

Attitudes of Serbian Citizens Regarding Relations with Kosovo and Albania

Analysis of public opinion poll



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The data presented in the report derive from the Western Balkans Security Barometer (WBSB) survey. WBSB is a new regional initiative launched by KCSS in 2020, implemented in cooperation with the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BCSP) in Serbia and Center for the Study of Democracy and Governance (CSDG) in Albania, supported by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). WBSB serves as an instrument to measure public perceptions in Albania, Kosovo and Serbia on different security-related issues. The findings demonstrate how citizens percept or are informed about the issues presented in this report. As such, the views presented in this report do not necessarily represent the views of the KCSS, BCSP, CSDG or NED.

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ATTITUDES OF SERBIAN CITIZENS REGARDING RELATIONS WITH KOSOVO AND ALBANIA

ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC OPINION POLL

March 2022



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THE BELGRADE-PRISTINA DIALOGUE

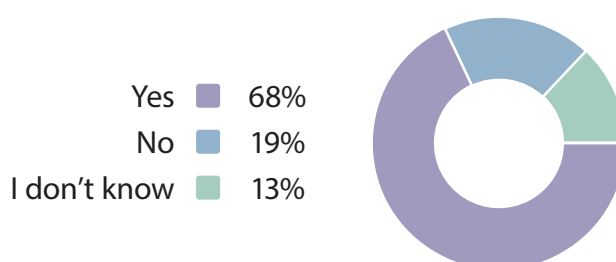
Relations between Serbia and Kosovo are currently reduced to the EU-facilitated talks in Brussels. The long-stalled talks went “back on track” after the appointment of EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajcak. The resumption of the dialogue was influenced by a different US approach to the Balkans following the presidential election and the appointment of Special Envoy Gabriel Escobar. Despite the international community's strong desire for the leaders of Serbia and Kosovo to return to the negotiating table, it seemed that Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and Kosovo's Prime Minister Albin Kurti were unwilling to take a step forward. Their first meeting in June 2021 in Brussels was not encouraging, as it revealed personal animosities that threatened to bring the dialogue to another impasse. With an accession perspective that includes no date, i.e. without a tangible ‘carrot at the end of the stick’, leaders seem less motivated to make bold decisions. The actors were more engaged in the production and management of a crisis than in taking an effort to reach a final solution and progress towards EU membership. All in all, ten years after the dialogue began, there is little room for optimism as relations between Serbia and Kosovo are now at their lowest level. Many agreements have not been fully implemented, while the implementation of Brussels' provisions concerning the association of Serb-majority municipalities is still pending.



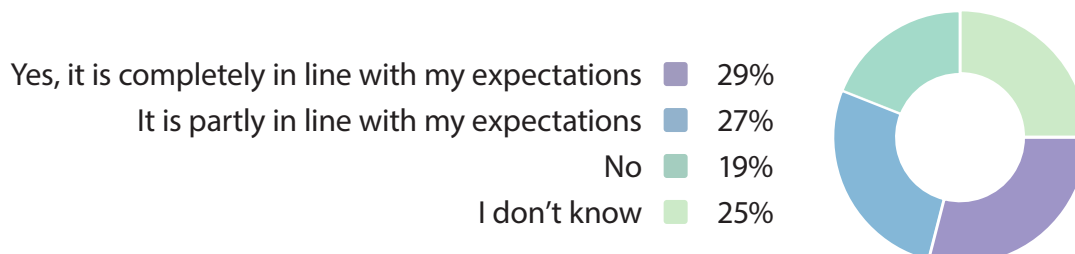
ON THE DIALOGUE

Regardless of the status of the negotiations and the outcomes, public opinion survey conducted in September 2021 shows that Serbian citizens have confidence in the process, the chief negotiator and his position in the dialogue. More than half of the population also believes that Serbian President wants the dialogue to succeed.

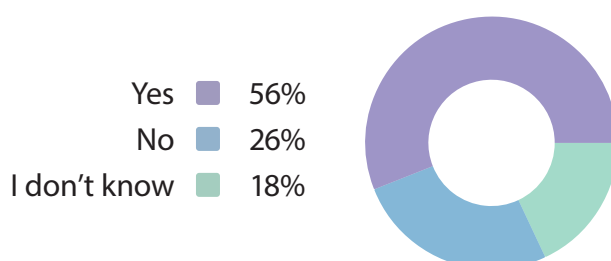
GRAPH 1 DO YOU SUPPORT KOSOVO-SERBIA DIALOGUE?



