

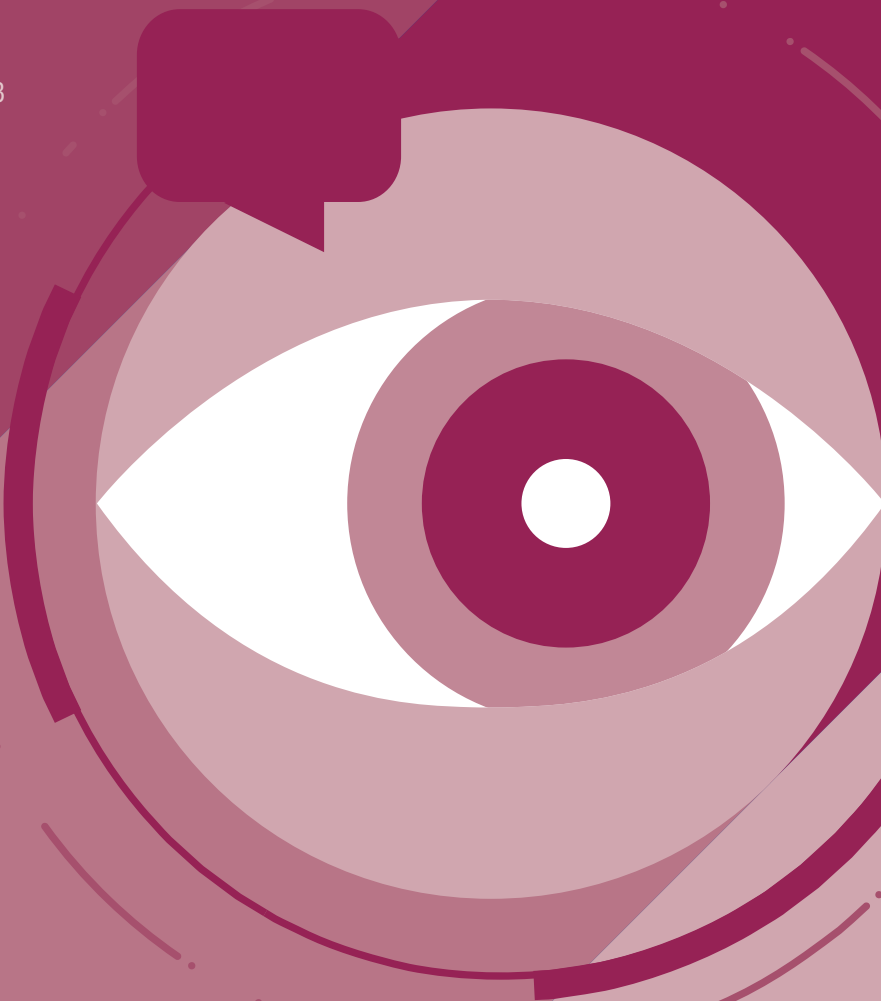


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# KOSOVO SECURITY BAROMETER

DE-CONSTRUCTING PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS  
Kosovo's foreign policy and dialogue with Serbia

DECEMBER 2018







# KOSOVO SECURITY **BAROMETER**

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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).

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# KEY FINDINGS

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Among all countries listed in the questionnaire, **Albania** is perceived as the friendliest country toward Kosovo. 86.4 per cent have declared to consider Albania as Kosovo's main strategic partner and ally. **Croatia** has been listed as the second regional strategic partner for Kosovo after Albania. Around 73.0 per cent of the citizens have seen Croatia from a positive prism. This once again confirm the fact that Kosovar perceive Croatia as the main ally within the EU.

**Macedonia** has marked the highest score in the past three years, almost half of the respondents, 50 per cent perceiving it as friendly country. This can directly be attributed to the internal functioning of the country after the last elections and the relationship with the Albanian community within Macedonia. Half of the respondents, 48.1 per cent believe that **Montenegro** is a friendly strategic partner for Kosovo, this positive perception can be attributed to the "political patience" shown in Podgorica in relation to the border demarcation agreement with Kosovo.

**Bosnia and Herzegovina** has been seen positively by around 36.0 per cent perceive it as a friendly country. The vast majority share negative perception toward BeH considering their alignment with Serbia strongly opposing Kosovo's independence and not hesitating to block Kosovo in regional initiatives.

In the brink of another war, this is the most common phrase widely used by the respondents when asked to qualify the relations between Kosovo and Serbia. The results of the KSB 2018 once again re-confirm the fact that over 85.0 per cent of the respondents consider **Serbia** as a very hostile country toward Kosovo. In addition, **Serbia** has been listed as the biggest external security threat to Kosovo.

A vast majority of the respondents, around 86.0 per cent strongly believe that the **United States of America (USA)** is the key strategic partner for Kosovo. Moreover, the respondents have openly declared in favour of more US involvement in the process of dialogue with Serbia. Moreover, the US support in the efforts to complete the transformation of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) into armed forces has had a major impact in shaping the positive attitude among the respondents.

**Germany** has been ranked on top of all EU countries, with 89.6 per cent of the respondents perceiving Germany as the main strategic ally within the EU. One of the key factors behind this positive perception has derived from the "open labour market" approach that Germany has been promoting in Kosovo.

Around 70.0 per cent believe that **Turkey** is a friendly partner toward Kosovo. There was a decrease in positive approach toward Turkey. The factors behind this decrease are highly related to the case of the six Turkish citizens arrested in Kosovo over Gulen links and extradited to Turkey with the demand from the Turkish president.

**UK** has been seen from positive prism by 80.0 per cent of the respondents. This reflects high expectations toward the increased number of bilateral programs focusing on strengthening the statehood building process in Kosovo. **France** is perceived mostly neutral, the hesitation toward France can be attributed to the proactive role of France in supporting the territorial exchange idea, followed by a lukewarm diplomatic relation between Kosovo and France – especially due to France’s hesitation in the visa liberalization process.

Around 80.4 per cent perceive **Russia** as a very hostile country toward Kosovo. The negative trending is attributed to the close diplomatic ties between Russia and Serbia. The continuous support from Russia has provided Serbia with a good negotiating positioning and solid bargaining chip toward the EU. This positioning has been considered as the key factor behind limited to non-existent political benefits for Kosovo from this process.

On the question who is benefiting more from the dialogue, a tendency to list the other party as a winner is highly present among the respondents. A collective paranoia generated from the lack of transparency created the perception that the dialogue is bringing political benefits to the “opponents” only. Henceforth, almost half of the respondents have declared that Serbia is benefiting more than Kosovo in this process.

In the eyes of the Kosovar Albanian respondents, the Association of the Serbian Majority Municipalities has been seen as a Republika Srpska scenario for Kosovo. Furthermore, it has raised fears on the future impact on the internal functioning of Kosovo being perceived as the Belgrade’s plan to extend their political influence in Kosovo. Hence, almost 80.0 per cent of the respondents believe that the ASSM poses direct risk to the internal functioning of Kosovo as a country.

Following the debate on who should lead the dialogue in Kosovo. Responding to an open ended question, around 15.0 per cent believe that the dialogue should be led by the President of Kosovo Hashim Thaçi. With slightly less support, 11.5 per cent of the respondents have listed Albin Kurti from Vetvendosje political party believing that he is highly skilled and capable to lead the dialogue. The fact that a vast majority of the respondents have suggested leaders rather than state institutions such as the Government by 4.24 per cent and Assembly 5.71 per cent is a key indicator of the necessity to have “strong men” behind the process.

A vast majority of the respondents, almost 81.0 per cent of the citizens have declared that the territorial exchange will not provide a long lasting solution between Kosovo and Serbia. Those who have answered yes to the territorial exchange idea have been following the President’s discourse on exchange northern part of Kosovo with southern part of Serbia.

Albeit, still in favour of the EU integration process. Half of the respondents believe that the Government of Kosovo is not successfully following its EU integration agenda. This disappointment has been present following the visa liberalization process and the limited implementation of the SAA.

Over 82.0 per cent of the respondents have declared to be pro NATO membership. This attitude is deeply rooted in the NATO intervention in former Yugoslavia and the KFOR mission as one of the key security providers alongside the KSF.

# INTRODUCTION

International system in the past ten years, since the declaration of the independence of Kosovo (2018), has experienced enormous changes. Multilateralism – the sole platform where small states have had the chance to enjoy more power and prestige – is being slowly ditched as many, once successful, international mechanisms are facing serious challenges. These developments have had a strong impact in the international political constellation. Moreover, it further adds to the complexity of Kosovo which is still seeking international recognition and membership in key international mechanisms.

In 2018, Kosovo has marked the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its independence. This milestone has called for reflection on the progress in completing the state-building process, challenges in the internal functioning of the country in various aspects starting from political, economical, societal trends and developments. Among myriad issues subject to discussion on the occasion of the tenth anniversary, Kosovo's foreign policy has been listed as the top priority by policy-makers and the think tank community. International recognition, non-recognizers within the EU, lack of success in obtaining membership in the international organizations continued to put the Kosovar diplomacy into test. In addition, ten years after, Kosovo is struggling with a new phenomenon, the "de-recognition" factor has opened new diplomatic fronts with Serbia. To make the situation even more complex, in the auspices of the EU facilitated dialogue with Serbia, ten years after the independence of Kosovo and eight after the ICJ decision on this matter, Kosovo has opened the chapter of territorial exchange or potential partition – the least expected political agenda to be followed by Kosovo – which has triggered many debates in the public opinion.

Facing challenges in several diplomatic fronts, Kosovo's vaguely established diplomacy did not demonstrate serious capacities to address all the abovementioned challenges successfully. The main focus and efforts in foreign policy has been oriented toward the EU facilitate dialogue with Serbia, consequently the dialogue became the sole avenue for Kosovo's foreign policy. The ongoing dialogue with Serbia is keeping international recognitions on hold, has made Serbia the sole avenue for Kosovo's foreign policy, and most concerning among all, has re-opened the debate over the territory and the status of Kosovo.

The foreign policy escapades of the newly established diplomacy of Kosovo have taken a rather dramatic turn. Kosovo received a relatively low number of international recognitions in the past years, while ten years after its independence Kosovo it still strug-

gling to be recognized by the five EU member states and the UN membership is a very distant foreign policy goal given the strong opposition by China and Russia in the UNSC.

Reaching favourable outcome in foreign policy such as obtaining recognition and establishing bilateral relations has been mission impossible for Kosovo's diplomacy. Owing to its constant internal political crisis and frequent election cycles in Kosovo, the long lasting and exhausting process of dialogue with Serbia, paired with the change in the global order, Kosovo has had harder time yielding tangible results in foreign policy. On the other hand, membership in other international mechanisms seems to remain on hold for Kosovo, this due to lack of proactive approach of the government and aggressive campaign against Kosovo led by Serbia.

Against this background, the foreign policy does not seem to be only the concern of policy-makers and the think tank community, but also for the ordinary citizens. Witnessing a strong reaction by the public opinion the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies continues to narrow 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. For the purpose of the trends, the main survey questions remained unchanged. KCSS continues to measure the way regional and international strategic partners of Kosovo are seen in the eye of its citizens, how does an average citizen of Kosovo perceive the pool of external influences in the Western Balkans and Kosovo specifically and what is the opinion toward the EU and NATO memberships. Similarly to the previous editions, KCSS has given a special focus to the EU facilitated dialogue with Serbia. However, following the debates over the potential epilogue of the dialogue, KCSS has included additional questions related to the legally bindings agreement and the leading negotiator on Kosovo's side.

