

SOCIAL DISTANCE OF THE CITIZENS OF THE REPUBLIC OF  
MACEDONIA TOWARD JEWS

СОЦИЈАЛНАТА ОДДАЛЕЧЕНОСТ НА ГРАЃАНИТЕ НА РЕПУБЛИКА  
МАКЕДОНИЈА ОД ЕВРЕИТЕ

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АПСТРАКТ

Досегашните социолошки истражувања на етничките, културните и религиозните односи во Република Македонија многу малку внимание им посветиле на односите на граѓаните на Република Македонија со еврејската заедница. Затоа, овој труд се фокусира на социјална оддалеченост на граѓаните на Република Македонија кон Евреите. Важноста на ова прашање е уште поголема со оглед на фактот дека оваа година се одбележуваат седумдесет години од трагичната депортацијата на над 7200 македонски Евреи во концентрациониот логор Треблинка од страна на фашистичката Бугарија (март 1943) за време на Втората светска војна.

Нашиот труд се заснова на анализа на податоците добиени од анкетното истражување кое беше реализирано во 2008 година како дел од меѓународниот истражувачки проект – Проучување на европски вредности. Анализата на социјалната оддалеченост е направена според степенот на религиозноста на луѓето, нивната верска припадност, нивото на образование, возраста и полот на учесниците во истражувањето. Вториот главен дел од анализата се однесува на споредба на социјална дистанца на граѓаните на РМ со други општествени групи, од една страна, и Евреите, од друга страна. Од голема важност за контекстот на анализата е да се имаат предвид современите и традиционалните социо-културни услови кои влијаат врз разликите во ставовите на македонските граѓани кон одредени општествени групи, во смисла на нивниот број, улога, влијание и учество во последните историски процеси во македонското општество,

постоенето на стереотипи и предрасуди и така натаму. Нашето истражување покажа одредени диференцирани ставовите на македонските граѓани (учесниците во анкетното истражување) кон Евреите, како и кон другите социјални групи, кои беа анализирани според нивните социо-демографски карактеристики.

Клучни зборови: социјална оддалеченост, граѓани на Република Македонија, Евреи, Христијани, Муслимани.

#### ABSTRACT

Previous sociological research on ethnic, cultural and religious relations in the Republic of Macedonia has paid very little attention on the relations of the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia with the Jewish community. Therefore, this paper is focused on the social distance of the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia toward Jews. The importance of this issue is even greater given the fact that this year marks the 70<sup>th</sup> tragic anniversary of the deportation of over 7,200 Macedonian Jews in Treblinka by the Fascist Bulgaria (March 1943) during the Second World War.

Our paper is based on the analyses of the data obtained from the survey which had been realized in 2008 as a part of the international research project - European Values Study. The analysis of the social distance is conducted according to the degree of religiosity of people, their religious affiliation, level of education, age and sex of the participants in the survey. The second major part of the analysis is related to the comparison of the social distance of citizens of the Republic of Macedonia to other social groups, on the one hand, and Jews, on the other. It is of great relevance for the context of the analysis to have in mind the contemporary and traditional socio-cultural conditions that influence the differences in attitudes of Macedonian citizens toward certain social groups, in terms of their number, role, impact and involvement in the recent and historical processes in Macedonian society, the existence of stereotypes and prejudices and so on. Our research has shown certain differentiated attitudes of the Macedonian citizens (participants in the survey) toward Jews as well as toward other social groups that were analyzed according to their socio-demographic characteristics.

Key words: social distance, citizens of the Republic of Macedonia, Jews, Christians, Muslims.

## INTRODUCTION

The fate of the Jews in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is mainly marked by World War II, and in that context, with national-socialism (Nazism) and Fascism. Nevertheless, the social status of this ethnic, as well as cultural and religious group has gone through drastic changes and developments in the history of human civilization in general. The year 2013 marks the seventieth anniversary (march 1943) of the deportation of around 7200 Macedonian Jews by the Bulgarian and German fascists in the camp Treblinka and in other concentration (extermination) camps in Europe and on the Balkans. These cited historical facts are part of the reason to reflect on the place and part that Jews have played on the Balkans, or more precisely in Macedonia.

