



Public Attitudes to Nature Conservation in Bulgaria
Joint Study carried out by the Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation
and the Institute of Sociology, BAS



Study Facts:

Representative for the population over 18 years old

Sample: 1000 people country-wide, interviewed individuals in towns and villages

Period of study: 15.10 – 26.10. 2007

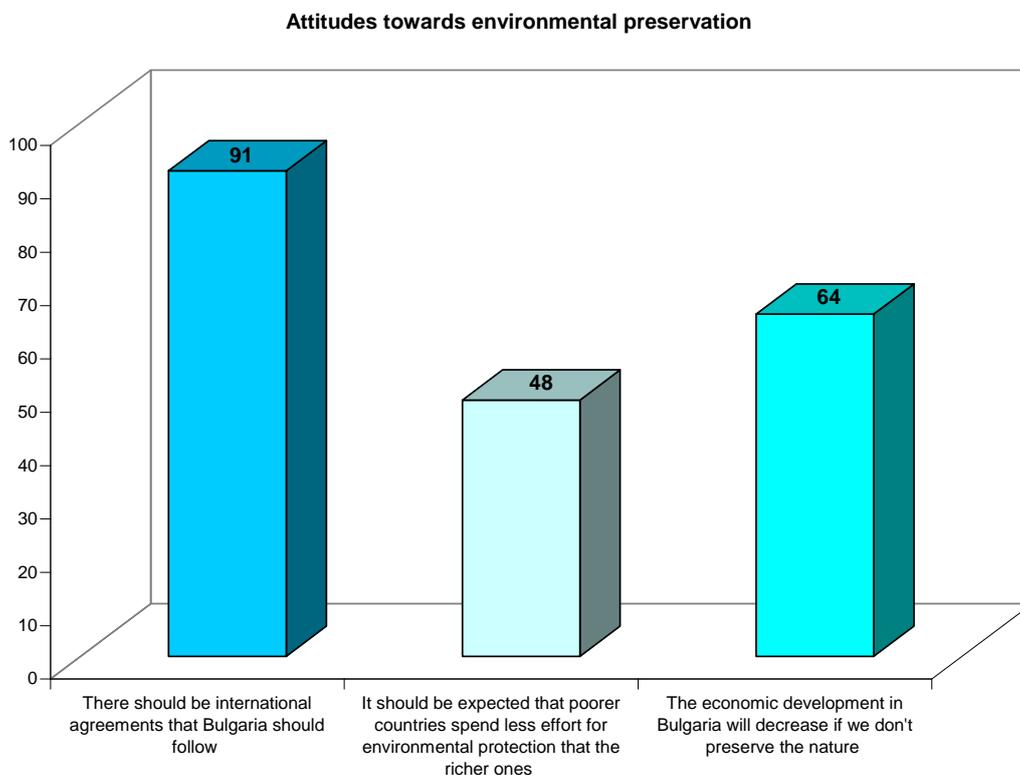
Dr. Rumiana Stoilova

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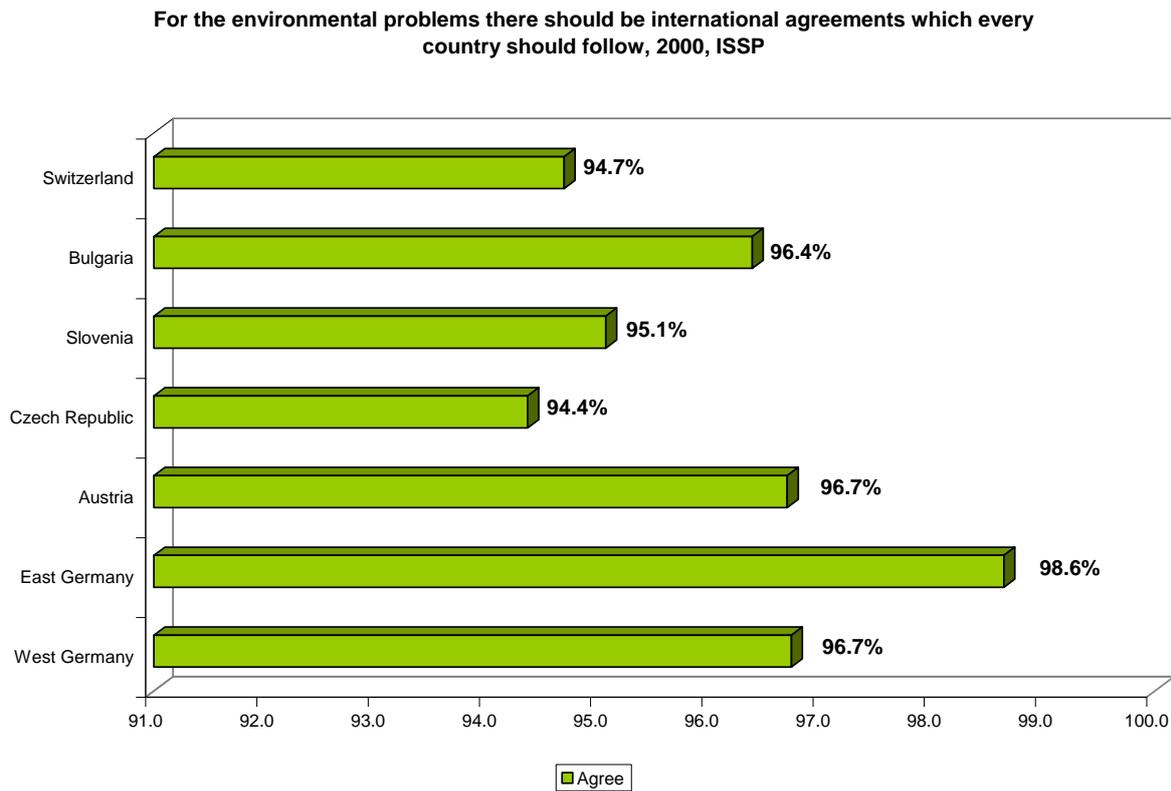
Attitudes to the significance of nature conservation

The study results indicate awareness of international agreements and awareness of links between economic development and conservation of the natural environment. The lower detected levels of passive attitudes typical of a nation that is the recipient rather than an active participant in nature conservation is a positive development. The largest percentage of interviewed people agree with the statement that «environmental issues should be governed by international agreements which Bulgaria and the other countries adhere to» - this statement drew support from 91% of respondents. It is followed by the statement “Economic progress in Bulgaria will slow down if we do not provide better protection of the environment”, about which 64% of respondents agree. The third statement, «It is to be expected that poorer countries will make less effort to protect the environment than richer countries» drew positive response from less than half of the studied sample (48%).



International comparison

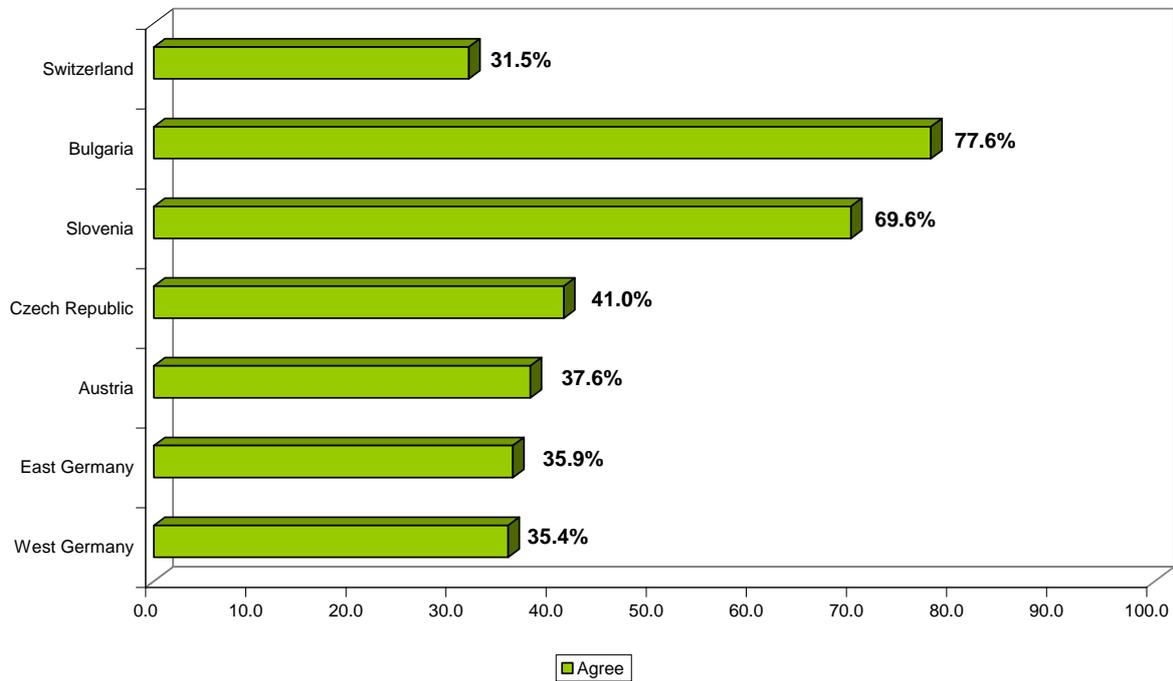
An international European survey “Environment”, conducted in 2000, allows the positioning of the Bulgarian public opinion on the broader European context¹. The opinion of the Bulgarians with respect to the statement «For the environmental problems there should be international agreements which every country should follow». This opinion is shared by more than 90% of the respondents in Europe.



A big difference in the public opinion is observed in the year 2000 between Bulgaria on the one side and Sweden, Austria, and Germany on the other regarding the statement that poorer countries should be expected to spend less effort for the conservation of the nature. The improvement of this attitude in 2007 for Bulgaria is a positive development observed in the current survey.