Hereafter, the special edition covers the following dimensions:

- Public perceptions toward relevant regional and international actors;
- Public perceptions toward external influences in Kosovo and Euro-Atlantic alliances;
- Public perceptions toward the EU facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia



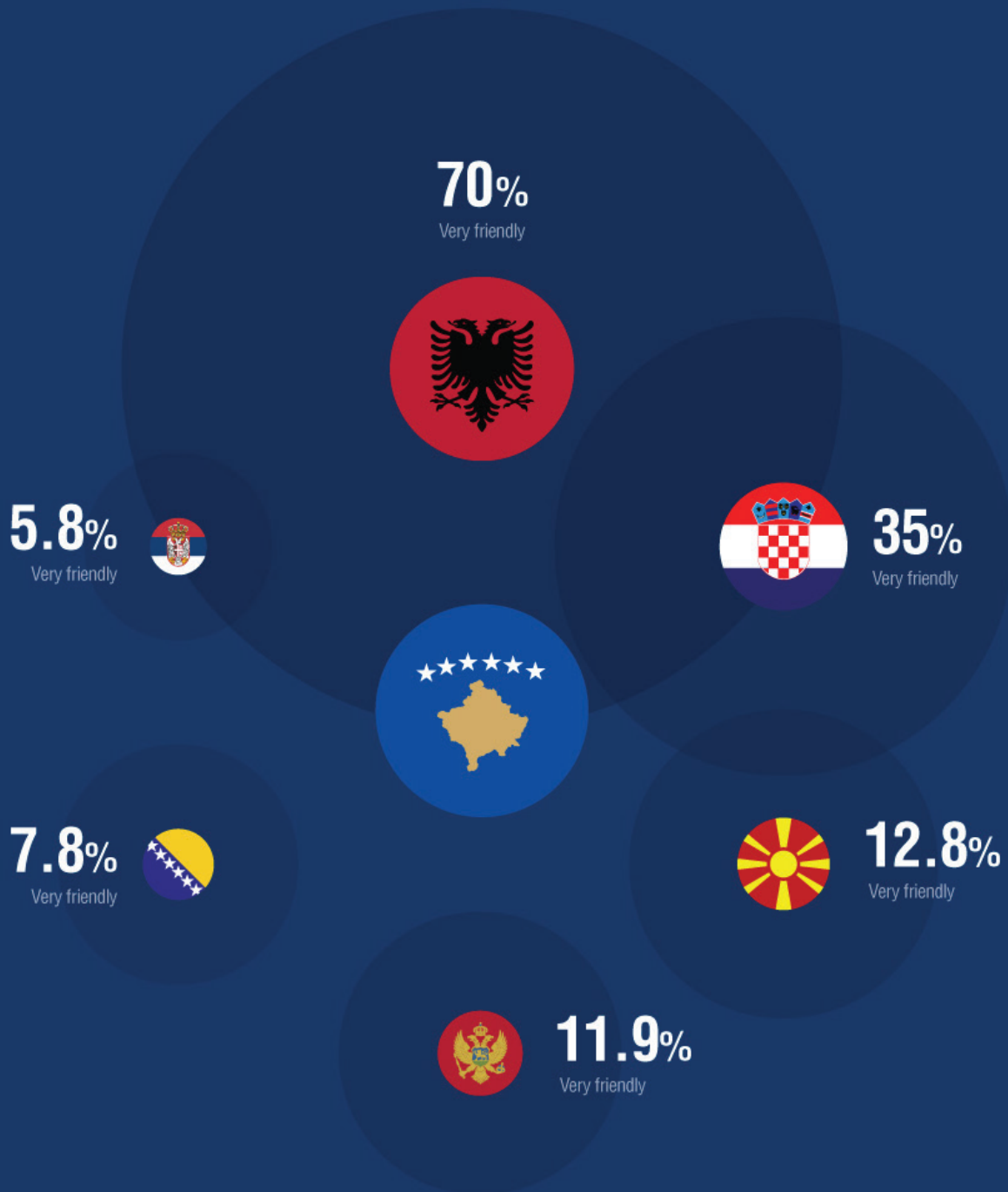
# **SEARCHING STRATEGIC PARTNERS**

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## **BILATERALISM AND MULTILATERALISM IN THE EYES OF THE KOSOVARARS**

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## KOSOVO'S MAIN STRATEGIC PARTNER AND ALLY



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## GOOD NEIGHBOURLY RELATIONS: Kosovo between scattered, complex, and well-established diplomatic ties

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Western Balkans is a volatile region; many countries of the region still have unresolved bilateral disputes. The ongoing dispute remain insurmountable obstacles, thus cooperation between Balkan countries remains limited – with some even posing economic embargo toward each other. In addition, freedom of movement, mobility and people to people communication remains one of the key challenges. Many EU projects and initiatives have been introduced to foster and facilitate cooperation in the Western Balkan. Furthermore, good neighbourly relations have been an integral part of the EU integration process as this principle was translated into an important accession condition in EU enlargement policy.

In the case of Kosovo, regional cooperation is an even more challenging process, lacking recognition by two regional countries such as Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina – which did not show hesitance in blocking Kosovo's presence in regional platforms, lack of freedom of movement and economic embargo further add to the complexity of the regional spirit. On the other hand, Kosovo's cooperation with the recognizers within the region remains at a satisfactory level, albeit it is challenged by the political events occurring sporadically such as the demarcation agreement with Montenegro.

The list of regional states included in the survey has remained unchanged from the previous editions;

it consists of the neighbouring countries – those 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 alignment with Serbia in relation to Kosovo; and Croatia due to its support in the state-building process, Kosovo defence and foreign policy, but also as a strategic partner within the EU.

The respondents were asked to rate the diplomatic 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. The countries included in the survey have been intentionally clustered based on the the key findings of this KSB 2018 edition. The chapter starts with the country having most intense relations with Kosovo such as Albania, followed by Macedonia and Montenegro for which the respondents seemed to share rather neutral opinions. The section continues with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, albeit not sharing borders with Kosovo, are relevant for the public opinion and overall Kosovo's foreign policy. Lastly, the section continues with Serbia, being qualified as a very hostile country toward Kosovo.

## 1.1 Beyond partnership: Albania in the eyes of Kosovar respondents

Among all countries listed in the questionnaire, Albania is perceived as the friendliest country toward Kosovo. The pattern of positive attitude toward Albania remains almost unchanged from the previous KSB editions. The KSB 2018 results show that a vast majority of the respondents, 86.4 per cent, have declared to consider Albania as Kosovo’s main strategic partner and ally. It is imperative to mention that this positive perception is not present among Serbian respondents, hence the negative perception toward Albania is mainly present among the Kosovo Serbs respondents.

A closer look into the main drivers and factors shaping the public opinion toward Albania shows that strongest element behind the positive perception is deeply rooted in the common national, historical and traditional sentiments. The qualitative feedback from field researchers shows that Albania is the most frequented country by Kosovars, henceforth a large portion of perceptions has been developed over the years and it is based on the personal experience of the respondents. In addition, the extensive cooperation in

culture has diminished borders between Kosovo and Albania. In hindsight, this has been the first and most successful cooperation between Kosovo and Albania, and it did not go unnoticed by the respondents.

In addition to the aforementioned elements, the feedback gathered through focus groups with field researchers confirms that the political aspect plays a crucial role behind positive perceptions. Albania remains the only country in the region fully supporting without any hesitation the political undertakings of Kosovo in international arena. This applies to the participation of Kosovo in regional platforms, in which Albania has proactively engaged to include Kosovo, also to political support provide in Kosovo’s aspiration to pursue membership in the international organizations. Regardless of the end result deriving from this cooperation, it is the symbolic meaning behind these efforts that matters more than the tangible strategic outcome in the eyes of the respondents.

On the other hand, the intensity of bilateral meetings in all levels of policy makers, civil society and the media has played a central role in this regard. Whereas, the proactive engagement of young professionals from Kosovo within the government of Albania has created a perception that Albania supports and offers solid platforms for Kosovars to establish their careers in politics beyond borders. Having a number of young professionals, mainly coming from the civil society background, who joined the government of Albania working as deputy ministers not only contributed to the exchange of experiences and expertise, but it has been seen as a good avenue to foster bilateral cooperation between Kosovo and Albania. Furthermore, Kosovars were actively engaged in key sectors such as the foreign policy, education, tourism, and health, where enhanced cooperation between the two countries is essential in the near future.

Opposing to the positive perceptions, around 5.0 per cent have shared neutral perceptions toward Albania, these hesitations have been more present among Kosovar Albanians who have shared sceptic approach toward the current government in Albania. The feedback from field shows that this hesitation is attributed to the perception that Albania has been using Kosovo politically to re-gain importance in the region – toward Serbia but also toward the EU. Where-

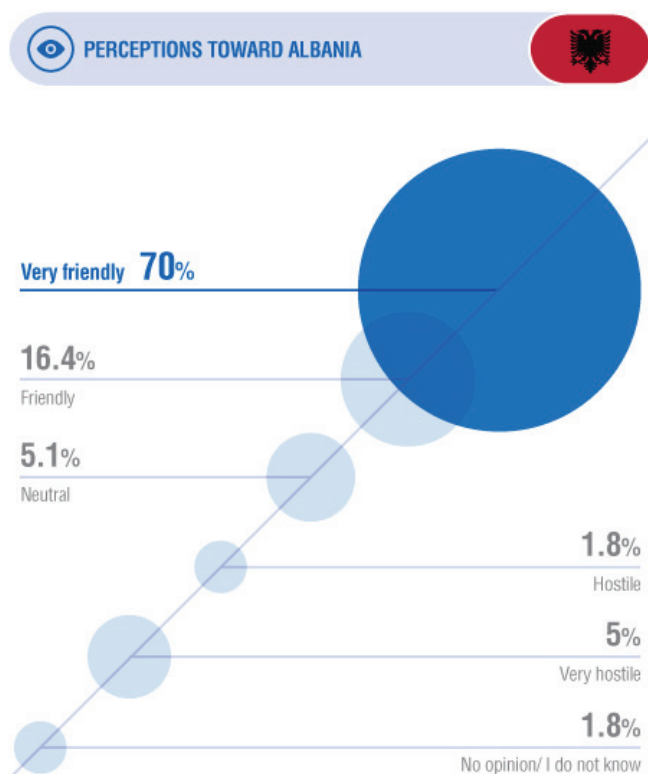


Figure 1 - Perceptions toward Albania

as a rather small portion of the respondents or 7.0 per cent – if put in numbers – believe that Albania is a hostile country toward Kosovo, this approach has been more present among Kosovo Serbs. In cases when this answer was provided by the Kosovar Albanians, the reasoning behind this was rooted on the fear of the “re-establishing political relations with between Serbia and Albania” and the rather vague and belated response toward the new developments in the framework of the EU facilitated dialogue with Serbia and potential deal that would include territorial exchange.

## 1.2 Kosovo in relation to Macedonia and Montenegro: the golden neutrality

Macedonia and Montenegro have been listed as rather neutral countries towards Kosovo. The citizens’ perceptions toward these countries has moved along the same lines in the past editions showing no significant change in the attitude of the respondents. As shown in figure 2 and 3, the overall perceptions when asked about Macedonia and Montenegro remain positive with a slight tilt toward neutral positioning of them toward Kosovo.

When asked about Macedonia, the percentage of the respondents who have qualified it as friendly toward Kosovo has marked the highest score in the past three years. With almost half of the respondents, 50 per cent, Macedonia has been clearly seen from a more positive lens that can directly be attributed to the internal functioning of the country after the last elections. The change in the political constellation in Macedonia and the re-arrangement of the political positioning toward the Albanian community within the government can be listed as the key factor behind this perception. Macedonian foreign policy has been seen a more progressive as to the previous one. The change in attitude has been reflected in the stance of Macedonia toward some key political events involving Kosovo, specifically in the political debated related to the territorial exchange with Serbia. In addition to this, the frequency of mobility between citizens and trade cooperation – especially in the zones across the border - has been listed as yet another important reason widely used by the respondents in their qualitative feedback.

A large portion of the respondents’, around 39.0 per cent believe that Macedonia remains neutral toward Kosovo. For those who have selected this alternative, Macedonia has undertaken a serious step with the fact simply by being listed among the first batch of countries to recognize Kosovo, nevertheless they do not see deeper engagement in bilateral cooperation between the two countries.

This edition has witnessed a historic low 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, to further continue decreasing to less than 8.0 percent in 2018. The factors behind those considering Macedonia a hostile country have been related to the concern related to the positioning of the Albanian community in Macedonia fuelled by extensive debates over the law on the of languages – which has approved after many failed attempts.

