

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS REGIONAL COOPERATION AND EU INTEGRATION

SERBIAN CITIZENS' PERSPECTIVE



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Perceptions presented in this report are a summary of information gathered from respondents and it only demonstrates how people perceive institutions. It is in no way a conclusive assessment of the quality of the work of institutions subject to this study. It shall serve as an instrument to them for addressing potential shortcomings but also an indicator of the effectiveness of their communication with the people.

The views presented in this report are perceptions of the respondents and do not necessarily represent the views of the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies or Belgrade Centre for Security Policy. Opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily represent the views of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

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KEY FINDINGS

Serbia's cooperation with some neighboring countries is hampered by conflicts during the 1990s, while citizens' attitudes are burdened by a negative perception of neighboring countries' political influence on Serbia. This has not been surprising, taking into account a very belligerent narrative about other regional actors that have dominated the pro-government mainstream media landscape in Serbia in recent years. Citizens are either unaware of the current level of cooperation with Kosovo security institutions or are dissatisfied with certain segments of cooperation. An exception to the dominant view on security cooperation is that most Serbian citizens would accept assistance from Kosovo security institutions in case of a state of emergency or natural/ humanitarian disaster in Serbia.

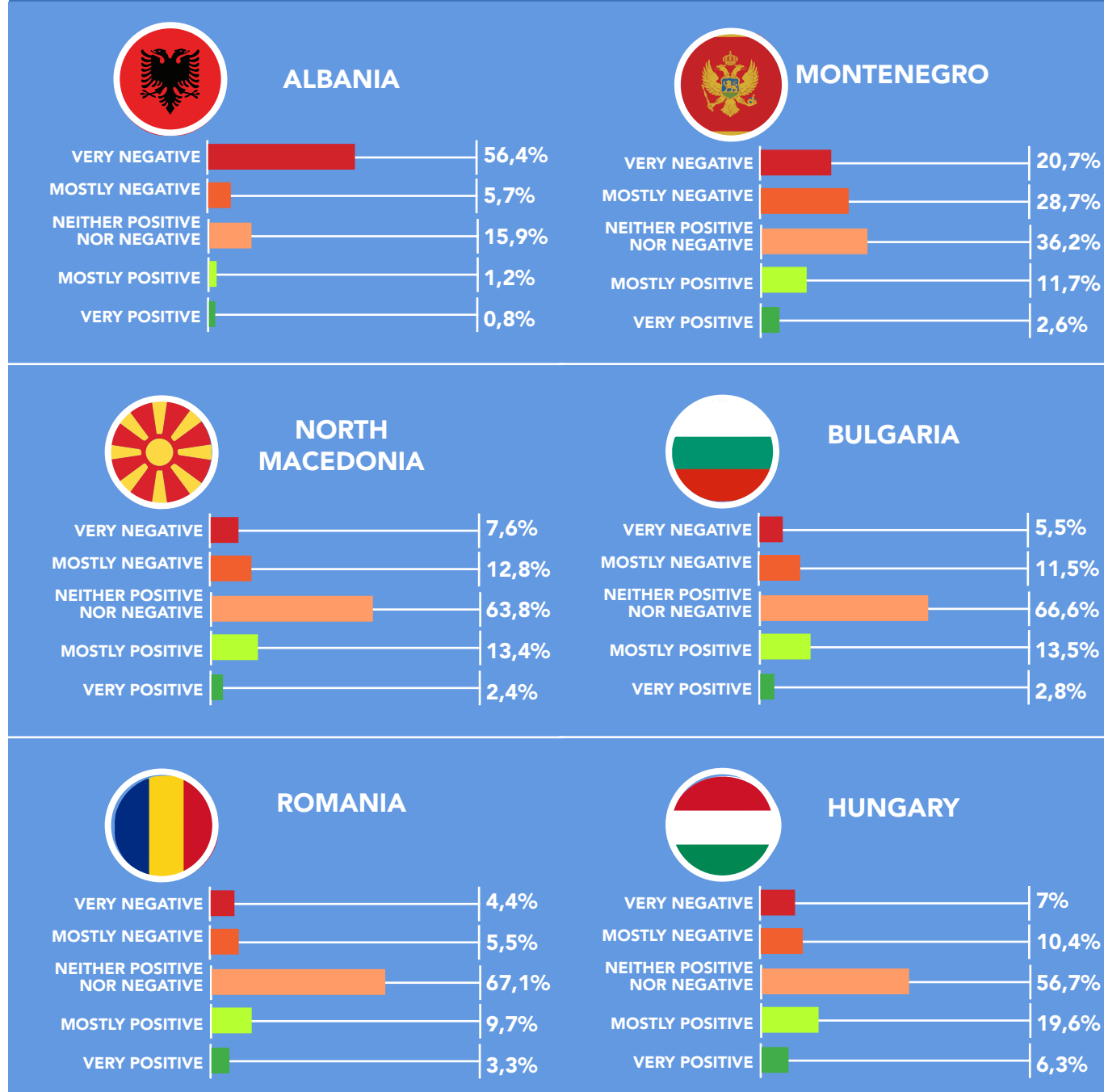
Serbia is an EU candidate country and EU integration remains formally the priority of Serbian foreign policy. Still, the lack of viable EU perspective and the dubious messaging by the Serbian leadership has seriously weakened public opinion support. As a result, the number of those who are opposed to the EU membership has risen, and so has the number of those who are indifferent towards the fate of the EU. On the EU path, the Kosovo dispute is seen as the biggest challenge the country must address before it can become a full member of the EU. This is one of the reasons behind the growing negative attitude towards the Union, because the preservation of Kosovo within Serbia is seen as the most important political issue.

