



KCSS
Kosovar Centre for Security Studies

KOSOVO SECURITY BAROMETER

SPECIAL EDITION: PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS TOWARD KOSOVO'S
FOREIGN POLICY AND DIALOGUE WITH SERBIA



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Perceptions presented in this report are a summary of information gathered from respondents and it solely demonstrates how people perceive institutions. It is no way a conclusive assessment on the quality of the work of institutions subject to this study. It shall serve as an instrument to them toward 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 Kosovar Centre for Security Studies. Opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily represent the views of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and Kosovo Open Society Foundation (KFOS)



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**SPECIAL EDITION: PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS TOWARD KOSOVO'S
FOREIGN POLICY AND DIALOGUE WITH SERBIA**

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Key Findings of the Special Edition on Kosovo's Foreign Policy and Dialogue with Serbia

- The pattern of positive attitude toward **Albania** remains unchanged over the years. **Albania** – among all countries listed in the survey questionnaire – is considered as the friendliest country toward Kosovo and the biggest ally and strategic partner. Whereas, the results of the KSB 2017 re-confirm the negative trend of negative perceptions toward **Serbia**. Around 90.0 per cent of the citizen see Serbia through a negative lens. Moreover, large portions of the respondents have considered Serbia as one of the biggest external security threat toward Kosovo.
- the results of the KSB 2017 re-affirm the neutral and positive perceptions toward **Macedonia** and **Montenegro**. **Croatia** has been perceived as a friendly country, as an ally, a strategic partner for Kosovo – including here the military component. **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, on the other hand, is seen as neutral toward Kosovo.
- **United States of America** is perceived as very friendly toward Kosovo. The US is viewed beyond the framework of the conventional bilateral relations; it is perceived more as one of the biggest ally and strategic partner for Kosovo. **Germany** is ranked as the biggest Kosovo ally, and strategic partner. Statistically speaking, 88.9 per cent of the respondents qualified Germany as a very friendly state toward Kosovo. **Turkey** is seen as a potential strategic partner for Kosovo, Followed by **Great Britain** and **France**.
- **Russia's** approach toward Kosovo has been considered as a very hostile. The negative trending, similar to the previous KSB editions, is attributed to the close diplomatic ties between Russia and Serbia.
- Around **93.6** per cent believe that **Kosovo** should become part of the **EU** in spite of it being a “far-fetched” goal. Similarly, **89.0** per cent of the citizens

believe that Kosovo should seek membership into **NATO**. Albeit for a limited percentage of the respondents, the enhanced interaction with NATO has been listed as a positive indication, and a window of opportunity for Kosovo's membership into NATO.

- A vast majority of the respondents, exactly **57.3** per cent (58.0 per cent from Albanian, and 61.0 per cent from the Serbian respondents), have declared that the agreements reached in Brussels have zero impact in normalization of relations.
- Around **73.0** per cent of the respondents believe that the Association is a very harmful agreement which is going to have a significant in Kosovo's internal functioning. It is imperative to mention that a very limited percentage of the Serbian respondents, around 6.0 per cent, believe that the Association will have negative impact in Kosovo.
- Around **48.5** per cent of the Albanian respondents believe that Serbia is benefiting more than Kosovo, this highly refers to the EU perspective for Serbia as the frontrunner in the EU integration process. On the other hand, around 29.3 per cent of the Serbian respondents believe that Kosovo is benefiting more than Serbia.

Introduction

In the eve of tenth anniversary of Kosovo's independence, the trajectory of establishing bilateral and multilateral of relations remains complex. Owing to its unique vulnerability – mostly political struggling for international recognition – Kosovo has had harder time achieving favourable foreign policy outcomes. To date most of the energy and efforts were oriented toward establishing relations with the non-recognizers, or campaigns to obtain recognitions. Following this approach, many recognitions remained quantitative– with no follow up in further deepening bilateral relations. In addition to bilateral level, similarly to other smaller states, Kosovo has preferred multilateral organizations – where the asymmetry of power among big and small states is slightly more diminished. However, this avenue proved to be even more complicated for Kosovo. Lacking recognitions by some key member states – some with the veto power, and some with significant influence internationally – Kosovo's hopes to participate in policy international platforms have been dashed. Failed attempts to join the UNESCO, and backing off the Interpol membership application reflect the political difficulties to penetrate in such platforms as a result of lack of clear foreign policy agenda.

The foreign policy does not seem to be only the concern of policy-makers but also ordinary citizens, hence the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies narrows down the results of public opinion on the broader issues of foreign policy and dialogue with Serbia in a form of Special Edition of Kosovo Security Barometer Programme. Intentionally, the survey questions have treated regional states separately from other geographically distant states. This way, the public opinions will be distinguished to those obtained through citizens' experience, due to the more intense relations and increased mobility; with the "big powers" mostly seen through the lens of the media, and their diplomatic presence in Kosovo.

International organizations have been a crucial subject to research following a) their extensive presence in Kosovo, through their active presence in form of missions, and b) the aspirations to become part of the international organizations, in line with the Kosovo's foreign policy agenda to join become part of the United Nations, European Union, NATO and other significant international multilateral platforms.

Hereafter, the special edition covers the following dimensions:

- Public perceptions toward relevant regional and international actors;
- Public perceptions toward international organizations, the Euro Atlantic integration process and other potential strategic partnerships;
- Public perceptions toward the EU facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia

Kosovo's Strategic Partners

Bilateral and Multilateral relations as seen by the Kosovo citizens

1. Kosovo vis-à-vis regional countries: between scattered, complicated, and well-established relations

The list of regional states included in the survey has remained unchanged; it consists of the surrounding countries – the ones sharing their borders with Kosovo, such as Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. In addition, the KCSS team of researchers considered including Bosnia and Herzegovina in the survey, mostly due to lack of diplomatic ties and its stance in line with Serbia in relation to Kosovo; and Croatia due to its extensive support in the state-building process, in foreign policy, but also as a strategic ally within the EU.

The respondents were asked to rate the relations and the attitude of these countries toward Kosovo starting from the negative scales such as very hostile, and hostile, continuing with the neutral positioning and the positive scaling as friendly, and very friendly. It is imperative to clarify that the perceptions toward regional countries have been shaped and determined by citizens' overall experiences, but also the frequency of diplomatic events taking place throughout the course of one year (2016 – 2017). Thus, making a clear distinction from how the overall perception toward other countries – the major powers – for which most of the information is based on the support during the 90's, their political attitude toward Kosovo declaration of independence – hence statehood recognition, their diplomatic presence in Kosovo, and the media reports.

The states are clustered in a specific way to reflect the key findings of this KSB edition, starting with the country having most intense relations with Kosovo such as Albania, to continue with two other neighbouring countries for which the respondents seemed to share neutral opinions such as Macedonia and Montenegro, and two other countries geographically more distant, but relevant for the public opinion and overall Kosovo's foreign policy.

1.1. Biggest regional ally: Public Perceptions toward Albania

Similarly to other KSB special editions, Albania – among all countries listed in the survey questionnaire – is considered as the friendliest country toward Kosovo, and the biggest ally not only in the regional level, but also internationally. Ranging at around 90.0 per cent, Albania was qualified as a friendly country toward Kosovo. The pattern of positive attitude toward Albania remains unchanged over the years; it is clear that in the eyes of the respondents (excluding a small percentage of the Serbian minority) Albania remains Kosovo's main ally.

There is a wide range of factors listed by the respondents who positioned Albania as a very friendly country; the key factors boosting this perception lie beneath the common national, historical, traditional and cultural features. Most importantly, the ethnically based sentiment is one of the key components defining the citizens' perception toward Albania. The positive attitude has been significantly increased by the extensive mobility, mostly of the Kosovar Albanians travelling to Albania, which has created a solid ground to develop perceptions solely based on their personal experiences. In addition, the list of potential factors influencing the perceptions toward Albania is also rooted in the cultural exchange between Kosovo and Albania. The joint activities and events among the artist communities in both countries have significantly diminished the differences among societies created throughout the history.

The qualitative feedback gathered through focus groups with field researchers; show that in addition to the aforementioned elements, the political aspect plays a crucial role when it comes to shaping the attitude toward Albania. A large portion of citizens have perceived Albania as a "political messenger", or a vocal voice of advocacy for Kosovo's participation in regional and international organizations. In addition to the foreign policy component mostly attributed to the political status of Kosovo in the international arena, the respondents have perceived Albanian political leaders as a symbol of unity. This attitude came as a result of annual inter-governmental meetings between Albania and Kosovo which took place in the past years, albeit limited more to their symbolic meaning, rather than producing tangible strategic cooperation between the two countries.

On the contrary, around 2.8 per cent have shared neutral perceptions toward Albania, while this is mostly common among the Kosovo Serb respondents, there is a minor portion of the Albanian respondents who have expressed their disappointment toward Albania, and this is mainly attributed to the lack of economic cooperation between two countries. Among them, some considered the leading role of Albania in the region, and the “re-establishing political relations with Serbia” has aroused scepticism among Kosovars. Public opinion in Kosovo has feared “de-factorization” of Kosovo slightly put under the shadow of the “Serbian – Albanian relations”

On the other hand, only 4.0 per cent has qualified Albania as a hostile country, thus the trend of negative perceptions remains similar to the previous editions. A large portion of the Kosovo Serb respondents admit the fact that Albania has a positive attitude toward Kosovo, but this does not apply to the Serbian minority living in Kosovo who do not hesitate to follow Belgrade’s approach toward Kosovo and Albania.

Public Perception towards Albania

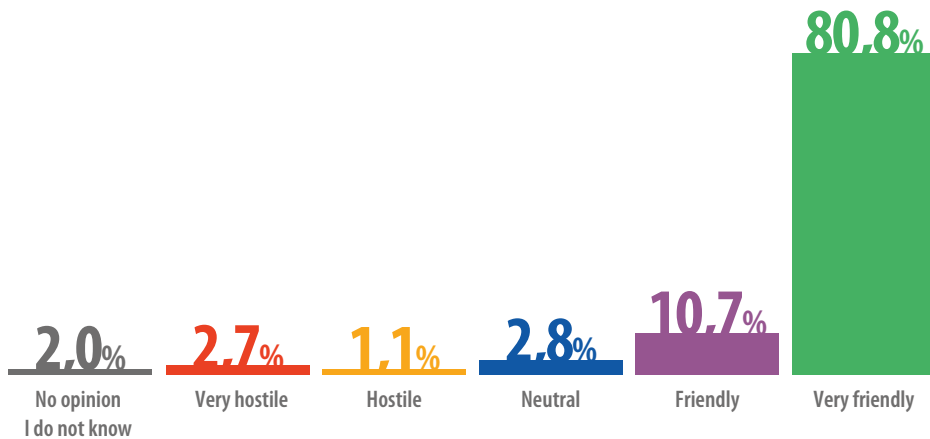


Figure 1 Perceptions toward Albania

1.2. Public Perceptions toward Macedonia and Montenegro

While the opinions toward Albania and Serbia have been clearly and sharply stated, when asked about Macedonia and Montenegro, the results of the KSB 2017 re-affirm the neutral and/or positive perceptions toward these countries. As shown in figure 2 the perceptions toward Macedonia and Montenegro are rather mixed, yet there is a tendency to position them as neutral or friendly toward Kosovo.

The initial idea behind the positive approach of these countries toward Kosovo has been positively shaped upon their political decision to recognize Kosovo's independence. The close proximity, and the freedom of movement policy of Macedonia and Montenegro with Kosovo, has been considered as a key factor behind the extensive mobility of the citizens resulting in perception created mostly on their personal experience. On the other hand, the negative perceptions can be attributed to the potential disputes (e.g. the border demarcation with Montenegro), or political events involving the Albanian communities living in these countries

When asked to rate the attitude of Macedonia toward Kosovo, it is of crucial importance to mention a significant increase in percentage of those qualifying Macedonia as a friendly country – more specifically from 35.3 per cent in 2016 to 43.2 per cent in 2017. The increase in the positive attitude is highly linked to the changes in the government in Macedonia. The tensed relation such as the incident that took place during the plenary session in the parliament during the first part of the year was slightly turned into a story of success. To date, Macedonia has managed to form a new government including the Albanian community living in Macedonia, with a leader that has been perceived to have an inclusive approach, and a promoter of equality and togetherness among all communities living in Macedonia. Furthermore, the discussion to change the law on the use of language in the state level has been considered as a positive step toward improving the lives of the Albanian community, and the overall inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia.