Similar to previous KSB editions, the trends of citizens’ perceptions toward Montenegro remain unchanged. The percentage of the respondents believing that Montenegro is a friendly country toward Kosovo has increased significantly.

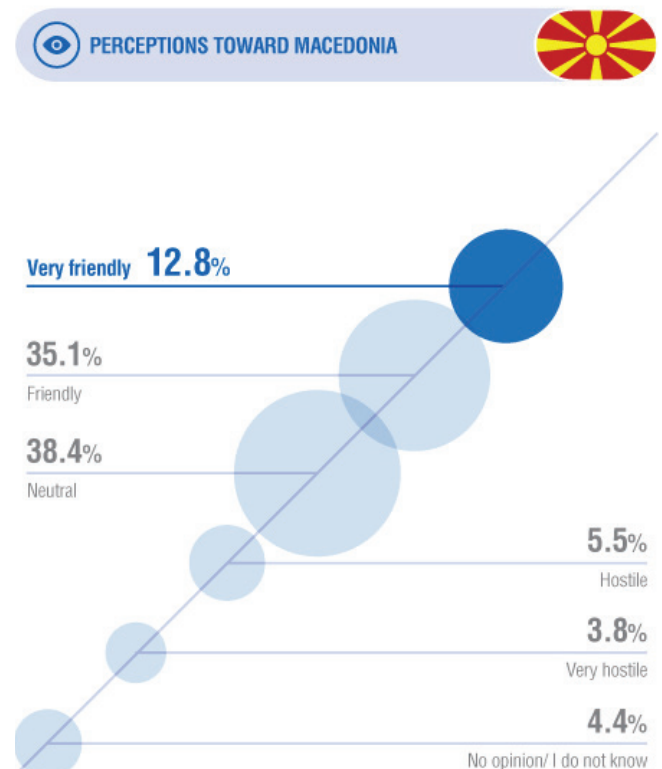


Figure 2 - Perceptions toward Macedonia

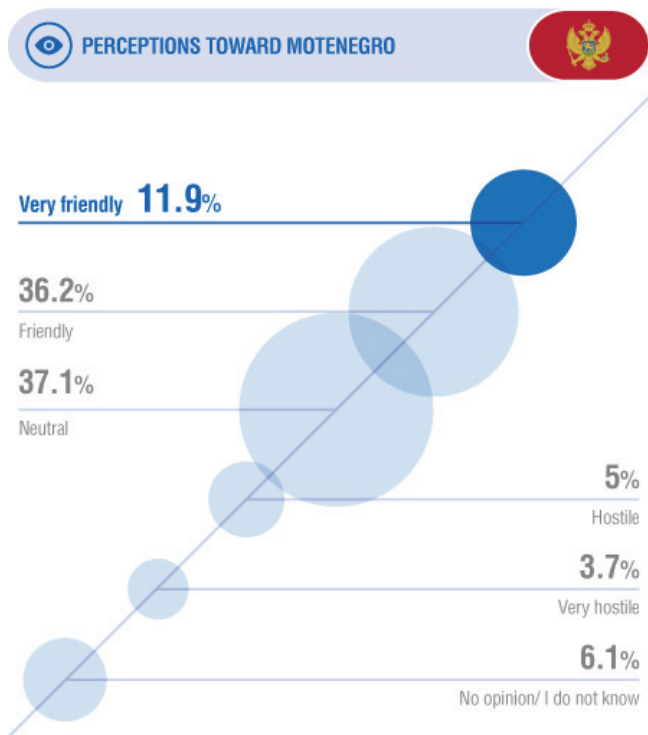


Figure 3 - Perceptions toward Montenegro

Half of the respondents, 48.1 per cent believe that Montenegro is a friendly strategic partner for Kosovo, this positive perception can be attributed to the “political patience” shown in Podgorica in relation to the border demarcation agreement with Kosovo. The qualitative feedback shows that the citizens have seen the problem in the margins of internal frictions among the political elite in Kosovo – the government and the opposition- and not as an open bilateral dispute with Montenegro.

The neutral approach expressed by around 37.1 per cent of the respondents can be attributed to the mobility, the close ties with the Albanian community living in Montenegro. Furthermore, it is rooted in the decision of Montenegro to recognize Kosovo in 2008, albeit bilateral cooperation remains limited and in the margins of trade cooperation. On the other hand, a small percentage of the respondents perceived Montenegro’s approach toward Kosovo as a hostile, by less than 9.0 per cent.

### 1.3 Kosovo in relation to Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina: shared past, uncommon future?

Incorporating Croatia in the questionnaire has been considered essential as the bilateral cooperation between Kosovo and Croatia has been solid, this cooperation has been intense and present among key sectors including here the political, security, economic and defence. It is imperative to highlight the significant increase in percentage of the respondents perceiving the attitude of Croatia toward Kosovo as a very friendly one. Among all countries from region listed in the questionnaire, Croatia has been listed as the second regional strategic partner for Kosovo after Albania. Around 73.0 per cent of the citizens have seen Croatia from a positive prism. This extensive positive attitude is embedded in the long lasting political support, cooperation in the defence sector and the overall support of Croatia in Kosovo’s effort to join the regional and international cooperation platforms.

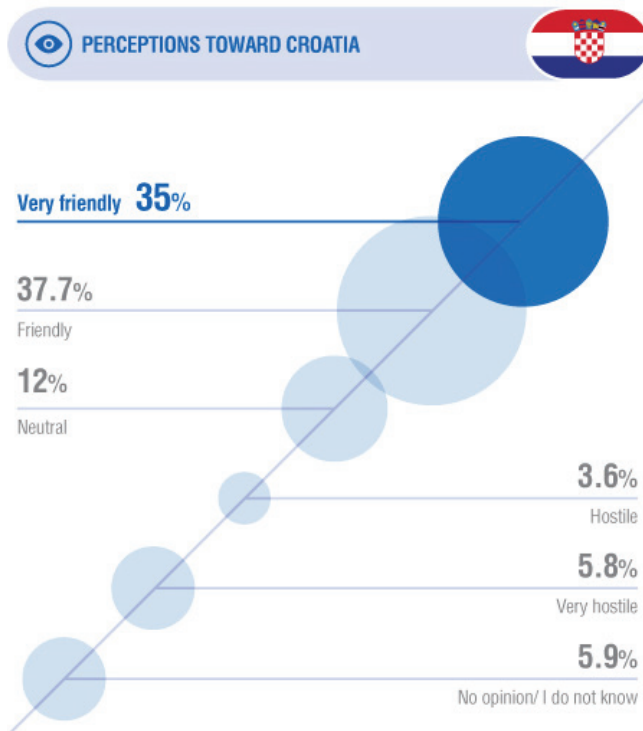


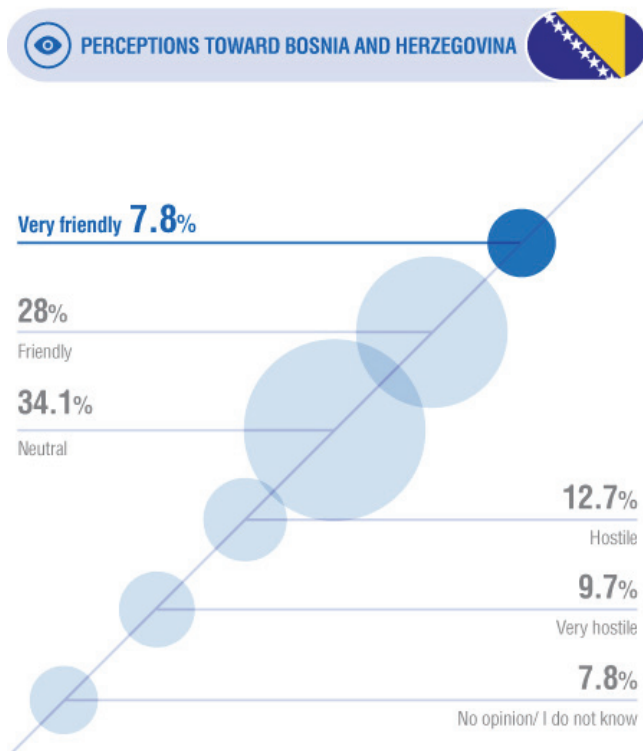
Figure 4 - Perceptions toward Croatia



The percentage of those considering Croatia as neutral rounds up to 12.0 per cent, followed by around 11.0 per cent who see it from a negative perspective. The neutral stance is explained by the respondents mainly by the high level of expectations toward Croatia, which then according to them, it had a lukewarm approach of Croatia within the EU –toward the Western Balkans in general.

Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo share a rather similarly complex story. While the overall political stance toward Kosovo among Bosnian entity has been softened in the past years, the vocal positioning of the leaders of Republika Srpska have led to a worrisome Serbian influenced policy toward Kosovo.

Considering the lack of diplomatic cooperation and stranded relations with BeH, when asked to rate the attitude of the latter toward Kosovo, quite a large portion of the respondents, around 36.0 per cent perceive it as a friendly country. Only 12.7 per cent of the respondents believe it is neutral toward Kosovo. Sharing a similar past and fate, especially with relation to the Serbian aggression can be listed as the key elements fuelling the positive approach, which is mainly based on compassion. Another reason behind these re-



**Figure 5 - Perceptions toward Bosnia and Herzegovina**

sults is related to the fact that the citizens are aware of the Bosnia complexity, hence they can easily 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 17.5 per cent of the respondents have shared negative perceptions when asked about BeH, mostly referring to the Serbian influence, the lack of bilateral relations, lack of freedom of movement of goods and people. Most importantly, the attitude aligned with Serbia toward Kosovo's independence has played a key role in shaping the negative perception toward BeH.

## 1.4. Relations with Serbia: in the brink of a war?

In the brink of another war, this is the most common phrase widely used by the respondents when asked to qualify the relations between Kosovo and Serbia. The results of the KSB 2018 once again re-confirm the fact that over 85.0 per cent of the respondents consider Serbia as a very hostile country toward Kosovo. In addition, Serbia has been listed as the biggest external security threat to Kosovo.

The negative approach of Serbia toward Kosovo reflects upon a deeply rooted conflict passed through generations and several decades of tensed relations between Kosovo and Serbia. These perceptions are build on the personal experience of the vast majority of the respondents who have been present during the war of 1999, and continued to witness the hostile approach of Serbia toward Kosovo in its state-building process.

The qualitative feedback from field research shows that the citizens perceive the negative approach of Serbia toward Kosovo in three different streams. Firstly, through the diplomatic battles in international arena and the game of powers within the EU facilitated dialogue. In this regard, the respondents believe that the obstructive role of Serbia has had a major impact in the process of gaining international recognition, de-recognitions from mostly African countries and the lack of progress in membership in international organizations. Secondly, the "Serbian List" factor, the highly influential Serbian political party which is integrated within

the current government of Kosovo. In the eyes of the respondents, the “Serbian List” functions under the directives of Belgrade and uses the political power and the privileges provided by the Ahtisaari Package to make Kosovo internally dysfunctional by blocking almost every large scale policy making initiative. The consecutive threats of the “Serbian List” to leave the government leading to snap elections have further contributed to the overall perception of its political influence and power in Kosovo. Thirdly, the aggressive nationalist rhetoric by the Serbian politicians has proved one the most concerning presumptions of the Kosovar Albanians respondents; it re-affirmed the fact that Serbia will not soften its approach toward Kosovo in the short run.

The key argument behind those qualifying Serbia as a very hostile country is the epilogue of the EU facilitated dia-

logue. The unexpected turn that the dialogue has taken in the brink of the field research, the debate over the territorial exchange or land swap deal, has further strengthened the negative perceptions toward Serbia, while the fear of it triggering another conflict has increased immensely.

A minor percentage of the respondents, around 8.0 per cent in average believe that Serbia is a friendly country toward Kosovo. Undoubtedly, this perception is present among the Kosovar Serbian respondents. The answer provided might be also based on the overall Serbian presence – especially in the northern part of Kosovo – through the parallel Serbian institutions providing services and generating income for the local Serbian community.