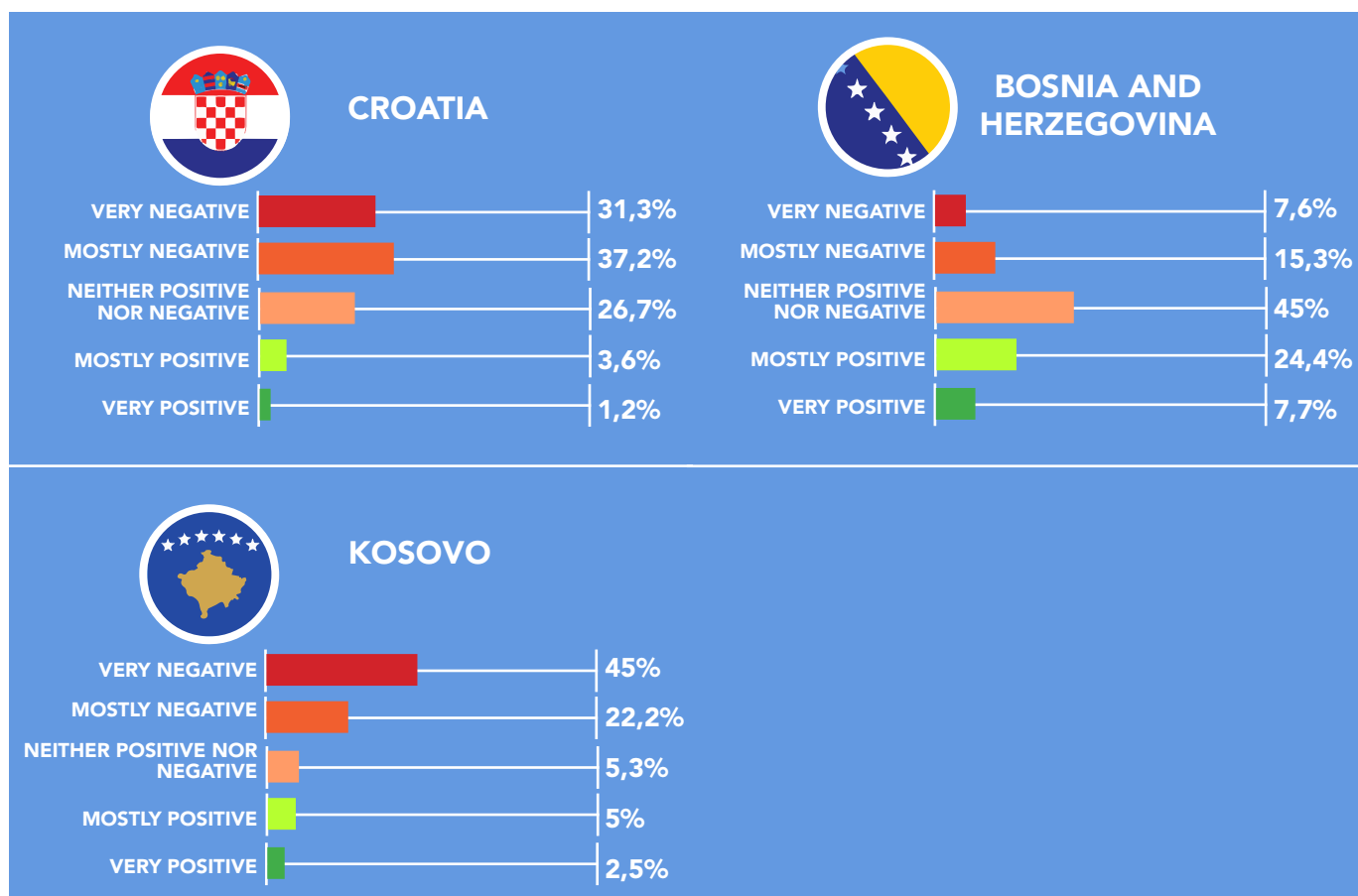
BILATERAL COOPERATION, CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION AND REGIONAL SECURITY