Statistically speaking, the percentage of the respondents considering Macedonia as a neutral country toward Kosovo is almost balanced to those perceiving it as positive. The qualitative feedback shows that this attitude is mostly based on the travel mobility, proximity to Kosovo, private healthcare, and other individually driven factors that are related to economic cooperation (especially in regions around the border with Macedonia).

This year has witnessed a significant decrease in percentage of those considering Macedonia as a hostile country, more specifically from 20.0 percent in 2016 it dropped in 13.5 per cent in 2017 (the lowest score being 40.0 percent of the respondents perceiving it as a hostile country in 2015). The factors behind those considering Macedonia a hostile country have been related to the court decision on the so-called the "Kumanovo Group", a process considered as a highly influenced by politics aiming to directly attack the Albanian community living in Macedonia.

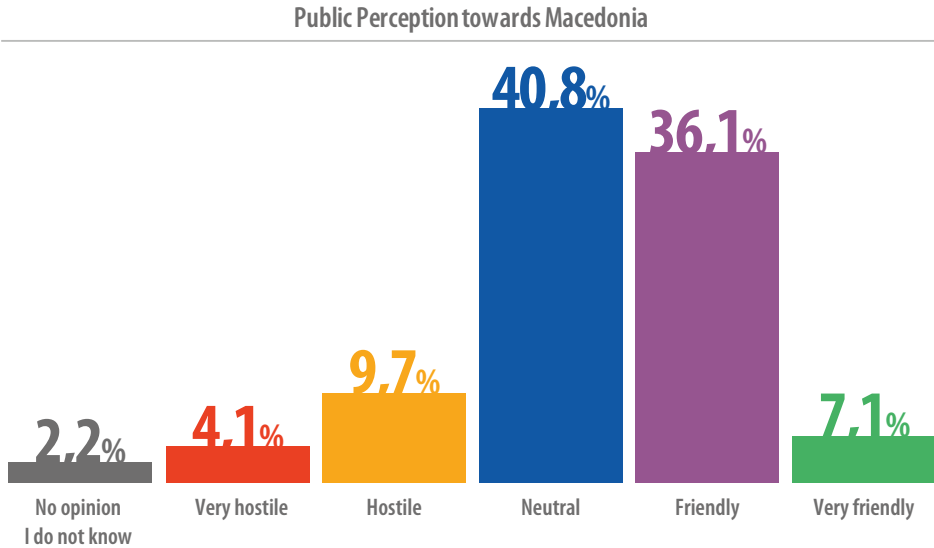


Figure 2 Perceptions toward Macedonia

Similar to the case of Macedonia, the trend of the respondents sharing positive stance toward Montenegro has been increasing during 2017. Speaking in numbers, the percentage of the respondents sharing positive perceptions toward Montenegro has been increased 6.8 per cent (from 37.1 per cent in 2016 to 43.9 per cent in 2017). While one would expect the contrary given the open bilateral dispute over the border demarcation, the positive approach seems to be have been increasing as a result of the neutral or “cold headed” approach of the Montenegrin government toward this issue. For some, the demarcation issue has been considered more of an internal problem between the political elites in Kosovo, rather than a problem between the two countries.

The neutral approach expressed by 44.6 per cent of the respondents can be attributed to the mobility, the close ties with the Albanian community living in Montenegro. On the other hand, a small percentage of the respondents perceived Montenegro's approach toward Kosovo as a hostile, by around 9.0 per cent. This can be attributed to the possible linkage between the political crisis related to the border demarcation issue with Montenegro and perhaps the anti-Albanian and anti-Kosovo rhetoric of opposition and Orthodox Church in Montenegro. Furthermore, the respondents sharing negative perceptions toward Montenegro might have considered it as they key obstacle in reaching the only tangible result that Kosovo can obtain on its path toward the EU.

Public Perception towards Montenegro

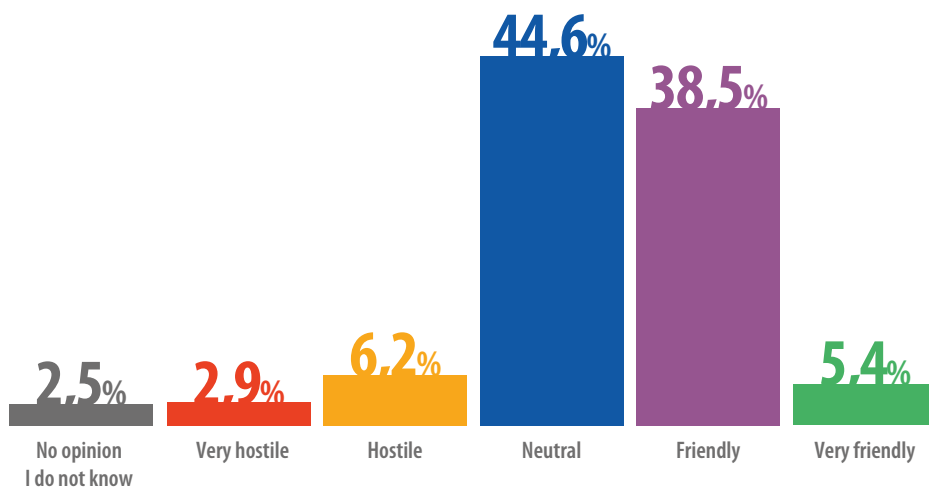


Figure 3 Perceptions toward Montenegro

1.3. Public Perception toward Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina

When asked about the attitude of Croatia toward Kosovo, the public opinion continued to remain positive, yet the results have shown slight increase since 2016. Statistically speaking, Croatia has been perceived as a friendly country toward Kosovo by around 67.7 per cent of the respondents. The qualitative approach shows that Croatia is perceived as ally, a strategic partner for Kosovo – including here the military component as well. While around 27.0 per cent perceive it as neutral, perhaps due to lack of intense bilateral level cooperation especially in the EU integration process, in which Croatia did not pursue a leading role in providing assistance to other Western Balkan countries aspiring to join the EU.

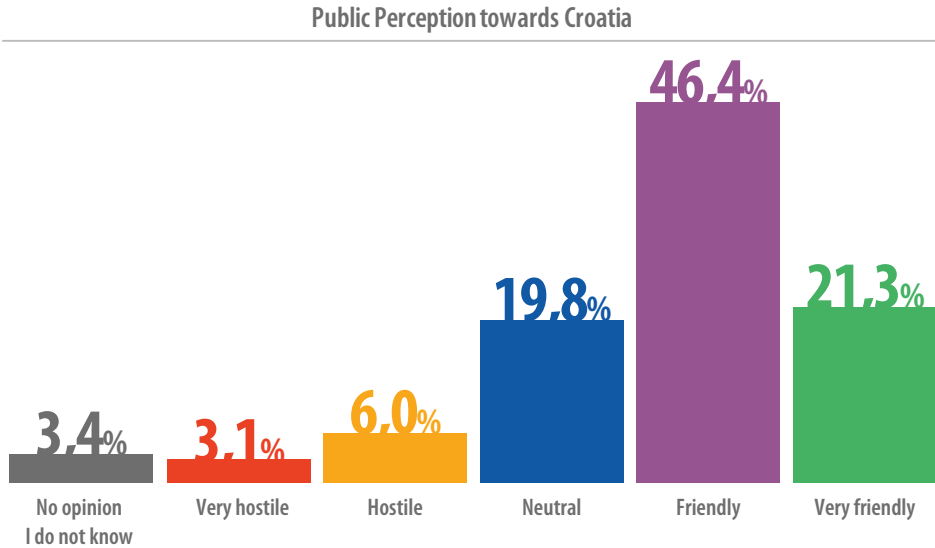


Figure 4 Perceptions toward Croatia

Considering the lack of diplomatic cooperation, and stranded relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, when asked to rate the attitude of BeH, quite a large portion of the respondents, around 25.0 per cent perceive it as a friendly country, followed by around 45.0 per cent of those considering it being neutral toward Kosovo. Sharing a similar past, especially with relation to the Serbian aggression can be listed as the main factors behind the positive approach mainly based on compassion. Another reason can be that the citizens can make a clear distinction between the overall Bosnian attitude toward Kosovo, and the blockade pushed and influenced by the Serbian federal unit – Republika Srpska.

Around 20.0 per cent of the respondents have shared negative perceptions when asked about BeH, mostly referring to the Serbian influence, the lack of bi-lateral relations, lack of freedom of movement of goods and people. Most importantly, the attitude – in line with Serbia – toward Kosovo's independence, paired by the fact that in the regional level Kosovo's aspiration to join the regional cooperation mechanisms have been mostly blocked by BeH, have contributed to the overall negative stance toward this country.

Public Perception towards Bosnia and Herzegovina

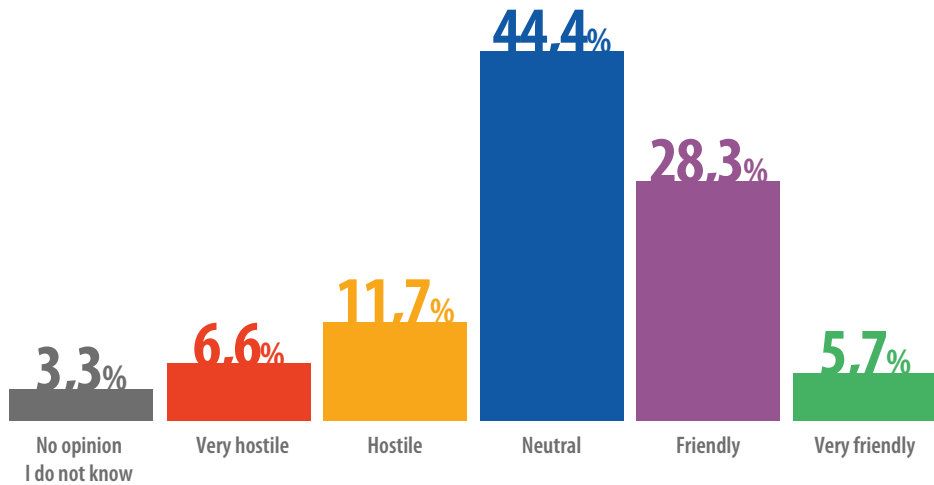


Figure 5 Perceptions toward Bosnia and Herzegovina

2. Searching strategic partners: Public perception toward major powers

International positioning is another foreign policy issue highly discussed among the public opinion in Kosovo. Over the past decade, strategic partnerships and international alignment have occupied a central position in Kosovo's diplomacy. As such, along with the regional countries, the respondents were asked to share their perceptions about the main global players, with some also having direct influence in Kosovo's foreign policy agenda.

Differently from the regional countries in which the perceptions have reflected a mixture of immediate political, social and cultural opinions, the qualitative feedback from field research shows that the perceptions toward the major powers are extensively developed on the overall positioning of these states toward Kosovo political status, the diplomatic representation of these states in Kosovo, some even based on the frequency of cooperation, and alignment with Serbia in relation to the status of Kosovo. The role of the media should not be ignored in this regard, as most of the information that citizens possess are based on what they absorb through media reports. The results of this section re-confirm the "western orientation" of the public opinion in Kosovo with a large portion of the respondents perceiving Germany, the USA, France, and Great

Britain as friendly toward Kosovo. The same positive trend follows the perceptions toward international organization, namely the EU and NATO. Similarly to the previous KSB special editions, the negative trend has been following Russia, evidently Russia is perceived from a negative lens as the majority of the respondents have qualified it as a hostile country toward Kosovo.