History records that the Jews settled on the Balkans as early as the first century A.D., but their presence in these territories became more intense from the 15<sup>th</sup> century on, with the banishing of the Jews from the Pyrenees, the so-called Sephardi or Sephardic Jews (Assa, 1992:11). The overall history of the Jews on Balkan territories, including Macedonia, is marked with their significant social and cultural influence. Namely, in the span of twenty centuries this ethnic, cultural and religious community was known as one of the main generators of the scientific, economic (industry, crafts, banking etc) and cultural life in the environment where they lived and acted (Lowenthal, Kovac ed., 1957, Assa, 1992). Their active participation in almost every aspect of the social development has continued in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, even after the tragic genocide<sup>5</sup> they were exposed to in the Second World War. In almost all of the republics of the former SFR Yugoslavia there were associations of Jewish communities, as well as individuals which, regardless of their increasingly lowered numbers<sup>6</sup>, continued their commitment in nurturing their own culture. In the former Socialistic Republic of Macedonia, similarly as the other federative republics, the Jewish population made an effort to keep the continuity, not limited to the memories of the genocide only, but to be involved, with special endeavors (sometimes more on the individual level of prominent intellectuals) in the building of the social systems and relations that marked the contemporary civilizational discourse of this environment. Today, the members of the Jewish community in the Republic of Macedonia are mainly concentrated in Skopje, and in smaller numbers in Shtip and Bitola.

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5 On the territory of Yugoslavia, before the Second World War there lived 70 000 Jews (in the year 1939), and after the war, in the newly-formed SFR Yugoslavia there were only left 15 000 Jews which managed to avoid the holocaust (Lowenthal, Kovac ed., 1957).

6 Only 5% of the total Jewish population (7125) of Macedonia survived after their deportation by the Bulgarian fascists to the concentration camp Treblinka. The last official census of the population of the Republic of Macedonia (2002) showed that today there are 53 Jews living there (Statistical Year Book of the Republic of Macedonia, 2011).

The first attempt to establish a Jewish society in Macedonia, as part of the Former Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (FSFRY), was made in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the Republic of Macedonia, after the establishment of its independence, in the year 1994, the Macedonian-Israeli society officially and for the first time promoted the idea for establishing a Holocaust Memorial Center for the Jews of Macedonia that was definitely realized in 2011. It represents one of the important institutions for preservation of the Jewish cultural heritage and their cultural achievements in the Republic of Macedonia.

Until recently, the sociological research of the ethnic, cultural and religious relations in the Republic of Macedonia have given little attention to the relations of the domicile population with the Jewish community, and, in that manner, of its place, role and importance (significance, value, meaning...), as for the history of Macedonia, as well as of contemporary Macedonian society. In this paper we have made an attempt of a concise analysis related to the nature and level of the social distance of the citizens of Republic of Macedonia towards the members of the Jewish community.

The goal of the research is to examine a few main questions:

What is the nature and the strength of the social distance that the participants of the research have toward different social groups and people with a particular lifestyle, including the Jews?

To what extent we can speak of social distance toward the Jews in several Balkan countries?

In what way is the social distance towards the Jews represented among the research participants regarding their gender, age, education, and employment status?

In what way is the social distance towards the Jews represented among the participants of Christian and Muslim religion?

In what way is the social distance towards the Jews represented among the participants that declare themselves to be religious, nonreligious or atheists?

Apart from the aforementioned questions, the research includes other questions concerning the level of trust toward people in general.

The context presumes the relevance of the actual, as well as the traditional socio-cultural conditions that influence the difference in opinions of the Macedonian citizens toward other groups, for example, their number, role, impact and involvement in the historic and in the recent processes in the Macedonian society, the possible existence of stereotypes and prejudices etc.

## METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

Our paper is based on the analysis of the data taken from a survey realized in 2008, as part of an international research project, with around sixty participating countries and titled European Value Survey. The survey contains issues related to the citizens of countries of the European continent and countries that incline toward the European civilization. The survey was realized through a standardized questionnaire for the countries of the European continent and for countries inclined towards European civilization. The standardized questionnaire implemented in the survey contains 141 questions divided in 6 blocks that relate to a wide variety of crucial themes of the social life, as follows: general values related to life; leisure time and work; marriage and family; politics, political action and ideology; civic association and action; trust in others (as individuals and as part of social groups or groups with a specific lifestyle; evaluating the social conditions; religion and morality.

Among other questions featured in the survey instrument was the scale for measuring the social distance, included in the block of questions used to determine the level of trust towards people and social groups. This particular case gives the participants the possibility to express their opinion on whether or not they would like certain people or groups of people to be their neighbors. The Jews, which are the target group in this very research, were also a part of the scale. Apart from this question, there are also questions related to the level of trust toward people in general, and all of these analyses, as mentioned, follow the specifications of the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants.

The survey was realized on a representative sample of 1500 participants in each country, including the Republic of Macedonia (male = 56,4%; female = 43,6%; age 18 +), which was designed through strictly defined metodological crteria by the coordinator of the international research, The University in Tilburg, Netherlands.

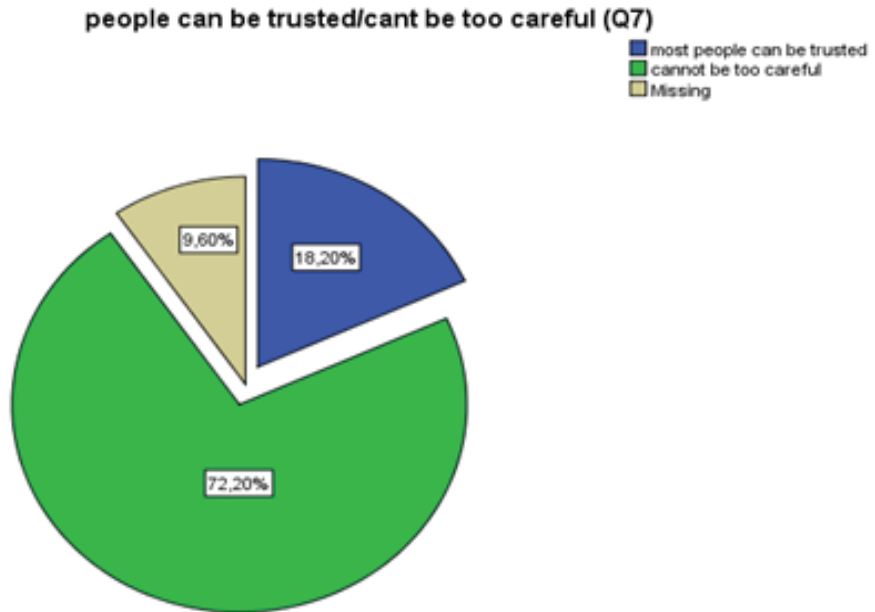
## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Trust toward other people

The fundaments of tolerance and respecting human rights is represented by a general trust of people and readiness to help others as well as accepting other people in the framework of their everyday interactions. The questionnaire included several questions designed to measure these pro-social tendencies of people, the results of which we have represented in our text in a more general manner. Namely the participants were given the opportunity to plead their trust in others. To answer the question "Generally speaking, do you

consider most people to be trustworthy or not?", 20,1% of the respondents opted for "Most people can be trusted", while 79,9% opted for the alternative "It is impossible to be careful enough" (see Graph 1). The answers allow us to conclude that the participants have not manifested a high level of trust in others (See: Dr. Petkovska, Dr. Popovski, MA. Jovanoski: 2010).