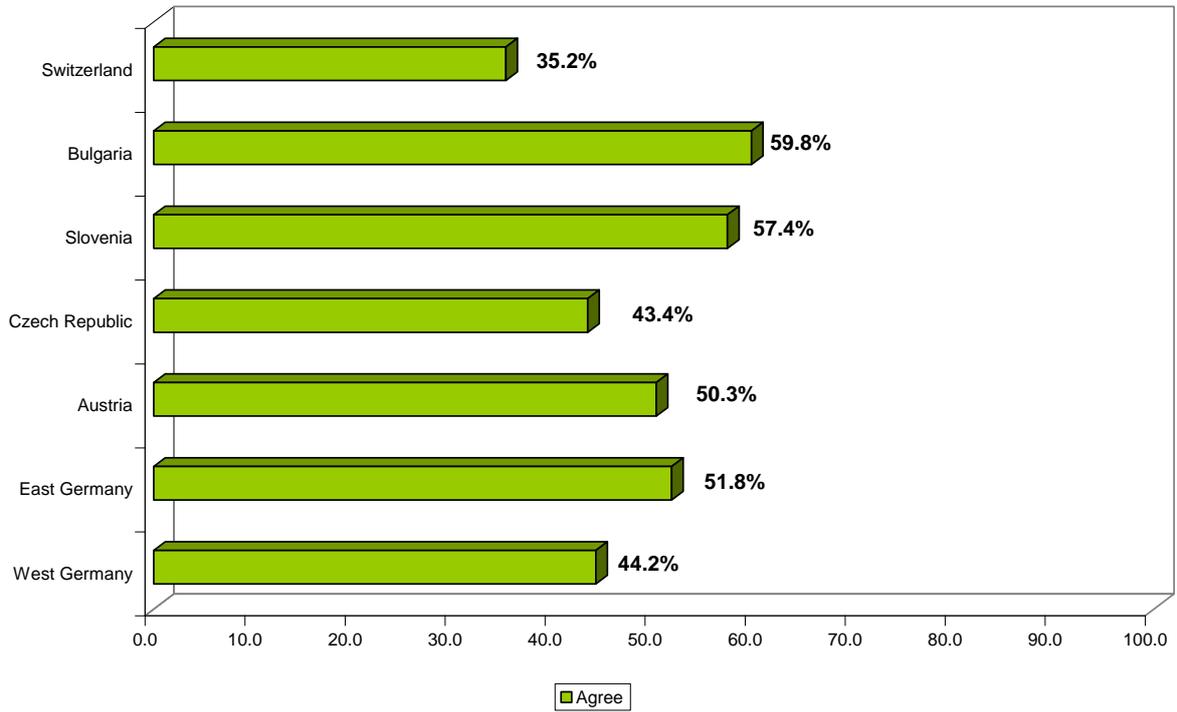
¹ http://www.gesis.org/en/data_service/issp/data/2000_Environment_II.htm

It should be expected that poorer countries spend less effort for the environmental protection than richer ones, 2000, ISSP

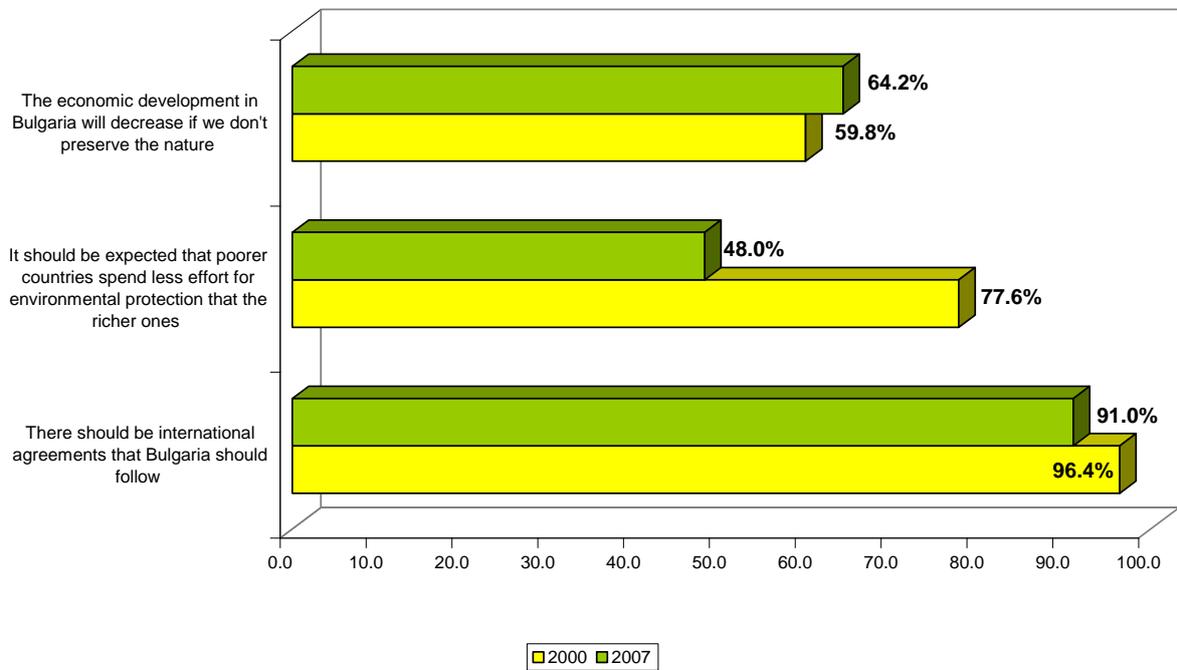


In Bulgaria, the attitudes relating economic development and nature conservation are clearly visible both seven years ago and now. We could only regret that the construction expansion in the country could not be stopped and does not correspond to the public opinion and evaluation. With respect to these attitudes there is certain increase (from 59% in 2000 to 64% in 2007) and still the opinions in Bulgaria remain higher than those in the other European countries taken in the comparison.

The economic development will decrease if we don't preserve the nature



Attitudes towards nature conservation (comparison 2000 and 2007)



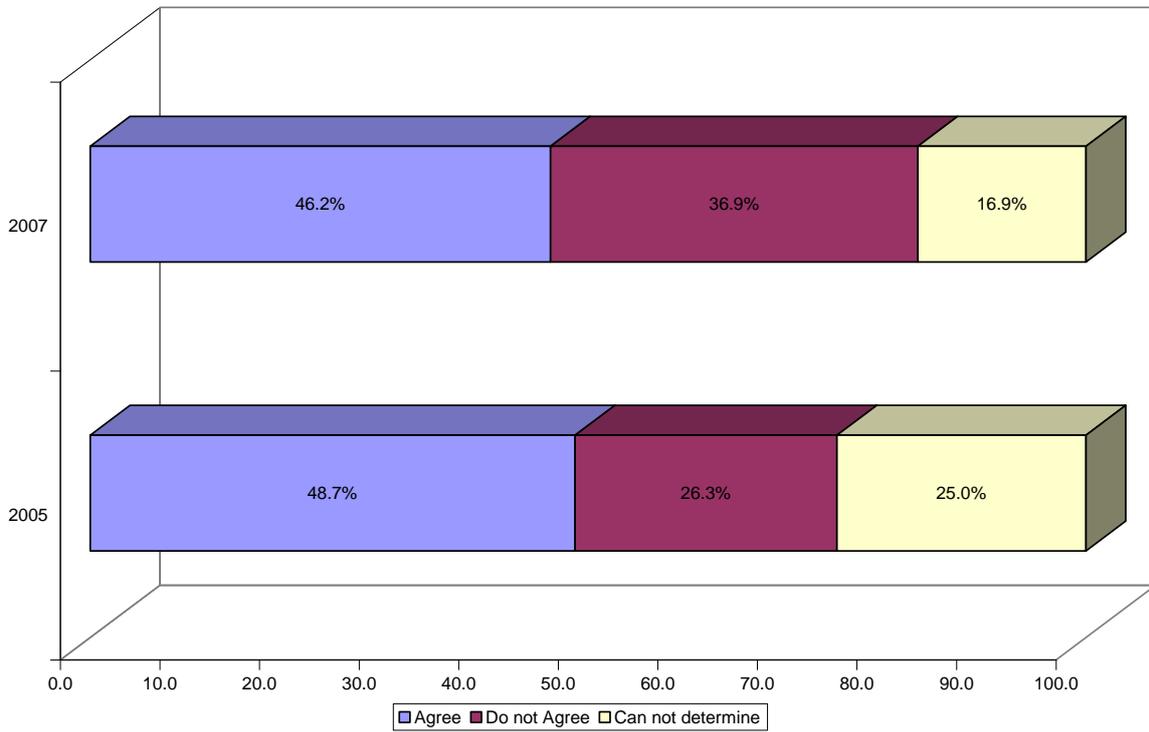
The next group of statements concerns the Bulgarian country-specific context. The largest

share of respondents agree that «Construction in protected areas (PAs) is absolutely impermissible» (82%) and «Owners of land in PAs must comply with restrictions imposed on construction» (87.7%). It is obvious that on matters concerning new construction in PAs, environment protection organisations will benefit from wider public understanding and support. There is a sharp divide, however, between respondents who agree and disagree with the statement «There is a sufficiently developed tourism infrastructure in Bulgaria» – those who agree account for 46.2% of all respondents while the "no" answers represent 36.9% of the total. Considerable share of people interviewed are undecided. These answers point to the lack of balance between nature conservation and the development of environmentally friendly tourism.