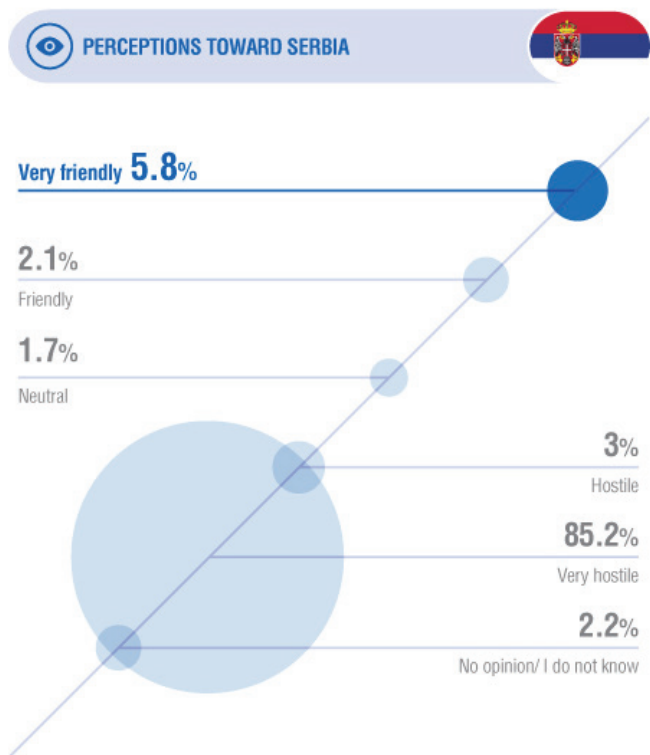


Figure 6 - Perceptions toward Serbia

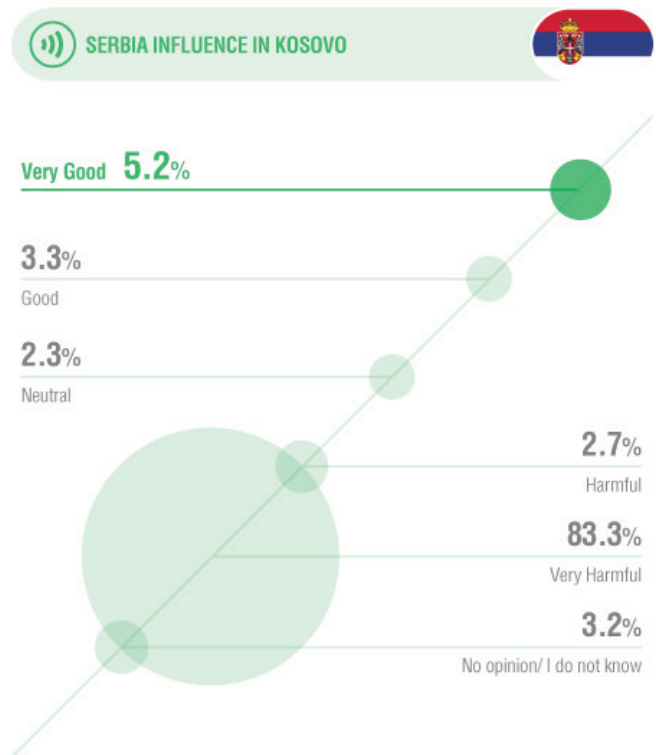


Figure 7 - Serbia influence in Kosovo



## KOSOVO'S MAIN INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIC PARTNER AND ALLY

3.2%

Very friendly



65%

Very friendly

3.4%

Very friendly



60.4%

Very friendly

23.5%

Very friendly



44.3%

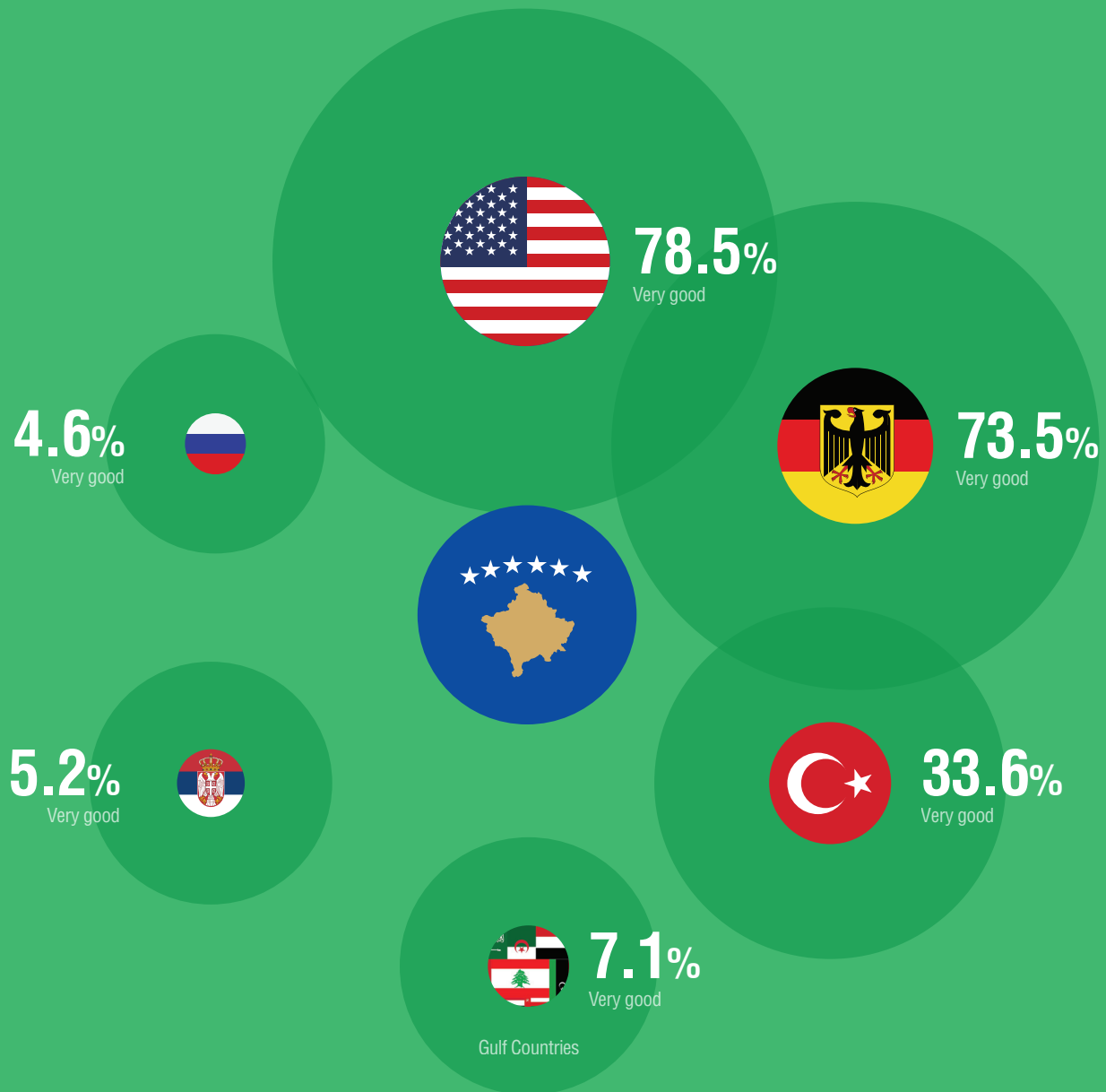
Very friendly



33.7%

Very friendly

## KOSOVO'S MAIN INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCERS



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## GLOBAL POWERS: Between alliances, partnerships, and fear

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Once again, the region is becoming a geostrategic chessboard for numerous external actors seeking to extend their presence and influence in the region. In addition to the EU agenda for which – at least – on paper all Balkan countries, including Kosovo, have declared to have been proactively following, a myriad of other external factors such as Russia, China, Turkey and the Gulf States are ramping up their political, economic and cultural influence in the region with a wide range of resources, intentions and interests. The US presence and the expansion of NATO, albeit in line with the EU or Western agenda, continues to take a large portion of attention not just by the policy makers and political elites but also from the public opinion in general.

International positioning of Kosovo and the frequency of diplomatic relations between Kosovo and the major powers have been discussed highly among public opinion in Kosovo. Carefully observing the changes in the international order, the challenges that the multilateral functioning of the world, the change in the US administrations, and internal EU crisis following the Brexit negotiations, as well as the role of the big powers (US and Russia) as the dialogue with Serbia is touching its end line, have determined the way the Kosovar respondents perceive the attitude of the listed countries toward Kosovo.

In Kosovo, the tenth independence anniversary has brought the process of establishing strategic partnerships and international alignment on top of the agenda. KCSS has continued to measure the perception of the citizens toward the main global players,

some with direct influence in Kosovo's foreign policy and given their role within the EU facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia – some even with crucial role in completing the statehood jigsaw internationally.

The list of countries listed in this section has remained unchanged, once again the qualitative feedback confirms that the perceptions toward these countries is rooted in the overall positioning of this countries toward Kosovo as a state, the intensity of diplomatic relations with Kosovo, and the levels of support or the opposition toward Kosovo in the international arena.

Perceptions in this section are rarely based on the personal experience, as it was the case with the regional countries. Hence, the role of the media as the key opinion maker should not be ignored in this regard. Differently from the previous KSB editions, this year the average respondent provided answer while being under the influence of the debates over the territorial exchange with Serbia, hence the opinion was highly based on the attitude of each country on this topic. In hindsight, this edition re-confirms the “pro western” approach in Kosovo, albeit with lesser enthusiasm. The public opinion (excluding the Serbian community in some cases) remains quite positive toward the Western powers and positive stance toward EU and NATO. Evidently, Russia and China – which for other countries in the region are seen as strategic partners – in Kosovo the overall public opinion remains negative.

## 2.1. Kosovo and the US: public perceptions toward the US influence in Kosovo under the new administration

When asked to qualify the United States of America (USA) approach toward Kosovo, a vast majority of the respondents, a solid 86.0 per cent strongly believe that the US the key strategic partner for Kosovo. In retrospective, all KSB editions have listed the US among the friendliest countries toward Kosovo. The qualitative feedback shows that this perception has been developed in the 1999 following the proactive and key role of the US in assuring NATO intervention in Kosovo. Additionally, the diplomatic support provided in the state-building process has further strengthened the positive approach toward the US. Last but not least, the KSB results this year show that the respondents view the Kosovo - US relations beyond the framework of the conventional bilateral relations; they perceive it more as one of the biggest ally and strategic partner for Kosovo. It is of crucial importance to mention the fact that differently from the previous editions, the respondents have openly declared in favour of more US involvement in the process of dialogue with Serbia. A vast majority of the respondents believe that only the US possesses the political capabilities to successfully end this process. Additionally, the US support in