Graph 1 General trust of the people



#### Questions concerning the social distance

Table 1 shows the results of the analysis of the data acquired from the attitudes of the Macedonian participants concerning the same question, in terms of the expressed distance towards different social groups, including the Jews (they had the option to declare if they would/would not accept the listed groups as neighbors). It can be noticed that the criteria for identification of the groups is diverse. Furthermore, social groups whose members have a different lifestyle are also mentioned (people with criminal records, left wing extremists, heavy drinkers, right wing extremists, large families, emotionally unstable people, people with AIDS, drug addicts, homosexuals), as well as groups whose identity is defined by their

ethnicity, culture, race and religion (people of different races, Muslims, immigrants/foreign workers, Jews, Gypsies, Christians). The Jews are mentioned in this second category. The analysis shows that the participants manifest lowest social distance toward having Christians as neighbors (5,7%), after that people with large families (14,1%), Jews (16,1%) and Romas (16,4%). On the other hand, they manifest the highest social distance toward living in the neighborhood of drug addicts (77,9%), people with a criminal record (70,1%), heavy alcoholics (63,9%), people with AIDS (61,5%) and homosexuals (58%). (See: Dr. Popovski, Dr. Petkovska, MA. Jovanoski, Aleksandar: 2010). Generally speaking, the social distance toward the second type of social groups is not highly expressed, including the one that relates to the Jews.

Table 1 Social distance toward various groups of people in Macedonia

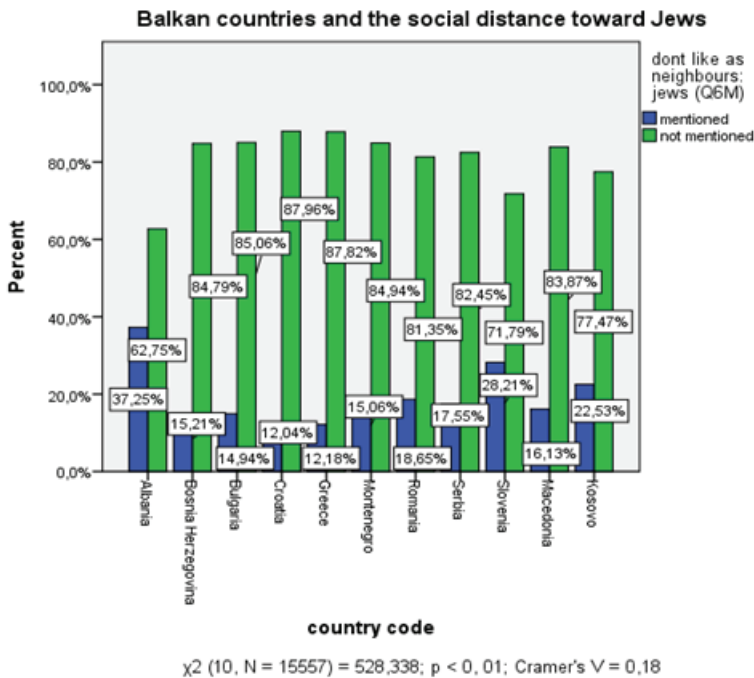
	don't like as neighbours (%)	
	mentioned	not mentioned
dont like as neighbours: people of different race	21,2	78,8
dont like as neighbours: Muslims	26,8	73,2
dont like as neighbours: Immigrants / foreign workers	20,4	79,6
<b>dont like as neighbours: Jews</b>	<b>16,1</b>	<b>83,9</b>
dont like as neighbours: Gypsies	16,4	83,6
dont like as neighbours: Christians	5,7	94,3
dont like as neighbours: people with criminal records	70,1	29,9
dont like as neighbours: left wing extremists	34,1	65,9
dont like as neighbours: heavy drinkers	63,9	36,1
dont like as neighbours: right wing extremists	34,1	65,9
dont like as neighbours: large families	14,1	85,9
dont like as neighbours: emotionally unstable people	44,8	55,2
dont like as neighbours: people with AIDS	61,5	38,5
dont like as neighbours: drug addicts	77,9	22,1
dont like as neighbours: homosexuals	58,0	42,0