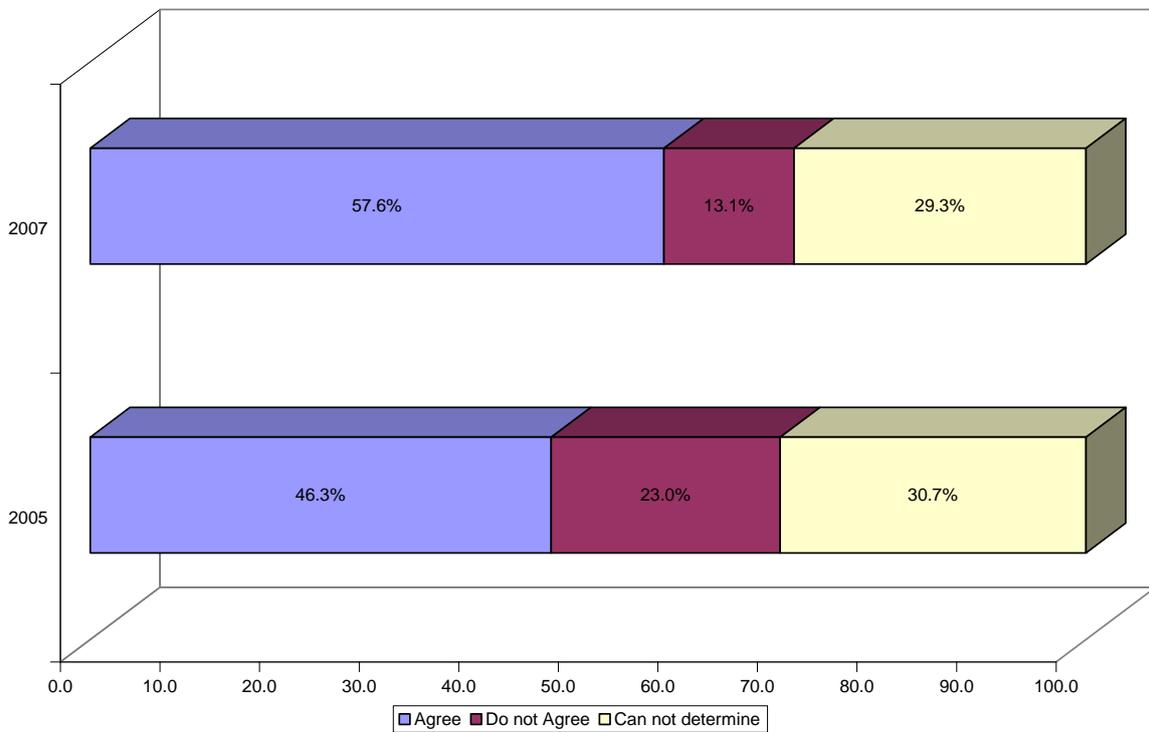
Dynamics in the attitudes

In preparing the analysis of the above statements we sought to compare how responses have changed in comparison with the previous study, commissioned by BBF in 2005. As to the statement «There is a sufficiently developed tourism infrastructure in Bulgaria», the share of those who disagree has grown, at the expense of undecided respondents. The statement «There is currently a sufficient number of buildings and structures in parks in Bulgaria» drew a larger number of agreeing respondents while the number of those who disagree has gone down, which may be due to the public debate surrounding new construction in the Strandzha Nature Park and the environmental activists' campaign to protect the area. As to the statement «Construction in protected areas is absolutely impermissible» there has been no change in attitudes compared to the previous study. The past two years have brought no change also in public attitudes to the statement «Owners of land in PAs must comply with restrictions imposed on construction». The share of undecided respondents has fallen. Public opinion on the issue of new construction in PAs is better informed, although a certain level of polarisation still remains. The share of those who believe that construction does not damage the environment registered a slight increase. The presence of extreme polarities on this issue is a significant factor, and this polarisation should be monitored as it develops in time and according to the local specifics.

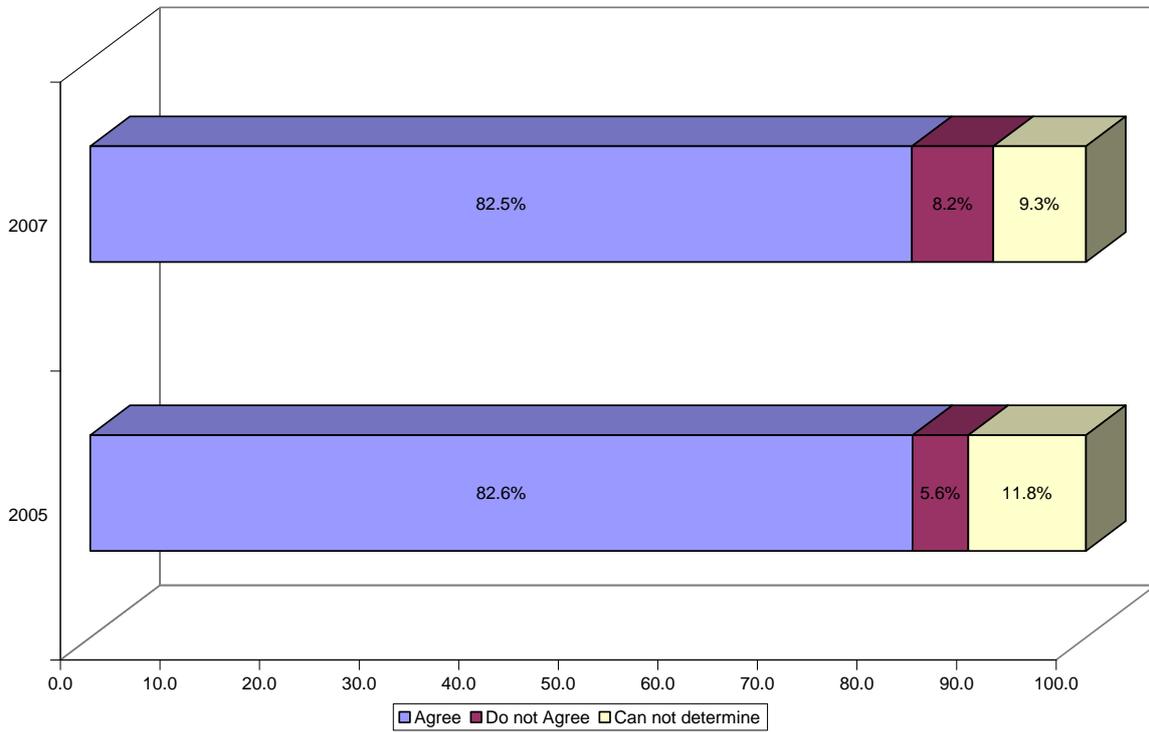
Bulgaria has sufficiently developed infrastructure for tourism



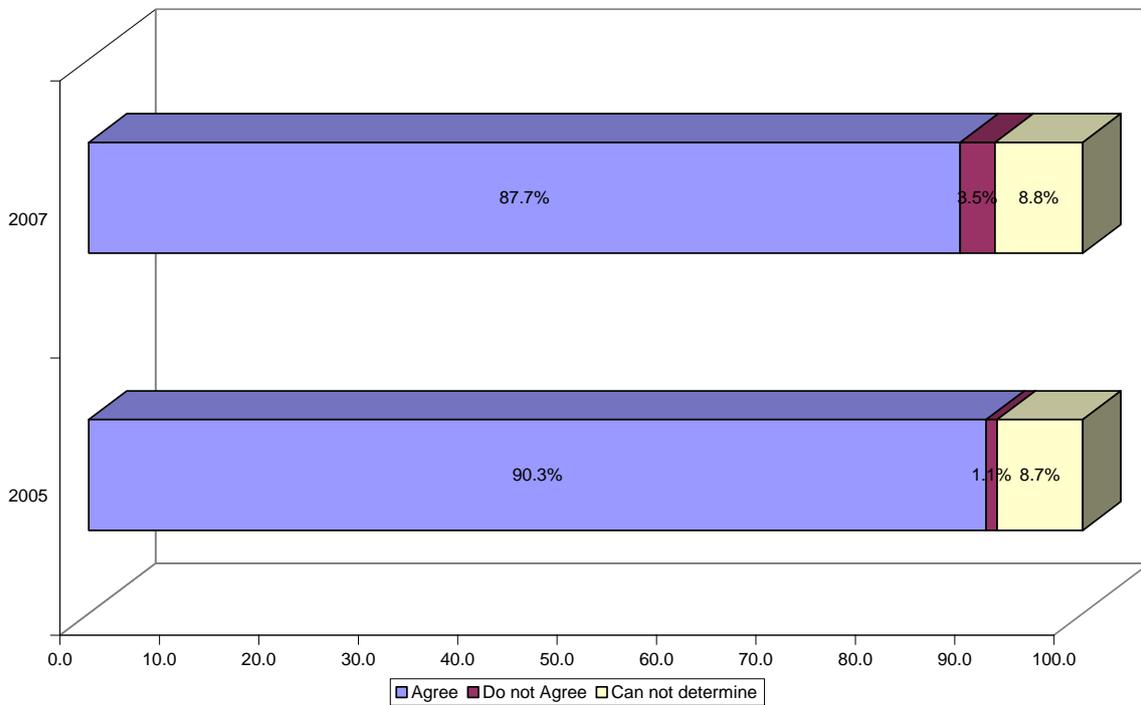
In Bulgaria, there are enough buildings in the parks



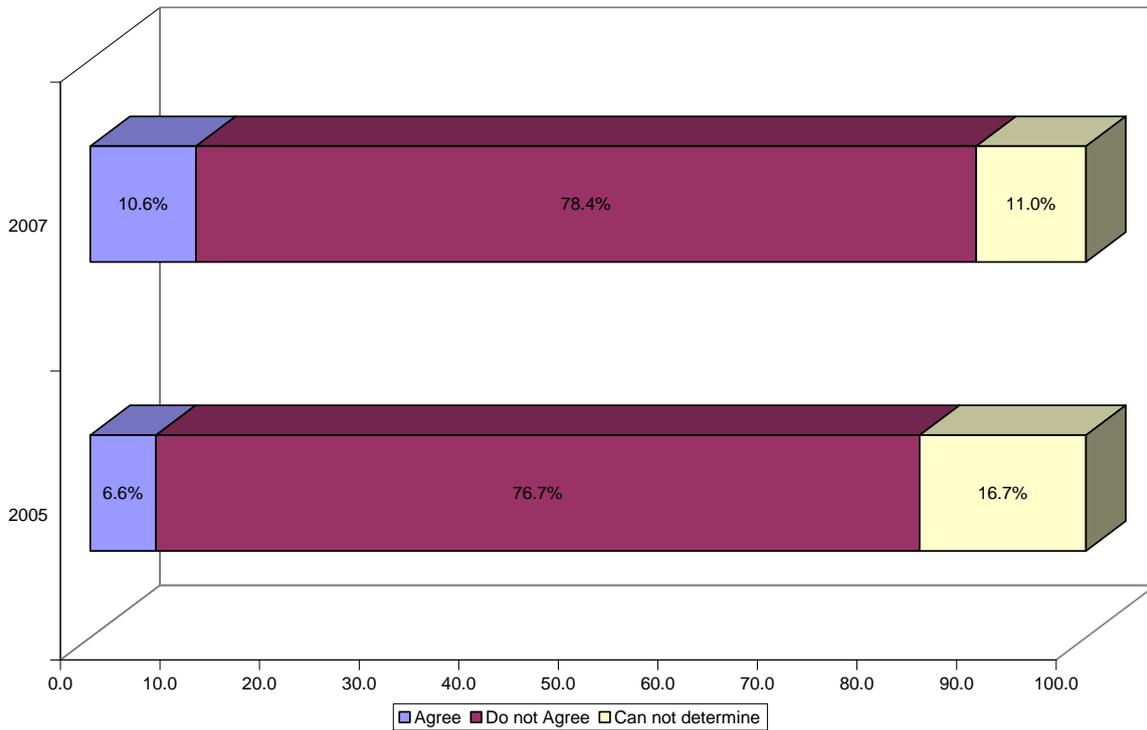
Construction sites in the protected territories are unacceptable