The Serbian public attitude towards Balkan countries has been predominantly hostile ever since the Yugoslav wars during the 1990s. With few exceptions, most leaders and governments in Belgrade have been adding fuel to the fire by engaging in loud feuds with governments in the region, as it has been the easiest way to strengthen domestic support.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the Serbian citizens assess the political influence of Albania, Croatia and Kosovo on Serbia as mostly negative. Despite there was no conflict between socialist Yugoslavia and Albania, negative citizens' attitudes towards Albania exist, as the country is seen as one of the biggest advocates of Kosovo's independence at the international level and a promoter of the idea of uniting all Albanians in the Balkans.

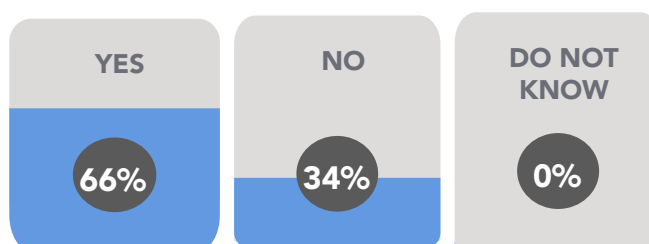
FIGURE 1 RESPONDENTS PERCEPTION ON POLITICAL INFLUENCE OF THE NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES ON SERBIA





The attitudes of the citizenry are optimistic when it comes to emergency situations as 66.5 percent of respondents would accept assistance from Kosovo security institutions in case of a state of emergency or natural/ humanitarian disaster in Serbia (floods, earthquakes, fires, pandemics, etc.). These data show that there is room for improving cooperation between Serbia and Kosovo in crisis management.

FIGURE 2 RESPONDENTS PERSPECTIVE ON WHETHER THEY AGREE TO THE ASSISTANCE OF KOSOVO SECURITY INSTITUTIONS IN THE EVENT OF A STATE OF EMERGENCY OR NATURAL / HUMANITARIAN DISASTER IN SERBIA (FLOODS, EARTHQUAKES, FIRES, PANDEMIC, ETC.)

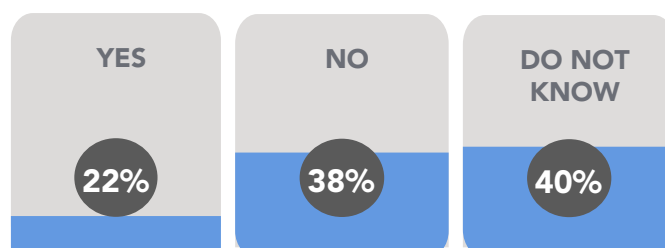


The same optimism is not shared about police cooperation between Serbia and Kosovo¹. Two out of five Serbian citizens (37.9%) are dissatisfied with the current level of police cooperation between Serbia and Kosovo. But, most people (38.9%) are not informed about police cooperation at all. The fact is that there is no direct cooperation between the police and judicial authorities of Serbia and Kosovo, which makes these bodies paralyzed and incapable of fighting organized crime and other issues of concern to citizens.²

1 Shpend Kursani. Police cooperation between Kosovo and Serbia. Belgrade Centre for Security Policy and Kosovo Security Studies Center, 2015, https://bezbednost.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/police_cooperation_ks_eng_v3.pdf