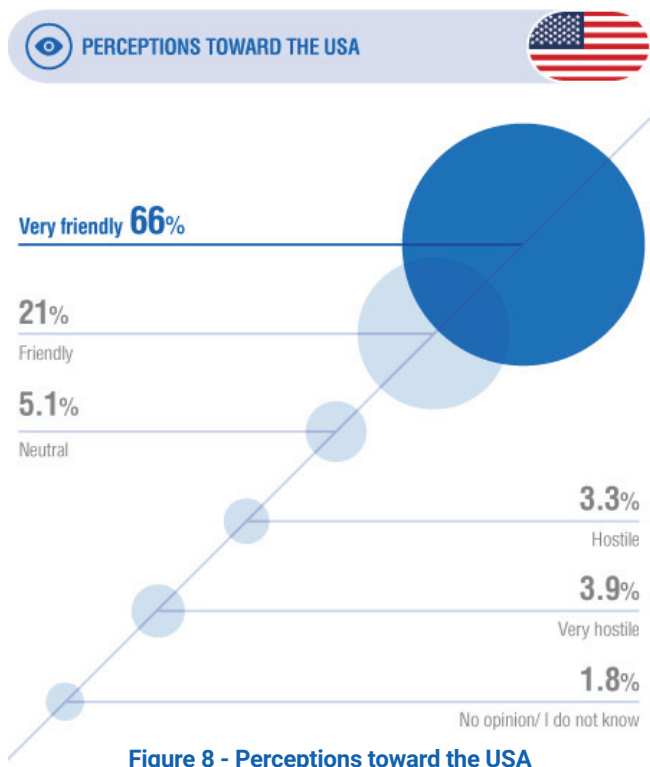


Figure 8 - Perceptions toward the USA

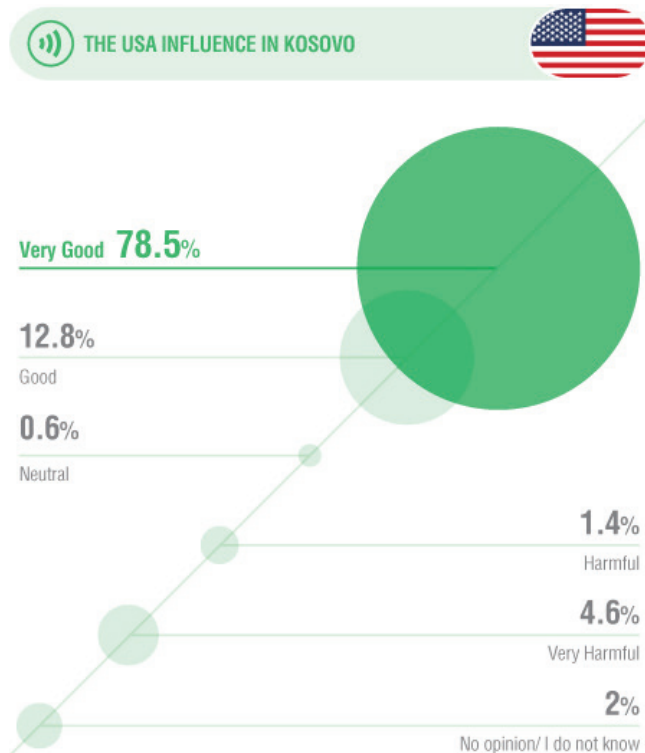


Figure 9 - The USA influence in Kosovo

the efforts to complete the transformation of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) into armed forces has had a major impact in shaping the positive attitude among the respondents.

The neutral stance, 5.1 per cent, toward the US is linked to the new administration and the general perception that the US has departed from the region, leaving the Kosovo issue in the hands of the EU. Whereas, the negative perception by almost 8.0 per cent is mostly present among the respondents from the Serbian minority – a perception that is shared for other Western powers in general.

The similar trend of perceptions has been noticed when asked to rate the US influence in Kosovo, a very large portion of the respondents, namely 91.3 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. However, in this year this perception has been extensively based on the fact that the biggest FDI in the field of energy in Kosovo includes a US power generator ContourGlobal worth around 1.3 billion euros<sup>1</sup>. This investment has been one of the most broadcasted topic in the media which has influenced the public opinion in the positive way.

1 <https://www.rferl.org/a/kosovo-signs-deal-us-power-provider-contourglobal-construct-coal-power-plant/28930283.html>

## 2.2. Kosovo and Germany: biggest political ally within the EU?

Among all countries listed in this section, Germany has been qualified as the country with the friendliest approach toward Kosovo. The results of the KSB 2018 rank Germany on top of all EU countries, with 89.6 per cent of the respondents perceiving Germany as the main strategic ally within the EU. One of the key factors behind this positive perception has derived from the “open labour market” approach that Germany has been promoting in Kosovo. Recently, Germany has launched a new type of visa – the so-called job seeker visa – has provided very unique opportunity for young qualified professionals from Kosovo to develop their careers in Germany. While this approach has further contributed to the increasing brain drain phenomena, it has had a great impact in softening and decreasing unemployment in Kosovo. Germany, has been seen as one of the key investing countries in Kosovo, but also as one of the key contributors in countries revenue through remittances. The large scale presence of Kosovo diaspora in Germany

has played a crucial part in developing such a positive approach.

In addition to the factors related to the economy, Germany has been seen as the main political ally toward Kosovo within the EU. Among all EU countries, Germany has been more vocal in its role in the EU facilitated dialogue and the conditionally it has been imposing toward Serbia in relation to the case of Kosovo. Furthermore, the strong stance of Germany toward the epilogue of the Kosovo- Serbia dialogue and the territorial exchange idea, has been listed among the key factors behind the massive positive approach toward this country.

In this line, when asked about the level and type of the German influence in Kosovo, around 86.6 per cent of the respondents believe that it is positive, followed by a very small percentage perceiving German influence as negative. In this case, it is important to mention the fact that the role of Germany has been seen also in the margins of the EU presence in Kosovo – given the fact that Germany is one of the key players when it comes to the region.

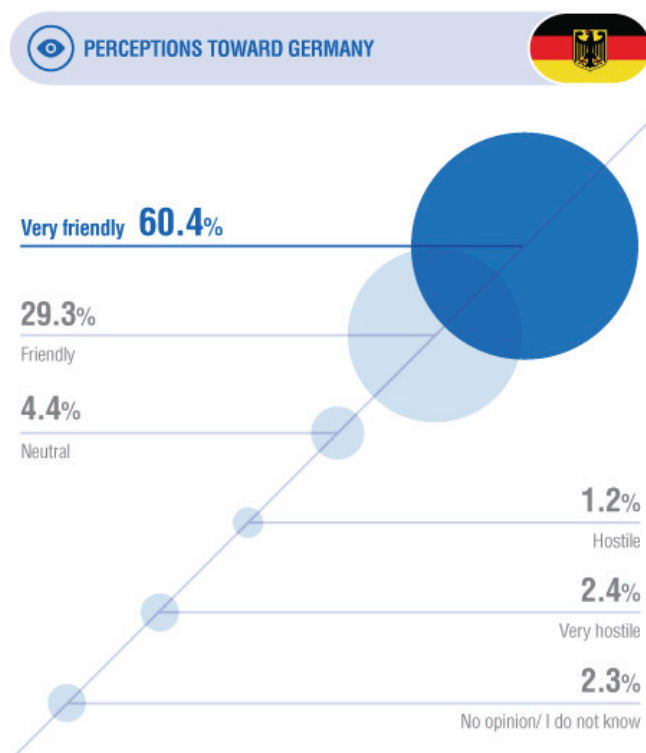


Figure 10 - Perceptions toward Germany

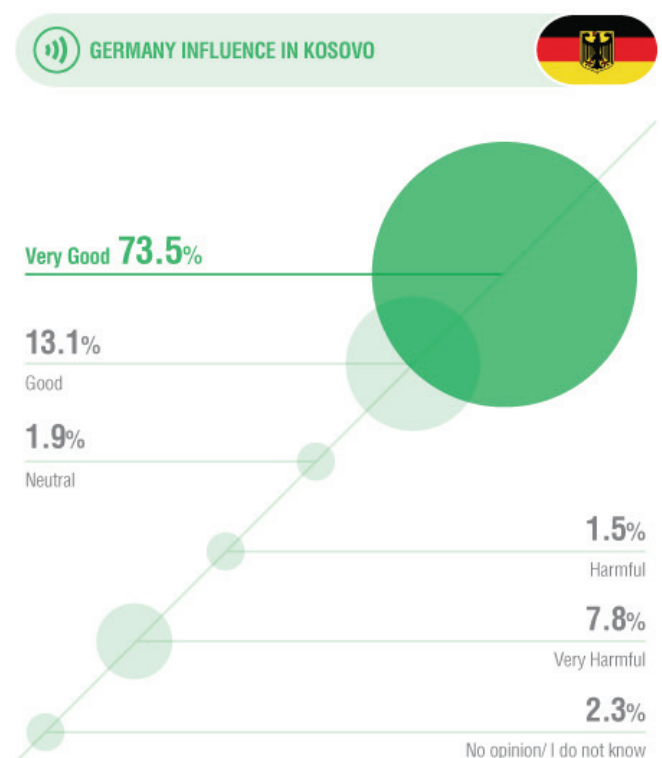


Figure 11 - Germany influence in Kosovo

## 2.3. Kosovo and Turkey: structured and intense influence

Bilateral relations with Turkey have continuously been part of the public debate in Kosovo. In some cases, Turkey has been perceived as an ally with the west – being part of NATO, in other cases it has been promoted as the “other alternative” to the west, notably the EU – this due to the recent scattered relations between Turkey and the EU, more specifically some of the key member states.

When asked to qualify Turkey’s approach toward Kosovo, a significant number of the respondents, almost 70.0 per cent of them, believe that it is a friendly partner toward Kosovo. The qualitative feedback from the respondents confirms that their positive perception stems from the religious and cultural sentiment. The increased mobility – with Turkey remaining one of the biggest countries where Kosovar can travel visa free – has further fed this positive approach. Trade and economic cooperation has been perceived from a positive prism, in this case the low percentage of the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Kosovo created the perceptions that Turkey is the biggest investor in Kosovo. When de-constructing the perception toward Turkey, it is rather im-

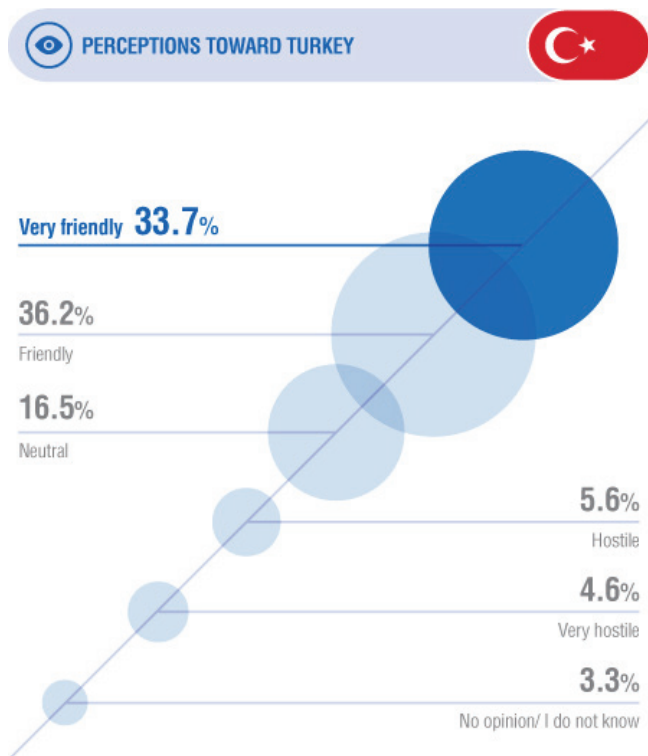


Figure 12 - Perceptions toward Turkey

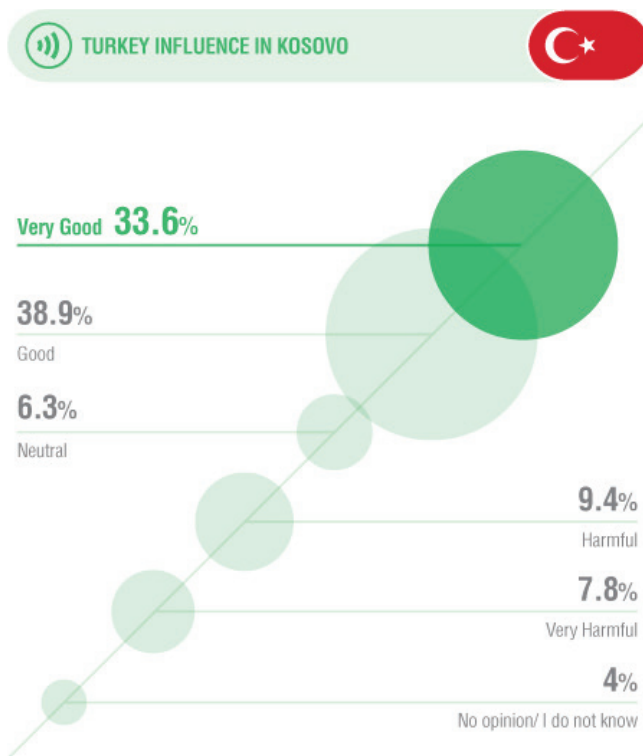


Figure 13 - Turkey influence in Kosovo

portant to mention that the percentage of those perceiving it as a positive country has decreased by 5.0 per cent since 2017. The factors behind this decrease are highly related to the case of the six Turkish citizens arrested in Kosovo over Gulen links and extradited to Turkey with the demand from the Turkish president<sup>2</sup>. The deportations have been considered direct involvement of the current Turkish regime in Kosovo. Furthermore, the shady process of deportation began to look increasingly like outright abductions, they have become an example of the threat posed by Turkey’s disregard for international norms and Kosovo, in this case. The deportation of the Turkish citizens – legally residing in Kosovo – has sparked large scale debates, it has been followed by resignations of both the Minister of Interior and the Director of Kosovo Intelligence Agency.