Land-owners in the protected territories should take into consideration the construction restrictions



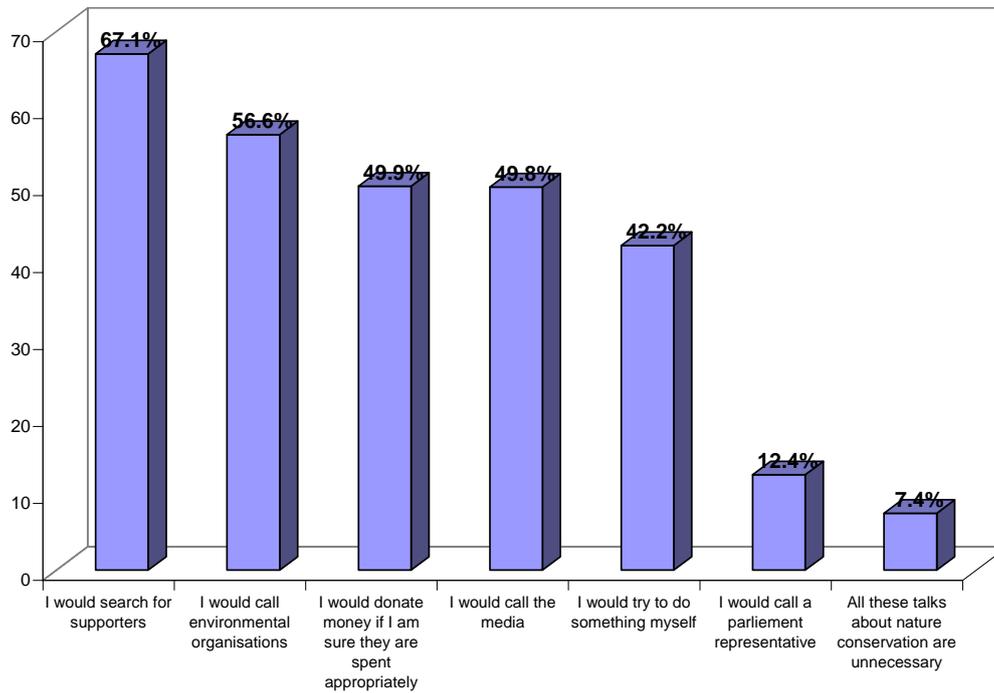
Constructions do not harm the environment



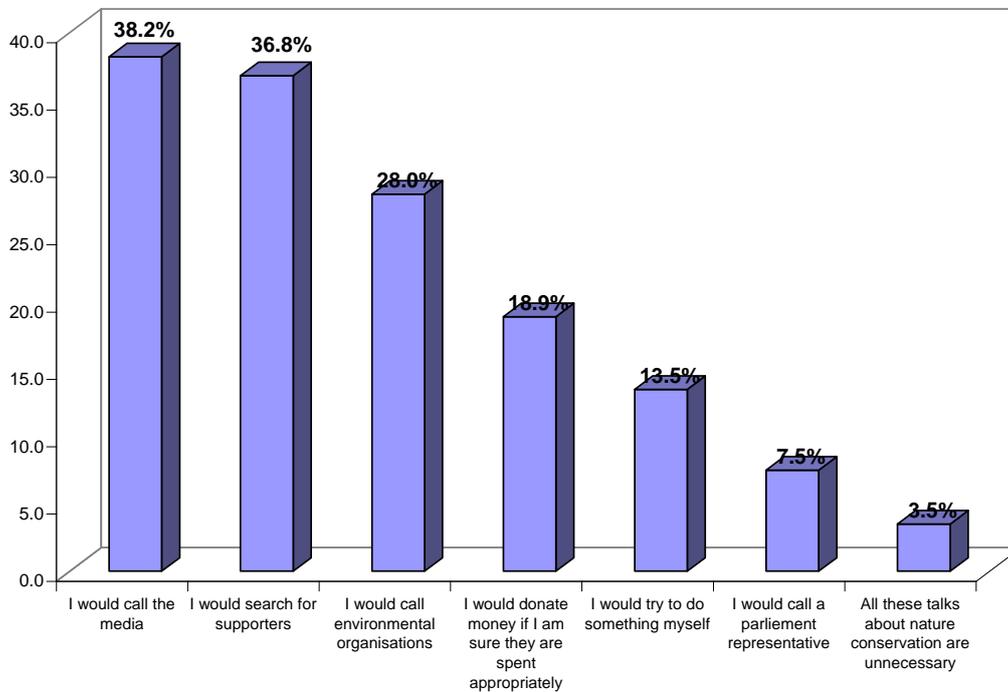
Dynamics in the attitudes for personal involvement

The first three top-ranking options of personal involvement or contribution in 2005 were "contact the media", "seek like-minded people" and "seek cooperation from an environmental organisation". The way these options were ranked 2007 has changed, with the media being dethroned by "seek like-minded people", followed by "seek cooperation from an environmental organisation", avz "contact the media" coming on the fourth place in the list in the present survey. The shift is from a more passive activity ("inform the media") to active citizens seeking like-minded individuals. The importance of civil society capable of organising its own actions and opposing the government has grown.

**In case of environmental problem, how would you react?
(2007)**



**In case of environmental problem, how would you react?
(2005)**



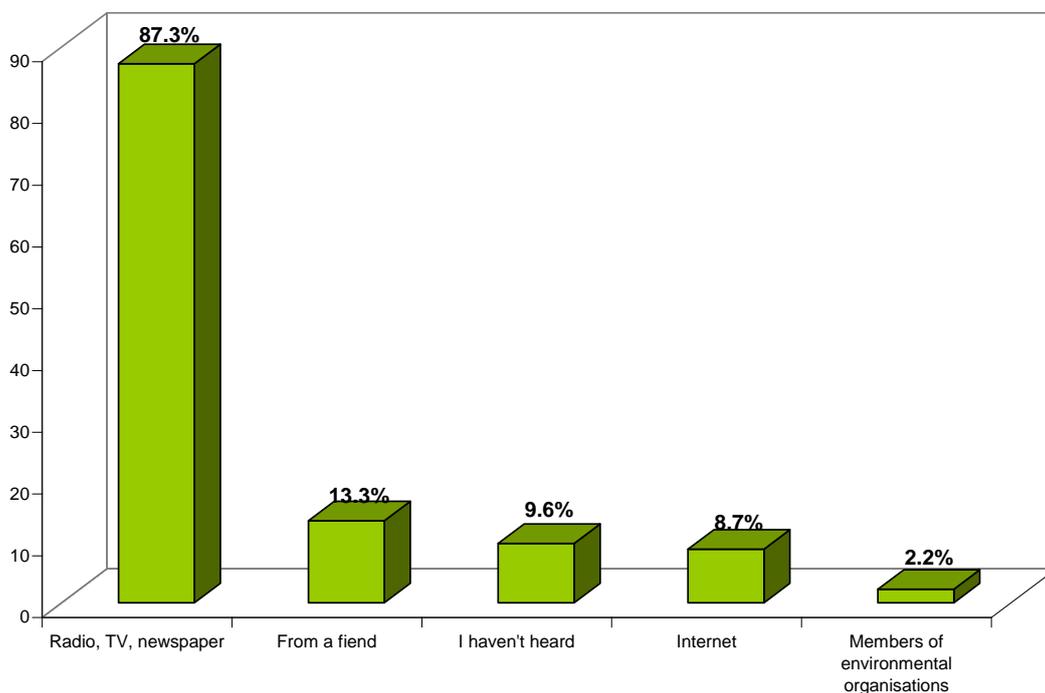
In 2007, 58.9% of respondents agreed with the statement «it is the government's responsibility to deal with natural environment issues". The responses "I will act myself" and "I will donate money if I'm certain it will be used for its intended purpose" were given by

42.2% and 49.9% of respondents, respectively. Judging from that shift of priorities in citizens' activity, we can safely assume that Bulgaria is experiencing a "green wave" of a raising public support for the nature protection. This is measured by the attitudes for citizens' more active involvement and the preparedness to hold meetings with the authorities to prevent damage being done to the environment.

Evaluation of the Media

The people from the representative sample, which includes different population areas, different age, education, and income groups, use predominantly the means of mass communication – radio, TV, and newspapers (87.3%) to inform themselves about the environmental problems. The rest of the information channels rank far behind – directly from colleagues and friends – 13.3%, through internet (e-mail, blog, web-site) -8.7%, directly from members of environmental organizations – 2.2%. As a whole the share of uninformed people who haven't heard of the any of the campaigns and don't use any of the information sources for the issues, as measured through different items in the survey varies around 9%. This is the share of the respondents who say “I haven't heard of any of the nature conservation campaigns”.

If you have heard about a nature conservation campaign in the last year, how did you hear about it ?

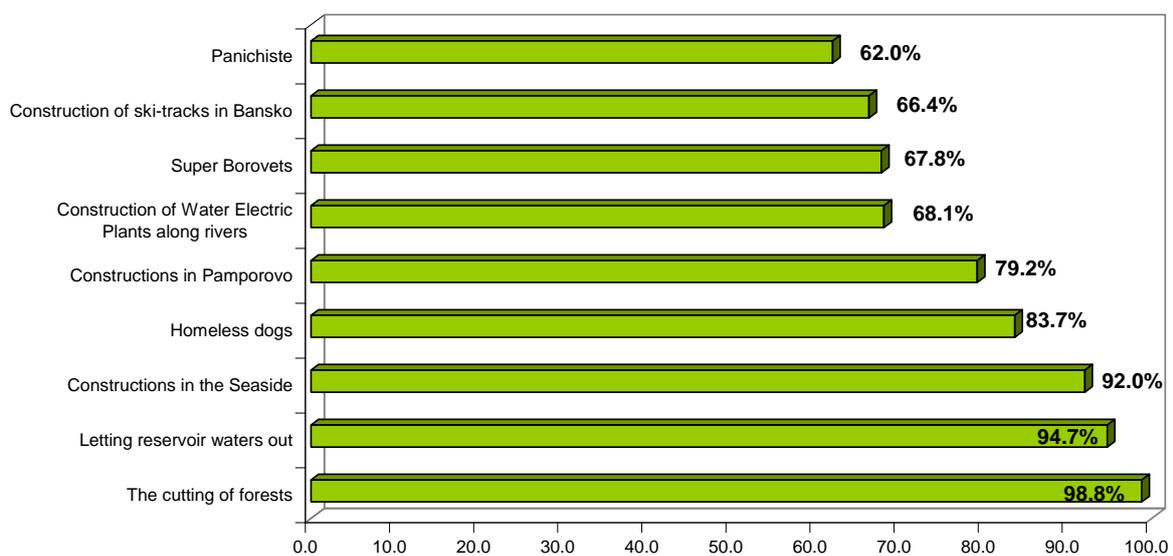


Priorities in Environmental Protection

The first three issues that meet the approval of over 90% of respondents are as follows: deforestation as a result of uncontrolled logging (98.8%), uncontrolled release of water from dams and resulting flash floods (94.7%), and over-construction at the Black Sea coast (92%).