Questions regarding the social distance toward the Jews on the Balkans

Another objective of this paper is a comparative analysis of the distance manifested toward the Jews by the participants from different Balkan countries, including that from the Republic of Macedonia. As it is shown in Graph 2, there are significant statistical differences, although with low intensity, between the answers of the question connected to the attitudes of the participants from these countries about having Jews as their neighbors. Thus, the

highest percentage of negative answers are demonstrated amongst the participants of Albania 37,2%, than Slovenia 28,2%, the participants of Kosovo 22,5%, following with Romania 18,6%, Serbia with 17,6%, the citizens of Macedonia with 16,1%, participants of Bosnia and Herzegovina with 15,2%, Montenegro with 15,1%, Bulgaria with 14,9%, Greece with 12,2% and Croatia with 12%. Basically, there is no significant social distance expressed by any country's participants <sup>7</sup>.

Graph 2 Balkan countries and the social distance toward Jews



Questions regarding the social distance toward the Jews in Macedonia according to particular socio-demographic characteristics of the participants

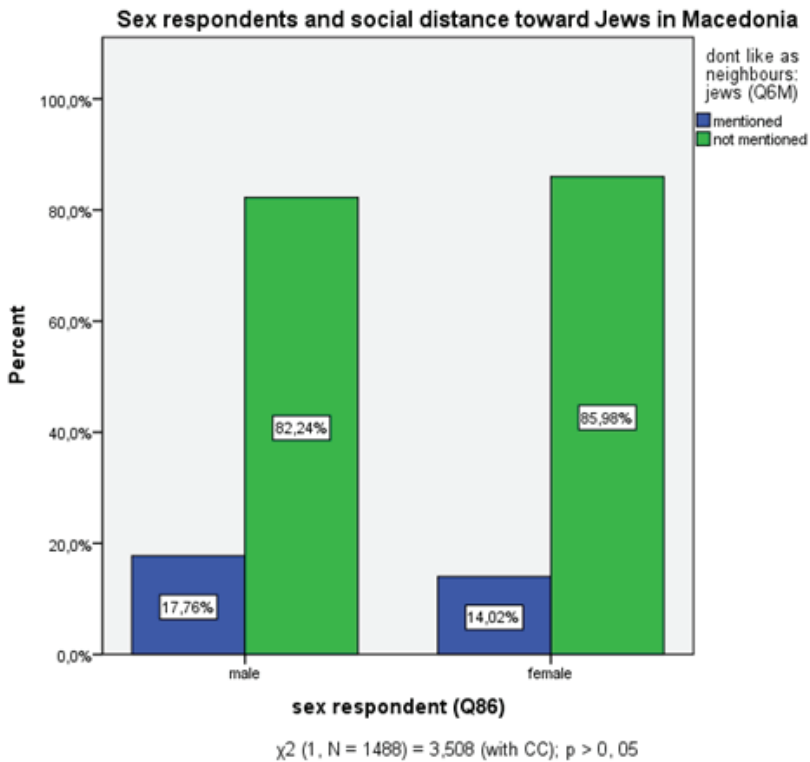
Graph 3 presents the percentages of the expressed social distance of the survey participants regarding their sex. What came as apparent was that this socio-demographic

<sup>7</sup> Number of inhabitants of Jewish origin: Bulgaria - 2000, Greece - 4500, Romania - 9500, Slovenia - 100, Croatia - 1700, Bosnia Herzegovina - 500, Serbia 1400, Macedonia - 190 (State Statistical Office, 2010 - 100), all other countries (Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro) less than 100 inhabitants of Jewish origin (Sergio DellaPergola. "World Jewish Population, 2012." The American Jewish Year Book (2012) (Dordrecht: Springer) p. 212-283.)