2 Bojan Elek. Towards More Effective Police Cooperation Between Serbia and Kosovo. Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, 2015, <https://bez->

FIGURE 3 RESPONDENTS PERCEPTION ON WHETHER THEY ARE SATISFIED WITH POLICE COOPERATION BETWEEN SERBIA AND KOSOVO



Serbian and Kosovo police cooperate at the border crossings/administrative line based on the Brussels agreement on integrated border management (IBM) from 2011.³ While there is no strong opposition to joint police cooperation, it is quite surprising that eight years after reaching the agreement, 27.3% are unfamiliar with IBM, and 14.3% think that cooperation does not exist. Apart from being poorly informed about the results of the technical and political dialogue between Belgrade and Prishtina, a potential explanation could be found in fact that most Serbian citizens do not travel to Kosovo and are not familiar with the existing regime of crossing border/administrative line.

FIGURE 4 RESPONDENTS PERCEPTION ON THE JOINT BORDER POLICE PATROLLING BETWEEN THE KOSOVO POLICE AND MUP OFFICERS



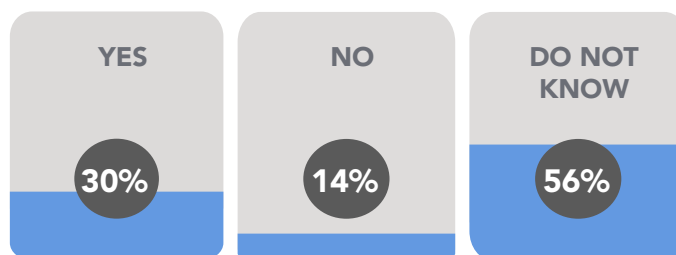
Serbia participate in numerous regional initiatives, such as RACVIAC – Centre for Security Cooperation, Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), Balkan Medical Task Force etc. Yet, more than half of the citizens are not aware of this. Nevertheless, the public is familiar with the agreement on regional representation and cooperation reached within Belgrade-Prishtina dialogue in February 2012. The agreement allowed Kosovo to participate in different regional forums independently under its own name, but including the famous asterix (*) next to Kosovo's name, with the footnote that says "this designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSC

bednost.org/en/publication/towards-more-effective-police-cooperation-between-serbia-and-kosovo/

³ The agreement regulates cross-border cooperation, including joint crossing points, regular communication between police authorities, customs and other agencies. Due to the principle of "constructive ambiguity", the term "borders" within the concept of IBM, is understood as a state border for Kosovo, while for Serbia it is an administrative boundary. Furthermore, using the term "jurisdiction" instead of "sovereignty" has also contributed to reaching the agreement and applying the IBM concept in six crossing points between Kosovo and Serbia.

1244 and the ICJ opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence". This has created public dissatisfaction in both societies, while the implementation of the agreement has been accompanied by controversy to date. Despite the agreement, under which Serbia should accept Kosovo as a member of regional initiatives, Serbia has continued to lobby against Kosovo's membership or decline to participate in various regional events if the provisions of the agreement are not respected, but Kosovo also does not abide by the agreement and often refuses to use an asterisk next to its name.

FIGURE 5 RESPONDENTS PERCEPTION WHETHER THEY ARE SATISFIED WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF SERBIA IN REGIONAL SECURITY INITIATIVES

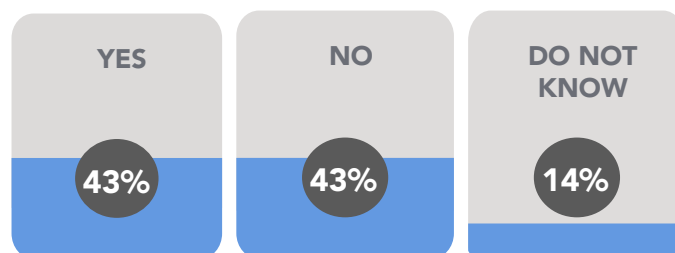


FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES AND EU INTEGRATION

EU membership has been a self-proclaimed goal of the Serbian Government since 2005⁴, but only 9 per cent of respondents consider it to be Serbia's main foreign policy priority. The public is convinced that the three most important foreign policy priorities are the preservation of Kosovo as part of Serbia (24 per cent), strengthening cooperation with neighbouring countries (20 per cent) and strengthening cooperation with Russia (20 per cent).⁵