More than 1/4 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

2 Bytyci, F. (2018, March 29). Six Turks arrested in Kosovo over Gulen links extradited to Turkey:… Retrieved December 9, 2018, from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-kosovo/six-turks-arrested-in-kosovo-over-gulen-links-extradited-to-turkey-anadolu-idUSKBN1H51JL>



derives from the doubt related to the structured influence of the current Turkish regime in Kosovo, and the potential Islamist agenda behind the Turkish investments. The tendencies of the Turkish president to re-gain importance using Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the former Ottoman territory is evident, this has been considered as a very costly political agenda by those who have chosen to remain neutral or shared negative perception (almost 10.0 per cent) toward Turkey. In addition, the internal political and economic crisis in Turkey has had a negative impact in the region and Kosovo and this has reflected in the overall perceptions toward this country. Regardless of the hesitations and doubts in relation to Turkey, a vast majority of the respondents around 80.0 per cent have declared that the Turkish influence in Kosovo is very positive.

## 2.4. Kosovo and the UK: do we have them on board?

The role of the UK in Kosovo continues to be very proactive on many levels. The UK has made extensive efforts to strengthen the rule of law in Kosovo by contributing to the overall EU reform agenda in Kosovo. Moreover, bilateral cooperation in the field of security and defence could not be left unnoticed by the broader public, especially on the opportunities provided for the Kosovo Security Force members – a vast majority of those widely presented in the media.

The UK has been traditionally listed among the countries with positive attitude toward Kosovo. Statistically speaking, roughly 80.0 per cent of the respondents see the UK stance toward Kosovo from a positive prism. The UK continuous and linear support has been listed as the key factor by those who answered this question positively. Moreover, the UK has been seen as a strategic ally, a strong and vocal supporter of Kosovo in international arena – mostly referring to the support provided in the ongoing processes of

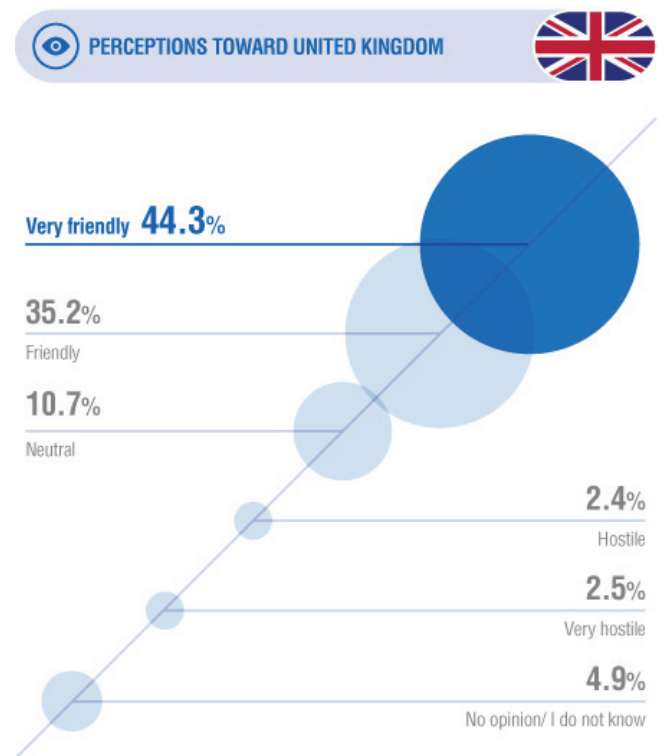


Figure 14 - Perceptions toward United Kingdom

membership in international multi-lateral platforms. While some believe that with the UK leaving the EU, Kosovo has lost a key strategic partner within the EU, a large percentage of the respondents are optimistic about the enhanced cooperation in the bilateral level. As such, many declared to be expecting more bilateral programs focusing on strengthening the statehood building process in Kosovo.

On the other hand, 10 per cent of the respondents have chosen to remain neutral. This answer has been highly related to the Brexit and the lack of capacities of the UK to deliver for the third countries, now that it is part of the ongoing negotiations to leave the EU. Those sharing neutral or even a slight negative perception recalled the London Summit of the Western Balkans – and the lukewarm outreach and success it had in pushing the EU agenda for the region – including here Kosovo.

## 2.5. Kosovo and the France: in search of new dynamics

The public opinion toward France has shown to be quite fluctuant in the previous KSB Editions. When asked to qualify the attitude of France toward Kosovo, half of the respondents have declared to perceive it as positive. The stance toward France was developed during the war, and immediately challenged after the war when partition of Mitrovica took place under the supervision of the French KFOR troops. The qualitative feedback received directly from the respondents create the assumption that they expect a more proactive approach of France in relation to Kosovo, and Western Balkans in general. Statistically speaking, around 58.0 per cent believe that France has solid attitude toward Kosovo.

The percentage of those remaining neutral in their stance toward France is rather high, around 27 per cent of the respondents believe that France is neutral toward Kosovo. This approach can be attributed to the modest role of France in promoting or supporting the diplomatic undertakings initiated from Kosovo. Moreover, this approach can be attributed to the support of France given to the territorial exchange idea, and the lack of political willingness in France to push forward the visa liberalization process for Kosovo.

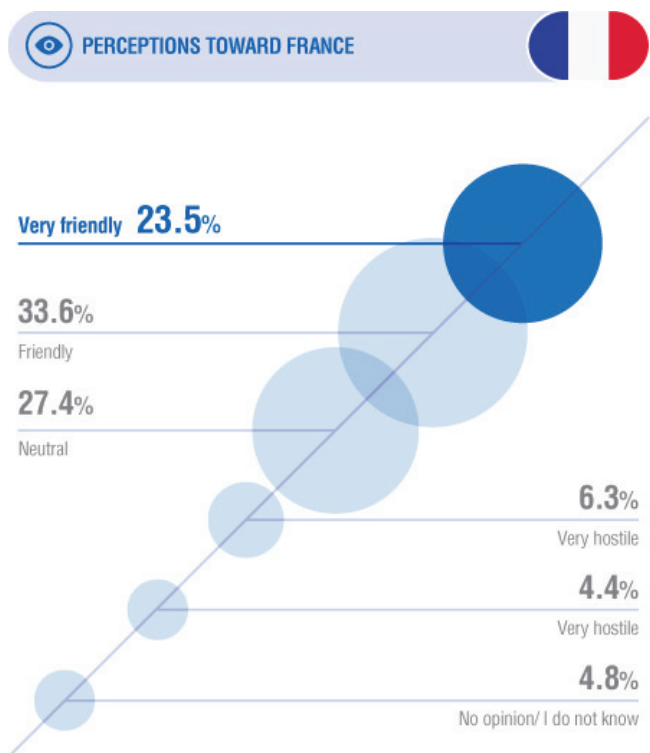


Figure 15 - Perceptions toward France

## 2.6. Kosovo and Russia: between hostility and negative influence

Russia represents one of the key obstacles for Kosovo in the international arena. In the eyes of the respondents, Russia aligns with Serbia and its veto power in the UNSC is keeping Kosovo away from one of the biggest political objectives since the declaration of independence in 2008. In addition to the destructive role of Russia in relation to Kosovo international arena, the Russian influence – mainly done through – the Serbian party in Kosovo “Serbian List” has been listed by the respondents as a key reason behind the negative approach toward Russia.

When asked to qualify Russia’s approach toward Kosovo, around 80.4 per cent perceive it as a very hostile country toward Kosovo. The negative trending, similar to the previous KSB editions, is attributed to the close diplomatic ties between Russia and Serbia. In addition to the widely known negative approach toward Kosovo in international arena, another concerning issue is the high political influence of Russia in the region using it as a solid ground to meddle with the US and the EU. As such Russia has been primarily concerned with the strengthening of its own position in EU

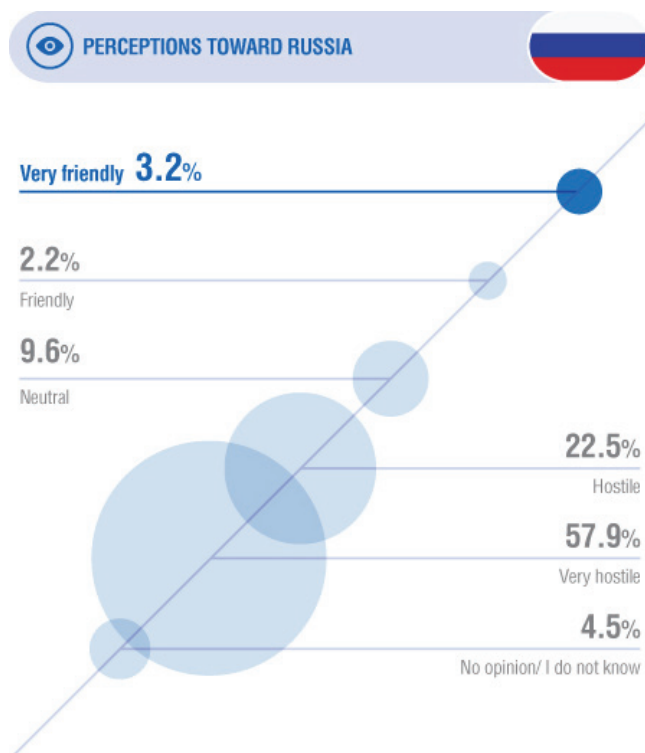


Figure 16 - Perceptions toward Russia



and US affairs and from this point of view, the Kosovo issue has perfectly served such an ambition.

The Russian influence in Kosovo, albeit not direct due to lack of recognition, in the eyes of the citizens has been considered to take place through Serbia, more specifically the Lista Srpska political party in Kosovo that takes directives from Belgrade. Furthermore, the continuous support from Russia has provided Serbia with a good negotiating positioning and solid bargaining chip toward the EU. This positioning has been considered as the key factor behind limited to non-existent political benefits for Kosovo from this process.

Thus, when asked about the Russian influence in Kosovo, around 78.0 per cent 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, more specifically by 8.7 per cent. This perception has been developed based on Russia's attitude toward Kosovo, and partnership with Serbia.