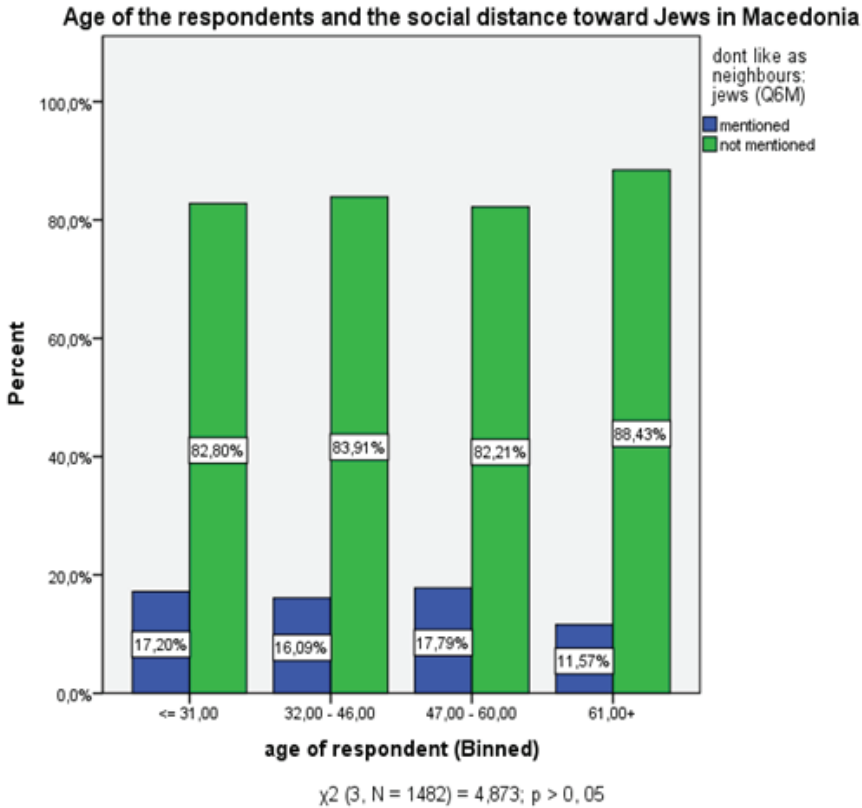
indicator did not appear to be a discriminatory factor when it comes to the level of social distance. Furthermore, the results of the analysis did not show a statistically significant difference in the attitudes between the female and the male participants.

Graph 3 Sex respondents and the social distance toward Jews in Macedonia



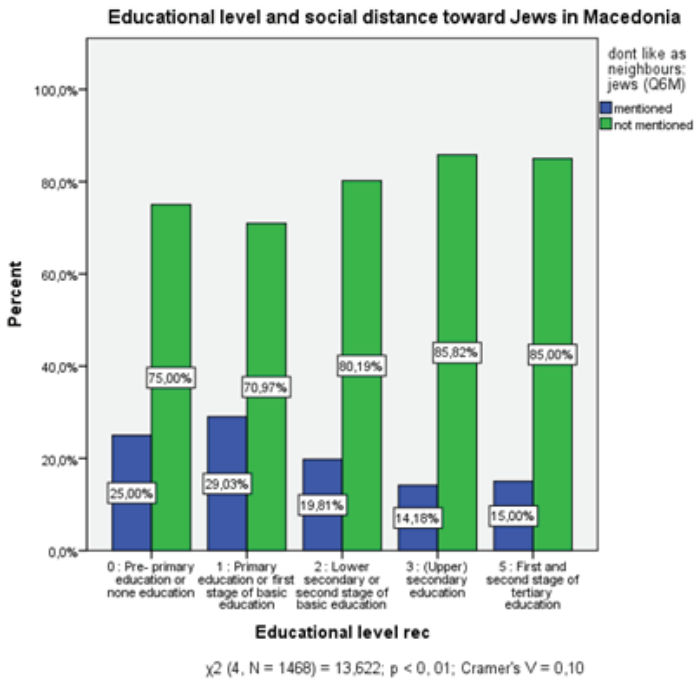
The age of the participants, did not turn to be a discriminatory factor as well. The results of this cross-tabulated analysis, expressed in percentages, are demonstrated on Graph 4.

