



**Vitosha  
Research**

## **Public Opinion on Non-Governmental Organizations in Bulgaria**

Sofia  
December 1996

Non-governmental organizations undoubtedly play a significant role in the evolution of a modern civic society. These types of organizations arise as spontaneous and voluntary civic associations and assume a number of important functions typically performed by state institutions. NGOs create opportunities for voluntary public activity and private initiative. Their importance calls for the study not only of their number and spheres of activity, goals, development, and public role, but likewise of public opinion about these organizations - whether the general public is familiar with the existing NGOs and their functions, how effective they are in the achievement of their goals, whether they have the necessary resources and ability to cope with different kinds of problems, how people generally see the future development of NGOs.

A representative national survey was conducted in the month of December 1996 with the aim of registering popular attitudes to NGOs in Bulgaria. It was conducted between 1-14 December, 1996 by the personal interview method with the participation of 1,561 respondents aged over 18. Two-stage cluster sampling was used. In the first stage 250 constituencies (clusters) were randomly selected from the list of constituencies in the last parliamentary elections of 1994, and the second stage consisted in randomly selecting 7 respondents out of each cluster. The sample included 176 clusters in towns and cities and 74 clusters in villages.

The survey emphasized the following major topics - the place of NGOs in Bulgarian society, their role in tackling critical social issues and problems, their potential influence in certain spheres of public life, public attitudes towards the various existing organizational forms - foundations, associations, unions, the popularity of various NGOs and their public image, the level of public confidence in NGOs, participation in the founding of charitable organizations. Another key objective of the survey was to examine public opinion about the creation of a favorable fiscal environment for third-sector development.

The survey findings are indicative of the level of integration of NGOs into public life and of the extent to which people generally trust them and rely on their support in coping with various problems. In its turn, popular faith is an indicator of the reputation that NGOs have managed to earn for themselves. The principal question that the survey sought to answer with the help of the data collected was therefore "what is the place of NGOs in public consciousness and how are they perceived by the Bulgarian general public?". The study of this question also drew on data from the polling of public opinion on NGOs conducted in April 1994. It covered similar questions and topics and thus now allows an overview of the tendencies in the evolution of public opinion with respect to NGOs over the period April 1994 - December 1996.

### **I. Attitude to Third-Sector Related Concepts**

The in-depth study of the problems related to the third sector in Bulgaria must begin with the question of current popular attitudes to NGOs and how they have evolved over the period April 1994 - December 1996. This is how the public perceives some basic notions referring to different types of nonprofit organizations - charitable organizations, foundations, civic associations, labor unions.

*Table 1. How do you perceive the notion "charitable organization"? (% , December 1996)*

Favorably	24,9
Rather favorably	43,5
Rather unfavorably	5,1
Unfavorably	3,9
Don't know / No answer	22,7

As a concept, "charitable organization" is perceived quite favorably by one fourth of the respondents - nearly as many as those who have no opinion on the question. The majority in fact expressed a positive attitude to the notion though with a certain hesitance, which only confirms the lingering mistrust towards this type of NGOs. A negative perception of charitable organizations was indicated by one of every eleven respondents and their share can be expected to decline in the future. It is characteristic that

the share of negative responses tends to rise in the higher the age groups, with a relatively strong statistical dependence among the two variables (Pearson=0.40138) . In terms of employment status, students actually tend to have the most positive attitude, and among the unfavorably inclined there predominated the group of non-working retired and handicapped persons (41.0%). No differences were to be observed by type of locality - the approval/disapproval rate was generally the same among village and town residents, with only a slightly higher (2%) incidence of lack-of-opinion responses among respondents from villages. There was no statistical dependence between level of education and attitudes with respect to this notion.

Regarding the term "foundation", the period between April 1994 - December 1996 is characterized by a tendency towards declining disapproval and increasing approval, observable with more than half of the respondents. As in the case of the term "charitable organization" above, the share of negative attitudes increases with the age of respondents. There is no statistical dependence between the "employment" and "education" factors and respondents' attitudes. The wholly negative opinions tend to predominate slightly among village residents. The share of negative attitudes tends to decrease with the increase in personal monthly income. The information and awareness level has risen in the period under consideration - the non-response rate has decreased (Table 2).