GRAPH 2 DO YOU SUPPORT THE CURRENT POSITION OF ALEKSANDAR VUČIĆ IN THE DIALOGUE ?



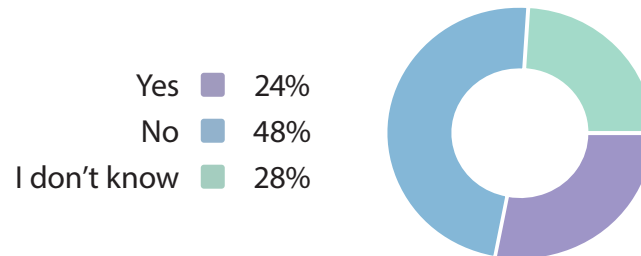
GRAPH 3 DO YOU BELIEVE THAT ALEKSANDAR VUČIĆ WANTS THE DIALOGUE TO SUCCEED?



In contrast, Serbian citizens are only partially informed about the content of the Belgrade-Pristina negotiations, and only a fifth of them believe that the process as a whole is sufficiently transparent. Although citizens do seem to believe that the dialogue has the potential to resolve outstanding issues, 59 percent believe that so far it has not changed anything in the relations between Kosovo and Serbia, while 80 percent do not

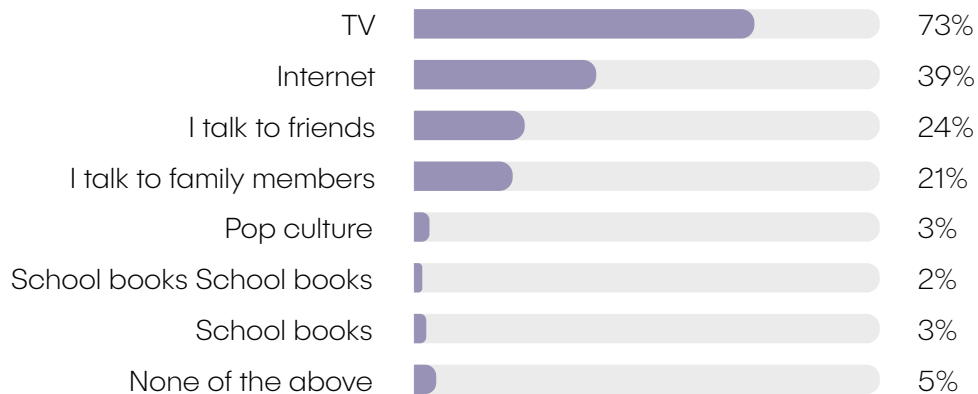
feel any tangible personal benefits. Finally, almost half of the citizens do not even know what the goals of Serbia are in its negotiations with Kosovo.

GRAPH 4 DO YOU KNOW WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF NEGOTIATIONS WITH PRISTINA?



Great support for Serbia's agenda in the dialogue, coupled with lack of information and transparency, speaks volumes of the immense, almost blind trust in the intentions of the chief negotiator and shows little critical examination of the government's decisions. Since more than two-thirds of citizens obtain information on Kosovo primarily by watching television, this lack of knowledge about the goals and the content of the dialogue may in fact be caused by mostly process-focused reporting with little content analysis, or unclear communication by the president and the lack of clear policy direction accompanied by state propaganda.

GRAPH 5 WHERE DO YOU GET INFORMATION ABOUT KOSOVO? (MULTIPLE POSSIBLE ANSWERS)