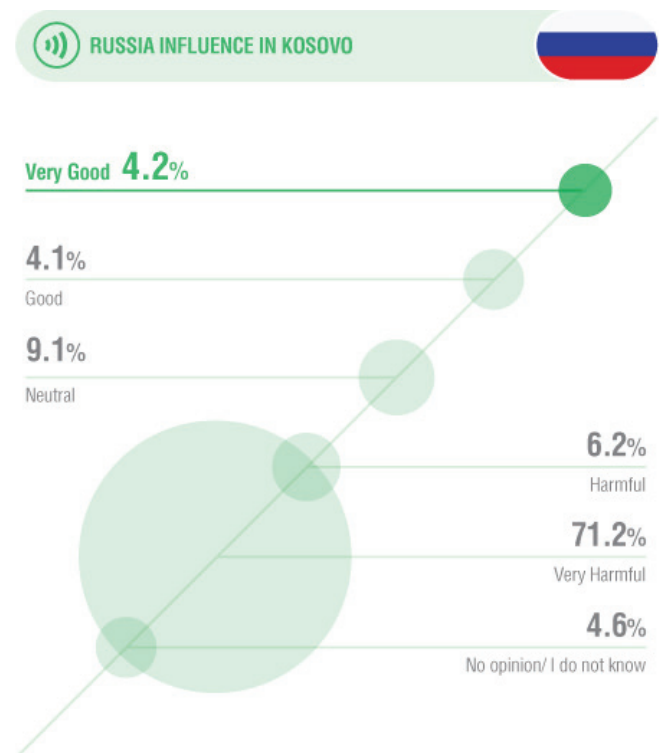
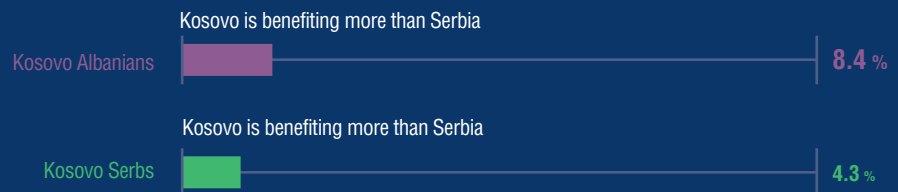
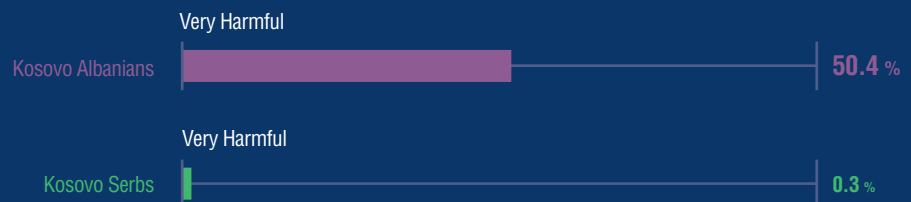


Figure 17 - Russia influence in Kosovo

### Who is benefiting more?



### The impact of the Association of Serbian Municipalities in Kosovo



### Does the land swap with Serbia offer a long term solution



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## DIALOGUE WITH SERBIA: Moving toward the final stage

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The EU facilitated dialogue represents the main pillar in Kosovo's foreign policy. Before the launch of the dialogue with Serbia, Kosovo had administered an independent foreign policy in which in which Serbia represented only one segment of it. Today, Kosovo's foreign policy depends fully on the outcomes of the dialogue with Serbia, this includes international recognitions, membership in international organization – take for instance the recent Interpol voting process – as well as the recent phenomenon of de-recognition. Furthermore, this process has had major repercussions in the internal functioning of the country, its political stability and security. The frictions between the political elite in Kosovo, the tensions and fear of potential escalation of situation in the northern part of the country have been listed as key concerns by the respondents.

Six years and numerous agreements in the so-called technical and political dialogue with Serbia, one question has been widely begged among the public opinion in Kosovo, what does normalization mean? The dialogue, at least in the language of the EU bureaucrats, initially aimed to normalize relations between Kosovo and Serbia has turned into conflict prevention mode. The agreements aimed to ease the lives of the citizens only contributed to a stronger status quo and frozen conflict situation. In hindsight, the closer we get to the finish line, the farther we are from normalization. Six years after, three risky alternatives are being offered to Kosovo: 1) the status quo which will eventually turn Kosovo into survival mode with

no future in international arena, 2) the Association of the Serbian Majority Municipalities – a potential Republika Srpska scenario, and 3) land swap which represents a very bold and risky agreement with unclear plan and lack of strong mechanisms and political will to be implemented successfully. As the EU dialogue is moving toward the end and all alternatives are far from what Kosovo was expecting to gain from it politically, the public opinion and political elite in Kosovo has never been more diverged.

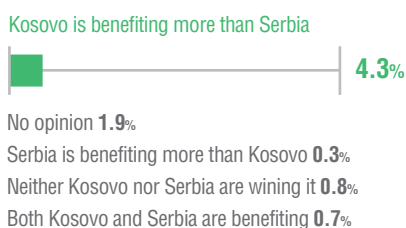
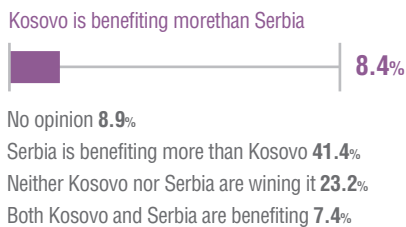
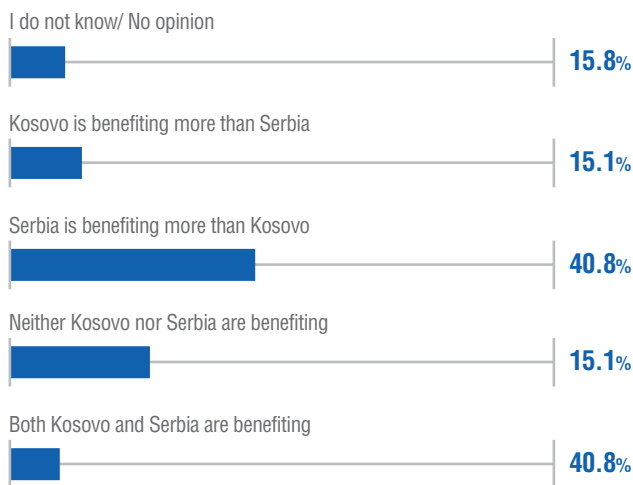
Standing on the verge of the snap elections, the manoeuvres of the political parties and their leaders are heavily calculated, with some not even hesitating to use nationalist rhetoric to gain more support and votes. Thus, the ongoing open dispute with Serbia provides a solid and comfortable avenue for the politicians to avoid discussing other concerning political, social and economic issues. Playing the nationalist card provides an opportunity for the current leadership to remain in power as long as the dispute with Serbia remains unsolved.

Following such concerning trends within the dialogue, KCSS continued to measure the public perceptions toward this process, while new questions have been included to adapt to the new streams of the dialogue. The results as well as the reactions of the respondents' reflect high levels of mistrust toward the role of the EU as facilitator and the end results of this process in general.

### 3.1. Winners and losers of the dialogue

Triumphalism is what both negotiating parties from Kosovo and Serbia have shown upon their return from Brussels. Each round of the dialogue and agreements signed in Brussels sparked an immense competition of who is the bigger winner of the round. Constructive ambiguity and lack of transparency from the facilitator and both parties in the dialogue created a fertile ground and unique political opportunities for each party to proclaim themselves as winners. Lack of transparency led to misconceptions among citizens, and the diplomatic wording of the EU, alongside local biased media controlled by the government, did not provide sufficient information for the general public. Moreover, the hostility that both parties have expressed toward each-oth-

Figure 18 - Perceptions on the outcome of the dialogue



er in process further strengthened hostility between the citizens of Kosovo and Serbia.

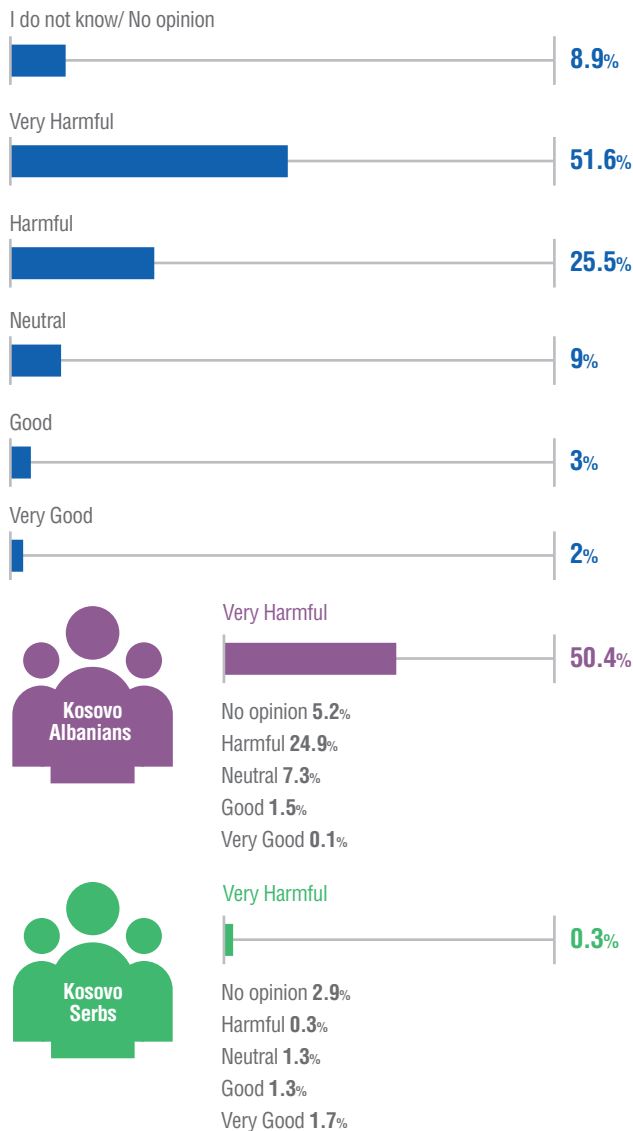
When asked the question who is benefiting more from the dialogue, a tendency to list the other party as a winner is highly present among the respondents. A collective paranoia generated from the lack of transparency created the perception that the dialogue is bringing political benefits to the "opponents" only. Henceforth, almost half of the respondents have declared that Serbia is benefiting more than Kosovo in this process. The arguments behind this approach were based on the fact that Serbia is using the dialogue as an easy avenue to progress in the EU integration process, whereas Kosovo still struggles to gain full recognition by all EU member states. Consequently, only 13.4 per cent of the respondents believe that Kosovo is benefiting from the dialogue. The asymmetric approach of the EU, the clear 2025 agenda for Serbia and uncertain EU perspective have further contributed to developing this perception.

More than a quarter of the respondents, 25.7 per cent to be precise, believe that the dialogue does not take place for the benefits of neither Kosovo nor Serbia. The qualitative feedback shows that the respondents believe that this process is widely pushed by the EU which is seeking for success stories in international mediation and enhancing its role as a peace and security provider. Whereas, a small percentage of the respondents, 8.0 per cent, believe that both are benefiting from the process mostly referring to the freedom of movement agreement which has been implemented successfully albeit limited.

### 3.2. The Association of the Serbian municipalities: A Republika Srpska scenario for Kosovo?

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. The content of this agreement has been causing striking debates between political elites in Kosovo. Whereas, its implementation has almost triggered new conflicts between Kosovo and Serbia. The fears of po-

**Figure 19 - Perceptions on the Association of the Association of Serbian Municipalities in Kosovo**



tential conflicts have been notices sporadically following the unilateral undertakings by the local Serbs to establish the ASSM with the help of Belgrade.

In the eyes of the Kosovar Albanian respondents, the ASSM has been seen as a Republika Srpska scenario for Kosovo. Furthermore, it has raised fears on the future impact on the internal functioning of Kosovo being perceived as the Belgrade's plan to extend their political influence in Kosovo. This argument has been strengthening with the presence of the "Serbian List" working under Belgrade's directives, thus the Association with executive powers would be shortly "instrumentalized" by Belgrade aiming 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 it will be against the multi-ethnicity state as stated in the Constitution of Kosovo. Given the above mentioned factors, almost 80.0 per cent of the respondents believe that the ASSM poses direct risk to the internal functioning of Kosovo as a country.

Opposing to the majority Kosovar Albanian respondents, the Serbian respondents, around 5.0 per cent, believe that the Association will have positive impact in Kosovo. The positive stance toward the ASSM reflects on the expectations that the local Serbian community has toward this mechanism. Being excluded from the dialogue – even though widely used as a bargaining chip by both Kosovo and Serbia – the Kosovar Serbs believe that this mechanism will finally deliver to their expectations.

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.