Other issues that were given high priority include the problem of stray dogs and cats (83.7%), over-construction in the Pamporovo resort (79.2%), the construction of small hydropower stations along rivers (68.1%), the Super Borovets project (67.8%), ski-runs in the Pirin National Park (66.4%), the project to enlarge the Panichishte skiing resort (62.0%). Public opinion priorities should alert environmental organisations to the issues that society deems most important. The top three priorities as registered by public attitudes are very clear – conservation of forests, controlled release of dam water and prevention of flash floods, putting a stop to over-construction along the Black Sea coast.

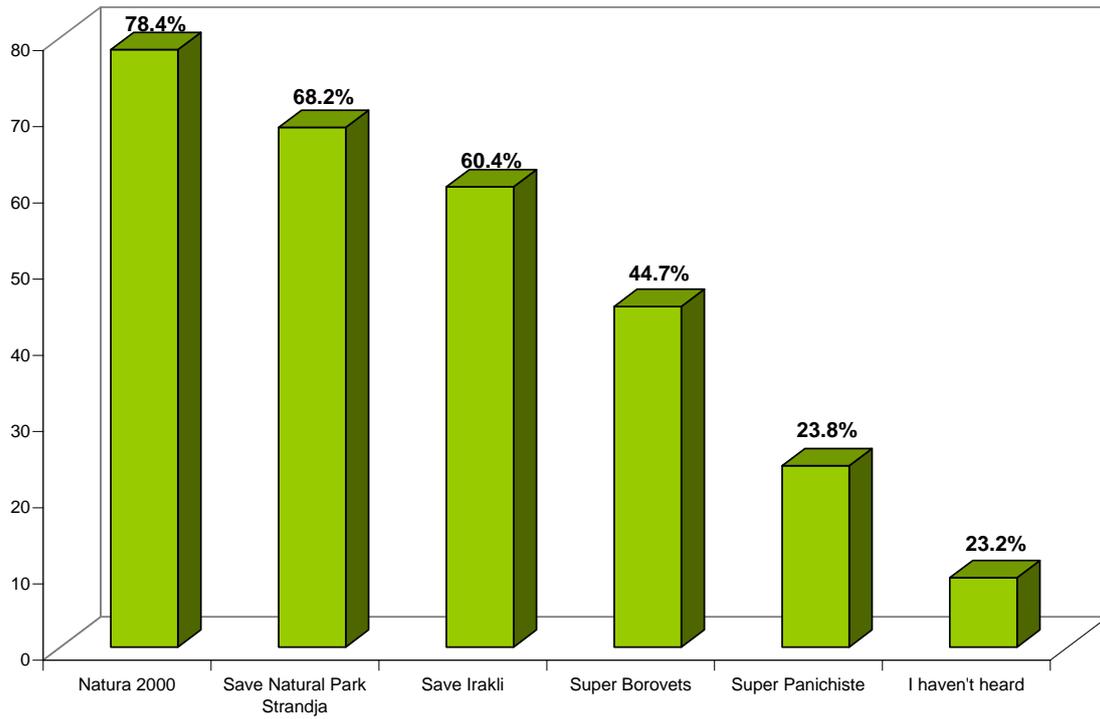
What are the most important problems for the nature conservation in Bulgaria in the moment?



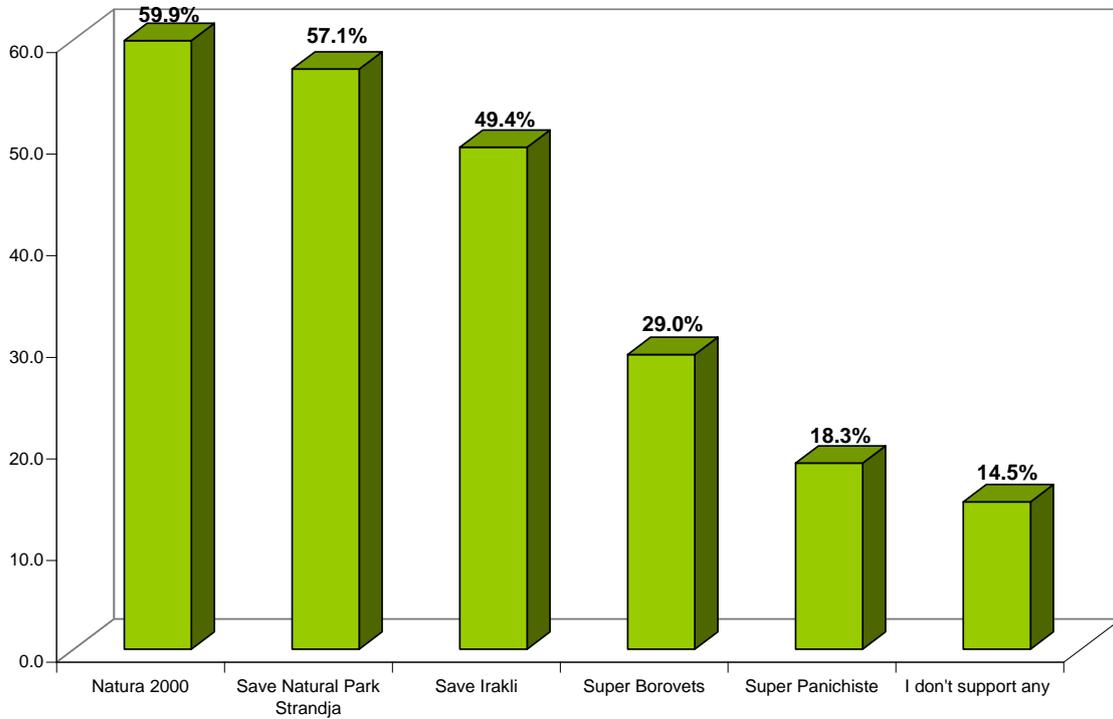
Environmental Campaigns

Public awareness on different environment-related issues varies widely. Therefore the preparedness of local people to support environmental NGO's efforts is expected to vary, too. Awareness of environmental campaigns during the current year is as follows - "Natura 2000" (78.4%), "Save Strandzha Nature Park" (68.2%), "Save Irakli" (60.4%), campaign against the construction of the Super Panichishte Ski Zone in the Rila National Park (23.8%), "Let Nature Remain in Bulgaria" (23.2%). The ranking of *support* for the various environmental campaigns is relative to the level of awareness. Support for all campaigns is however lower than awareness, but the respective scores are very close, which indicates there is room for better public awareness efforts.

Which of the following environmental campaigns have you heard of?



Which of the following environmental campaigns do you personally support?

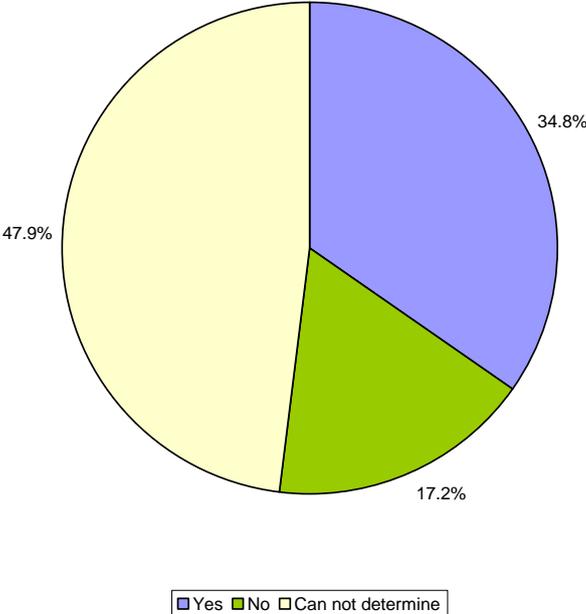


Natura 2000

One of the most heatedly discussed topics in the course of the past year was, without any

doubt, the inclusion (and exclusion) of areas into (and out of) the Natura 2000 network. 78.4% of respondents were aware of this campaign - the largest number compared to other environmental campaigns included in the study. 59.9% of respondents are in favour of Natura 2000. Of note here is the fact that the share of respondents who support the campaign is considerably lower than the percentage of respondents who were aware of its existence. That is why we also sought an answer to the question “What are the benefits for local people from the inclusion of areas in the Natura 2000 network?”. On this issue, public opinion remains uninformed to a considerable degree – 34.8% of respondents see benefits from inclusion in the network, while 17.2% believe there are none, and nearly half (47.9%) of respondents are undecided. These results are in support of the opinion that the government's efforts to raise public awareness as to the benefits of the network were inadequate and a more active stance would have prevented opposition in many places.

Are there any advantages for the local people from the inclusion of the territories in the Natura 2000 network?