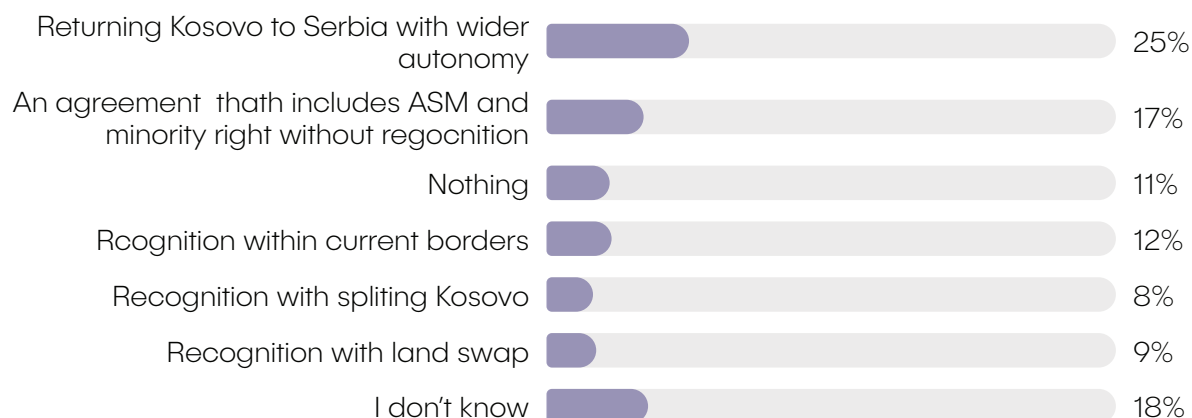




ON IDEAL OUTCOMES OF THE DIALOGUE

Using the media, statesmen can greatly shape people's expectations about the outcomes of dialogues. A quarter of the population thinks that returning Kosovo to Serbia, with a wider autonomy, would be the best outcome of the dialogue. These opinions are easy to understand considering that the most frequent associations with Kosovo among the respondents are 'the heart of Serbia' and 'the cradle of Serbs and Serbian identity'. It comes as a no surprise that citizens, considering that they believe that Kosovo was taken from Serbia, strongly identify with it and think that the only solution is to have it returned to Serbia. Slightly less than one-fifth would be in favour of an agreement consisting of the establishment of the Association of Serb-majority municipalities, a special status for monasteries, including Kosovo membership in the UN and other international organisations, but without Serbia's recognition of Kosovo independence. Polls show that Serbian citizens do not support the idea of territorial division of Kosovo and land swap, the idea that was launched by the presidents of Serbia and Kosovo in 2018. Not reaching an agreement is ideal for every tenth citizen of Serbia, while 12 percent support mutual recognition within the existing borders.

GRAPH 6 WHAT WOULD BE THE IDEAL OUTCOME OF THE DIALOGUE?

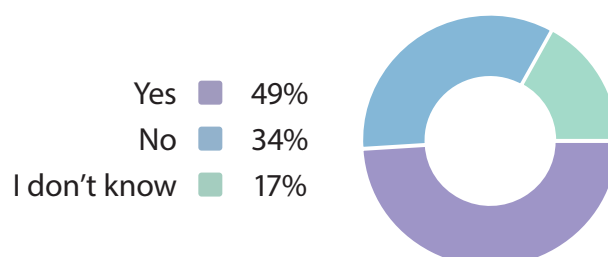


Citizens do not want to give up on Kosovo, but at the same time feel that current negotiations are not heading in that direction. However, there are no great hopes and expectations from the main negotiators because most citizens trust that Kosovo and Serbia will reach a final agreement, just not in the near future. Polls also show that almost half the citizens think that development of Serbia is possible even without an agreement, although many admit that there will be some consequences if political leaders do not reach it.

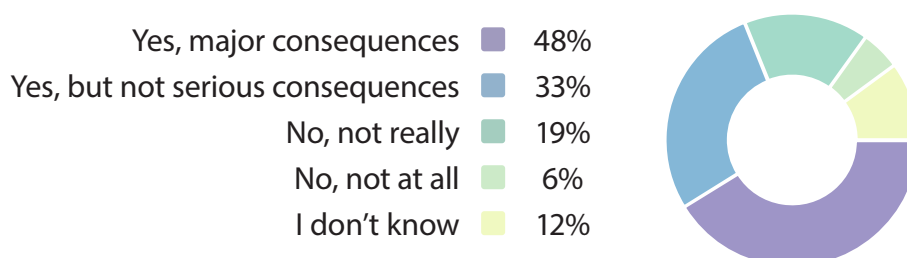
GRAPH 7 WHEN WILL THE FINAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN SERBIA AND KOSOVO BE REACHED ?



