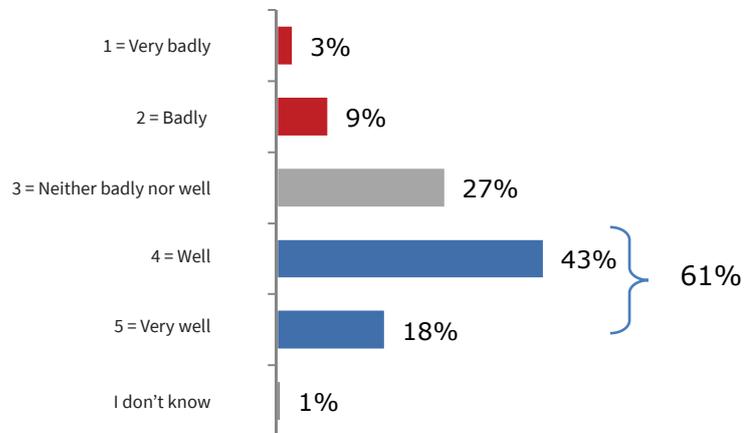


More than two thirds (69%) of the surveyed respondents who have had contact with the police regarding pandemic related issues, assess the contact positively (aggregate of answers 4+5). This actually represents 9% of all respondents, as opposed to 2% of all respondents that are dissatisfied with the established contact. In this case of personal contact with the police, positive evaluation prevails over negative.

With reference to the COVID-19 pandemic, the respondents were asked to give their assessment of the performance of police-related tasks in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic (Graph 7).

Graph 7:

In the course of the COVID-19 pandemic the police performed their tasks:



It is worth mentioning that almost two thirds (61%) produced a positive mark (an aggregate of marks 4 and 5) as opposed to 12% who produced a negative mark, and 27% who remained neutral.

This question may be regarded general, where the formulation of the viewpoint is under the influence of one's 'political affiliation'. Hence, the percentage of negative evaluation is higher among the VMRO-DPMNE supporters, as opposed to the higher percentage of positive evaluation noticeable among the SDSM and DUI supporters.

CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY POLICING

One of the topics of this survey is measurement of awareness and evaluation of the concept of community policing, as a concept of police operation and organization of police operation at a local level.

This concept of police organization and of police operation within the community prioritizes the issue of building mutual trust and cooperation among the police and the citizens, and emphasis is placed on the preventive and proactive approach dwelling on problem-oriented police operation at a local level.

The obtained results from the survey indicate that only 9% of all respondents have heard of this concept (Graph 8) and these responses are mainly given by the younger respondents and those with higher education degree.

The awareness in terms of this concept has similar representation within all regions of the Republic of North Macedonia (ranging from 4% in the Pelagonija region to 11% in the Skopje region).

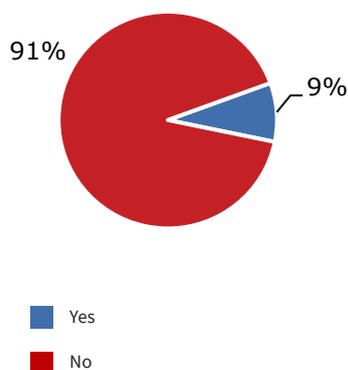
Graph 8:

T8: Have you heard of the concept of 'community policing'?

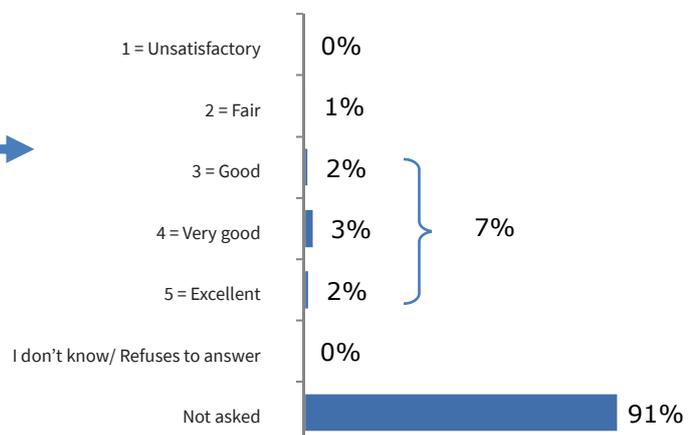
T8a: What mark would you give to the functioning of the concept of 'community policing'

on a scale from 1 to 5 following the school system grading scale?