Table 2. How do you perceive the term "foundation"? (%)

	April 1994	December 1996
Favorably	12,9	15,4
Rather favorably	28	36
Rather unfavorably	9,9	8,5
Unfavorably	4,7	4,8
Don't know / No answer	44,6	35,3

The term "civic association" enjoys a higher approval rate than "foundation", and the distribution of responses remains more or less the same over the period. There is a more tangible rise in the level of awareness - less than one third of the respondents would not commit themselves to, or had no opinion.

Table 3. How do you perceive the term "civic association"? (%)

	April 1994	December 1996
Favorably	14,2	17,2
Rather favorably	33,2	40,5
Rather unfavorably	8,8	7,3
Unfavorably	3,2	4,1
Don't know / No answer	40,6	30,8

Clearly, public consciousness is still marked by a more unfavorable perception of "foundations" in general, while "civic associations" seem to enjoy greater popular trust. Once again the share of negative attitudes increases with age - a tendency observable with respect to the other types of NGOs as well. The share of entirely unfavorable opinions is lowest among students. There is a certain statistical dependence between attitudes and the level of education (Pearson = 0.25813).

Table 4 displays respondents' entirely negative and positive perceptions of other concepts relevant to the transition period:

Table 4. How do you perceive the term ... ? (%)

	Favorably		Unfavorably	
	April 1994	December 1996	April 1994	December 1996
Welfare state	22.0	25.9	2.4	4.9
National consensus	28.0	31.6	3.3	3.5
Market economy	27.5	22.1	3.9	9.1
Privatization	21.6	19.4	3.9	10.2
Private initiative	29.9	29.5	2.9	5.1
Political party	15.4	12.5	9.1	10.4
Professional/Labor union	15.6	14.9	7.5	9.4
Union of artists/intellectuals	21.1	17.4	2.3	4.6

There appears to be an interesting tendency towards decline in the share of markedly favorable and rise in entirely unfavorable opinions with respect to the economic terms "privatization" and "market economy", while "private initiative" retains the same rate of approval, with a rise in unfavorable attitudes. The terms "welfare state" and "national consensus" still do not seem to have become trite through overuse and not only retain but actually reinforce their positive connotations. The politically loaded terms "political party", "labor union" and "artistic union" have been discredited in the public consciousness. It is hardly surprising that the markedly favorable perceptions of the term "welfare state" rise with the age of respondents and there is a strongly pronounced one-way statistical dependence. It is interesting to note that respondents living in villages tend to have more positive attitudes to the same term as compared to town residents. There is also a correlation between personal income size and the particular perception of a given term. Thus for example the share of quite favorable opinions tends to diminish with the rise in personal income. The youngest respondents (aged under 20) display the most pronounced negative attitude to the "national consensus" notion and conversely, the most favorable perception of the term "political party". Another characteristic of younger people is their relatively better grasp of the cited terms, i.e. the non-response rate is lowest in this group. Respondents aged under 29 are the ones to perceive most favorably the term "labor union". Clearly, the oldest respondents are as a rule more negatively inclined to the various terms. There is a strong statistical dependence between the perception of "private initiative" and employment status, between household income and "privatization", and between the size of personal monthly income and the term "market economy".

## II. Perception of the Activities of Non-Governmental Organizations

### 1. Potential for Addressing Problems of Serious Public Concern

One of the objectives of the two third-sector surveys was to examine popular understanding of the activities of NGOs and more specifically in the sphere of health and social services, education, transport and public order. The majority of respondents believe that the healthcare problems in their home town or village can be resolved by the respective Ministry (prevailing opinion in the towns) or the Municipal Council (prevailing opinion among respondents living in villages).

Table 5. Who is really in position to address existing healthcare problems in your home town (village)? (%)

	April 1994	December 1996
Parliament	14	15,5
Respective ministry	39,4	43,7
Municipal council	33,4	31,9
Charitable organizations	0,8	1,5
Don't know/No answer	12,5	7,5

Although over the two and a half years there has been a certain rise in the share of respondents who do consider charitable organizations to be able to deal with healthcare problems in a given locality, in this respect they are still ranked last by public opinion. Respondents in the 20-29 age group tend to express the highest confidence in non-profit organizations, followed by those aged 30-39. The youngest respondents (aged under 20) are characterized by the lowest rate of trust in NGOs. Employed people are generally most inclined to rely on non-governmental organizations and students - the least. City residents also tend to be more favorably inclined, with a relatively strong statistical dependence between the type of locality and level of trust (Pearson = 0.49418). The respondents from the lowest-income group tend to have the strongest faith in charitable organizations.