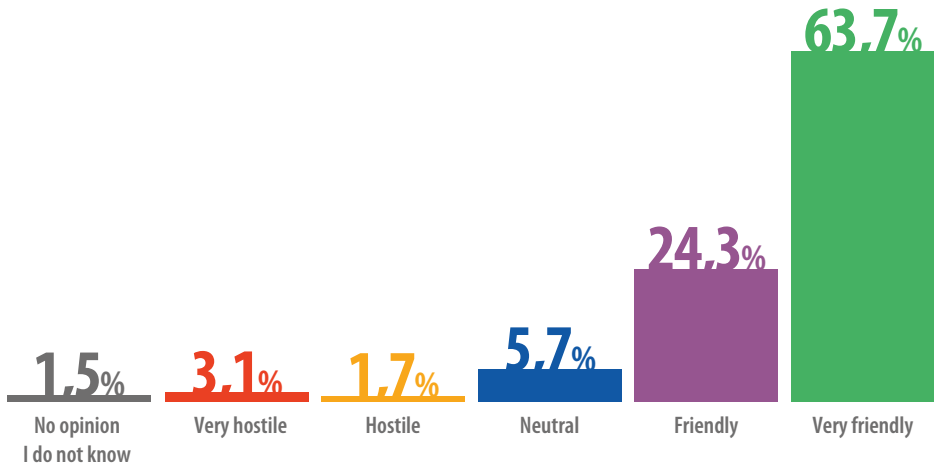
2.1. Bilateral relations with the United States of America: public perceptions toward the US influence in Kosovo

The solid diplomatic ties with the United States of America (USA) after the independence, the extensive support for Kosovo throughout the state-building process, and the assistance provided in fulfilling Kosovo's aspiration to join international organizations represent a small segment of factors behind the extensive positive approach of the public opinion toward the USA. The friendly approach of the USA in the eyes of the respondents in Kosovo is not limited only to the events of the past decade – the post-independence period – but also in the vocal support of the US before and after the war of 1999 in Kosovo.

When asked to qualify the positioning of the US toward Kosovo, similarly to the previous KSB editions, the US is perceived as a friendly country toward Kosovo, by around 88.0 per cent of the respondents. The qualitative feedback from field research indicates that the respondents view the US beyond the framework of the conventional bilateral relations; they perceive it more as one of the biggest ally and strategic partner for Kosovo. In this regard, it is imperative to mention that the new US administration and the vague presence in the region in general, did not manage to fade the positive attitude toward the US, statistically speaking a slight increase of those perceiving the US as friendly has been noted, by around 2.5 per cent since 2016. Similarly, when asked to rate the US influence in Kosovo, a very large portion of the respondents, namely 95.7 per cent of them has declared that the US influence in Kosovo is very positive. This influence has been perceived to be multi-dimensional, including here the political, economic and cultural.

The positioning of the US toward Kosovo is sharply divided among Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb respondents. As reflected in the table below, the negative trends toward the US (and most of the western powers) are attributed to the Kosovo Serb respondents, believing that the western influence in Kosovo is harmful, while supporting the Russian sentiment to a large extent.

Public Perception towards USA



Public Perception towards USA's Influence in Kosovo

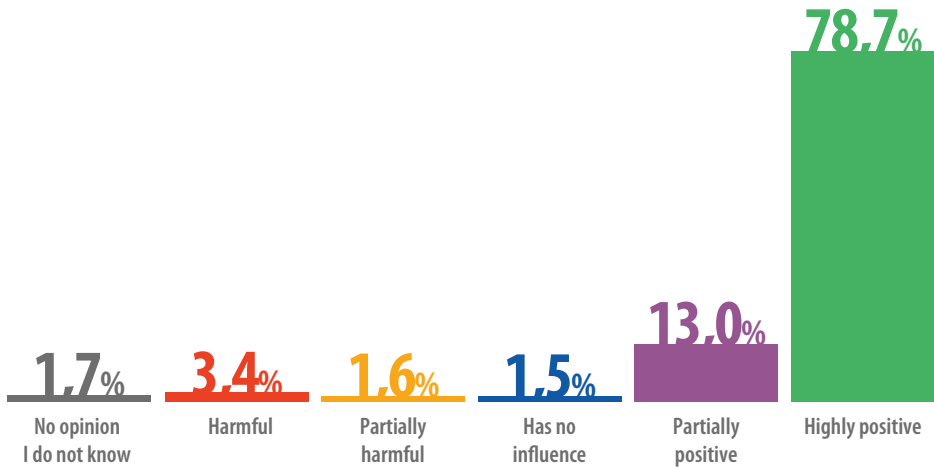


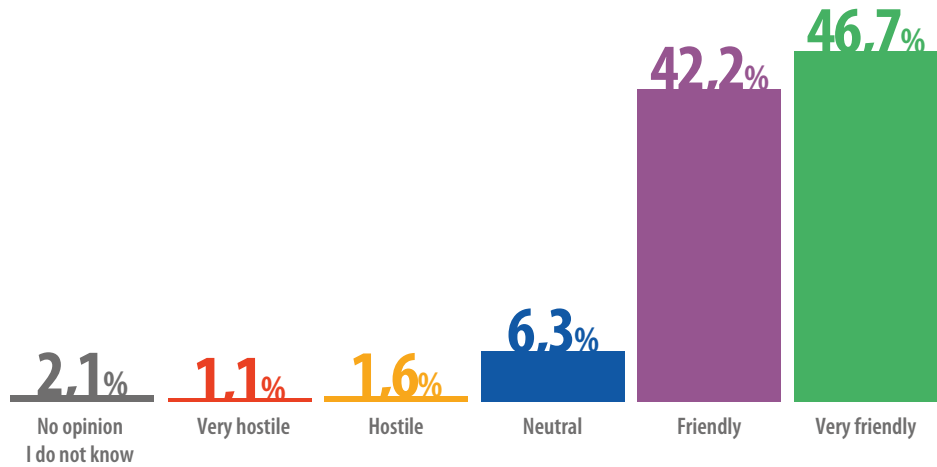
Figure 6 Perceptions toward the USA and its influence in Kosovo

2.2. Germany, Kosovo's strongest European ally: public perceptions toward German influence in Kosovo

The results of the KSB 2017 rank Germany as the biggest Kosovo ally, and strategic partner. Statistically speaking, 88.9 per cent of the respondents qualified Germany as a very friendly state toward Kosovo. A wide range of factors stand behind the extensive positive positioning of the respondents when asked about Germany. Firstly, the political factors including the role of Germany during the war of 1999, but mostly for the political contribution in Kosovo's efforts in declaring independence, and the statehood building process. The political aspect in the case of Germany has an additional dimension, the role of Germany within the EU. The clear and vocal attitude of Germany, namely its reform approach (differently from the Brussels approach) is widely praised by the public opinion in Kosovo. In this regard, the German approach toward Serbia by imposing the political conditionality, particularly in relation to Kosovo, has been highly appreciated by the respondents. Secondly, two interlinked factors such as the Kosovar diaspora, remittances brought from Germany, and the economic aftermath can be a strong factor behind the trend of perceptions qualifying Germany as a very strong ally for Kosovo. Another fundamental factor contributing to the increase of positive approach toward this country is the decision of the German Government to ease its work permit regime for Kosovo citizens, aiming for qualified workers to fill the labour market needs in Germany, but also helping Kosovars to get jobs in their area of expertise.

In this line, when asked about on the level and type of the German influence in Kosovo, around 92.0 per cent of the respondents believe that it is positive, followed by a very small percentage perceiving German influence as negative. Similarly, around 3 per cent also qualified Germany as a hostile country toward Kosovo, an opinion that is mostly present among Kosovo Serb respondents.

Public Perception towards Germany



Public Perception towards Germany's Influence in Kosovo

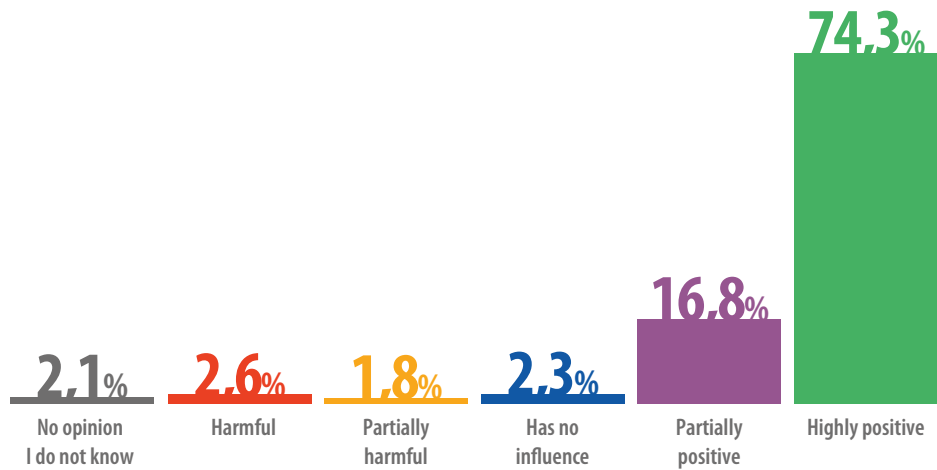


Figure 7 Perceptions toward Germany and its influence in Kosovo

2.3. Public perceptions toward Russia: between hostility and negative influence

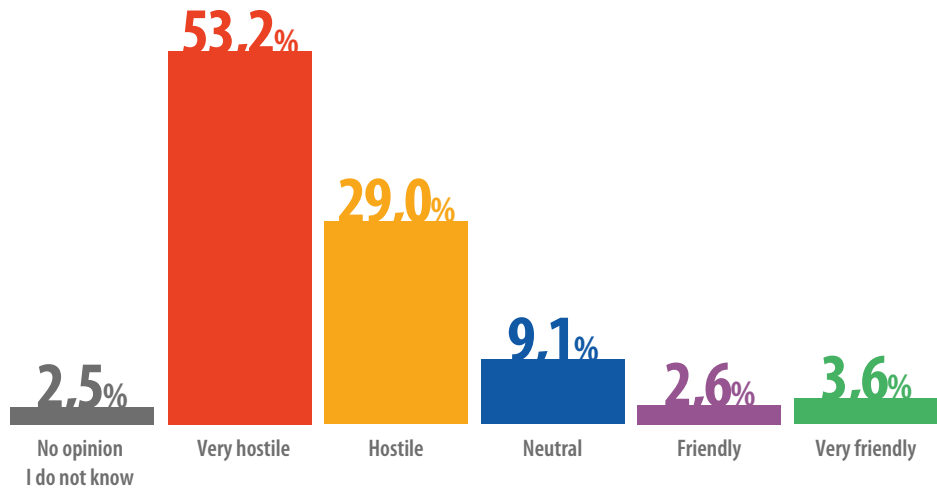
Russia aligns with Serbia in the eyes of the public opinion in Kosovo. When asked to qualify Russia's approach toward Kosovo, around 85.0 per cent perceive it as very hostile. The negative trending, similar to the previous KSB editions, is attributed to the close diplomatic ties between Russia and Serbia. Hence, the first argument listed by the respondents is related to Russia's attitude toward Kosovo's independence. Clearly, the public opinion perceives Russia as one of the big obstacles undermining Kosovo's integration in the key international political platforms, namely the United Nations, given its permanent veto power in the UN Security Council¹.

In addition to the widely known negative approach toward Kosovo in international arena, another concerning issue is the renewed interest of Russia in the Western Balkan region. The qualitative feedback shows a perception that Serbia is becoming the main hand of Kremlin in the Balkans, as such one of the key concerns for the public opinion seems to be the Russian influence in the northern part of Kosovo – a Serbian inhabited area. The results show that a stronger negative stance toward Russia was fuelled after the "train incident", the Russian train painted in Serbian colours and the words "Kosovo is Serbia" attempted to enter Kosovo from Serbia. This event sparked debates and raised fears of a potential armed conflict between Serbia and Kosovo. In addition, the Russian proxies in the northern part of Kosovo – the Russian media and the non-governmental organizations are extensively spreading their influence in the north. Thus, when asked about the Russian influence in Kosovo, around 83% of the respondents believe that it is very harmful, and mostly political. More importantly in the eyes of the public opinion Russia and Serbia back each-other in order to feed their ambition of maintaining influence in Kosovo, but also dominating the entire region.

The positive opinions on Russia's approach toward Kosovo are reflected among the Kosovar Serbian respondents taking part in this survey, more specifically by 6.0 per cent. This perception has been developed based on Russia's attitude toward Kosovo, and partnership with Serbia. Other relevant factor can be related to projects and investments in the northern part of Kosovo.