Serbia's partnerships with Russia and China, along with years of anti-Western narratives and propaganda pushed through the pro-government mainstream media⁶, has resulted in a decline of the support of Serbian citizens for the country's EU membership. The latest research shows that there is a relative majority that believes Serbia should not become a member of the EU (43.4 per cent), while only 42.5% per cent of respondents are in favour of membership. This number of those opposing the EU membership increased from 35 per cent in 2017 according to previous BCSP research.⁷

FIGURE 6 RESPONDENTS PERCEPTION WHETHER THEY SUPPORT THE INTEGRATION OF SERBIA INTO THE EU



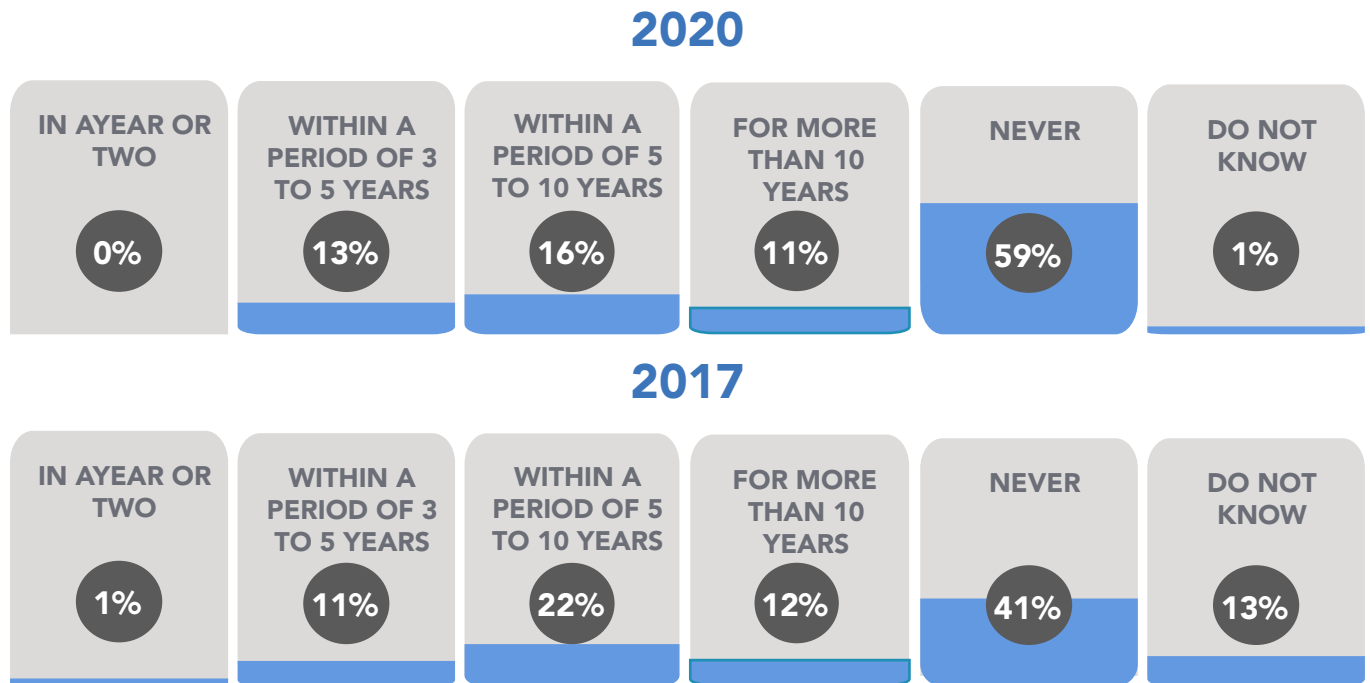
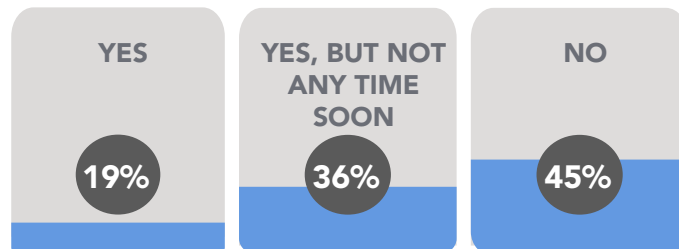
Compared to three years ago, there is growing pessimism about the date when Serbia will join the EU. Today, 59 per cent of people think that Serbia will never enter the EU. The results further show that almost half of the citizens think that the EU does not want to accept Serbia as a member.