GRAPH 8 DO YOU THINK THAT THE DEVELOPMENT OF SERBIA IS POSSIBLE WITHOUT AN AGREEMENT WITH KOSOVO?

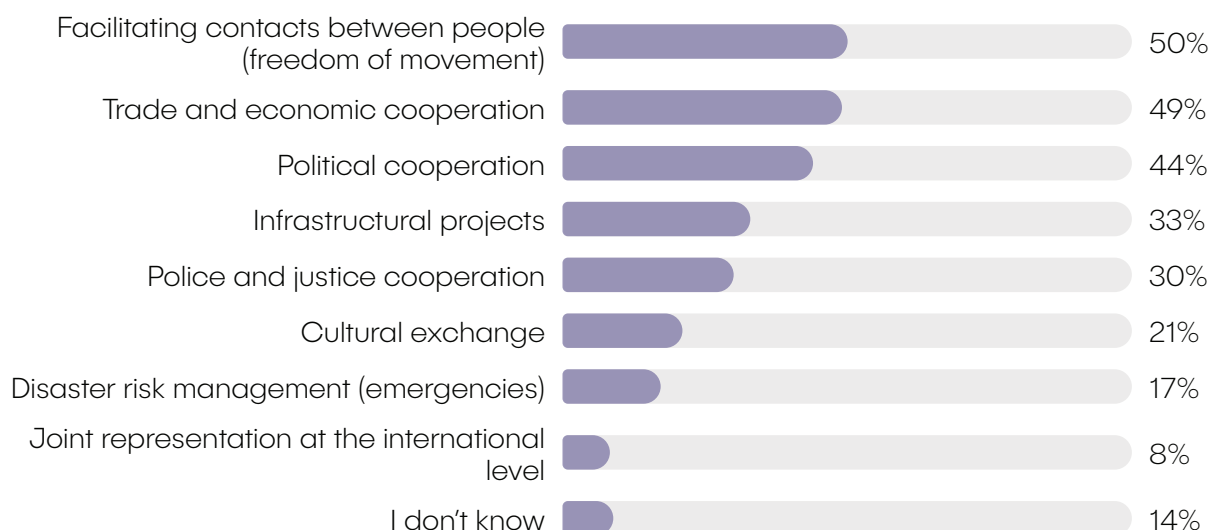


GRAPH 9 DO YOU THINK THAT THERE WILL BE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES IF SERBIA AND KOSOVO FAIL TO REACH AN AGREEMENT?



The future is not so grim because a significant percentage of citizens think that there are prospects for improving cooperation in the short term, regardless of the outcome of the dialogue.

GRAPH 10 WHAT SHOULD BE THE PRIORITIES IN COOPERATION BETWEEN KOSOVO AND SERBIA? (MULTIPLE POSSIBLE ANSWERS)

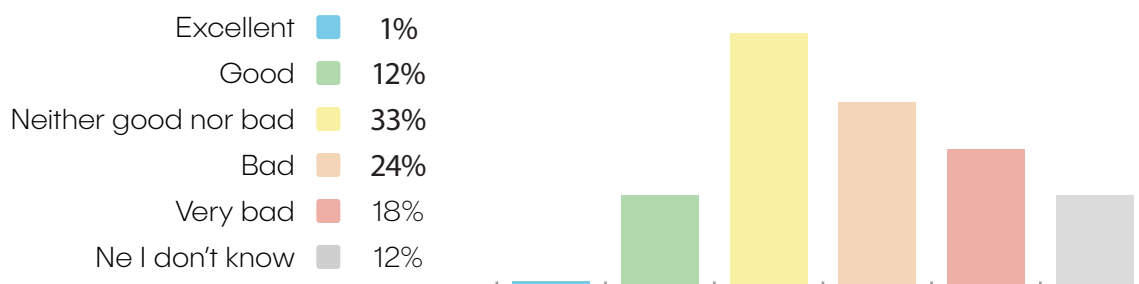




ON THE ROLE OF THE EU AND THE US

In the previous period, the EU has once again taken the lead in the dialogue, while the US presence has increased through the roles of several special envoys for the Balkans. The EU-US rift over Kosovo has diminished after the US presidential election, and the EU and US have shown a more coordinated approach to the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue. Despite these developments, the attitudes of Serbian citizens about the role of the EU and the US in the process are not positive. One-third of the Serbian citizens assessed the work of the EU as a mediator in the dialogue as neither good nor bad, while a large percentage believe that EU's work in this process is mostly bad.