While the number of respondents who believe that charitable organizations can cope with social service problems on a local level has doubled, proportionally their share is still the lowest. NGOs are capable of dealing with social service problems mainly according to respondents from the 30-39 and 40-49 age groups, i.e. mature adults who are aware of and acknowledge the potential of charitable organizations in this respect. As the size of their income grows, respondents prove less likely to rely on charitable organizations in the sphere of social services. This tendency is backed by a very strong correlation.

*Who is really in position to address the problems of your home town (village) in the sphere of ... ?*

	Education		Public order		Transport	
	April 1994	December 1996	April 1994	December 1996	April 1994	December 1996
Parliament	11.0	13.2	11.9	15.0	5.8	7.8
Respective ministry	48.9	51.1	25.8	22.5	28.3	20.6
Municipal Council	26.7	25.5	49.7	54.5	53.1	63.0
Charitable organizations, civic associations	0.8	1.0	1.4	0.6	1.0	0.7
Don't know/No answer	12.6	9.2	11.3	7.4	11.9	7.9
Total:	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Public transport and public order problems are clearly left outside the realm of charitable organizations and civic associations - they should, according to those surveyed, be resolved by the local government authorities. Less than 1 % of respondents consider NGOs capable of dealing with the above problems, with those aged 20-29 being the most numerous group among them. The currently employed rely to the highest degree on NGOs as regards dealing with public transport problems. A comparison between the two periods shows a slight growth in confidence in the third sector only in the sphere of education, where respondents assume that the respective ministry is to play a decisive role. Here again,

respondents in the 20-29 age group and the oldest ones - aged 60 and over, as well as those with lower income are most optimistic that NGOs are truly capable of addressing education problems on a local level. Not a single university graduate placed his/her confidence in charitable organizations with respect to education and the maintaining of public order. Among those who felt NGOs could successfully deal with public order issues, the correlation is 9 to 1 in favor of respondents living in towns and cities.

The municipal council is the state institution in a position to resolve these problems according to more than half of the respondents. The number of those who have no opinion or decline to give an answer to this question has dropped in the second survey.

*Table 6. Who is really in position to address the social service problems in your home town (village)? (%)*

	April 1994	December 1996
Parliament	11,3	12,8
Respective ministry	20,8	23,7
Municipal council	54,4	52,2
Charitable organizations	1,2	2,8
Don't know/No answer	12,3	8,5

## **2. Perception of the Influence of Non-Governmental Organizations**

In addition to the estimated capacity of NGOs to solve problems in areas of critical import to the country, the survey studied popular perceptions regarding the influence of such organizations over decision-makers in the spheres of national security, the economy and finance, social and environmental issues.

Over the period under consideration there have not occurred any appreciable changes in the general skeptical outlook regarding the potential of civic associations to become an influential factor in addressing national security problems. Among those who feel that civic groups can exert "considerable" influence in this respect, young people are the least numerous, and the 50-59 age group occupies the largest share among respondents who chose the option "never". However, there does appear to be growing confidence that these organizations are capable of exerting considerable influence over decision-makers in this high-priority area to the country. This tendency finds further confirmation in the fact that the number of respondents with no opinion is declining.

*Table 7. To what extent do you feel that different groups of citizens sharing a common goal can influence decision-making in the sphere of national security? (%)*

	April 1994	December 1996
Considerably	7,5	15,2
In isolated cases	23,6	24,3
Never	38,4	38,4
Don't know/No answer	30,6	22,1

The higher the level of education, the lesser is respondents' confidence that NGOs could indeed influence decision-making concerning national security issues. Nearly half of those living in villages chose the option "never".