4 Serbian National Strategy for the Accession of SCG (Serbia and Montenegro) to the EU, Ministry of European Integration – Government of the Republic of Serbia, <https://www.mei.gov.rs/eng/documents/national-documents/serbian-national-strategy-for-the-accession-of-scg-to-the-eu>

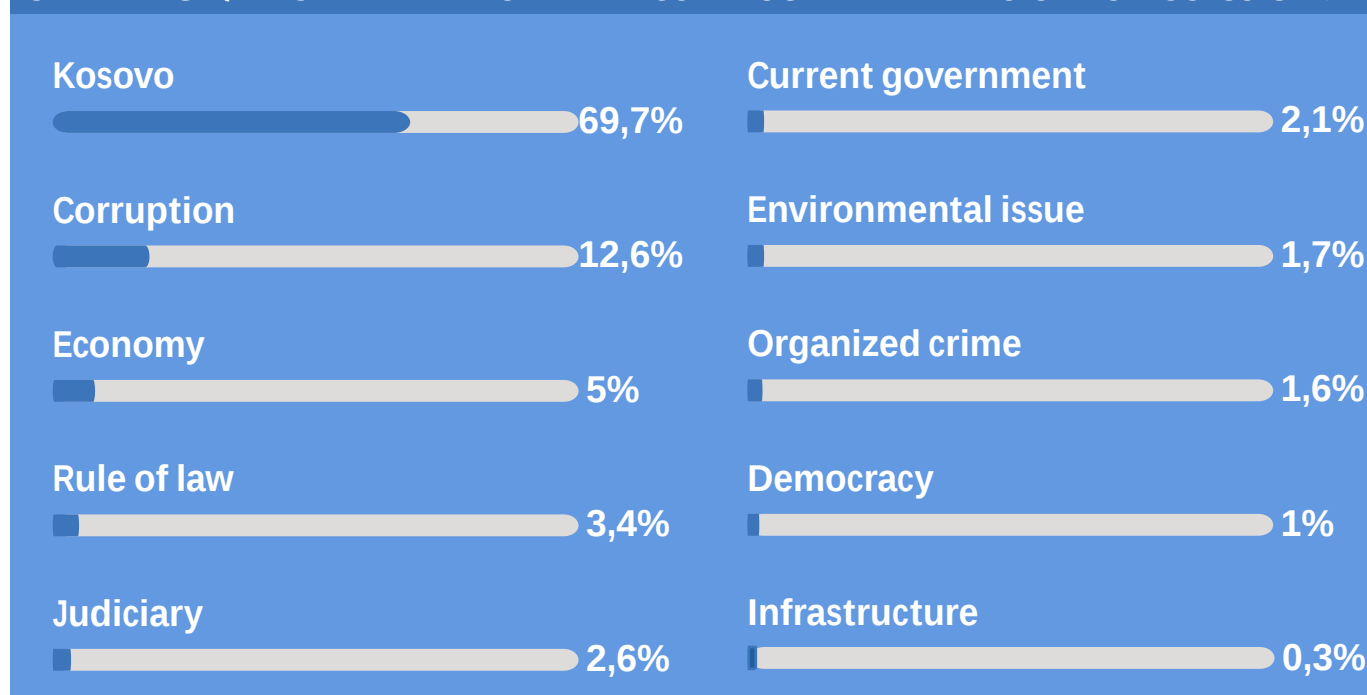
5 Maja Bjelos, Vuk Vuksanovic and Luka Steric. 2020. "Many Faces of Serbian Foreign Policy Public Opinion and Geopolitical Balancing." Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, November 11, 2020. <https://bezbednost.org/en/publication/many-faces-of-serbian-foreign-policy-public-opinion-and-geopolitical-balancing/>

6 Vuk Velebit, Proruski narativ u srpskim medijima [Pro-Russian Narrative in the Serbian Media], Talas.rs, 20 May 2019, <https://talas.rs/2019/05/20/pro-ruski-narativ-prvi-deo/>