Graph 4 Age of the respondents and the social distance toward Jews



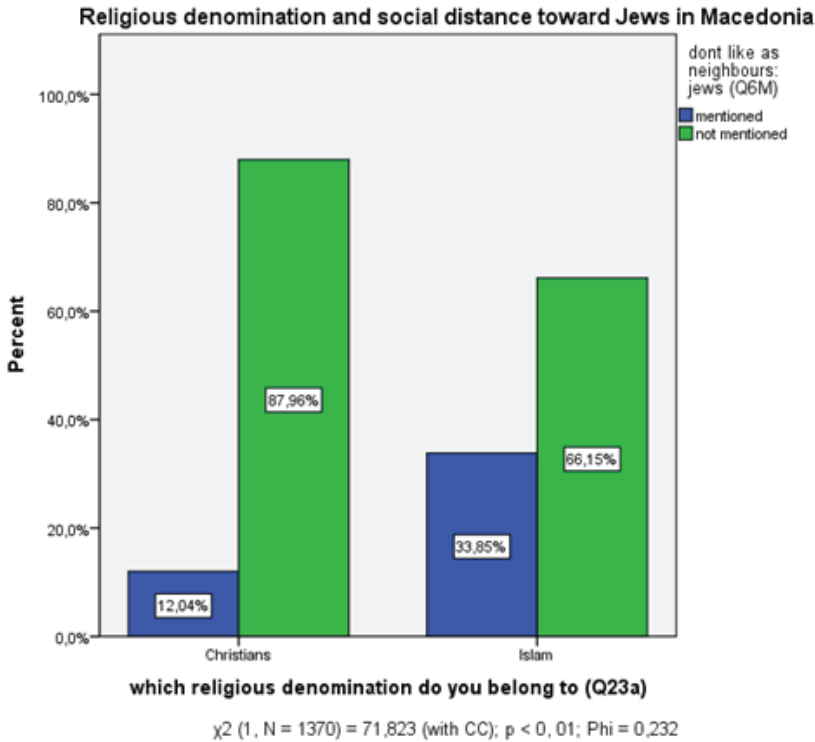
The comparison of the answers to the stated question concerning the level of education of the participants revealed significant statistical differences, although with low intensity. Generally, it is evident, as the graphs show on Graph 5, that the participants with a higher level of education have expressed higher social distance toward the Jews, comparatively with the participants with a lower level of education.