According to those surveyed, the financial and economic sphere is a priority of state institutions and of no immediate concern to NGOs, and therefore the potential influence of civic associations is more or less nominal. There is a deepening polarization of opinions which becomes more pronounced as the age of respondents increases and here again, an increasing number of people appear to have an opinion on the matter. There is an extremely strong statistical dependence between employment status and opinions on this matter. Students constitute the largest share (over one fifth) of those who believe in the greater potential of NGOs in this specific field. The higher the level of education, the lower the non-response rate and the skepticism expressed. As respondents' income increases, the confidence declines that non-profit organizations can really influence the decision-making process as regards economic issues. Confidence is generally higher among the city population, while skepticism is evenly distributed among village and city residents (accounted for by the higher non-response rate).

*Table 8. To what extent do you feel that different groups of citizens sharing a common goal can influence decision-making in the sphere of finance and the economy? (%)*

	April 1994	December 1996
Considerably	7,7	11,3
In isolated cases	23,1	23,7
Never	40,3	44
Don't know/No answer	28,9	21

Regarding social problems, an area where state institutions themselves are facing a great many difficulties, public opinion seems undecided - there is both growing confidence and skepticism concerning the capacity of NGOs to positively influence decision-making in the social sphere. Notwithstanding a slight decline, the non-response rate remains relatively high - about one fifth of those surveyed. The strongest confidence in the potential influence of non-profit organizations in this area is expressed by the 40-49 age group and the lowest by respondents from the oldest age group - aged 60 and over. As in the case of the economic and financial sphere, here again students are most inclined to place their faith in the representatives of the third sector (their share is more than one fourth). Respondents with lower incomes tend to have greater confidence in the potential influence of NGOs in the social sphere.

*Table 9. To what extent do you feel that different groups of citizens sharing a common goal can influence decision making in the social sphere? (%)*

	April 1994	December 1996
Considerably	13	17,3
In isolated cases	36,2	35,3
Never	25	27,9
Don't know/No answer	25,8	19,5

In public consciousness it is the environment, to a certain extent along with the social sphere, which is the prime field of activity of civic associations. Respondents in their 40s and 50s seem most certain of the real potential of non-profit organizations, while young people aged under 20 express the greatest

reservations. The higher the level of education, the more confident the respondents, and here again the correlational dependence is quite significant. There is a negative correlation between income size and confidence in the capacity of third sector organizations to help solve environmental problems - that confidence tends to decline with the rise in income. Assessing the potential of civic associations, the respondents have expressed the lowest level of skepticism and mistrust (17.9%) and the strongest confidence (27.3%) that the representatives of the third sector can indeed influence decision-making in this area.

*Table 10. To what extent do you feel that different groups of citizens sharing a common goal can influence decision-making in the sphere of the environment? (%)*

	April 1994	December 1996
Considerably	20,3	27,3
In isolated cases	34	34,5
Never	19	17,9
Don't know/No answer	26,7	20,3

### 3. Popularity of Non-Governmental Organizations

According to preliminary data there are currently approximately 2,700 not-for-profit organizations registered in Bulgaria. The survey tried to establish the extent to which they are familiar to the general public and whether people could enumerate familiar names of third-sector associations through an open-ended question (unprompted, i.e. without suggesting any names of organizations).

NGOs still do not seem to be in the focus of the general public's attention, as confirmed by the fact that 72.6 % of those surveyed failed to name a single NGO. It comes as no surprise that the most widely known organization is the Open Society Fund, followed by Saints Cyril and Methodius Foundation. The majority of the names below were only cited by less than 1% of the respondents.

*Table 11. The number of charitable organizations, foundations and civic associations in Bulgaria has increased in the past few years. Can you name any such organizations? (December 1996, unprompted)*

	named by (%)*
Open Society Fund	14.6
Saints Cyril and Methodius Foundation	8.2
International Red Cross	3.7
Eureka foundation	1.8
UNICEF	1.7
TASHKO Humanitarian Foundation	1.7
Roma Union	1.2
Union for Private Initiative	1.0
Federation of Science and Technology Unions	0.7
Konrad Adenauer Foundation	0.5
Center for the Study of Democracy	0.4
Slavyani Foundation	0.3



Friedrich Naumann Foundation	0.2
Applied Research and Communications Foundation	0.1
Union of Bulgarian Foundations and Associations	0.1
Others	9.0

(\*) Base = 1824

245 respondents or 14.9% named only one familiar charitable organization, foundation or association, 128 persons (7.8%) named two, 51 (3.1%) of those surveyed were able to list three names, ten respondents listed 4 names, and three, 5 names.