Awareness of the concept of 'community policing'



What mark would you give to the functioning of the concept of 'community policing'?

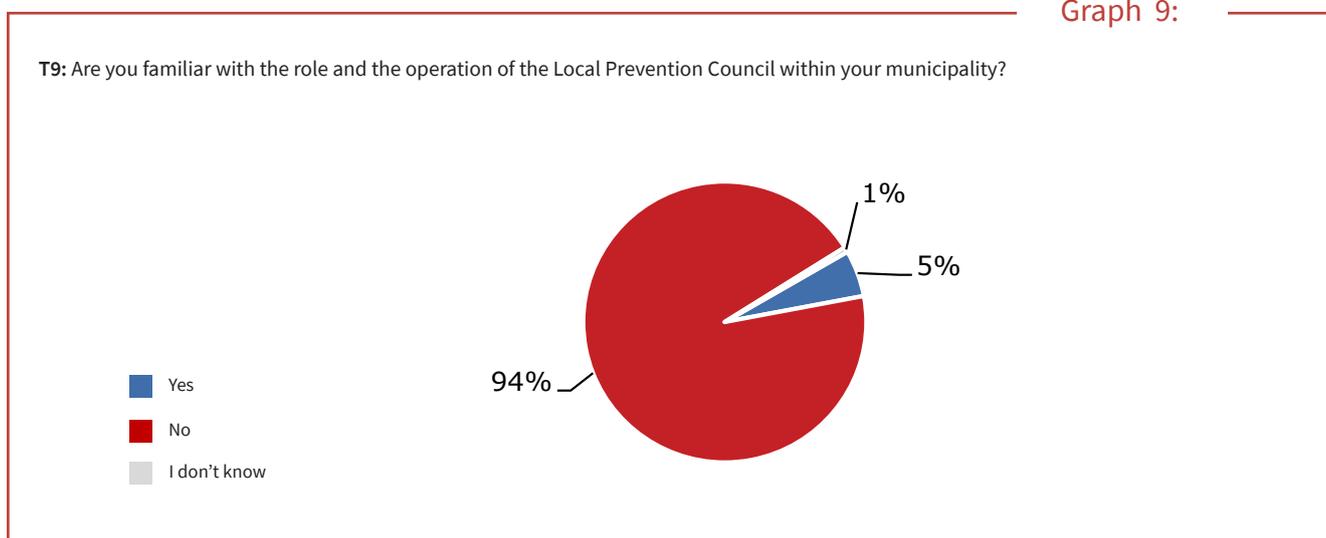


In the subsequent section of the survey, the respondents that have heard of this concept (9% of all respondents) mark the functioning of the concept of 'community policing' following the school system grading scale of the Republic of North Macedonia. The majority, i.e. more than three thirds (which is actually 7% of all respondents) positively mark the concept (an aggregate of marks 3+4+5). On the basis of the afore-stated it may be inferred that the promotion/familiarization of the public with this concept is to be intensified and that the functioning of the concept has been positively marked.

In the context of this concept, all respondents were asked whether they were familiar with the role and operation of the Local Prevention Council (LPC) within their municipality.

Only 5% of all respondents stated that they were familiar with the role and operation of the Local Prevention Council within their municipality (Graph 9).

Graph 9:



Respondents of higher degree of education are more familiar with the role and operation of the Local Prevention Council.

Remark:

In principle, respondents of higher degree of education are citizens that are more interested in and are more familiarized with the functioning and operation of the local community, and thus with the operation of the police within their respective municipalities.

Generally speaking, the same recommendation is applicable to the Local Prevention Council (LPC) – necessity of a more intense campaign/ promotion of the role and functioning of LPC, which significantly contributes to building trust and enhancement of partnership among the institutions, local self-government and the citizens.

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