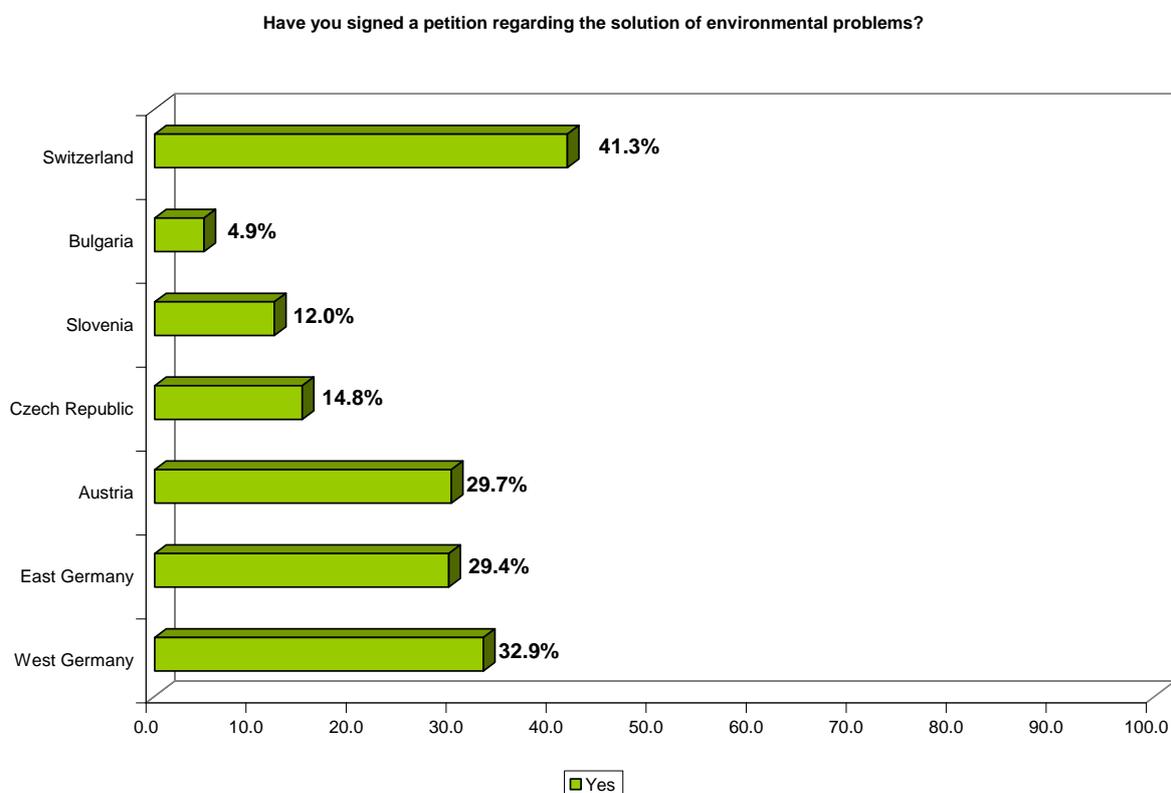
Awareness, Support, Involvement

The trend still persists for the levels of awareness and support to be higher than these for personal involvement and contribution. Over the past 5 years, 27.2% of respondents took part in an activity to protect the environment, 12.7% signed petitions concerning environmental protection, 3.0% took part in protest activities or demonstrations, 2.5% donated money to environmental organisations. These figures are much lower than the registered levels of awareness and support.

Dynamics of Involvement

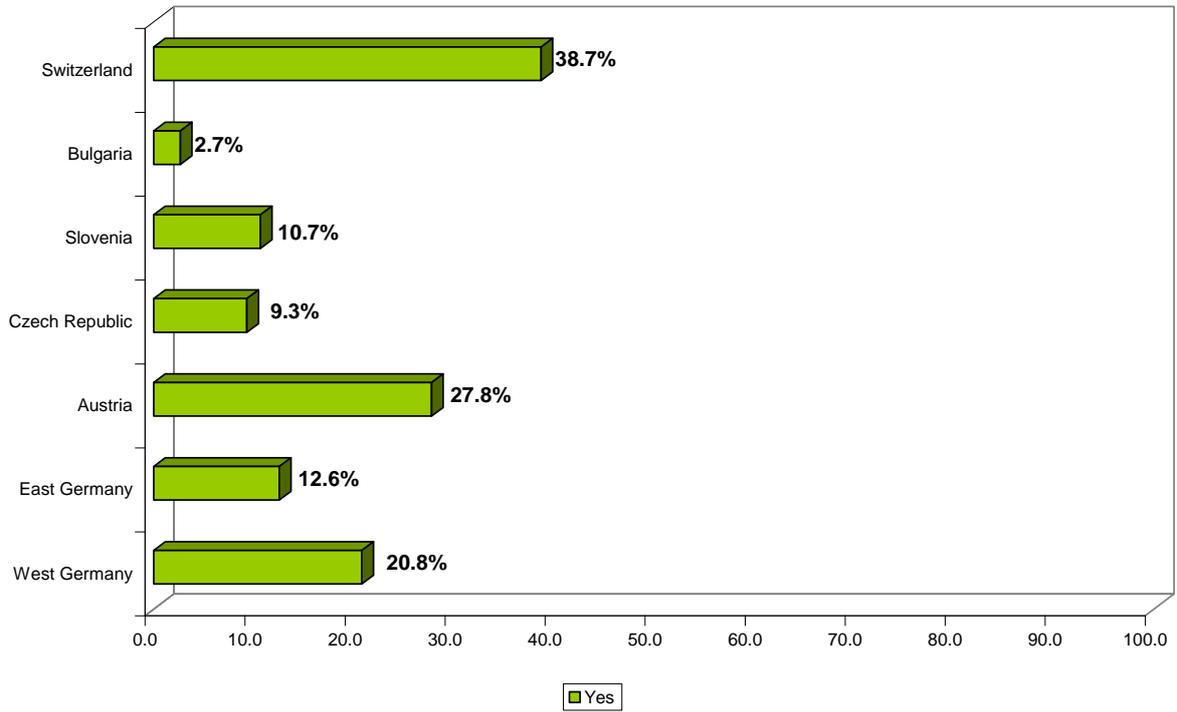
The tendency that people are more informed and prone to support than actually involve themselves personally in a campaign remains. In the last five years 27.2% of the respondents have participated in an environmentalist action, 12.7% have signed a petition for nature conservation, 3.0% have participated in a demonstration and 2.5% have donated money to an environmentalist organization.

The strongest tendency in signing environmentalist petitions has Switzerland - 41.3%². In the year 2000 Bulgaria occupies the last place with the modest 4.9%. It is interesting to observe that Switzerland is also the country with the highest share regarding donations to environmentalist organizations – 38.7% but has low share regarding participation in demonstrations – 6.6%. Similar is the tendency in all European countries which shows different levels of readiness of the people for personal engagement and support of the environmentalist cause.

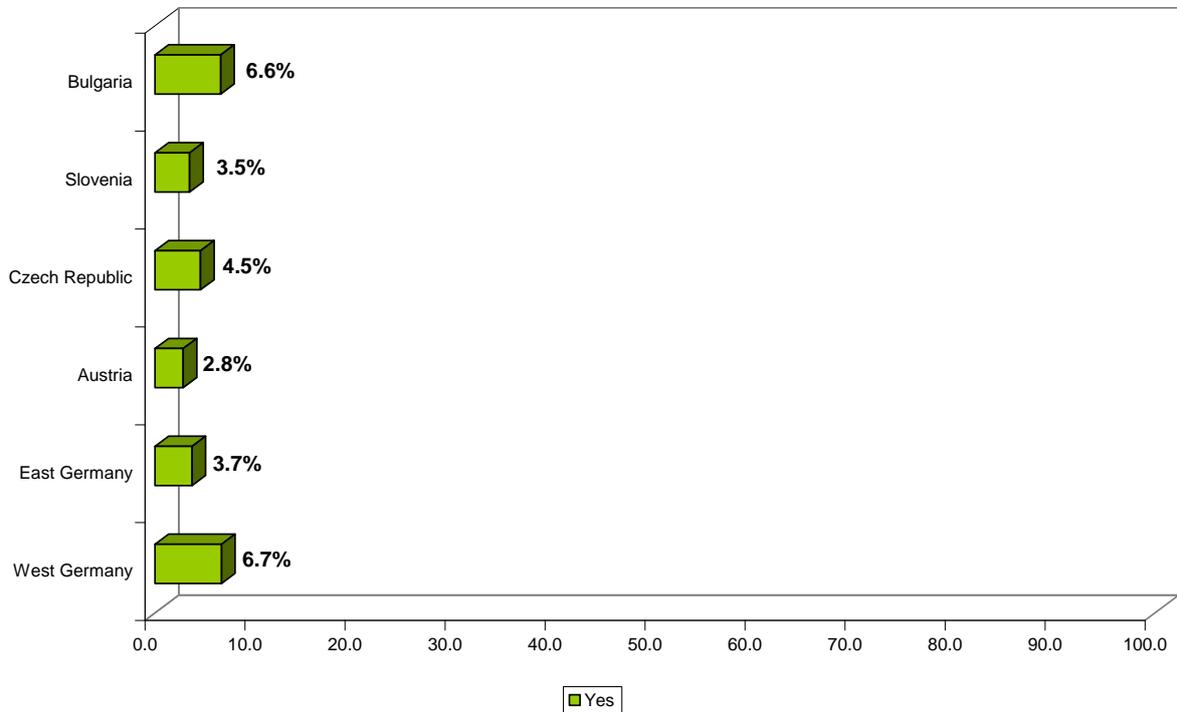


² International Social Survey Program, Environment II, 2000 (ISSP).

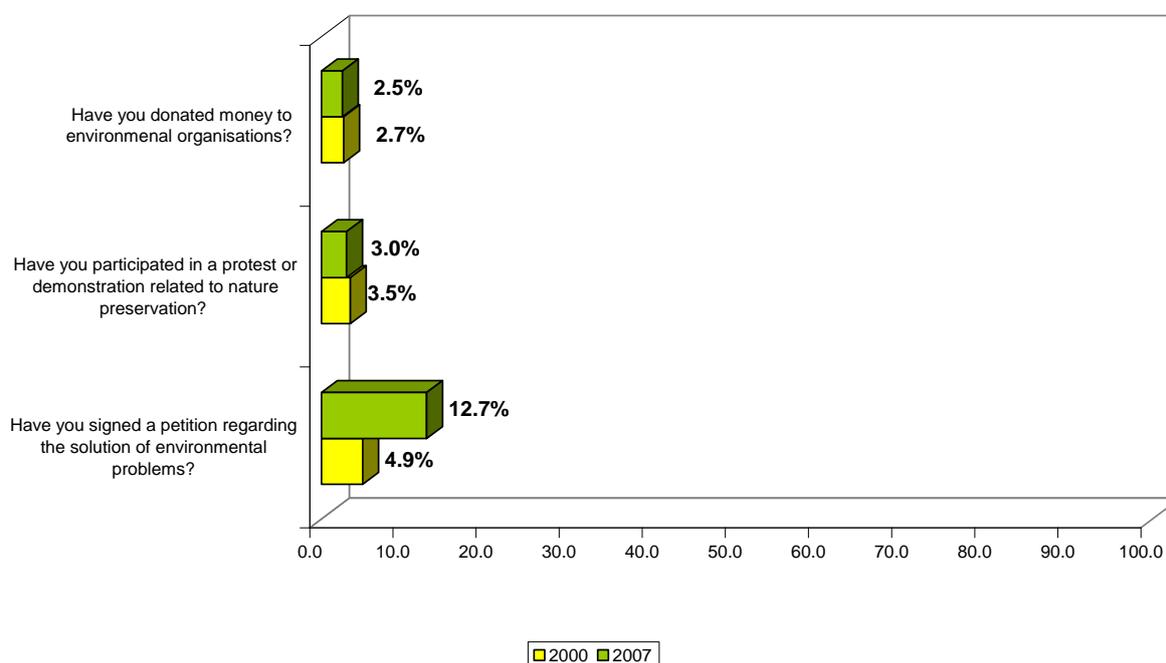
Have you donated money to environmental organisations?