### III. Public Confidence in Non-Governmental Organizations

The answers to the question "If your family urgently needs a large amount of money (for medical treatment for instance) who would you turn to for assistance?" are indicative of the level of confidence in NGOs (Table 12). Generally, in the two and a half years between the two surveys there have occurred no significant changes in how people expect to react in case of an urgent need for money.

Table 12. If your family urgently needs a large amount of money (for medical treatment for instance) who would you turn to for assistance? (%)

	April 1994	December 1996
To Parliament	1,2	1,1
To the President	2	1,8
To the Government	1,6	1,1
To the municipal council of my home town (village)	11,3	10,3
To a large public enterprise	1,1	3
To a large private company	4,1	3,3
To a charitable organization, foundation	2,7	4,3
To friends and relatives	76	75,3

In both surveys, it is friends and relatives that people are most likely to turn to first for urgent financial assistance. State institutions - parliament, government, president - retain very low shares. People appear widely inclined to seek help from local municipal councils which are ranked second after relatives and friends. Growth is observable only with respect to seeking assistance from charitable organizations or large public companies. All other categories undergo slight decline. Only two out of every 100 respondents have ever sought help from a charitable organization, foundation or civic association. The youngest respondents are most inclined to turn for help to friends and relatives, while the oldest are most likely to seek urgent financial assistance from state institutions such as Parliament and the President. About one third of those who would turn to NGOs are aged 60 and over, and the under 20 age group occupies the smallest share. A cross-tabulation by employment reveals that the share of those who would seek financial assistance from charitable organizations is highest among the retired (37.3%), while it is 8.5% among students. The distribution of answers by type of locality indicates that the shares of respondents living in villages and towns are about equal only in the case of the "large public enterprise" option. Among town residents, 3.9% would first turn for help to a non-profit association and among respondents living in villages this share is 3.5%. There is an average

statistical dependence between the two indices (Pearson = 0.55598). With the rise in income there is a decline in the number of those likely to seek assistance from friends and relatives. In the lowest-income group (up to 16,000 Leva, Dec. 1996), a mere 3% would turn to an NGO, and this share grows to 6% among respondents whose income ranges between 24,000 - 32, 000 Leva (Pearson = 0.41996). No statistically appreciable dependence is to be observed between expressed preferences and level of education. There is therefore much to be done in the way of popularizing the activities of those organizations and fostering greater public awareness so that their resources could be of benefit to more people. The few who have actually sought assistance had typically needed help with a personal or family problem. There is strong statistical dependence between seeking assistance from non-profit organizations and both age and education. A positive answer has been given by one third of the respondents with a permanent position. Interestingly enough, 2.3% of those living in villages have actually approached such organizations, while the corresponding share among town residents is 1.8% (Pearson = 0.54463). In the lowest-income group only one in 100 respondents has ever turned for help to NGOs, and in the 24,000-32,000 Leva income group - three out of every 100.

#### IV. Attitude to Non-Governmental Organizations

NGOs are essential elements of civic society and popular attitude towards them is therefore an important indicator of the extent to which our society is opening up.

*Table 13. Do you feel it is fair for the activity of charitable organizations, foundations and associations to be encouraged by the state through tax relief measures? (%)*

	April 1994	December 1996
Yes; under any circumstances	7,5	12,7
Yes, provided their activity is under strict control	34,2	38,9
Yes, provided they are Bulgarian	3,7	7,1
No; under no circumstances	14,8	8,8
Cannot say	39,9	32,6