GRAPH 11 HOW WOULD YOU ASSESS THE WORK OF THE EU AS A MEDIATOR IN THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN BELGRADE AND PRISTINA?

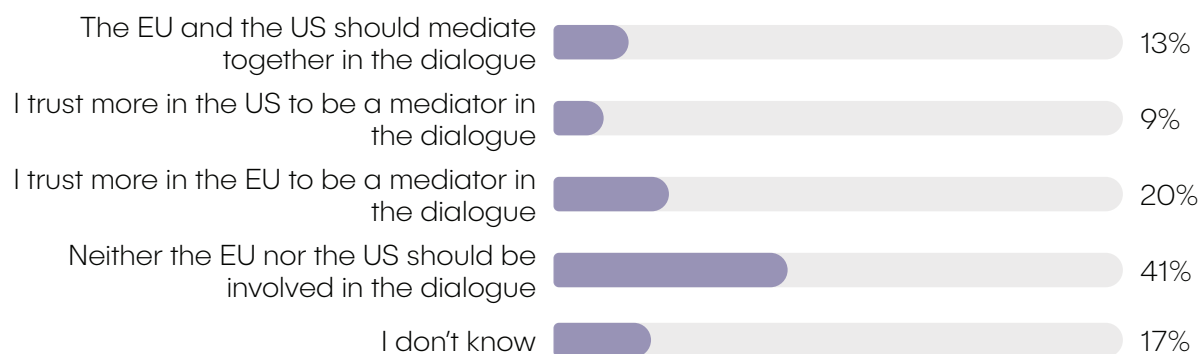


GRAPH 12 WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION'S WORK AS A MEDIATOR IN THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN KOSOVO AND SERBIA ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH?



Although citizens are dissatisfied with the EU's role in the process, one-fifth have more trust in the EU as a mediator in the dialogue. Only 13 percent would support the option where the EU and the US would join forces in mediating the dialogue. However, the prevailing opinion is that neither the EU nor the US should be involved in it, suggesting that citizens may want the two parties to have direct talks without any intermediaries, or that citizens want new actors to become involved in the dialogue, which is a hypothesis that requires verification through a new survey.

GRAPH 13 WHO WOULD YOU TRUST MORE AS A MEDIATOR IN THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN BELGRADE AND PRISTINA – THE EU OR THE US?