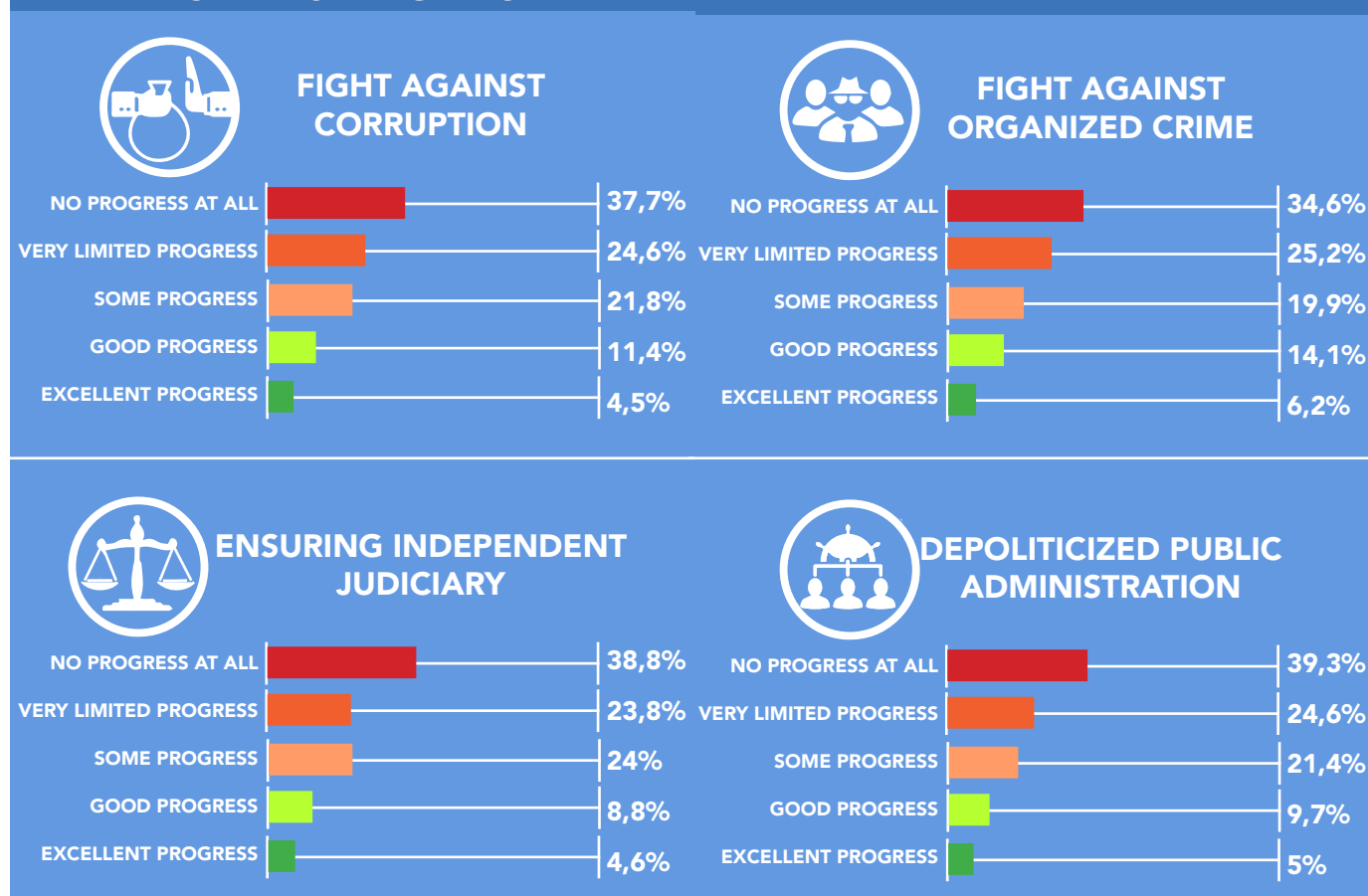
7 Miloš Popović. Public Opinion on the Security of Serbia and Dialogue with Pristina. Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, February 13, 2017. <https://bezbednost.org/en/publication/public-opinion-on-the-security-of-serbia-and-dialogue-with-pristina/>

FIGURE 7 RESPONDENTS PERCEPTION ABOUT THE DATE WHEN SERBIA WILL JOIN THE EU**FIGURE 8** RESPONDENTS PERCEPTION WHETHER EU IS INTERESTED IN HAVING SERBIA AS A MEMBER

Growing Euroscepticism and deterioration of the public support to the EU membership are also associated with the slow speed of the EU accession process. So far, Serbia has opened 18 out of 35 chapters in negotiations with the EU. However, due to a lack of progress in implementing some political criteria and the rule of law reforms, EU integration stalled in 2020, and no chapters were opened. Nevertheless, the dominant perception of the two-thirds of respondents is that the primary condition for membership is resolving the Kosovo dispute, which helps explain the negative attitude because the preservation of Kosovo within Serbia is seen as the most important political issue.