There is an overall increase in the share of people who believe the state should encourage the activity of NGOs through tax relief. Another favorable tendency is the more supportive attitude towards Bulgarian charitable organizations, foundations, associations. Yet, the majority of those surveyed only approve of tax relief measures if third-sector activities are subject to strict regulations. One in eight is unconditionally in favor of tax relief for NGOs. Unconditional support tends to grow with age, the share of respondents under 20 being 3.8% and of those aged 60 and over, ten times as large (38.6%). The same tendency is observable among the total opponents of such measures - 3.2% and 28.8% respectively. The correlational dependence is also quite strong - Pearson = 0.61685. Unconditional support is evenly distributed among village and town residents. One fifth of the respondents from the lowest-income group are entirely in favor of tax relief for these organizations. This share grows to 37.7% in the 8,000-16,000 Leva income group and drops to 8.6% among the wealthiest. It is worth noting that the "under no circumstances" option has been chosen largely by respondents with average income (between 8-24 thousand Leva), and only 1 in 9 of the respondents from the highest-income group is of the same opinion. Education does not appear to be a statistically relevant factor in this case. University graduates have the lowest share of "no opinion/no answer" and "cannot say" responses. Women are generally more likely to have an opinion on the matter. They are more inclined than men to support Bulgarian foundations and associations. Men place a greater emphasis on control over the activities of these organizations.

About one third of those surveyed would seek assistance from an NGO on a personal or family matter. However, 63% are positive that personal or family problems cannot be solved by such organizations, whether out of lack of confidence in the third sector or because of the traditional view that one ought to keep private problems to oneself. The oldest respondents (aged 60 and over) are most inclined to seek help from an NGO on a personal or family matter (one third) while in the youngest age group this share is almost ten times smaller (3.7%). One third of the respondents from the highest age group have failed to give an answer to this question. Of those who have expressed readiness to seek assistance on such a matter, 38.4% have permanent employment. One third of the respondents living in villages have answered in the affirmative and this group also has a lower non-response rate. A cross-tabulation by income reveals that the lowest-income group (up to 8,000 Leva) has the largest share of people likely to seek financial assistance with a personal or family matter. This readiness tends to decline as the level of education increases - university graduates are the least inclined to expose their personal problems. There are no observable differences in opinion by gender.

*Table 14. Would you turn to a charitable organization, foundation or civic association for assistance in addressing a personal or family matter? (%)*

Yes	30
No	62,7
No answer	7,3

The non-response rate to this question is relatively low, which indicates that respondents tend to have a clear idea of their own possible reactions and behavior.

Public consciousness does not seem to be too preoccupied with the problems of specific social groups. One fourth of the respondents would actually solicit financial assistance from charitable organizations on behalf of such groups - which is even less than the share of those inclined to seek financial assistance on a personal or family matter. Here again, as in the previous question, the youngest respondents are the least inclined, and the oldest express the greatest readiness to seek aid on behalf of specific social groups. This finds further confirmation in a cross-tabulation by occupation - the group of the retired holds the largest share of those answering in the affirmative. Town residents generally seem more ready to solicit assistance from an NGO as compared to those living in villages. The average income group (between 8-24 thousand Leva) makes up 59.8% of those who answered positively (Pearson = 0.57970). The highest share of affirmative answers is held by respondents with the lowest level of education. There tends to be a slight prevalence of negative answers among women.

*Table 15. Would you appeal to a charitable organization, foundation or civic association to address the problems of a specific social group? (%)*

Yes	24,3
No	66,5
No answer	9,3

The problems of the locality are most likely to motivate the greatest number of people (one third) to seek financial support from a charitable organization, civic association or foundation. Of those who answered in the affirmative, the youngest and oldest respondents form a share above the average for all respondents. The highest non-response rate to the question is among the 40-59 age group. There is a relatively higher share of positive attitudes among housewives, the city population, the average to higher income group (16-32 thousand Leva), university graduates (Pearson = 0.5915) and men.

*Table 16. Would you appeal to a charitable organization, foundation or civic association to address problems of your home town (village)? (%)*

Yes	30,6
No	60,3
No answer	9,1

Just over one fifth are inclined to seek financial assistance from an NGO about a critical social issue and one in 10 respondents has no opinion. The shares of the respondents aged under 20, between 30-39, and those aged over 60 are above the average for all respondents. The permanently employed make up 41.2% of the positive answers (Pearson = 0.58586). There is no statistical dependence between the type of locality and the inclination to make a more active commitment on an important social issue. Nevertheless, town residents do display a slightly greater readiness, as well as respondents from the 24,000-32,000 Leva income group. The distribution of positive and negative attitudes according to the gender variable is the same. The correlation with the level of education is very weak.