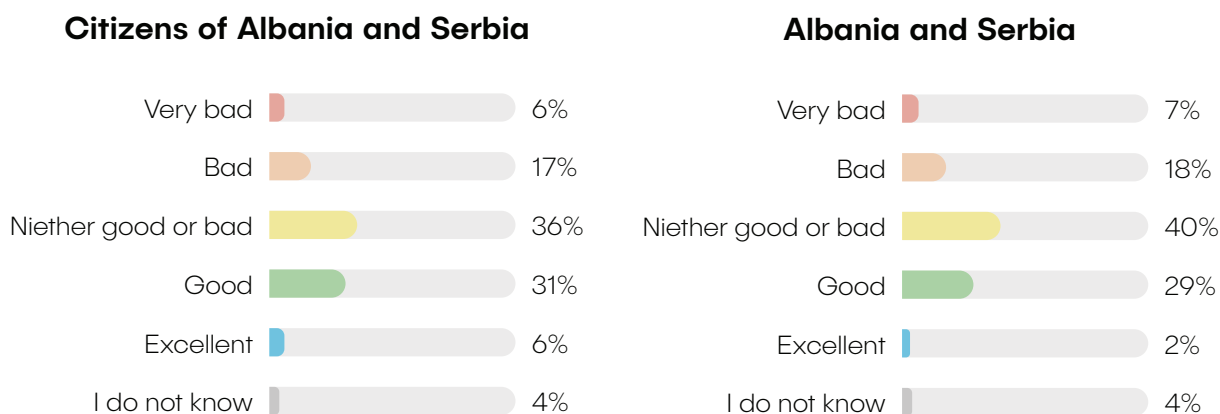




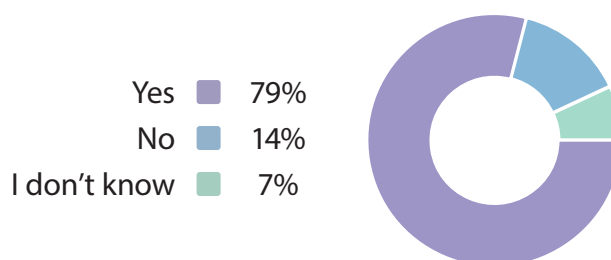
RELATIONS WITH ALBANIA

Serbia's relations with Albania have intensified in the last three years, especially since the creation of Mini Schengen. Citizens recognise that Serbia has intensified these relations, but see that their quality as neither good nor bad. There is an expectation that relations between Serbia and Albania will be the same in the coming years, if not even better. Also, the prevailing opinion of the citizens is that Serbia should improve its relations with Albania regardless of Serbia's attitude towards Kosovo. In addition, more than half of the citizens believe that relations between Serbia and Albania are important for the security and stability in the region.

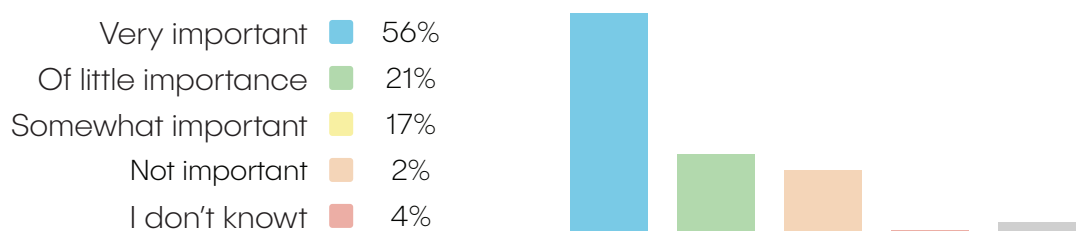
TABLE 1 PLEASE ASSESS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN:



GRAPH 14 SHOULD SERBIA FURTHER IMPROVE ITS RELATIONS WITH ALBANIA?

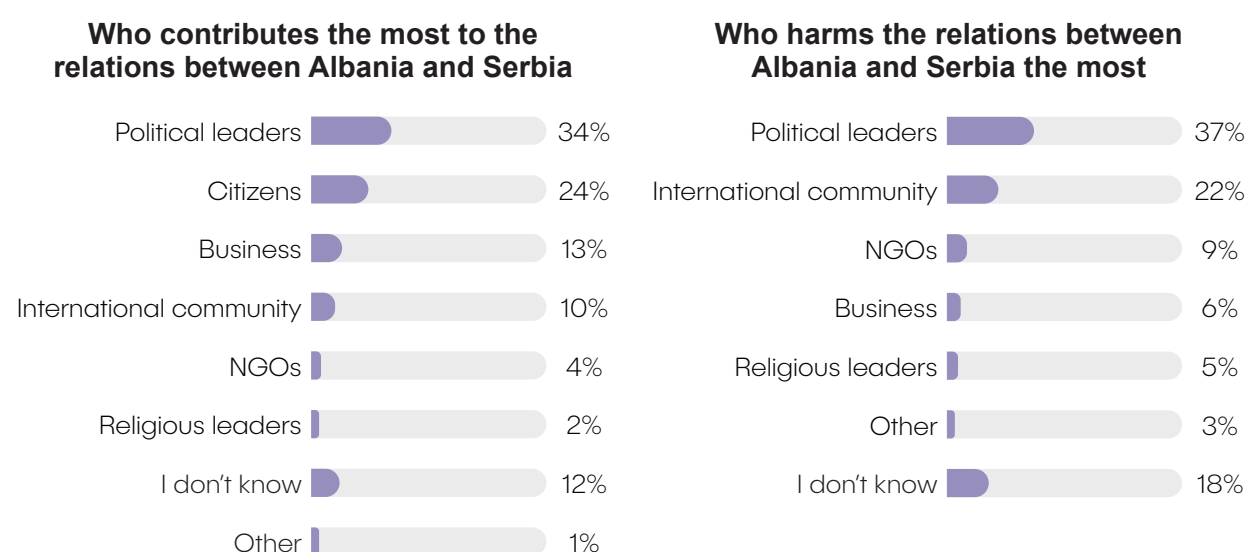


GRAPH 15 HOW IMPORTANT ARE RELATIONS BETWEEN SERBIA AND ALBANIA FOR THE SECURITY AND STABILITY IN THE REGION?



