

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS EUROPEAN INTEGRATION, INFLUENCE OF EXTERNAL ACTORS AND GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE IN ALBANIA





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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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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Methodology.....	3
1. Public perceptions on European Integration.....	4
2. Public perceptions on Influence of External Actors towards Albania	7
3. Public perceptions on Government Performance	10
Conclusions	12
Endnotes	14

INTRODUCTION

The Western Balkans Security Barometer (WBSB) is a regional project that measures public perceptions in Albania, Kosovo and Serbia for a wide range of security, rule of law, justice, regional cooperation and peacebuilding issues, implemented by local civil society organisations in the respective countries.

WBSB has an identical methodology in all three countries, and it also measured simultaneously the perceptions of the citizens of Kosovo and Serbia on the same issues. The results of the WBSB will be published in four different reports for each country.

CSDG has implemented WBSB in Albania for the second year since 2021. Along with the National Security Barometer which CSDG has produced since 2019, this project has produced a wealth of data that are used by a wide range of actors from policy makers, security practitioners, academia, the media, the international donors, etc.

The regional edition measures not only the perception of Albanian citizens towards their institutions and security issues, but also their perceptions on regional cooperation and specifically the relations between Albania, Kosovo, and Serbia.

The first report was "Public Safety and Internal and External Threats" (2022). The second report was "Public Perception towards Security and Justice Institutions and Corruption Issues" (2022). The third report was "Public Perceptions towards Regional Cooperation and Bilateral Relations of Albania with Serbia and Kosovo with Serbia" 2022.

This is the fourth report **"Public Perceptions towards European Integration, Influence of External Actors and Government Performance in Albania"** 2022.

The findings of this report indicate an outstanding support that citizens in Albania have for the country's membership into the European Union, although 51.10% think that this will not happen in the near future. As the main reason for the country's non-membership in the European Union, 71.17% of the respondents list the poor state of democracy, widespread corruption and the lack of reforms.

Due to the considerable support that citizens have in Albania towards the country's membership process into the European Union, 64.98% consider this process as the country's main objective. On the other hand, 73.18% of citizens, who think that Albania has other alternatives besides that of integration into the European Union, list the Open Balkan as another possible alternative.

Italy (89.11%) and the United States of America (88.42%), are considered for the second year in a row as the countries that have the most positive influence towards Albania, followed by Germany (87.75%) and Turkey (82.08%). Meanwhile, just like the previous year, Russia (77.51%), Iran (76.02%) and Serbia (58.37%) are considered as the countries which have the most harmful influence towards Albania.

More than half of the respondents (58.13%) think that they are not represented by the governing institutions at the central level, and also 53.99% think that they are not represented by the governing institutions at the local level. In both cases, this number has increased compared to 2021.

Economic development (58.75%), fight against corruption (56.04%), fight against organized crime (55.86%) and fight against nepotism and ensuring equal opportunities in employment (51.39%), are considered areas in which performance of the government is considered bad.

METHODOLOGY

The report has been produced based on data collected from a survey based on multi-layered random sample of 1120 adults conducted between 23 September and 2 October 2022 through face-to-face interviews.

Surveys were proportionally distributed among 61 municipalities of Albania, taking into consideration the rural/urban areas, gender, and age quotas. Based on this multi-layered sampling approach an accurate geographic and demographic representation of Albania's adult population has been achieved, while maintaining a sampling error lower than $\pm 2.9\%$ for the overall sample.

1. PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

Respondents in Albania express an outstanding support towards the country's membership into the European Union, while a slight increase in this support can be observed compared to the previous year. Fewer citizens from 2021 do not support the country's membership in the EU.

GRAPH 1 PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS ON THE SUPPORT TOWARDS EU MEMBERSHIP

DO YOU SUPPORT THE MEMBERSHIP OF YOUR COUNTRY INTO THE EU?

	2022	2021
Don't know/No opinion	0.41%	0.79%
Yes	98.43%	96.69%
No	1.71%	2.52%

Respondents were asked if the European Union is willing to accept Albania as a member country. Despite the fact that the majority of respondents have a supportive attitude towards the country's membership in the EU, 51.10% think that this will not happen in the near future, while only 26.59% think that Albania will join EU in the near future. Compared to last year, the number of respondents who think that the EU is not ready to accept Albania as a member country has more than doubled. 9.18% of the citizens asked in 2021 thought that the EU is not ready to accept Albania as a member country, while 21.06% of the citizens asked in 2022 think the same.