1 P. Kallaba "Russian interference in Kosovo: how and why?" 2017. Available here: http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Russian_interference_in_Kosovo_finale_2_735070.pdf

Public Perception towards Russia



Public Perception towards Russia's Influence in Kosovo

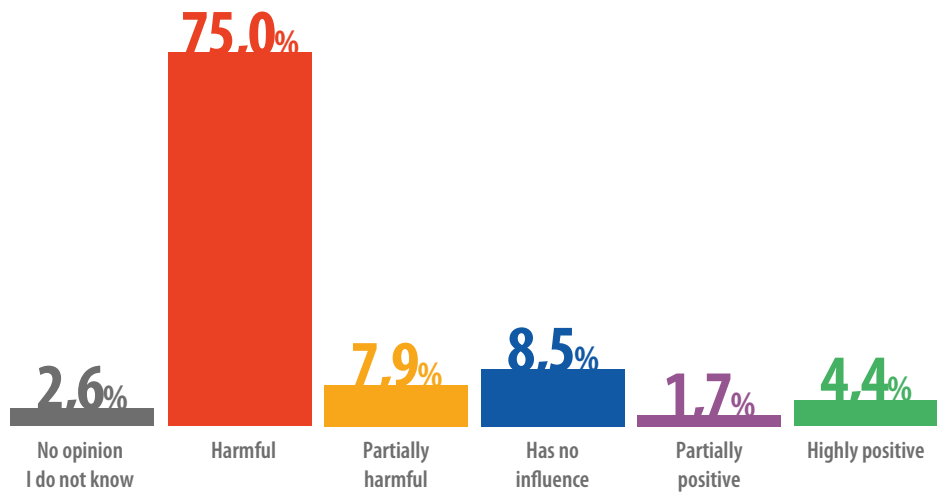


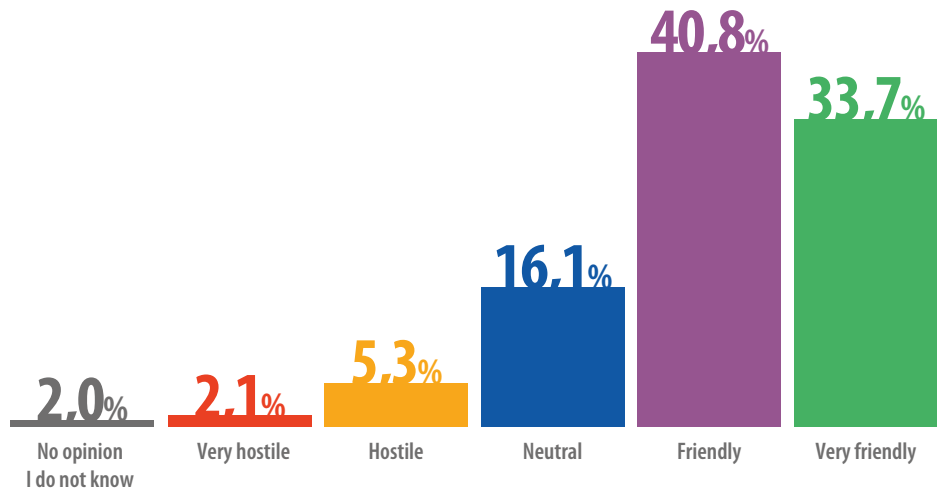
Figure 8 Perceptions toward Russia and its influence in Kosovo

2.4. Public perceptions toward Turkey: beyond economic partnership?

Bilateral relations and strategic partnership with Turkey are overly debated among the public opinion in Kosovo, with some even perceiving it as an alternative to the west, notably the EU. When asked about Turkey's approach toward Kosovo, a significant number of the respondents, namely 74.5 per cent of them, believe that it is a friendly partner. While most of the respondents confirm that their positive perception stems from the religious sentiment, another fundamental factor behind the positive approach is the increased mobility – mostly of the Kosovar citizens travelling to Turkey. In the verge of isolation – mostly from the West – Turkey is one of a few countries where Kosovo citizens can travel without visa. Henceforth, a large portion of the respondents build their perceptions based on their personal experiences. Another decisive driver of the positive approach is also the economic cooperation between Kosovo and Turkey, which existed in many forms, trade cooperation and the Turkish investments in the past years. Struggling to increase the foreign direct investments, contribution of any form was considered a good step forward, which was the case of Turkey in Kosovo. The media coverage in this regard has further contributed to creating the impression that Turkey is one of the most relevant investors in Kosovo, while many of it came in a form of public private partnership, on the contrary to the EU development funds, for instance. Similarly, when asked to rate the Turkish influence in Kosovo, around 74.0 per cent of the respondents did not hesitate to provide a positive answer.

A rather solid percentage of the respondents' appeared to be more hesitant in relation to Turkey. When asked about the Turkey's approach toward Kosovo, around 17 per cent of the citizens have chosen to remain neutral. Their neutrality derives from the doubt of the reasoning behind the Turkish investments, presence in Kosovo, and the repercussions of its increased influence in Kosovo. The qualitative feedback shows that the fear of the alleged Turkey's Islamist agenda in Kosovo and the spread of religious extremist ideas is one of the key factors contributing to this hesitation. And the role of certain media reports in creating this opinion may have helped a lot in this regard. Secondly, the overall tendency of Turkey to remain relevant in the Balkans – mostly using Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina – is considered to be a very politically costly agenda for Kosovo. As a consequence, around 15 per cent of the citizens consider the Turkish influence to be a very harmful for Kosovo, while around 8.0 per cent believed it to be a hostile country toward Kosovo. The public calls of the Turkish Ambassador to take action against some journalists for commenting the military coup in Turkey in July 2016, and the pressure to arrest the alleged collaborators of the opposition in Turkey, have been considered as very concerning and threatening to freedom of speech, human rights, and the democratic values.

Public Perception towards Turkey



Public Perception towards Turkey's Influence in Kosovo

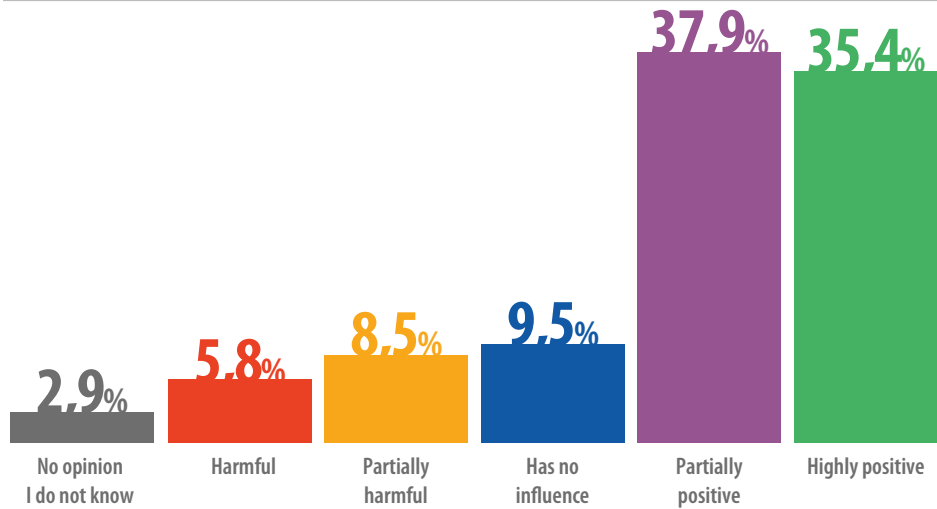


Figure 9 Perceptions toward Turkey and its influence in Kosovo

2.5. Great Britain and France: Public opinion toward relevant Europe's partners

The last batch of states among global major powers is the one including the Great Britain and France, and by coincidence one is getting prepared to leave the EU (the GB), while the other (France) is expected to finally take a significant place in the EU integration path for the Balkans, including Kosovo. The results of the previous BKS edition have shown that the overall perception toward both countries is rather positive.

In the eyes of the public opinion in Kosovo, Great Britain has been always perceived as a friendly country toward Kosovo. Statistically speaking, around 77.2 per cent of the respondents perceive it to be very positive toward Kosovo. This trend has been purely based on the extensive assistance of the GB during the war of 1999 in Kosovo, but also the state building process – especially after the declaration of the independence – being perceived as a strategic ally to assist Kosovo in fulfilling its aspiration to successfully penetrate in international arena. It is imperative to mention that the positive perception has decreased slightly from the previous BKS (2017). The slight decrease of about 7.0 per cent can be related to the Brexit, the hesitation is surely linked to the fact that Kosovo will lose one of the biggest allies within the EU, and ally that is not easy to replace during the times of uncertainty within the EU.

The UK has enjoyed largely positive perception by Kosovar respondents over the past three years. Exactly, 82.2 per cent of the respondents shared positive perceptions toward the UK in 2014, this trend continued to increase in 2015 to 83.9 per cent. The key factors leading to the positive perception toward the UK has been attributed to the support received by the UK during the war alongside the US, later on these perceptions have been based on the UK support given to Kosovo on its way to the EU membership, and the statehood building process in general. The results of the referendum in the UK brought uncertainty, thus reflecting the scepticism of the respondents in general. Afraid to lose one of the biggest supports within the EU, the respondents were rather confused on the role of the UK in the future, thus marking an increase in the percentage of those who listed the UK as neutral. Around 16.5 per cent of the respondent perceived the GB as a neutral country toward Kosovo referring to the fact that the attention and presence of the GB continues to fade. Only 3 per cent of the respondents qualified the GB as a hostile state toward Kosovo. A positive stance toward the GB has been noticed also among the Kosovar Serbs participating in the survey.

Public Perception towards Great Britain

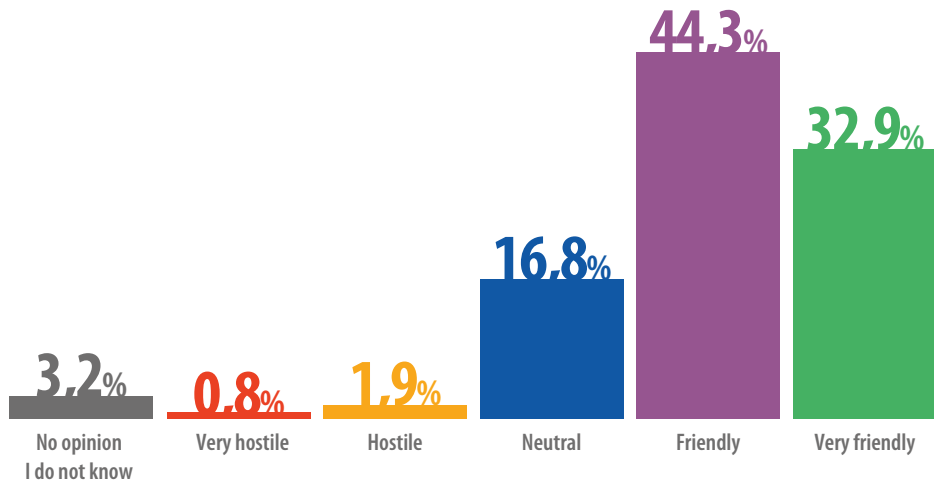


Figure 10 Perceptions toward Great Britain

The public opinion toward France has shown to be quite fluctuant in the previous KSB Editions. Similarly, the KSB 2017 results show that among all other EU member states listed in the survey, France has received positive perceptions yet slightly lower comparing to the GB. When asked about France's attitude toward Kosovo, over 59.0 per cent of the respondents believe that France is a friendly country toward Kosovo. The positive approach is rooted in the provided for Kosovo during the war, but also the positive stance of France upon the declaration of independence from Kosovo. Moreover, the role of France within the EU has contributed to the overall positive stance toward France. The qualitative feedback shows that the public opinion in Kosovo is expecting a more proactive approach of France in relation to Kosovo, and Western Balkans in general.