A good indicator about the level of public awareness is the fact that the vast majority of respondents do not know of a single case of actual involvement and assistance provided by NGOs. This suggests that these organizations are merely present in public consciousness without even a general idea of the nature of their activities. It is characteristic that the share of negative responses tends to rise in the higher the age groups, with a relatively strong statistical dependence among the two variables (Pearson=0.40138) . In terms of employment status, students actually tend to have the most positive attitude, and among the unfavorably inclined there predominated the group of non-working retired and handicapped persons (41.0%). No differences were to be observed by type of locality - the approval/disapproval rate was generally the same among village and town residents, with only a slightly higher (2%) incidence of lack-of-opinion responses among respondents from villages. There was no statistical dependence between level of education and attitudes with respect to this notion.

*Table 17. Has a charitable organization, foundation or civic association ever helped you, an acquaintance of yours, or people from your home town (village)? (%)*

To the respondent or a member of the family	1,1
To a neighbor or acquaintance	3
To fellow community members	6,6
Does not know of the existence of such organizations	5,5
Does not know of such a case	80
No answer	3,8

It is also interesting to compare the favorable and unfavorable popular assumptions about NGOs.

Table 18. Views on charitable organizations, foundations, and civic associations (December 1996)

	Rather agree	Rather disagree	Don't know/ No answer
Provide a quick way for dishonest people to enrich themselves	25.7	25.4	48.9
Constitute a means of money laundering	24.3	21.0	54.6
Help obtain additional funds from the European Union and other international organizations for solving the country's social and economic problems	36.2	10.9	52.9
Serve as conduits for foreign interests and influence	20.1	24.8	55.1

The claim that NGOs are used in the personal interests of dishonest people elicits about equal agreement and disagreement. Public opinion remains divided and doubts about the integrity of these organizations have apparently still not been dispelled. Most respondents assent to the statements "They help us survive the present hard times", "Allow people to better vindicate their own interests and to participate in addressing important problems", and "Help obtain additional funds from the European Union and other international organizations for addressing the country's social and economic problems". Negative answers prevail as regards the views that "They are superfluous and useless" and "Serve as conduits for foreign interests and influence". More than half of those surveyed do believe NGOs "are reviving a noble Bulgarian tradition". One in 9, however, disagrees with that statement. Asked whether NGOs are of help to people in the present difficult situation, respondents once again have given largely positive answers - 45.8%, while the non-response rate to this question is one of the lowest. The fact that 52% of those surveyed appreciate NGOs as needed and useful is a most eloquent token of support for the third sector. Just about 9% perceive NGOs as "superfluous and useless".

Only 12 people of all those surveyed had actually been involved in establishing a charitable organization, foundation or civic association, making up barely 0.8% of all respondents. Of those who have answered "does not know of the existence of such organizations", the shares of respondents aged under 29, of housewives, town residents, and women, are above the average for all respondents, while the share of those who have chosen the option "does not know of such a case" is highest among the 50-59 age group, the retired, and those with temporary employment. The demographic profile of those who have answered "to the respondent or a member of his/her family" is the following - prevailing shares among the 20-29 age group, the unemployed, university graduates, men, and respondents whose income ranges between 24,000-32,000 Leva. Those that have acquaintances or fellow community members who have been assisted by NGOs are mostly respondents living in towns. It is worth noting that the wealthiest (with incomes over 32,000 Leva) are least aware of the existence of NGOs. Unsurprisingly, the respondents with elementary education are most unfamiliar with non-profit organizations, with a relatively strong statistical dependence between the two variables - Pearson = 0.57531.

Here are some more notable demographic characteristics concerning responses to the above claims:

"Provide a quick way for dishonest people to enrich themselves" - of those who agree the highest shares are held by respondents from the 20-29 age group, those aged 60 and over, as well as town residents and men. The rate of assent is lowest among the youngest respondents. With the increase in

income, disagreement tends to decline. University graduates are more inclined to believe that NGOs serve as cover-ups to unlawful personal gains, as compared to respondents with a lower level of education.

"Constitute a means of money laundering" - the reverse tendency is to be observed in this case - agreement is strongest among the 30-39 age group and men, and disagreement, among younger respondents. There is strong statistical dependence between employment status and opinions about this claim. Once again there is greater polarization of opinions among the city population. It is worth noting that the rate of agreement is highest in the highest-income group - 34.2%.