Politicians are perceived as those who can contribute the most to the improvement of mutual relations, but also as those that can hurt them the most. It is interesting that citizens see themselves as actors that can contribute to the improvement of people-to-people relations which could later be transferred to the state level. Despite the great role of the international community in the region, citizens do not believe that the international community can contribute to improving the relations. However, more than a fifth of the population thinks that the international community can do the most damage to relations between Albania and Serbia. Although religious leaders have become more influential in recent years, and people in Serbia have become increasingly religious, it is important to note that religious leaders are not viewed as important actors in Serbia-Albania relations.

TABLE 2 MAIN CONTRIBUTORS AND SPOILERS OF SERBIA-ALBANIA RELATIONS

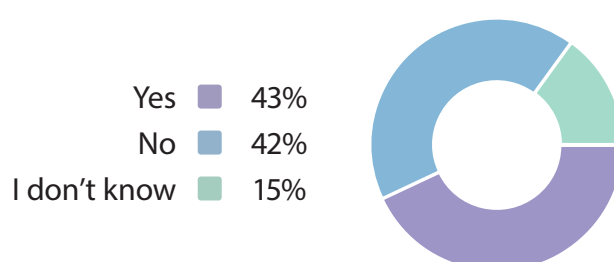




ETHNIC DISTANCE TOWARDS ALBANIANS

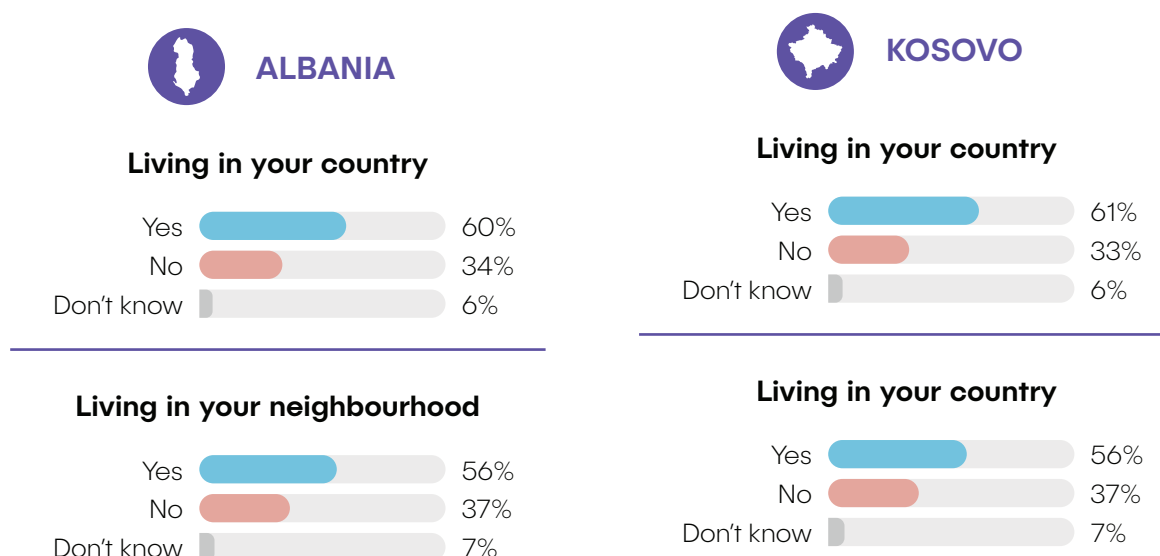
Serbian society is deeply divided over whether peace between Kosovo and Serbia is possible in the foreseeable future. In addition to the lack of tangible results of the dialogue, this pessimism can also be understood as being the result of an ethnic distance towards Albanians, which is constantly present and promoted in public sphere.