The percentage of those remaining neutral in their stance toward France is rather high when compared to the GB, for example, around 39.0 per cent of the respondents have expressed hesitation in qualifying France as neither friendly, nor a hostile country toward Kosovo, and as such they have decided to remain neutral in their stance. This group is followed by a small percentage of 8.0 per cent of those who considered it to be a hostile country toward Kosovo. The reasons behind this positioning can be rooted in a more distant event such as the inefficiency of French troop's (part of KFOR) in preventing the division of Mitrovica back in 1999. Another factor behind this attitude is the events that took place during 2017. The arrest of former opposition leader – now the prime minister of Kosovo – by French authorities based on an Interpol arrest warrant issued by Serbia, seems to have contributed to the overall negative approach toward France by the public opinion in Kosovo.

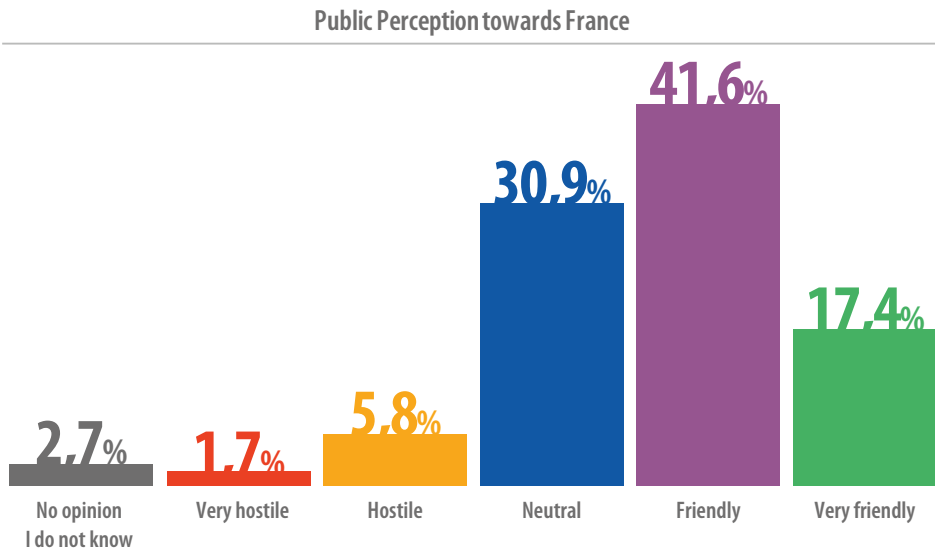


Figure 11 Perceptions toward France

3. Kosovo vis-a-vis multilateralism: Public perceptions toward the EU and NATO

Kosovo has clearly demonstrated its aspirations to become part of the multilateral platforms. The ambition to join these international multilateral and intergovernmental structures, namely the EU and NATO, has been an integral part of the political discourse in Kosovo. Following the efforts to further intensify the relations with the EU – clearly expecting concrete steps in the EU integration process for Kosovo on the one hand, and much complicated relations with the NATO on the other hand, KCSS considered as highly important to measure the public perceptions toward the most relevant Euro-Atlantic structures. The results of the KSB 2017 re-confirm the strong support and willingness to join both the EU and NATO. Furthermore, it proves that the public opinion is in line with the government in Kosovo when it comes to establishing multilateral relations.

In addition to the aspirations to join the EU and NATO, as well as the relations – not matter how complex they are- the opinions and perceptions given in this section are also highly influenced by the missions and presence of these structures in Kosovo. While this can be considered as positive due to the fact that the perceptions are built on personal experience, however, it can be risky as the entire perception can be based on the performance of the mission without knowing the details or understanding the broader picture.

3.1. Kosovo and the EU: Public Perceptions toward the EU

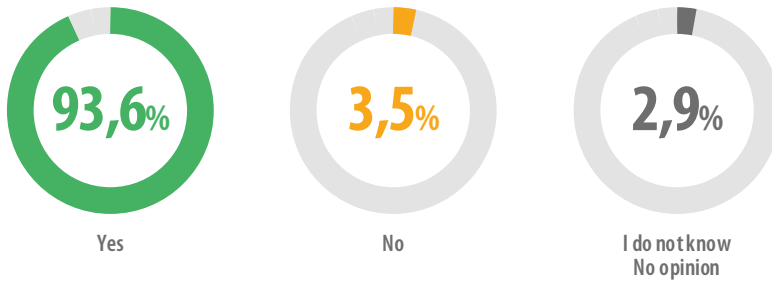
Integration within the EU remains the key objective of the Kosovo Government; as such the process of EU integration remains a top priority in the agenda. The ambition to join the EU has an impact in the overall policy making process in Kosovo; this is surely reflected in the necessity to have all legislations and standards in line with those of the EU. In spite of the fact that the road toward the EU has proven to be of extreme challenge – given the political obstacles – the public opinion in Kosovo remains very positive toward Kosovo membership into the EU. The results of the KSB 2017 demonstrate that one of the least potential candidates to join the EU, or better said, the almost inexistent country in the near future EU enlargement agenda such as Kosovo remains one of the most positive country toward the EU. Nevertheless, the same approach did not apply to the question whether the EU is ready to accept Kosovo. This clearly shows that the public opinion is aware of the obstacles and has lowered their expectations toward the EU.

Statistically speaking, when asked whether Kosovo should aspire EU membership, the vast majority of the respondents, namely 93.6 per cent have responded positively in spite of it being a “far-fetched” goal for Kosovo. The extensive positive approach toward the EU, most importantly, reflects the fact that the EU is perceived as one of the main strategic partners for Kosovo. It is difficult to accurately assess how the Stabilization Association Agreement has affected public opinion in Kosovo; the usual explanations involving the lengthy process of the implementation of the SAA, and lack of knowledge about it further contribute to this perception. The positive stance toward the EU membership is not necessarily based on the tangible results in the EU integration process, and it is not interlinked with relations between Kosovo and the EU, it is rather based on the perception of the benefits of a country upon membership in this structure. In this line, it is important to mention that the respondents are viewing the EU as a “problem solver” mechanism responding to the endemic level of corruption, lack of rule of law, and the slow pace of economic development.

The negative perception, although very small in percentage, around 3.5 per cent of the respondents believe that Kosovo should not seek EU membership. This perception is very present among Kosovo Serbs respondents evidently seeking partnership with Russia instead, thus aligning with Belgrade’s foreign policy in this respect. Only 29.87 per cent of the Serbian respondents believe that Kosovo should not seek EU membership, followed by 33.7 per cent refusing to take positioning in this regard. This can be considered rather alarming for the EU given its extensive presence especially in the north of Kosovo.

A very small percentage of the Albanian respondents believe that Kosovo should not join the EU, notably 1.4 per cent.

Public Perceptions towards Kosovo's membership into the EU



Public Perceptions towards Kosovo's membership into the EU

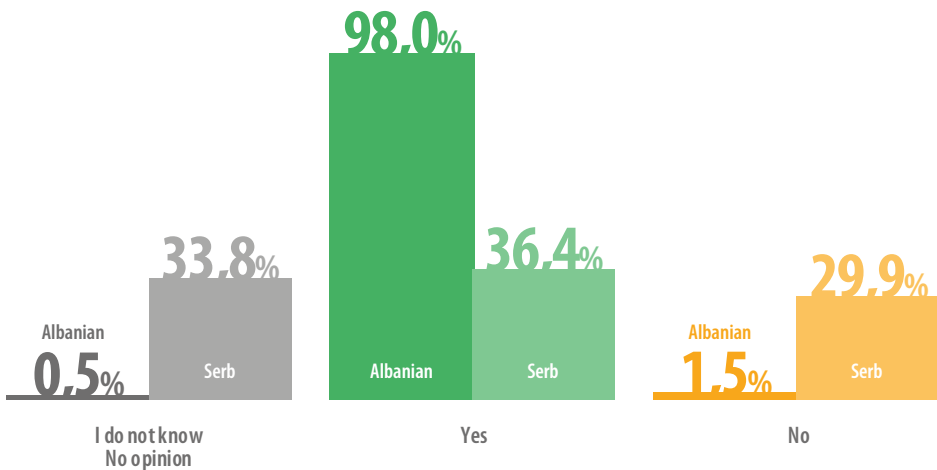


Figure 12 Perception on EU perspective for Kosovo

The high level of positive attitude seems to have been faded among respondents when asked about the readiness of the EU to accept Kosovo. Intentionally, KCSS has added this question to the survey attempting to de-construct the correlation between the willingness of Kosovo to join the EU vis-à-vis the EU readiness to embrace Kosovo. The results reflect a rather balanced attitude (both negative and positive) of the respondents in relation to this question. Around 45.0 per cent of the respondents believe that the EU is ready to accept Kosovo. The arguments used by the respondents were largely related to the ongoing process taking place between Kosovo and the EU, namely the Stabilization Association Agreement. A vast majority of the respondents answering positively to this question believe that the EU is ready to embrace a reforming country willing to fulfil the membership criteria, thus shifting a part of the blame to local political elites who only use the EU integration in the political discourse without following a clear reforming agenda.

Another more sceptic percentage of the respondents, namely 45.0 per cent, believe that the EU is not ready to accept Kosovo. The argument behind this stance lies in the fact that Kosovo remains the only country from the Western Balkans with major challenges in applying for the EU membership. The additional benchmark for Kosovo (border demarcation with Montenegro) in the visa liberalization process is perceived from a negative point of view as well. The qualitative feedback shows that the respondents perceive this stagnation more of shared blame of the Kosovo Government – failing to ratify the border demarcation agreement – part of the visa liberalization roadmap, and the unprecedented case of the EU imposing political criteria in a process that is technical, and not at all related to the EU integration process, and the EU membership criteria².

Additionally, there is a perception that the EU has asymmetric approach toward Kosovo, and that reaching consensus among member states – especially the non-recognizers – is not going to be seen on the horizon in the short run. The feedback from focus group discussions, reflect a rather hesitant approach backed by the existing political challenges, with many fearing that Kosovo will share a similar fate to Macedonia having a political issue/ open dispute that highly interrupts or obstructs country's ambition to join the EU.

A large-scale hesitation was shown also among the Serbian respondents with almost 60.0 per cent believing that the EU is not ready to accept Kosovo, the arguments used to justify this opinion was closely related to the ongoing EU facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, and the implementation of the agreements signed in Brussels in the framework of this process. Around 30.0 per cent of the Serbian minority respondents have refused to share an opinion in this regard. The hesitation to answer the EU related questions- which if quantified- is quite large, can also be related to the overall lack of information, or even low level of interest to understand the EU integration process.

2 This due to the fact that the EU has visa lifted the visa regime with non-European countries (e.g. Colombia and Taiwan).