Graph 5 Educational level and the social distance toward Jews



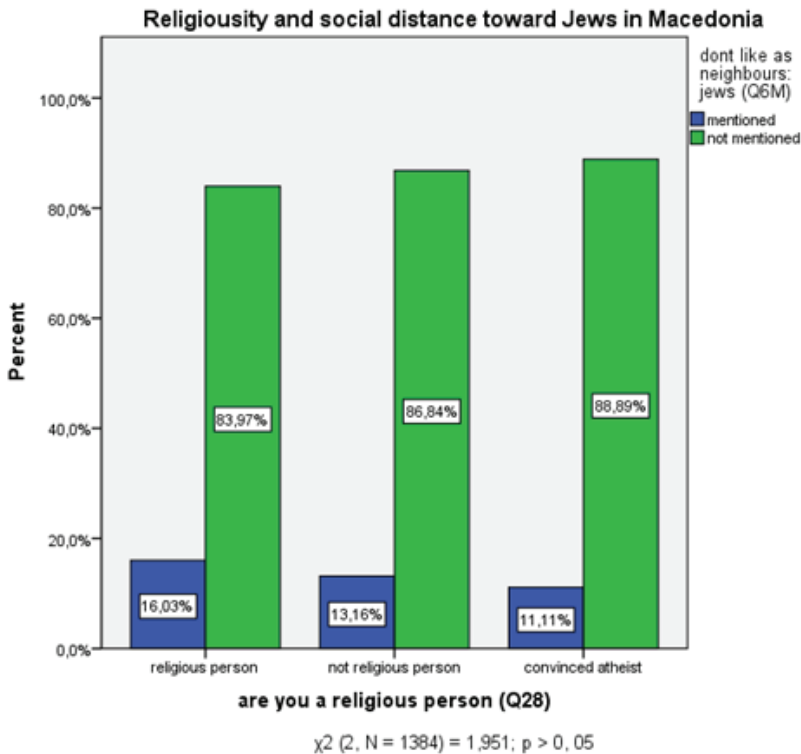
Graph 6 presents the results taking in consideration the religious affiliation of the participants toward the expressed level of social distance regarding Jews. Here we found a significant statistical difference of medium intensity. The Muslim participants have expressed a higher level of social distance toward the Jews, than the participants of Christian religious affiliation.

Graph 6 Religious denomination of the respondents and the social distance toward Jews



Finally, Graph 7 presents the results of the cross-tabulated analysis of social distance toward the Jewish people expressed by the participants' declared level of religiosity. The differences in the answers given are not statistically significant, though, nominally, the declared atheists have expressed the lowest level of social distance toward the Jewish community.

Graph 7 Religiosity and social distance toward Jews in Macedonia



## CONCLUSION

The meticulous analysis of the results from our research related to the attitude of the Macedonian citizens (participants in the survey) toward the Jewish community, has exposed several basic aspects of the demonstrated social distance, measured with one variable of a question placed in a complex questionnaire designed in the form of a structured interview. Firstly, the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia have expressed a low level of social distance toward the Jews, as did other participants from Balkan countries (the Republic of Macedonia is somewhere in the lower second half on the scale of expressed distance). Secondly, the comparison of the gathered data with the socio-demographic characteristics

of the participants in the study (sex, age, level of education, religious affiliation and level of religiosity) we came to these conclusions: there are significant statistical differences of low intensity related to the level of education - the participants with higher levels of education expresses a higher level of social distance; significant statistical differences of medium intensity are found within the members of different religious denominations, Muslims and Christians, where the Muslims have expressed a higher level of social distance toward Jews than the Christians; while the other characteristics of the participants as age and gender do not appear to be a discriminatory factor for social distance toward the Jews.

Having these observations in mind, it can only be assumed that the attitudes, or the level of social distance of the participants of the survey, conducted on the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia, toward the Jews, are reminiscence of indirect, mediated and assimilated experiences (inherited historical knowledge, especially those connected to the holocaust, oral tradition etc), as well as the constellation of the international relations (especially in terms the position in the international community of Israel, and the achievements and influence of the Jewish communities in particular countries around the world). The establishment of the Holocaust Memorial Center of the Jews from Macedonia in Skopje, the capital of the Republic, and in that sense the strengthened presence of the information concerning the activities and the history of the Jewish community in the country is a possible influence in the forming of the public opinion. Naturally, a certain number of Jews, mainly members of the social elite, prominent intellectuals, cultural elite, businessmen and individuals of the political and the public sphere in the Republic of Macedonia (like the Sadikario, Mizrahi, Kolonomos, Tadzer, Romano families etc.) contribute significantly in the building of a generally positive attitude toward the, already small in numbers, Jewish community in this country. In that sense, unless a more comprehensive study is conducted, we would not be able to speak of a completed value model from which we would extract decisive conclusions of clearly defined reasons concerning the level of social distance of the Macedonian citizens toward Jews in the Republic of Macedonia as a particular ethnic, cultural and religious community.

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