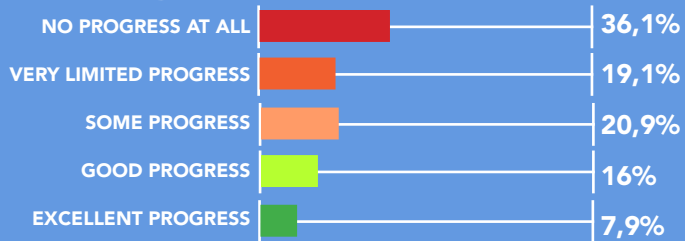
FIGURE 9 OPEN-ENDED QUESTION - RESPONDENTS PERCEPTION ON THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE / PROBLEM THAT SERBIA MUST RESOLVE IN TERMS OF EU ACCESSION?

However, most citizens realistically assess that there is no or minimal progress in areas such as the fight against corruption and organised crime, ensuring the independence of the judiciary, depoliticising public administration and organising fair elections.

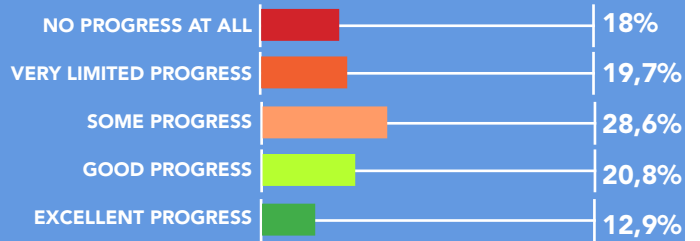
FIGURE 10 RESPONDENTS PERCEPTION ON THE PROGRESS OF SERBIA IN AREAS RELATED TO THE EU INTEGRATION



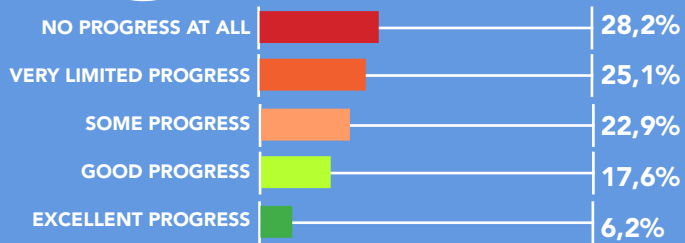
ENSURING FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS



STRENGTHENING REGIONAL COOPERATION



SOLVING BILATERAL DISPUTES WITH SERBIA



METHODOLOGY

The public opinion poll was conducted by the Sprint agency in the period from October 5 to 15, 2020. The survey was conducted on a representative sample of 1,095 adult respondents from the Republic of Serbia. The research was conducted with the aim of examining the attitudes of Serbian citizens on their trust in the state institutions and the perception of corruption including citizens' attitudes on regional cooperation and EU integration. The team of 59 interviewers in total conducted a field research using the "face to face" technique.

The research has covered 120 polling stations. The polling stations were stratified into nine strata according to the criteria: polling station size (small/medium/large) and region (Vojvodina, Belgrade, Central Serbia). In each strata, the number of polling stations where field research was conducted was determined in accordance with the share of the population in that strata in relation to the total population of voters according to the voter list from the 2020 parliamentary elections: "Vojvodina small" - 1; "Vojvodina medium" - 10; "Vojvodina big" - 20; "Belgrade small" - 0; "Belgrade medium" - 4; "Belgrade big" - 26; "Central Serbia small" - 9; "Central Serbia medium" - 20; "Central Serbia big" - 30; Within each of the nine strata, sampling was random, three-stage: the sampled polling stations within each strata were determined by the PPS method (probability proportional to size sampling), the households in which the survey was conducted were determined randomly depending on the type of settlement - rural/urban; type of building - houses/buildings; stories of buildings - low/high buildings; while the respondent within a household was determined by the criterion of the first coming birthday.

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