Have you participated in a protest or demonstration related to nature preservation?



Involvement dynamics (comparison 2000 and 2007)



Highest improvement for Bulgaria concerning the personal involvement is towards signing petitions from 4.9% in 2000 to 12.7% in 2007.

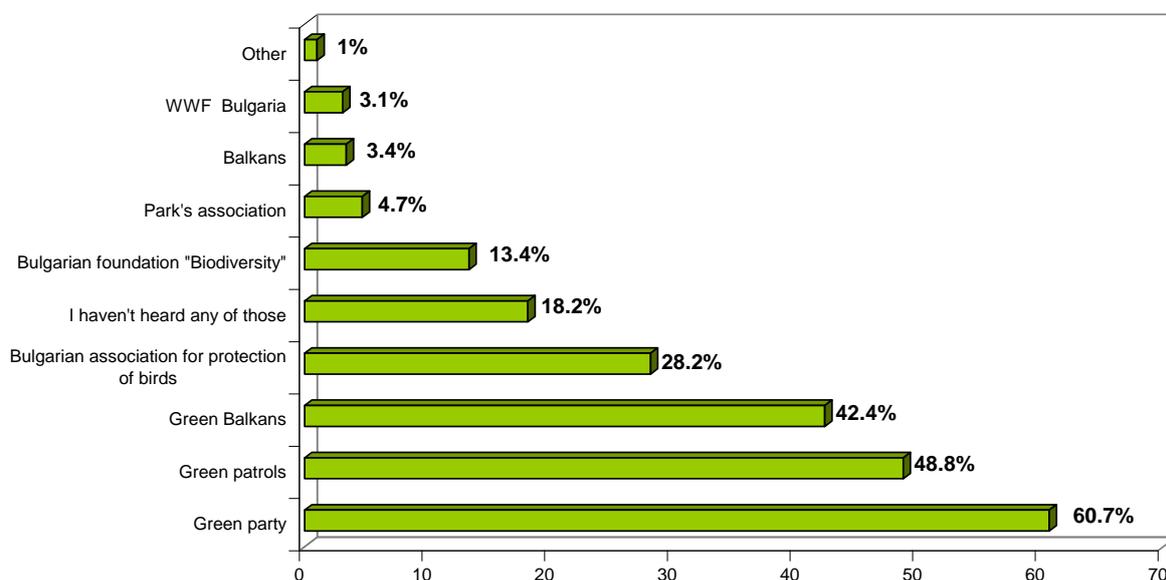
Popularity of Environmental Protection

The organisations and people involved in environmental protection have a major role to play in making environmental campaigns more popular.

Organizations

This is how environmental organisations rank in the awareness assessment – Green Party - 60.7%, Green Patrols – 48.8%, Green Balkans - 42.4%, Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds - 28.2%, Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation -13.4%, Association of Parks 4.7%, Balkani - 3.4%, WWF Bulgaria – 3.1%. The organisations that have been on the scene since the early days of democratic change are clearly distinguished - the Green Party and the Green Patrols. Another organisation was added by respondents in a total of 10 survey questionnaires even though it was not on our list - Ekoglasnost, in spite of the fact that it has not been active in public life over the past several years. Public attitudes tend to be inert and require more time to change, respectively they die out rather slowly.

Which environmental organizations do you know?

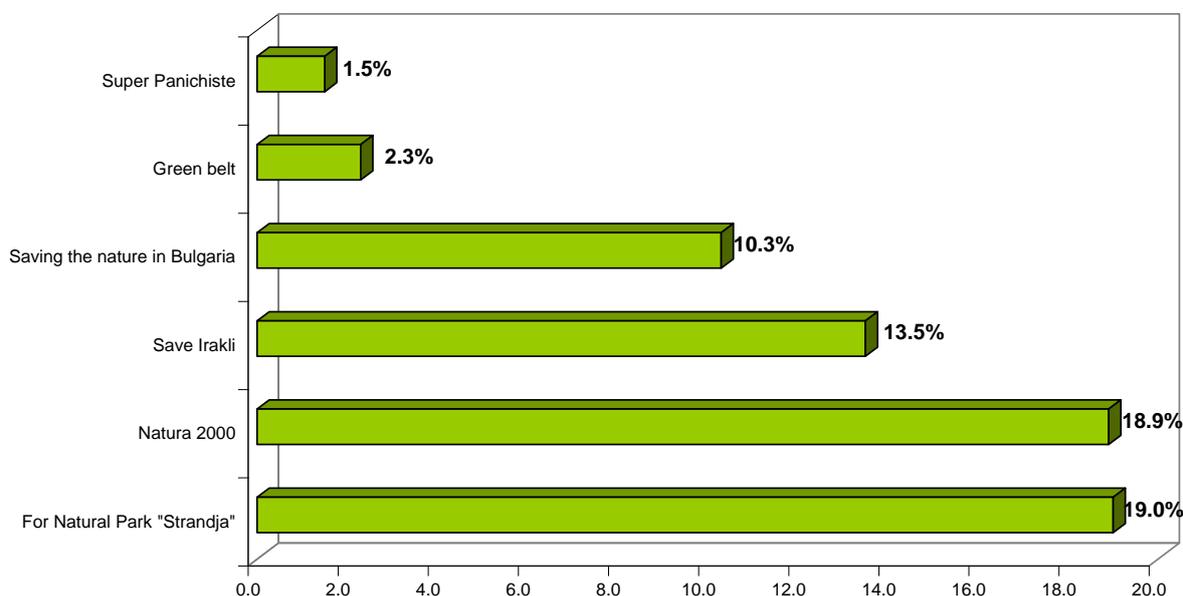


At the same time, the beginning of a second green wave is clearly – environmental organisations without a clear political orientation are gaining popularity, such as Green Balkans, Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds, the Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation. The remaining three organisations also have a distinctive environmental profile without a political "tag" to it; these, however, are not so well recognised. The green segment of civil society has a distinct profile and a number of publicly recognisable organisations.

Public recognition of the Bulgarian foundation “Biodiversity”

The foundation is recognized through its contribution and participation in the following campaigns – “For Natural park Strandja” – 19%, Natura 2000 – 18.9%, Save Irakli – 13.5%. Green belt – 2.3%, Super Panichiste – 1.5%. This allows for evaluation of the efforts and resources invested as measured by the achieved effect as recognition by the public and also contributes for the consideration of actions that would further improve it.

Which of the following campaigns do you associate with the participation of the Bulgarian foundation "Biodiversity"?



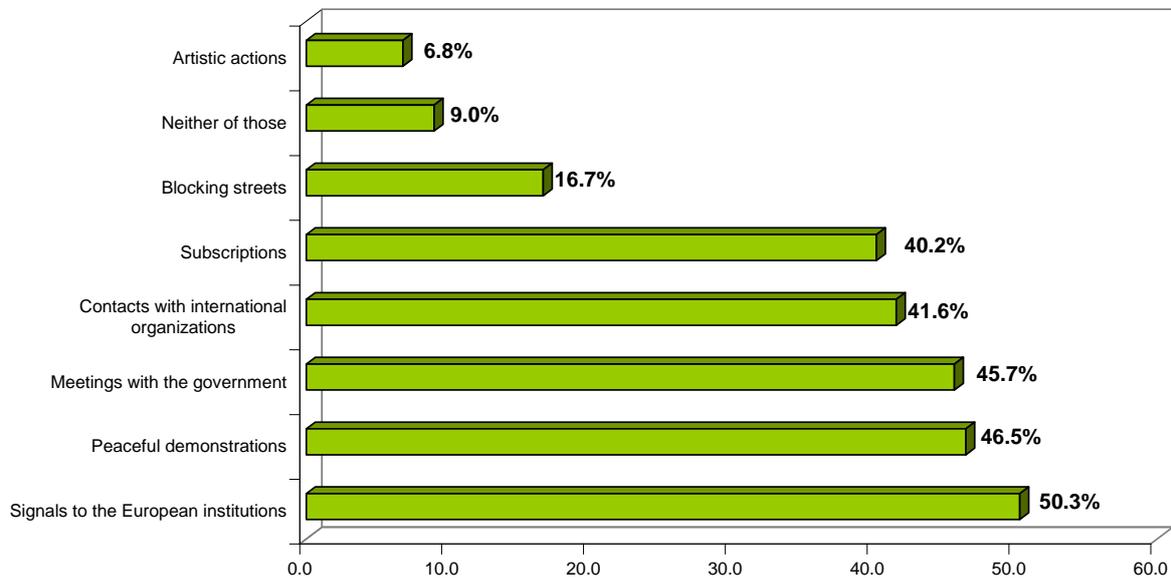
Persons

There is a long list of Bulgarians and foreign nationals that public opinion associates with the cause of nature conservation. The Bulgarian personalities are divided into four categories – those belonging to the "first green wave" in the early days of democracy, personalities that gained public recognition recently as part of mass protest activities to protect nature, sports and art celebrities and government officials whose responsibilities include environmental protection.