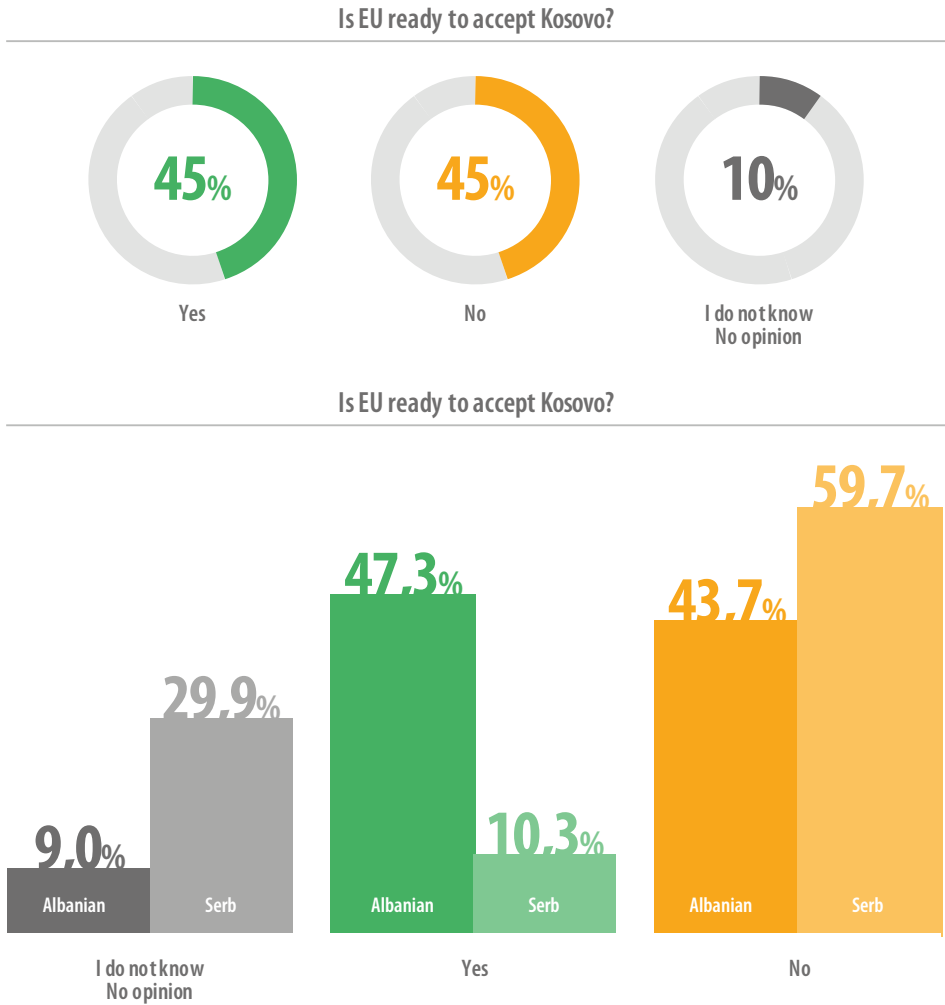


Figure 13 Perception on EU readiness to accept Kosovo

3.2. Strengthening Partnership: Trends of Public perception toward membership into NATO

Kosovo has set a clear Euro-Integration agenda, these aspirations have carefully crafted and reflected in national strategies in foreign policy. Following this, KCSS has been continuously measuring the public opinion perceptions toward all aspiring international structures and alliances. Notably, NATO takes a significant place in the survey.

The public opinion toward membership into NATO has remained unchanged throughout the years, although it witnessed slight moves along the lines depending on the events

taking place during field research and data collection period. The KSB results show that around 89.0 per cent of the citizens believe that Kosovo should become member of NATO. When deconstructing the public opinion toward NATO, a clear distinction between NATO of 1999, and the one of today has been made. Creating this timeline is imperative given the role of NATO during the war/ military intervention in Former Yugoslavia, followed by the KFOR mission still present in Kosovo, and the political stance that NATO has taken in relation to Kosovo – with the four non-recognizing countries that have a significant impact shaping the political attitude of the alliance today. And in the case of Kosovo, a vast majority of the respondents have created a stance toward the alliance during 1999, whereas the relations with NATO remain a political process known and understood only among elites.

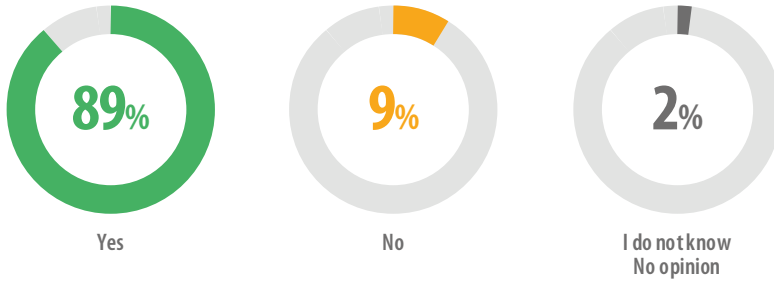
Undoubtedly, NATO enjoys a sound level of trust among the citizens of Kosovo, mostly based on the military intervention during the war in 1999. The positive opinions are also shaped by the presence of the KFOR mission in Kosovo – a positive stance which is also present among Serbian minority respondents. In spite of NATO's neutral approach toward Kosovo, the complex relations did not fade the enthusiasm of the public opinion in Kosovo, more importantly this reflects upon the fact that the Kosovo views NATO as a strategic defence partner, aligning among other regional countries/ military forces such as Albania, Croatia and Montenegro – NATO members maintaining a very solid bilateral military partnership with Kosovo.

Albeit for a limited percentage of the respondents, the enhanced interaction with NATO has been listed as a positive indication, and a window of opportunity for Kosovo's membership into NATO; furthermore, it increased the visibility and the role of NATO in Kosovo. This, however, does not mean that challenges in relation to membership into NATO are diminishing or softening.

On the other hand, around 9.0 per cent of respondents on average oppose membership into NATO; the negative perception is present mostly among the Kosovar Serbian respondents who firmly oppose the integration of Kosovo into NATO. This can also be explained by the fact that in line with the politics in Belgrade, the Serbian respondents oppose NATO, while clearly showing preference to strengthen partnership in the defence sector with Russia.

A slight hesitation has been shown also by the Albanian respondents, the debate over the transformation of the Kosovo Security Force into Kosovo Armed Force, most importantly, the statements of the NATO officials in relation to this process has created mixed perceptions among Albanian respondents. Mixed messages and statements requesting alignment with Belgrade in the case of the transformation of the Kosovo Security Forces have further contributed to this hesitation in relation to NATO.

Public Perceptions towards Kosovo's membership into NATO



Public Perceptions towards Kosovo's membership into NATO

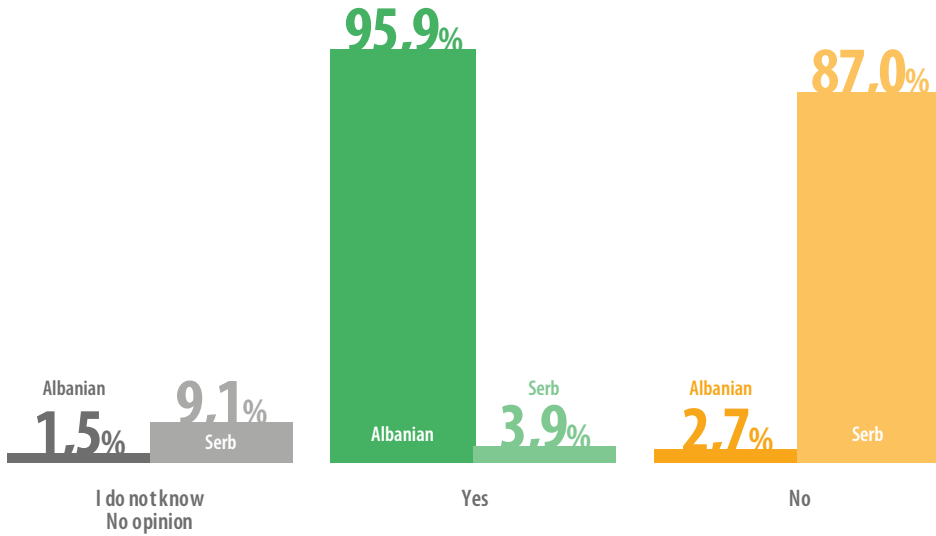


Figure 14 Perceptions toward membership into NATO

In(tense) relations

4. Public Perceptions toward Serbia

When asked about Serbia, the results of the KSB 2017 re-confirm the negative trend of negative perceptions toward this country. Similarly, or almost exactly the same to the previous edition in 2016, around 90 per cent of the citizen see Serbia through a negative lens. When asked to qualify the attitude of Serbia toward Kosovo, the Kosovo Albanian respondents did not hesitate to reflect their negative perceptions. Moreover, large portions of the respondents have considered Serbia as one of the biggest external security threat toward Kosovo.

The qualitative feedback of all KSB editions has shown that most of the perceptions are highly linked to the memories of repression, and those directly related to the war of 1999. This edition has witnessed a very strong “come back” of the fear of a renewed armed conflict, or potential attack from Serbia. This perception has been highly fuelled by the so-called Train Incident, referring to a train painted in Serbian colours and the words “Kosovo is Serbia” attempting to cross the Kosovar border. Kosovo saw this incident as a deliberate provocation vowing to stop the train and protects Kosovo’s territorial integrity, while the political leadership in Serbia continued declaring their commitment to save every inch of “their territory”. This incident, which took place in January 2017, set a negative footing, and warned for a rather tensed year between the two countries, with a lot of potential for a repetitive aggression by Serbia.

The aggressive nationalist rhetoric by the Serbian politicians continued during 2017. Statements of the former President of Serbia Tomislav Nikolic that “*Serbia would be ready to instantly send armed forces to Kosovo, if it is necessary in order to protect Kosovo Serbs*”. These statements were fully backed and fuelled by the Orthodox Church in

Serbia – which stand hand-in-hand – with the governments stance toward Kosovo. The leader of the church called for use of force to “take back Kosovo – the Jerusalem of Serbia” in his statement: *“Kosovo can be taken away, be occupied as it is today, but Serbia can never say ‘we are giving that away’, because what is given away is lost forever, while what is taken away by force, is taken back the same way,”*

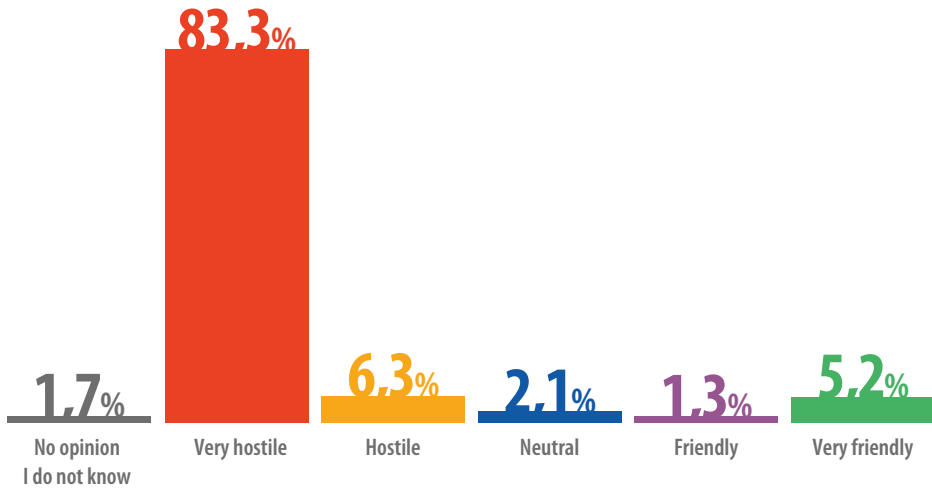
These events proved one the most concerning presumptions of the Kosovar Albanians respondents; it re-affirmed the fact that Serbia will not soften its attitude toward Kosovo in the short run. Serbia’s destructive role toward the independence, the enhanced attempts to de-stabilize the country, and halt the state-building process in Kosovo, has played a very significant role in shaping the perceptions toward Serbia.

In addition to the aforementioned factors, another factor contributing to the solid negative perceptions toward Serbia is highly linked to the lack of concrete results deriving from the EU facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. The weak implementation of the agreements reached in Brussels in the framework of the dialogue feeds further the pessimism toward Serbia. The ultimatum of the Serbian political elites threatening to unilaterally establish the Association of the Serbian Municipalities in case if the Kosovo Government fails to fulfil this commitment, was as an act of aggression risking to diminish the limited progress that the dialogue has reached in normalizing relations.

The hostility between countries, making the headlines of almost all media reports further fuelled the negative public opinion in Kosovo, continued with the arrest of the now Prime-Minister of Kosovo – back then one of the opposition leaders in France with the arrest warrant issued by Serbia in Interpol. Many other arrests occurred when Kosovo citizens travelled through Serbia – in spite of the freedom of movement agreement signed in Brussels.

A minor percentage of the respondents, around 7.0 per cent in average think that Serbia’s approach toward Kosovo is positive. In this regard, the Kosovar Serbian respondents, including the respondents in the northern part of Kosovo gave their opinion on Serbia’s approach toward Kosovo, thus seeing the presence of Serbia in areas inhabited by the Serbian minority as positive and necessary. This, however, reflects a clear separation between Serbia and Kosovo, as such it can be perceived as a gradual acceptance of the factual reality of Kosovo’s existence as a state, and their reality of living in Kosovo.