GRAPH 2 PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS ON THE EU WILLING TO ACCEPT ALBANIA AS A MEMBER STATE

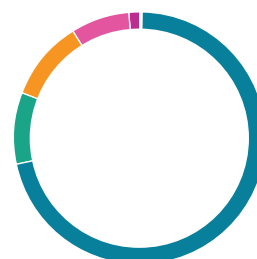
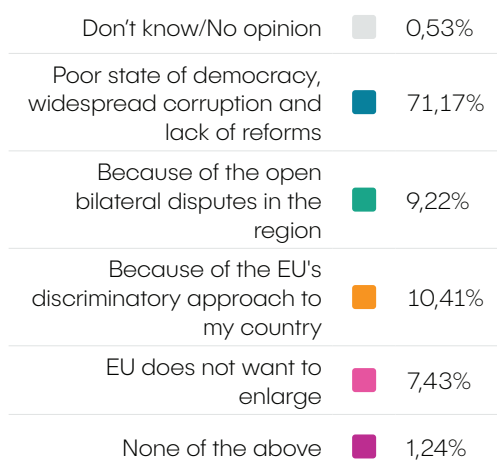
DO YOU THINK THAT THE EU IS WILLING TO ACCEPT ALBANIA AS A MEMBER STATE?

	2022	2021
Don't know/No opinion	1.26%	2.06%
Yes, in the near future	26.59%	33.60%
Yes, but not in the near future	51.10%	55.16%
No, it is not willing to accept	21.06%	9.18%

As the main reason for the country's non-membership in the European Union, the respondents (71.17%) list the poor state of democracy, widespread corruption and the lack of reforms. 10.41% of respondents think that the main reason why Albania is still not a member of the EU is related to the discriminatory approach of the EU towards the country, 9.22% think that open bilateral disputes in the region affect the country's membership, while 7.43% of respondents think that this is an issue related to the EU itself, which does not want to enlarge.

GRAPH 3 PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS ON THE REASONS WHY ALBANIA IS NOT AN EU MEMBER YET

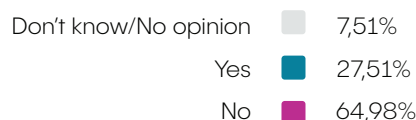
**WHY DO YOU THINK
YOUR COUNTRY IS
NOT AN EU MEMBER
YET?**



Due to the significant support that citizens have in Albania towards the country's membership process into the European Union, they consider this process as the country's main objective. 64.98% of the respondents think that Albania has no other alternative to European Union membership, while 27.51% think that the country may have another alternative besides being a member of the European Union.

GRAPH 4 PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS ON THE ALTERNATIVES TO EU MEMBERSHIP

**DO YOU BELIEVE
YOUR COUNTRY HAS
AN ALTERNATIVE TO
EU MEMBERSHIP?**



73.18% of citizens, who think that Albania has other alternatives besides that of joining the European Union, list the Open Balkan as another possible alternative.

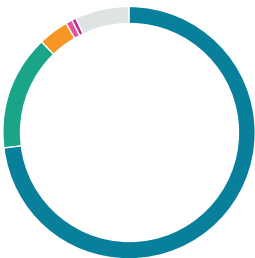
14.62% estimate that the regional alliance with Turkey constitutes another alternative for Albania in spite of that of EU membership, while 3.87% of the respondents express rejection towards any kind of integration of the country.

Although few in number, the citizens asked in Albania consider regional alliances with China and Russia as other alternatives in addition to that of membership into the European Union. 0.94% of the respondents think that a regional alliance with Russia is an alternative for Albania, while 0.54% think a regional alliance with China as another option from that of the integration into the European Union.

GRAPH 5 PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS ON OTHER ALTERNATIVES FROM EU MEMBERSHIP

IF YES, WHAT
IS THAT
ALTERNATIVE?

"Open Balkan"	73,18%
Regional alliance with Turkey as the pivot	14,62%
No kind of integration	3,87%
Regional alliance with Russia as the pivot	0,94%
Regional alliance with China as the pivot	0,54%
Other	6,84%



2. PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS ON INFLUENCE OF EXTERNAL ACTORS TOWARDS ALBANIA

As in previous year, citizens in Albania were asked about the influence that a number of powerful countries have towards Albania.

Italy (89.11%) and the United States of America (88.42%), are perceived for the second year in a row as the countries that have the most positive influence towards Albania, followed by Germany (87.75%) and Turkey (82.08%).