Effectiveness of Environmentalists' Activities

The top ranking activity here is “alerting EU institutions” (50.3%); similar in the rate of agreement as to their effectiveness are “contacts with international institutions” – 41.6%. Three types of activity draw an almost equal share of support for their effectiveness: peaceful protest – 46.5%, meetings with authorities – 45.7%, petitions - 40.2%. Artistic performances are deemed to be the least effective (6.8 %). However, given the public effect of celebrities' involvement has, such forms of activity should by no means be underestimated. It should be taken into consideration that they attract a more targeted audience and supporters. Respondents specifically mentioned that more active efforts at the local level are needed, such as contact with the mayor's office, awareness raising and finding resolutions to issues at the local level. Also significant is the way environmental actions' effectiveness is rated: first comes "alerting EU institutions", followed by protest, and then "meetings with government officials". The order these are ranked in very clearly reveals a problematic deficit of confidence in the way government works.

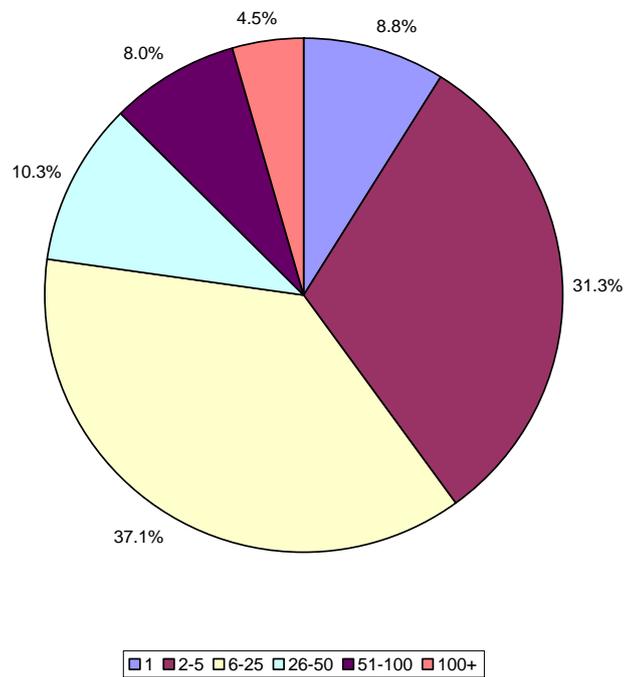
Which actions of the environmentalists do you consider as most effective?



Attitudes towards donations

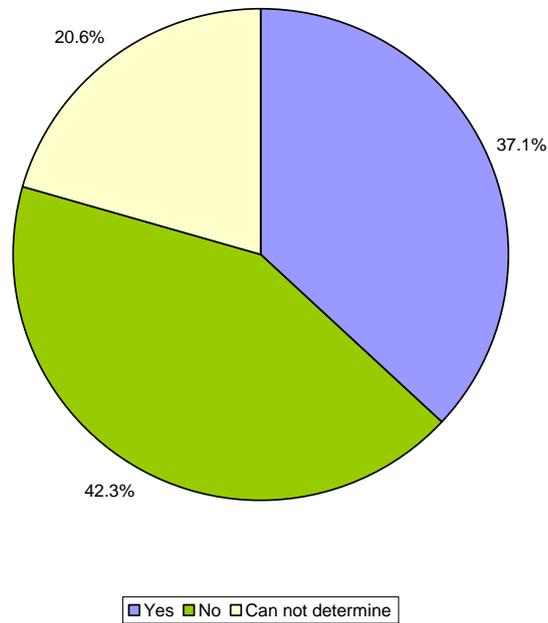
A little more than 50% have determined a concrete form of donation – the rest are divided between “I will not donate” – 36.4% and “I participate with voluntary work” – 9% - in some cases with the addition of “in case the whole family participates”. Among the concrete forms of donation, most popular is through SMS – 39.1% followed by donation campaigns on public places (streets, parks, etc) -20.3%, shops that take out part of the price for nature conservation – 14.3%, donations in the municipality; preferred are donations related to children. Donations that benefit children are often seen as a cause that competes to the environmentalist one but probably those two aspects can be joined.

Size of the donations for nature conservation (in BGN)



Relatively thin is the share of people who can contribute with a donation. Up to 1 lev would donate – 8.8% - 2-5 lv. 31.3%, 6-25 lv. -37.5%, 26-50lv – 10.3%, 51-100 lv. – 8.0%, and 100+ lv. – 4.5%. The largest is the share in the category 6-25lv, after which a decrease is observed in the readiness to donate larger amounts. The larger donations should be sought through a different type of donations forms as compared to the average amounts for which in the moment there is readiness to be donated for environmentalist campaigns.

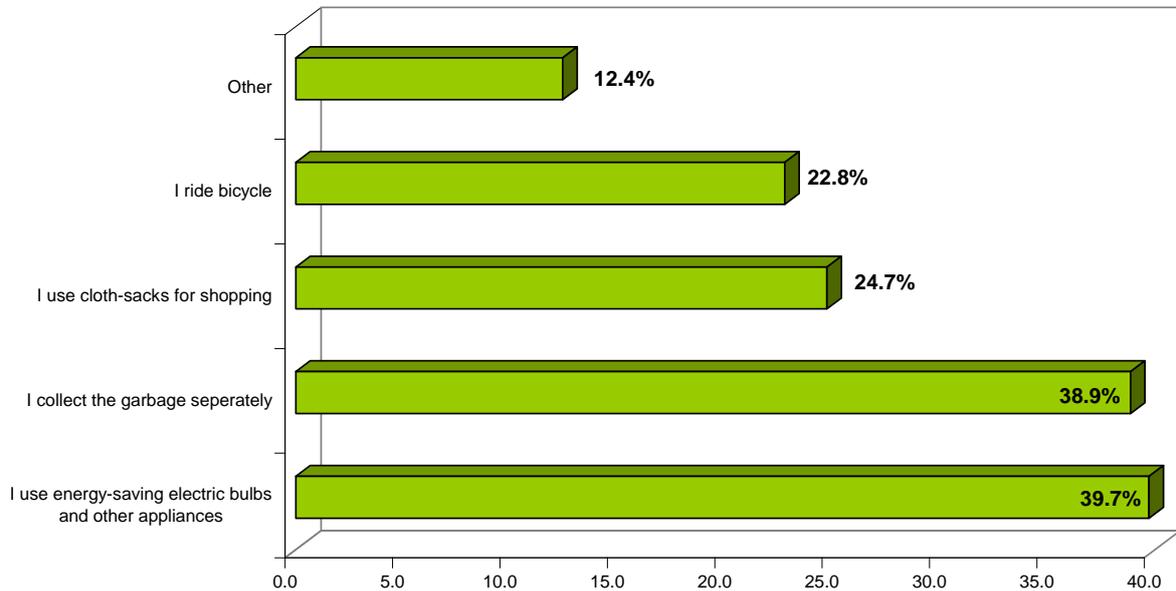
Would you donate money for purchase of land from its owners for the purpose of nature conservation?



Green Lifestyle

The issues of tourism, "green" lifestyle and organic food give a natural direction to the ties between environmentalists and other related causes. Less than one third of respondents have indicated that they practice "green" lifestyle – using energy saving light globes and appliances (39.7%), separate waste collection (38.9%), using a textile long-life shopping bag, thus avoiding plastic bags (39.7%), using a bicycle for regular transportation (22.8%). Quite notable, however, is the way respondents continued the list of "green" activities that were not listed in the questionnaire - walking, using better quality petrol, using natural fertilizers, turning electric devices off instead of leaving them in standby, regular gardening and hiking, vegetarian diets, planting trees etc.

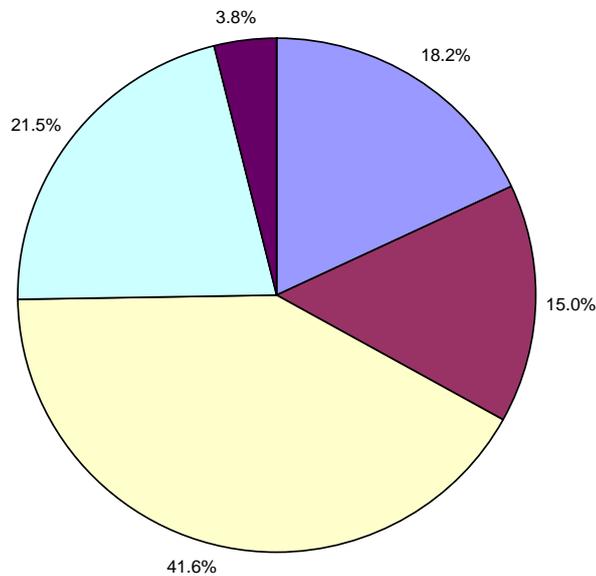
What from the green way of life is part of your every-day life?



Organic Food

Selecting high-quality organic food for one's diet is part of “living green”. When shopping for food, 46.5% of respondents show interest in what its origin is. The same share of replies is however given by people who show no interest in organically grown produce – 45.8%. This issue shows a clear polarization of opinion. Therefore we looked into the reasons for such lack of interest in organically grown food. The first reason is insufficient trust in agricultural producers: 83.8% of respondents said they do not trust the people who advertise their produce as being organically grown. Only 16.2% trust farmers are telling the truth. The reply most often given to the "organic food" question is: "labels lie when they advertise a product as organically grown" - 41.6%, followed by the statement that supply is insufficient - 18.2%, (more frequently the opinion of people living in big cities) and the opinion that organic products are too dear – 15% of respondents.

What do you think about the bio-foods?



■ The supply is insufficient ■ They are too expensive □ The sellers lie with the "bio" label □ I am not interested ■ I actively look for them

Conclusions

We have sufficient grounds to assert that a second “green wave” is present in Bulgaria, following the first one in the beginning of democratic changes, during the late 80s. The green segment of civil society, 20 years after its birth, has a distinct profile and a number of publicly recognizable organisations. These organisations cooperate with each other, form coalitions and unite in favour of common environmental causes. This provides an optimistic outlook for the green sector's sustainability and resistance to attempts to hijack the green idea. On the other hand, funding opportunities for environmental activities through voluntary donations only are relatively limited. The group of people who is in a position to make donations is rather small. Green lifestyle practices and organic food awareness continue to be important niches still to be developed in Bulgaria, although many people still treat these issues with some distrust. Therefore manufacturers should be much more persistent in explaining the principles of control and certification in order to increase customer confidence; salespeople should also be more active in expanding the choice of organic foods which, despite being more expensive, have proven positive effects on human health.