"Serve as conduits for foreign interests and influence" - Although young people generally reject the view that NGOs are "superfluous and useless", they are the ones who agree to the greatest extent that these associations are "conduits for foreign interests and influence" (23.1%). Over one fourth of the university and college graduates also assent to the above statement.

"Help obtain additional funds from the European Union and other international organizations for addressing the country's social and economic problems" - the respondents aged under 20 display the highest rate of agreement - 43.6%, followed by the 30-39 age group, while disagreement is most pronounced among the 40-49 age group. The higher the level of education, the greater the confidence that NGOs are capable of attracting additional financial resources from abroad to help deal with major domestic problems.

## V. Conclusions

The findings of the survey on popular perceptions of non-governmental organizations in Bulgaria suggest the following major conclusions:

1. Unreservedly favorable perceptions of third-sector related concepts range between 13-25%, and completely unfavorable ones, between 4-5%. There is an overall decline in negative, and growth of positive attitudes to NGOs over the considered period between April 1994 - December 1996 - a tendency which is expected to continue in the future. Foundations are the most negatively perceived, while charitable organizations enjoy the highest rate of approval, probably because foundations are associated with past disclosures of unlawful business operations, incompatible with the very essence of nonprofit organizations. A more favorable perception of third-sector related terms is characteristic of the younger respondents, students, town residents, and those from the higher-income groups. Conversely, older respondents, non-working retired and handicapped persons, those living in the villages and respondents from the lower-income groups display a more negative attitude. Another promising tendency is found in the observed increase in respondents' awareness of NGOs.

2. There has been a noticeable rise in optimism and confidence in the potential of third-sector organizations. Students, the employed, and town residents are most confident that NGOs are capable of influencing decision-making in key areas to the country, as confirmed by strong statistical dependence rates. Young people (aged under 29) are the most supportive and believe to the greatest extent in the competence and resources of NGOs. Respondents generally see the best opportunities for real influence and positive action on the part of NGOs in spheres and activities which the state is no longer in a position to maintain - more notably, social and environmental problems. In this respect respondents from the lowest-income group tend to have more faith in the third sector. According to those surveyed, the ability of NGOs to address major social problems in the areas of healthcare, education, public order, and transport is still limited. The share of those who nevertheless believe this is possible ranges between 0.6-2.8%.

3. Cited by 14.6% of the respondents, Open Society Fund holds the lead in popularity, followed by the Saints Cyril and Methodius Foundation with 8.2%, but the bulk of the organizations have only been named by less than 1% of those surveyed. NGOs still do not appear to be too prominent in public consciousness, i.e. they are largely unfamiliar to the general public. Of those surveyed, 72.6% failed to name a single organization. Ten out of all respondents have listed 4 names, and three have actually named 5 third-sector associations.

4. As a result of the low public awareness of the activities of charitable organizations, foundations, and civic associations, only 2 in 100 respondents have ever turned for help to such organizations. NGOs should therefore place greater emphasis on providing more information and popularizing their activities among the general public. Faced with a financial emergency, 4.3% of those surveyed would actually solicit their assistance.

5. The group of people with positive attitudes to third-sector organizations, as established on the basis of opinions expressed on a series of statements about NGOs, makes up 35-40%; the share of negative attitudes is about one fourth (25%), and that of neutral ones - about 40% on average. The findings suggest that there is currently a favorable environment for fostering broader third-sector support, which could be achieved by NGOs through more effective steps to inform the general public and greater transparency of their activities.

6. There is call for a more comprehensive in-depth study of the underlying causes of the negative attitudes to NGOs among certain professional and income groups; such a study should also seek to explain the negative correlation between income size and the disposition to the third sector, which tends to become less favorable with higher income. A survey among the business and political elite, as potential donors and lawmakers, would shed further light on third-sector related issues and attitudes.

7. The findings indicate there is solid support for introducing a more favorable tax policy regarding charitable organizations, foundations, and civic associations. In 1994 the share of those who opposed tax relief for the third sector was twice as large as the share of respondents who were unconditionally in favor of such measures. The reverse tendency can be observed in the second survey of December 1996. The share of respondents who do think that the state should facilitate the activities of NGOs through tax relief has reached 58.7%. One in eight is unconditionally in favor of tax relief for NGOs.