Public Perception towards Serbia



Public Perception towards Serbia's Influence in Kosovo

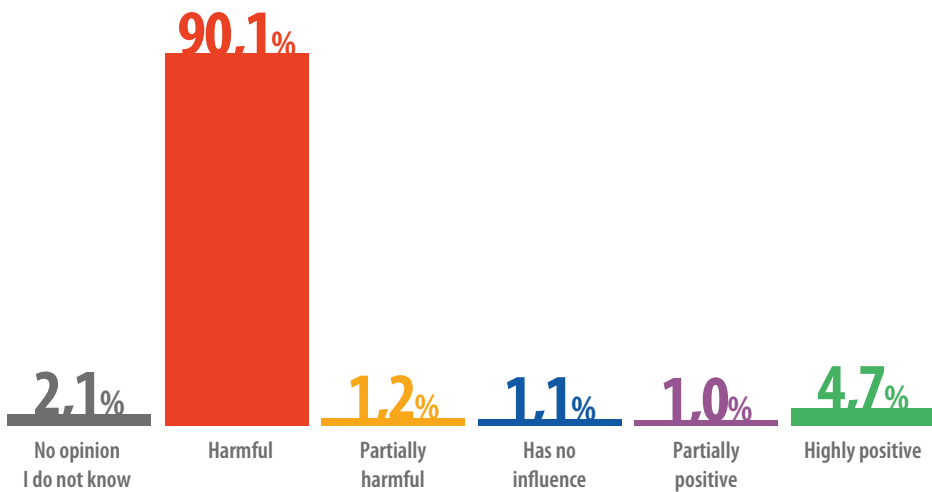


Figure 15 Perceptions toward Serbia and its influence in Kosovo

4.1. Dialogue with Serbia: new diplomatic battlegrounds?

The EU facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia represents one of the key pillars in Kosovo's foreign policy, but also with major repercussions in internal political stability and security. What aimed, at least theoretically, to normalize relations be-

tween Kosovo and Serbia diverged and interlinked with other foreign policy issues, thus challenging the diplomatic ambitions of Kosovo. Firstly, the launch of the dialogue has had major impact in the international recognitions for Kosovo, many states – those geographically distant, not sharing keen interest in the region, or indecisive in their states toward Kosovo's independence – are reluctant to take decisions in this regard waiting for the outcome of the dialogue. Secondly, the interconnection made between the EU integration process for Kosovo with the progress in the dialogue, notably the implementation of the agreements signed in the framework of the dialogue.

The dialogue has had critical impact in the internal functioning of the country. Opposite political approaches toward this process has deeply divided the political elites in Kosovo. Agreements signed, mostly those in the framework of the political phase of the dialogue, have triggered strong debates in the Kosovo parliament, massive protests organized by the opposition. This situation instigated the political deadlock, eventually resulting in snap election in Kosovo. KCSS, following the trend on the dialogue since the launch of this process, considered of a great importance to further measure the impact of the dialogue internally. The results show that agreements such as the one on the Association. Community of the Serbian majority municipalities in Kosovo will have serious impact in the functioning of the country. Similarly, the number of the respondents believing that dialogue the agreements signed between Kosovo and Serbia are leading to normalization remains very low.

4.2. Re-defining normalization?

Normalisation became a buzzword of the EU facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. From normalization, the far-fetched goal on which the dialogue process has been built upon, the state of relations between countries got tensed to the point where conflict prevention events are considered milestones in the process, instead of the implementation of agreements leading to normalization.

When asked if the dialogue is leading to normalization of the relations between Kosovo and Serbia, a vast majority of the respondents, exactly 57.3 per cent (58.0 per cent from Albanian, and 61.0 per cent from the Serbian respondents), have declared that the d in agreements reached in Brussels have zero impact in normalization of relations, thus the situation remains the same. The percentage of those sharing the negative perception toward this process has slightly increased by 7.3 per cent since 2016.

One of the key factors behind this attitude, as mentioned by the majority of the respondents, is the discontinuation of the process for a significant period of time. This

stagnation has been caused by internal political events in Kosovo and Serbia, such the snap elections in Kosovo, and the presidential elections in Serbia. The delay in forming the government in Kosovo, dragging feet to appoint a new interlocutor responsible for the dialogue with Serbia has had its share of impact in the overall stagnation. The attention toward internal political issues has also contributed to limited to no efforts in implementing the existing agreements by both sides.

The presidential campaign in Serbia made Kosovo a “fruitful” for the candidates running for president to endorse nationalist rhetoric - an aggressive approach with major impact on citizens opinions toward Serbia. Conflict prevention state of mind triggered by the so-called train incident, has had a significant impact in the attitude toward the dialogue. The train bearing Serbian national symbols, including strong political statements such as Kosovo is Serbia in 21 different languages – including Albanian, attempted to enter Kosovo from Serbia (through the train tracks connecting to Serbia in the north). The train eventually was stopped by the one person standing behind this idea- the Serbian president, after clear responded by Prishtina warning to stop the train from entering Kosovo. This move has been considered as a pure provocation from the Kosovo side – moreover – it prompted fears that heated nationalist rhetoric will escalate into another armed conflict. This incident marked the most hostile exchanges between the two sides, especially since the launch of the dialogue. This incident re-confirmed the obstructive approach of Serbia toward Kosovo, while it diminished the expectations that the dialogue will eventually soften Serbia’s approach toward Kosovo. Moreover, it showed how fragile the EU imposed “normalization” is in reality, and the artificial “progress” that the parties were selling to the EU without making political efforts to change the situation in the ground. 2017 marks the year of the dashed hopes that the EU facilitated dialogue will lead to Kosovo’s recognition by Serbia. Furthermore, the incidents in the northern part of Kosovo, mostly related to the concrete wall built by the Serb authorities has reinstated the ethnic based division in Mitrovica. The agreement to remove the wall was reached in Brussels, a lengthy meeting that aimed to defuse the tensions between Kosovo and Serbia.

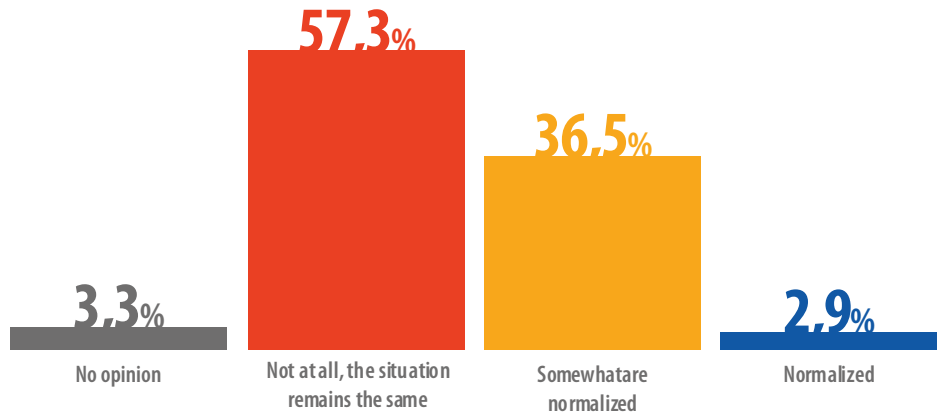
Agreements signed for the sake of “progress” in the EU integration path for both sides, the constructive ambiguity – or the sign the agreements and later agree on the content – can also be considered the key reasons behind the failure to stay finish to what was agreed in Brussels. In the case of Kosovo, lack of consensus among parties on key points of agreements has led to political crisis and stagnation in implementation of agreements.

The events that have fuelled the negative perceptions that the dialogue is not leading to normalization, is linked to the arrests of the Kosovo citizens – both based on the arrest warrants issued by Serbia in Interpol, but also of those who travelled through Serbia, based on the EU freedom of movement agreement. The arrest of the former leader of the opposition, now Kosovo's Prime Minister, Mr. Haradinaj, has sparked many debates in Kosovo. The constant request of Serbia toward French authorities – who arrested Mr. Haradinaj – to extradite him in Serbia for about five months has created the perception that Serbia continues the aggressive approach toward Kosovo.

Among Serbian respondents, around 61 per cent declared that the dialogue has not changed the situation. The Kosovo Serbs represent the only group highly depending on the dialogue, but also expecting concrete results from it. However, they are the least involved in the process to convey their expectations, but they were political “instrumentalised” by both parties, without hesitation – parties that so far presented zero strategy on how to integrate the Serbian population living in the north of Kosovo.

On the other hand, a rather smaller group, consisting of 36.5 per cent of the respondents (37.6 per cent among Albanians, and 18.0 per cent among the Serbian respondents) believe that the dialogue produced limited results toward normalization. This approach, among Albanian respondents was based on the freedom of movement agreement, the most tangible results deriving from the dialogue. The same group of the respondents believe that the most challenging part was to bring the parties together to discuss normalization, and by doing so, the EU has already yielded results in the process. The Serbian respondents appeared to be more hesitant when referring to a specific case of success. The freedom of movement component does not apply to them as there is limited progress in increasing mobility within Kosovo (very poor connectivity of the north- mostly inhabited by Serbs, with the south of Kosovo). A very small percentage of the respondents believe that the agreements have had an impact and normalized relations between Kosovo and Serbia, thus reflecting an “elitist” driven process totally detached to citizens necessities.

Public Perception on the Normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia



Public Perception on the Normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia

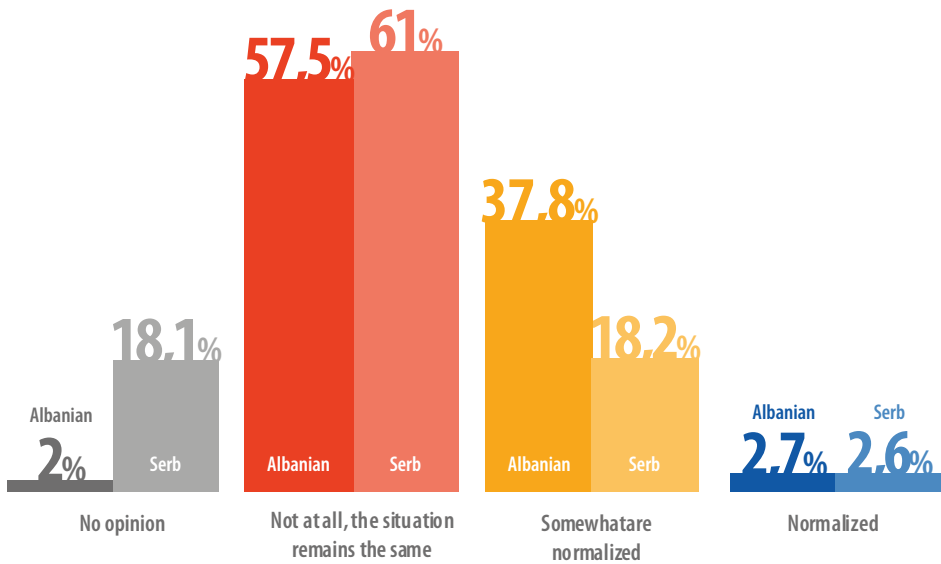


Figure 16 Perceptions on Normalization of Relations between Kosovo and Serbia

4.3. The impact of the Association/ Community of the Serbian municipalities

The agreement on the establishment of the Association of Serb Majority Municipalities (ASMM) was signed by both parties in August 2015 under the auspices of the political phase of the dialogue. Rapidly, the content and the intent of this agreement sparked

debates between the government and the opposition in Kosovo. This agreement had a multi-dimensional impact in Kosovo; the external impact is related to the commitment to implement the agreements in Brussels, and the ultimatums from Belgrade – committing to unilaterally establish the Association without Prishtina's consent.

Internally, the ASSM – seen as a similar model to the one of the Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina, raised fears on the future impact on the internal functioning of Kosovo. A mistake made by creating the single party representation for the Serbian minority in Kosovo such as the "Lista Srpska", working solely on Belgrade's directives, an Association with executive powers would further strengthen the possibility and fear that the association will very shortly be "instrumentalized" by Belgrade to internally disrupt political processes in Kosovo. Moreover, a separate ethnically - based association would contribute to further isolation of the Kosovo Serbs from Kosovo Albanians, thus against the multi-ethnicity state in the Constitution of Kosovo.