Meanwhile, just like previous year, the countries rated with the least positive influence towards Albania are Saudi Arabia (26.27%), China (22.44%), Serbia (9.16%), Russia (4.21%) and Iran (3.97%).

What is evident in this year's survey is the fact that more citizens compared to 2021 perceive United Kingdom as a country that has a positive impact towards Albania. For all other countries, the number of citizens who think the same has decreased compared to the previous year 2021.

Regarding countries, which are considered to have a harmful influence towards Albania, just like previous year, Russia (77.51%), Iran (76.02%) and Serbia (58.37%) head the ranking.

It is evident that there is a significant increase from last year in the number of citizens who consider the influence of Russia and Iran as mainly or extremely harmful to Albania. 47% of respondents thought in 2021 that Russia has mainly or extremely harmful influence on Albania, while in 2022, this number is 77.51%. 27.29% of respondents thought in 2021 that Iran has mainly or extremely harmful influence towards Albania, while in 2022 this number is 76.02%.

As in 2021, countries which are considered to have less harmful influence towards Albania are Italy (0.34%), Germany (1.54%) and the United States of America (1.62%).

Also, fewer citizens asked in 2022 (2.20%) compared to 2021 (7.09%) think that United Kingdom has a harmful influence towards Albania.

GRAPH 6 PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS ON THE INFLUENCE OF FOREIGN POWERS TOWARDS ALBANIA (2022)

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT IS THE INFLUENCE OF THE FOLLOWING COUNTRIES TOWARDS ALBANIA? (2022)	Don't know/ No opinion	Extremely harmful	Mainly harmful	Neither positive nor negative	Mainly positive	Extremely positive
Kosovo	1,13%	0,58%	2,60%	18,61%	57,07%	20,01%
Montenegro	2,25%	0,25%	3,26%	34,17%	56%	4,08%
North Macedonia	1,81%	0,67%	5,57%	34,37%	54%	3,58%
Serbia	1,66%	19,52%	38,85%	30,81%	8,87%	0,29%
Greece	0,84%	2,14%	14,78%	35,01%	44,14%	3,08%
Croatia	3,61%	0,61%	2,19%	45,32%	46,69%	1,59%
China	5,44%	3,91%	20,55%	47,65%	21,77%	0,67%
France	2,34%	0,79%	9,08%	39,30%	46,64%	1,85%
Germany	1,03%	0,27%	1,27%	9,68%	68,07%	19,68%
Iran	5,50%	43,70%	32,32%	14,49%	3,62%	0,35%
Russia	1,55%	40,73%	36,78%	16,73%	4,03%	0,18%
Saudi Arabia	9,48%	1,14%	9,67%	53,43%	25,95%	0,32%
Turkey	0,87%	0,36%	2,28%	14,41%	62,54%	19,54%
Israel	11,27%	2,46%	8,16%	44,22%	32,71%	1,17%
United Kingdom	1,29%	0,39%	1,81%	23,81%	60,44%	12,26%
United States	0,72%	0,29%	1,33%	9,23%	54,53%	33,89%
Italy	0,62%	0,15%	0,19%	9,92%	70,66%	18,45%

GRAPH 7 PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS ON THE INFLUENCE OF FOREIGN POWERS TOWARDS ALBANIA (2021)

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT IS THE INFLUENCE OF THE FOLLOWING COUNTRIES TOWARDS ALBANIA? (2021)	Don't know/ No opinion	Extremely harmful	Mainly harmful	Neither positive nor negative	Mainly positive	Extremely positive
Kosovo	1,55%	0,54%	1,85%	6,04%	58,33%	31,69%
Montenegro	2,68%	0,39%	2,28%	21,26%	63,82%	9,57%
North Macedonia	1,78%	0,46%	3,28%	20,18%	63,99%	10,31%
Serbia	1,88%	13,01%	30,73%	33,02%	20,33%	1,02%
Greece	1,47%	1,66%	11,22%	24,45%	53,45%	7,74%
Croatia	2,43%	0,57%	1,59%	23,59%	61,73%	10,09%
China	2,44%	2,77%	17,15%	40,96%	32,65%	4,04%
France	2,04%	2,29%	14,45%	27,63%	47,32%	6,27%
Germany	1,32%	0,12%	1,02%	5,72%	56,84%	34,97%
Iran	7,13%	5,03%	22,26%	47,72%	16,55%	1,31%
Russia	2,61%	15,97%	31,03%	31,98%	15,98%	2,44%
Saudi Arabia	8,39%	0,73%	6,59%	45,34%	35,07%	3,89%
Turkey	1,35%	0,66%	1,62%	4,52%	46,99%	44,87%
Israel	4,76%	0,60%	4,27%	34,25%	46,38%	9,74%
United Kingdom	2,87%	1,15%	5,94%	31,46%	50,99%	7,60%
United States	1,44%	0,25%	1,52%	4,75%	43,96%	48,08%
Italy	1,53%	0,36%	0,87%	4,20%	54,92%	38,12%

3. PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS ON GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

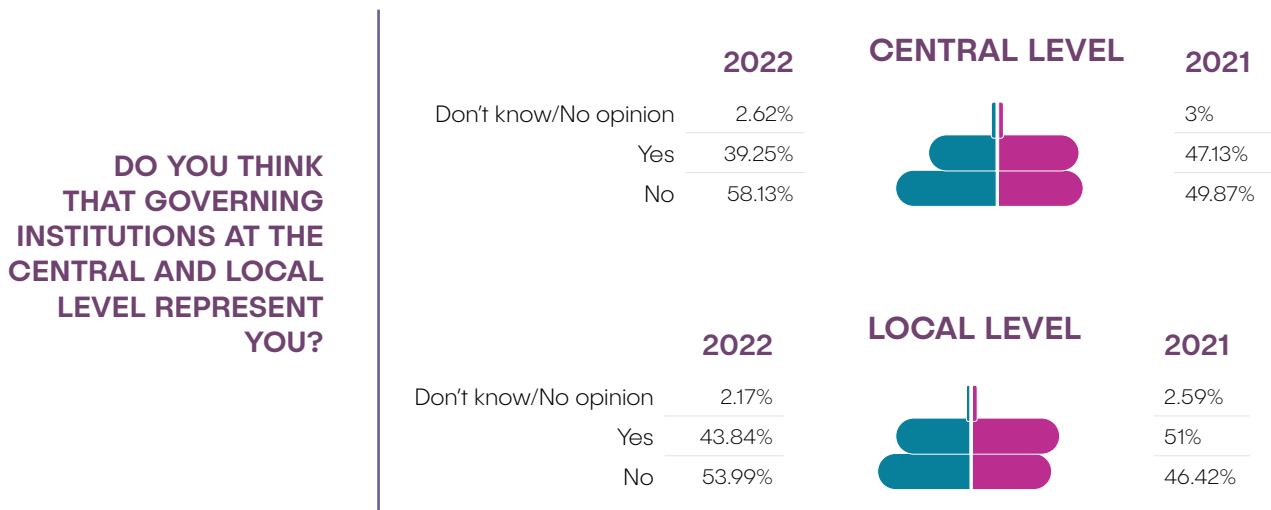
More than half of the respondents (58.13%) think that they are not represented by the governing institutions at the central level, and also 53.99% think that they are not represented by the governing institutions at the local level. In both cases, this number has increased compared to 2021.

In contrast, compared to 2021, fewer citizens think they are represented by governing institutions at both levels.

47.13% of respondents in 2021 thought they were represented by central level institutions, while 39.25% think the same in the 2022 survey.

51% of respondents in 2021 thought they were represented by local level institutions, while 43.84% of them think the same in the 2022 survey.

GRAPH 8 PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS ON THE REPRESENTATION OF GOVERNING INSTITUTIONS AT THE CENTRAL AND LOCAL LEVEL



In this year's survey, citizens in Albania were asked about their assessment of the Government's work in some of the main fields.

Economic development (58.75%), fight against corruption (56.04%), fight against organized crime (55.86%) and fight against nepotism and ensuring equal opportunities in employment (51.39%), are considered areas in which performance of the government is considered bad.

On the other hand, energy supply (82.95%), ensuring equal gender representation (80.26%), defense sector (77.18%) and the improvement of the culture and sports sector (70.82%) are considered fields where the government's work is rated as good or somewhat good.