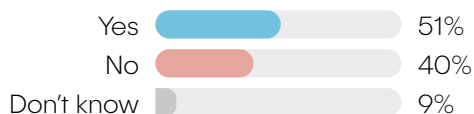
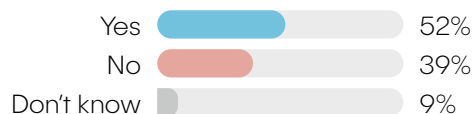
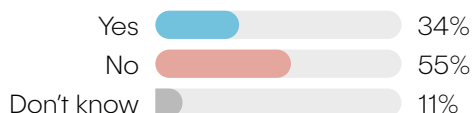
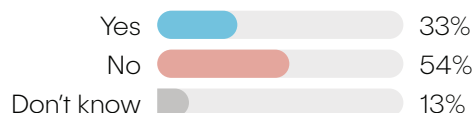
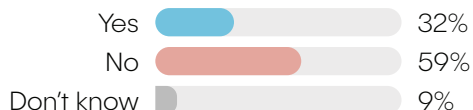
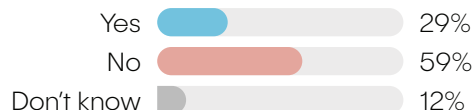
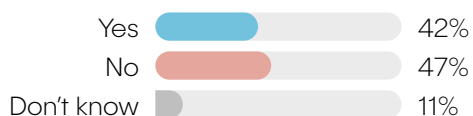
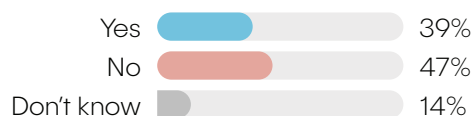
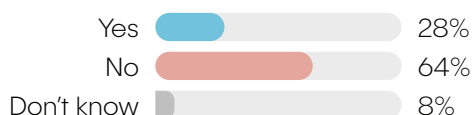
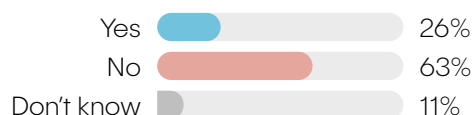
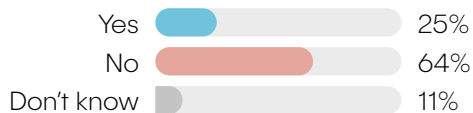
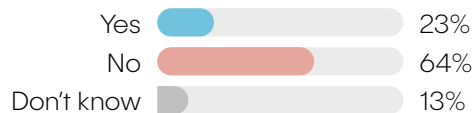
GRAPH 16 DO YOU BELIEVE THAT THERE WILL BE PEACE BETWEEN SERBIA AND KOSOVO IN THE NEAR FUTURE?



Therefore, the ethnic distance towards Albanians from Albania and Kosovo has not diminished over time. This is not surprising if we take into account the hate speech of public officials and the anti-Albanian rhetoric in the Serbian mainstream media. As a result, almost two-thirds would not accept Albanians, regardless of their origin, as civil servants or public officials in Serbia, or as persons married to someone in their family, while two-thirds would not like to see them as their (grand)children's teachers. Research shows that citizens of Serbia do not differentiate between Albanians from Albania and Albanians from Kosovo. One possible rationale is that most of them have no personal contacts with people in Kosovo and Albania, and that they have never even met an Albanian.

TABLE 3 WOULD YOU ACCEPT ALBANIAN CITIZENS/KOSOVO-ALBANIAN CITIZENS:



As your colleague at work**As your colleague at work****As your superior at work****As your superior at work****As a teacher to your (grand) children****As a teacher to your (grand) children****As your friend****As your friend****As a public official****As a public official****As someone that is married to a member of your family****As someone that is married to a member of your family**

An encouraging finding is that approximately 60 percent of the citizens would accept Albanians from Kosovo and Albania as their compatriots or neighbours. Still, people are polarised over whether it would be possible for them to be friends with Albanians.



ABOUT RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The public opinion poll was conducted by Deep Dive agency in the period from 15 to 25 September 2021. The survey was conducted on a representative sample of 1,000 adult respondents from the Republic of Serbia, using the "face to face" technique.

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