The agreement on the Association, and the status of it became one of the reasons which led to the political deadlock in Kosovo and increased dissatisfaction with the government in Kosovo, the benefits and the future of the dialogue with Serbia. The agreement has been sent to the Constitutional Court for review. The courts' decision, albeit written in vague language – similarly to the ambiguous content of the agreement, found it not compliance with the Constitution of Kosovo in five points.

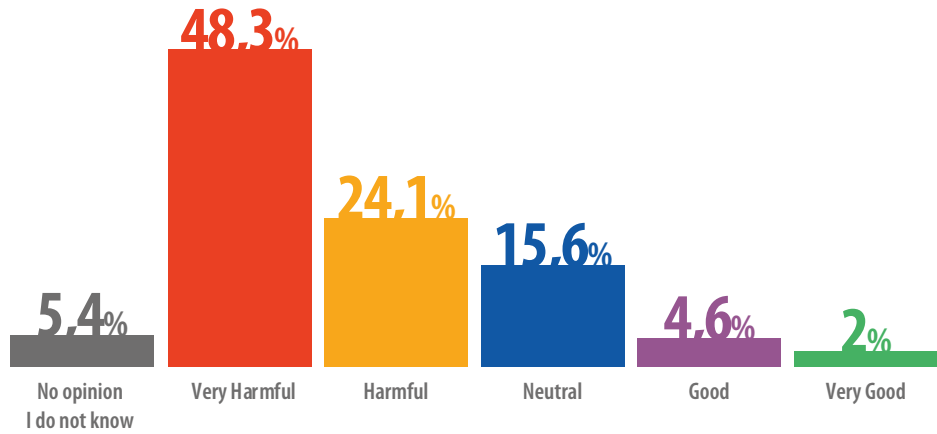
Facing a political deadlock, snap elections, conflicted attitudes toward the Association, and fear of more extended influence of Serbia in Kosovo's internal issues, the majority of the respondents shared negative perceptions when asked about the Association. Around 73.0 per cent of the respondents believe that the Association is a very harmful agreement which is going to have a significant impact in Kosovo's internal functioning. It is imperative to mention that a very limited percentage of the Serbian respondents, around 6.0 per cent, believe that the Association will have a negative impact in Kosovo. Being left out of the dialogue process, used politically by both Prishtina and Belgrade, the Serbian minority in Kosovo seems to have high expectations on the Association.

Around 15.6 per cent of the respondents believe that it is neutral. The neutral option in the scaling most of the times indicated lack of information, or lack of capability to foresee what the Association is going to bring, it also indicates that the respondents lack information in this regard. To this, the constructive ambiguity approach of the EU has had a significant impact.

On the other hand, the percentage of those believing that the Association will have a positive impact in the internal functioning of Kosovo is quite high among the Serbian minority. Around 50.0 per cent of the Serbian respondents believe that it is positive,

seeing the Association as a tool to get their messages conveyed and their lives improved in Kosovo. It is of crucial importance to mention that among Serbian respondents, quite a high percentage of around 25.0 per cent, refused to give an opinion in this regard, clearly reflecting hesitation to see the Association as a game changer mechanism in Kosovo.

Public Perception on the Establishment of the Association of Serbian Municipalities in Kosovo



Public Perception on the Establishment of the Association of Serbian Municipalities in Kosovo

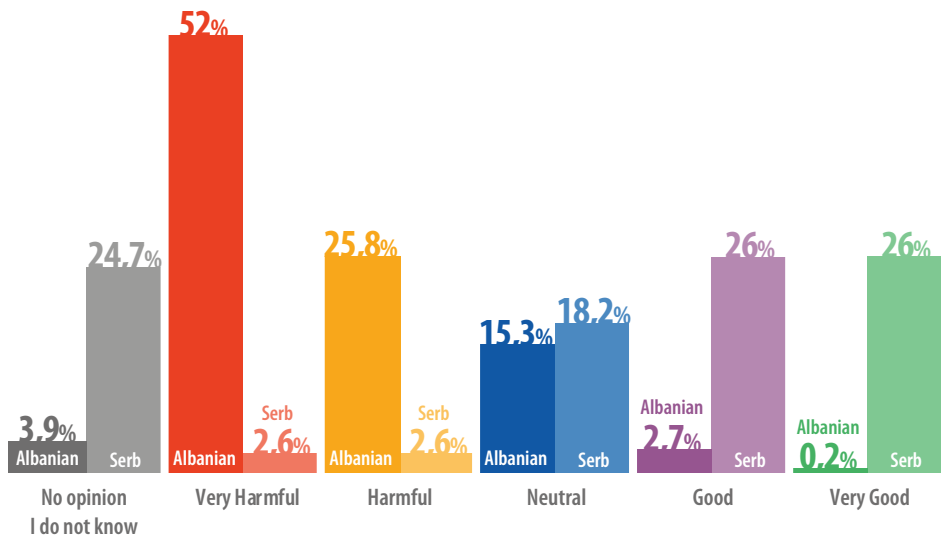


Figure 17 Perceptions on the Association of the Association of Serbian Municipalities in Kosovo

4.4. Who is winning it?

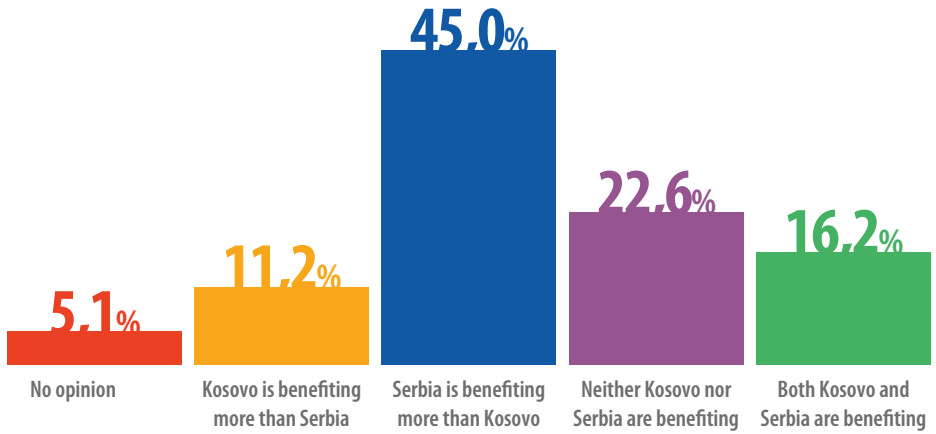
Each round of the dialogue listed winners and losers of the round of the dialogue. Constructive ambiguity played a very significant role in neutralising the competition between parties and public opinions in both sides. The carefully crafted texts have given the opportunity for each party to claim victory and triumphalism. Lack of transparency led to misconceptions among citizens, and the diplomatic wording of the EU, alongside local biased media, did not provide sufficient information for the general public.

When asked the question who is benefiting more from the dialogue, each party showed tendency to consider the other one as a winner. This perception has been developed mainly due to lack of sufficient information about the dialogue, lack of trust toward respective governments, and the EU constructive ambiguity. The main criteria used to measure the others' sides benefits from the dialogue varied from one side to the other, nevertheless, the common denominator was the progress in the EU integration process. Thus, 48.5 per cent of the Albanian respondents believe that Serbia is benefiting more than Kosovo, this highly refers to the EU perspective for Serbia as the frontrunner in the EU integration process. But only 5.3 per cent of the Serbs have considered Serbia to be a winner, this is linked with the status of Kosovo, the feeling of losing something big to progress in the EU integration path. Around 29.33 of the Serbian respondents believe that Kosovo is benefiting more than Serbia, and only 9.4 per cent of Albanian respondents only believe that to be the case. The small percentage of those believing that Kosovo is benefiting – among Albanian respondents – refer to the Stabilization Association Agreement, which according to them opens the EU membership perspective for Kosovo.

Around 21.7 per cent of Albanians and 33.3 per cent of Serbs believe that neither of the parties is benefiting, seeing the dialogue more of an EU agenda to gain global credibility as a negotiator. On the other hand, 16.0 per cent of Albanians and 12.0 of Serbs see this process as beneficial for both parties, claiming that it will solve the biggest bilateral dispute in the region, and will clear path toward the EU.

A solid 20.0 of the Serbian respondents refused to answer this question, which reflects upon their level of knowledge about the process, followed by 4.0 per cent of Albanian respondents choosing to not answer the question.

Public Perception on the Outcome of the Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia



Public Perception on the Outcome of the Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia

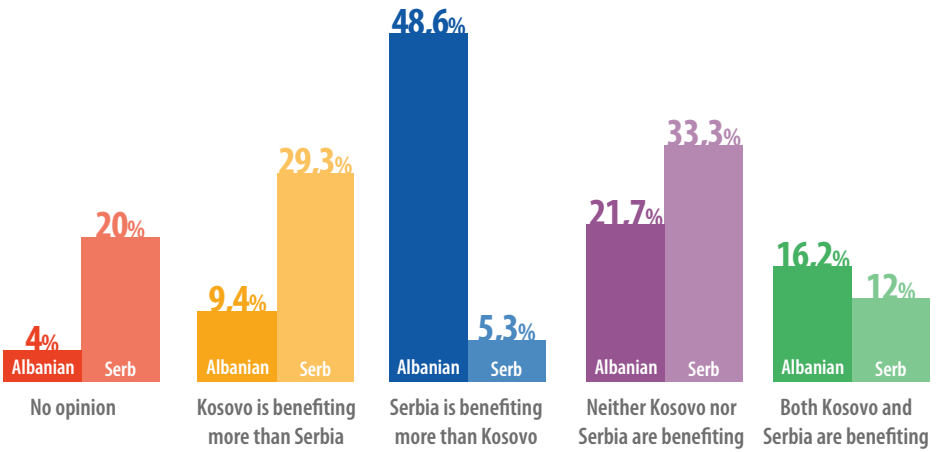


Figure 18 Perceptions on outcome of the dialogue

Annex on Methodology

- The Kosovo Security Barometer (KSB) is a specific program of the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS) established in September 2012.
- Its primary focus is to measure public's trust toward security and justice institutions in Kosovo as well as to measure citizens' perception of the internal and external security threats posed to Kosovo.
- The KSB is the first and the largest undertaking of this kind designed, implemented, and communicated by a local think tank in Kosovo.
- The KSB's uniqueness in Kosovo is its political neutrality. As an independent think-tank, KCSS has no political constraints in communicating any of the findings and messages of the survey.
- The KSB is a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods that provides objective and credible results.
- Its data are collected through face-to-face interviews with randomly selected respondents conducted by KCSS field researchers throughout the entire Kosovo.
- The KSB questionnaire mostly consisted of closed-ended questions in the form of five-point Likert Scale, followed by several open-ended questions that allow respondents to provide their thoughts without predefined options.
- KCSS teams of 22 field researchers conducted the sampling, piloting, and the interviews. The national sample from which the research was drawn featured 1,125 households, following a representative sample of the population above 18 years old in Kosovo.
- The ethnic breakdown of the interviewed respondents was: 90 percent K-Albanian, 7 percent K-Serbian, and 3 percent others (Turks, Bosnians, Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians, Gorans, Croats, and Montenegrins) mirroring Kosovo's ethnic make-up.
- The sample frame was based upon telephone code areas, and, as such included the following 8 regions: Ferizaj, Gjakova, Gjilan, Mitrovica South, Mitrovica North, Peja, Prishtina and Prizren.
- The first stage of geographical clustering was based on the 2012 Kosovo Census Report. The second stage involved clustering samples by municipal area with a stratified rural/urban sample as per the number of households. The

last stage followed a random sampling method using the nearest 'birthday method.'

- Random sampling ensures that each resident in Kosovo has an equal probability of being chosen for an interview. With the sample used for this study, the results of the survey mirror trends in attitudes and perceptions amongst the entire adult population of Kosovo in general. The margin of error is 3 percent with a confidence interval of 95 percent.
- A pilot interview was conducted in mid-September 2017 to test the feasibility of the questionnaire prior to the commencement of fieldwork. The research team subsequently reported that the pilot interview was successful, and no problems were encountered with the pilot instrument. All interviews were completed from 5th until 11th of October 2017. Data processing and analysis has been completed using the SPSS software.
- Perceptions presented in this report are a summary of information gathered from respondents and it demonstrates how people perceive the Kosovo institutions

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