GRAPH 9 PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS ON THE WORK OF ALBANIA'S GOVERNMENT IN RELEVANT FIELDS

Please rank the work of Albania's Government in the following fields:

DEFENSE SECTOR

Don't know/No opinion	2,28%
Good	23,80%
Somewhat good	53,38%
Bad	20,54%



FIGHT OF CORRUPTION

Don't know/No opinion	0,78%
Good	6,58%
Somewhat good	36,6%
Bad	56,04%



FIGHT OF ORGANIZED CRIME

Don't know/No opinion	0,47%
Good	5,72%
Somewhat good	37,95%
Bad	55,86%



ENSURING EQUAL GENDER REPRESENTATION

Don't know/No opinion	3,97%
Good	33,66%
Somewhat good	46,6%
Bad	15,77%



FIGHTING NEPOTISM AND ENSURING EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN EMPLOYMENT

Don't know/No opinion	2,23%
Good	10,64%
Somewhat good	35,74%
Bad	51,39%



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Don't know/No opinion	0,31%
Good	6,23%
Somewhat good	34,71%
Bad	58,75%



ENERGY SUPPLY

Don't know/No opinion	0,29%
Good	37,67%
Somewhat good	45,28%
Bad	16,76%



IMPROVING HEALTH SYSTEM

Don't know/No opinion	0,19%
Good	15,22%
Somewhat good	48,85%
Bad	35,74%



IMPROVING SECTOR OF CULTURE AND SPORT

Don't know/No opinion	5,35%
Good	23,35%
Somewhat good	47,47%
Bad	23,83%



CONCLUSIONS

This report was prepared with the aim of examining the attitudes of Albanian citizens towards EU integration as well as governance performance in several key fields. The report also analyses the impact that a number of key countries have towards Albania.

European Integration is considered one of the main goals and objectives of Albania. The First Intergovernmental Conference between Albania and the EU which took place on July 19th 2022,¹ opened a new chapter in the path of Albania's membership in the European Union, while on September 15th 2022, Albania officially began in Brussels the technical process of the analytical examination of EU legislation (acquis), the so-called screening process.² The majority of citizens in Albania support the country's accession process to the European Union, but as of late there has been an increased awareness regarding the technical aspects of the process and the time it will require. Despite the opening of negotiations, citizens are more knowledgeable about the level of readiness of the country as well as the responsibility of a few major institutions involved in this process, viewed as a monitoring one.³

On the other hand, one of the main obstacles that citizens in Albania consider to have influenced the country's non-membership in the EU is related to the prevalence and spread of corruption, which continues to be one of the main issues with consequences for the proper functioning of all state institutions. More and more citizens in Albania are aware of the main internal problems, although this has seldom transformed into practical steps and reactions to tackle and enhance the situation.⁴ Albania continues to remain one of the countries with high levels of corruption,⁵ which constitutes one of the biggest challenges for foreign investors as well.⁶ Additionally, the level of criminal prosecution and punishment of high-ranking officials remains low, although the numerous corruption cases in essential parts of the economy, in which politicians and other officials at the central and local level have been implicated.⁷

The wide spread of corruption in state institutions appears to have weakened citizens' trust in governing institutions at all levels, making them not feel represented by these structures. Despite the territorial reform started in 2015, violations have been continuously considered in local government units, through the use of public procurement and other state assets for electoral purposes. Furthermore, in recent years, especially in election years, whether they are local or parliamentary elections it is recorded from the local authorities an increase in the number of large procurements contracts which reach a value over 100 million ALL.⁸ The upcoming local elections in Albania, which will be held this year on May 14th,⁹ take place after the boycotted elections of 2019 and after the winning of Socialist Party in 60 out of 61 municipalities.

In this year's survey it is evidenced a notable increase in the number of citizens who think that Russia and Iran have mainly or extremely harmful influence towards Albania, considered to be affected by recent international developments, such as the beginning of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine on February 24th, 2022. Albania supported the Resolution of the UN General Assembly, which condemns the Russian occupation of Ukraine and imposed a series of sanctions against Russia.¹⁰ While within the scope of this support, several decisions were approved, including allowing Ukrainian citizens to enter and stay without a residence permit in Albania for a period of 1 year. From

24th February to 31st December 2022, nearly 32,000 Ukrainians entered Albania, of which nearly 29,000 left the country. As of end December 2022, about 2,500 Ukrainians who have fled the war in Ukraine were estimated to be present in Albania.¹¹

In September 2022, Albania officially severed diplomatic relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, in response to the cyber-attack that occurred on July 15th, 2022, when online services and government sites administered by the National Information Society Agency (AKSHI) went down.¹² It should be noted that relations between Albania and Iran have been tense for years due to the decision of the Albanian government to shelter several thousand mujahedin as refugees, part of the opposition People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (MEK), whose relocation to Albania was with the mediation of the United States of America.¹³ According to American security experts, Iran's cyber-attack on Albania was precisely related to the sheltering in Albania of the Iranian opposition group MEK.¹⁴

ENDNOTES

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