### 3.3. Who should lead the show?

Who is going to lead Kosovo to the finish line? This is the question that has been tormenting the public opinion in Kosovo. The launch of the political high level phase of the dialogue requested for "the strong men" to be included in the process. Being represented by Presidents, both Kosovo and Serbia have entered the critical phase of the dialogue. However, while many do not argue about the political monopoly and support that the Serbian president Alexander Vucic has, in Kosovo the recent debates have put into question the support that the President of Kosovo Hashim Thaçi has in this process.

The debate over the lead negotiator has further escalated after the Alpbach Forum in which both presidents have officially launched their idea of border correction/ territorial exchange as a possible long lasting solution for the Kosovo – Serbia dispute. After this high level EU political event, mistrust toward President Thaci has sparked among polit-

ical elites and public opinion, several attempts have been undertaken in the Assembly to strip this “privilege” from the president, albeit rather unsuccessful and politically vague and naïve moves.

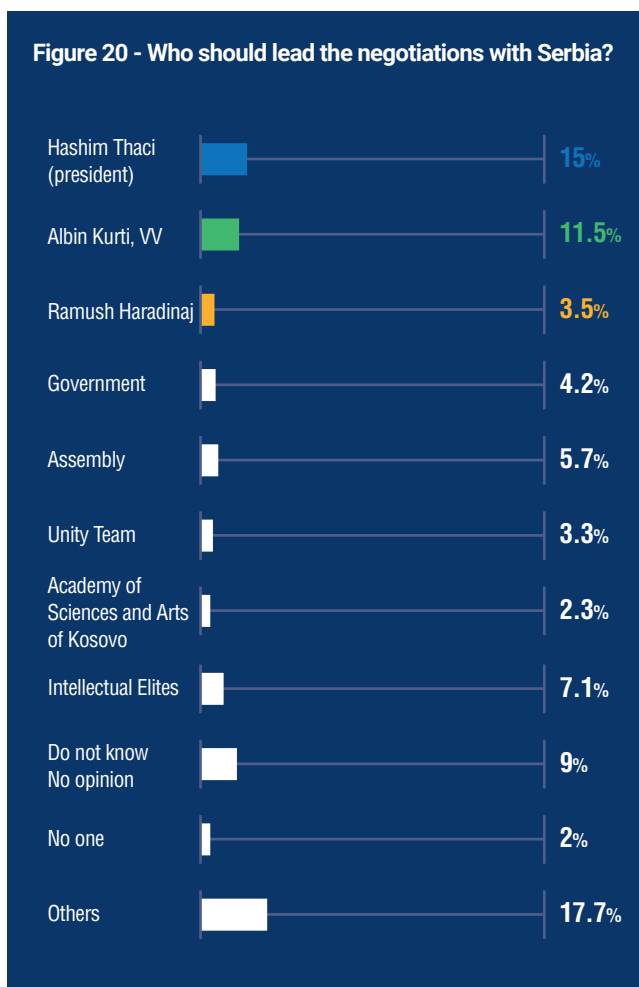
Following this trend, KCSS has created an open ended question designed to get the first alternative provided by the citizens as a valid and independent answer. The decision to leave this question open ended was intentional for two reasons: 1) to allow the respondents to be creative when providing their answers, and avoiding predicting or influencing the answers, and 2) methodologically, open ended questions may yield more candid information, outside of the box thinking, creative and unique insights for the researchers. The respondents were asked to list the individuals that should lead the dialogue with Serbia. As shown

in the results, the respondents were widely divided among several political leaders, state institutions and non-political elites. While in Serbia the positioning of President Vucic in unquestionable, in Kosovo, President Thaçi does not possess the same level of comfort in Kosovo.

As shown in the graph, the public opinion is highly divided and ambivalent when asked about the leading negotiator. Around 80.0 per cent of the citizens have provided answers to this question, among those around only 15.0 per cent believe that the dialogue should be led by the President of Kosovo Hashim Thaçi. The qualitative feedback shows that the respondents who have listed President Thaçi as a leader in the dialogue, support his political endeavors in general. With slightly less support, 11.5 per cent of the respondents have listed Albin Kurti from Vetvendosje political party believing that he is highly skilled and capable to lead the dialogue. The fact that a vast majority of the respondents have suggested leaders rather than state institutions such as the Government by 4.24 per cent and Assembly 5.71 per cent is a key indicator of the necessity to have “strong men” behind the process. Furthermore, the low percentage of those believing that this process can be successfully led by the Assembly or the Government corresponds with the overall low trust of the citizens toward these institutions. The current Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj was listed by only 3.5 per cent clearly reflecting his lack of proactive involvement in the process. A rather small percentage of the respondents, 3.2 per cent precisely, have shown eagerness to have a unified approach of all political leaders/parties toward Serbia through the Unity Team.

It is worth noting an innovative approach of the respondents listing the intellectual non-political elites by 7.19 per cent, the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Kosovo by 2.3 per cent show that the respondents are seeking for alternatives beyond of the current ones and those who have already been directly involved in the dialogue, furthermore, of the politicians who have not hesitated to use the dialogue for their political benefits.

**Figure 20 - Who should lead the negotiations with Serbia?**



### 3.4. Season finale: land swap leading to long lasting solution?

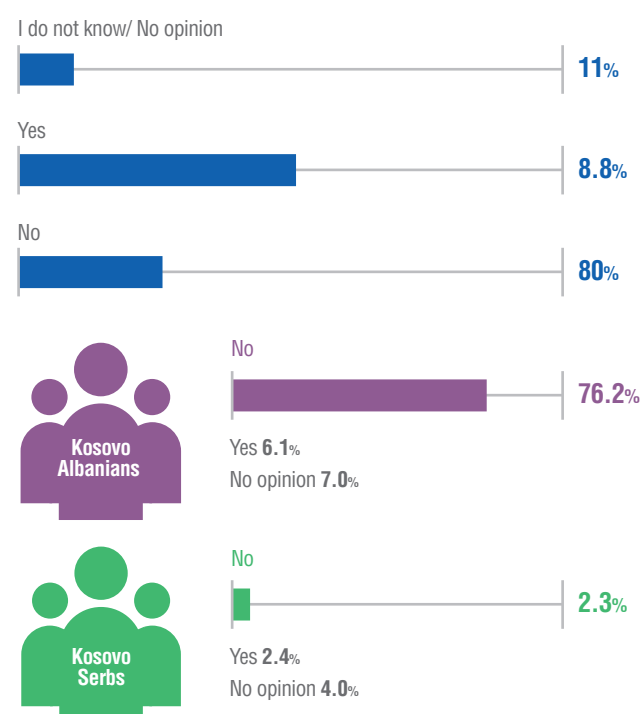
In August, in a rather orchestrated event President of Kosovo and Serbia with their supporters sitting in the front row, proposed to resolve the long-lasting dispute by exchanging territories. While not sure about the exact plan, since it has never been revealed, many hints have been provided by the President of Kosovo in the aftermath of Alpbach. The master plan which would allegedly provide a long-lasting solution includes the Serb populated municipalities in the northern part of Kosovo with the Albanian populated towns in the southern part of Serbia, this is one of the alternatives among many.

This idea has sparked many debates, while many international scholars working on the Balkans have tried to show their arguments pro and against this solution, in Kosovo the public opinion ranged from shocking reaction of disapproval to grudging acceptance. The exchange of territories was seen as a Serbian led agenda, and the fact that it has been publically endorsed by the President of Kosovo came as a shock for the public opinion in Kosovo.

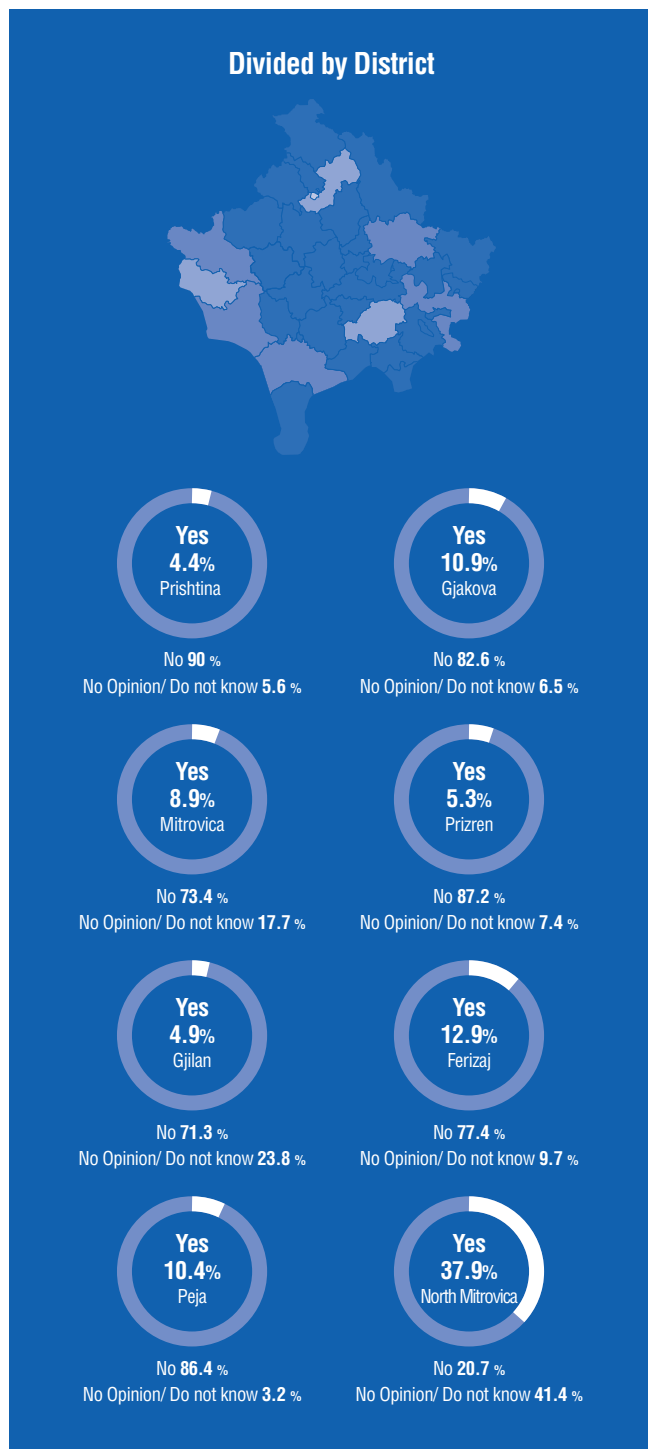
Asked whether the territorial exchange will provide a long lasting solution, a vast majority of the respondents, almost 81.0 per cent of the citizens have declared that it will not. The main argument behind the negative answer, albeit knowing the urgency to seal a deal with Serbia, is the lack of trust to undertake such a serious action with Serbia. On the other hand, the qualitative feedback shows that the basic information pertaining the plan to implement such a risky agreement was not revealed. Henceforth, the potential implications in the lives of the citizens would not be able to be predicted at this point. In addition, there respondents have raised the simple question, how and who? If this agreement will be pushed forward, how will it be implemented and who will ensure full implementation of it. In the eyes of the respondents, the EU lacks capacities to guarantee the implementation of such a politically sensitive agreement. This perception has been based on the inability of the EU to ensure implementation of simpler technical agreements.

On the other hand, in spite of all the risks, around 9.0 per cent have shown positive opinion about this agreement. Showing clear sign of influence by the media and press conferences issued by the President of Kosovo, when asked which territories shall be exchanged to reach the long awaited peace, a vast majority of those who said yes declared that it would be acceptable to swap some territory of Kosovo in the north with Albanian inhabited towns in south Serbia. The positive attitude has been present mainly by the Kosovo Serb respondents living in the northern part of Kosovo. The qualitative feedback shows that the Kosovo Serbs from the south of Ibar river are reluctant to accept this deal. Being aware that the change in ethnic composition within Kosovo the Ahtisaari package with all privileges for the Serbian minority will be invalidated politically, as such losing the political importance and the benefits provided by this package can be costly for the remaining Serbs in Kosovo.

Figure 21 - Do you think that the territorial swap will provide a long-lasting solution?



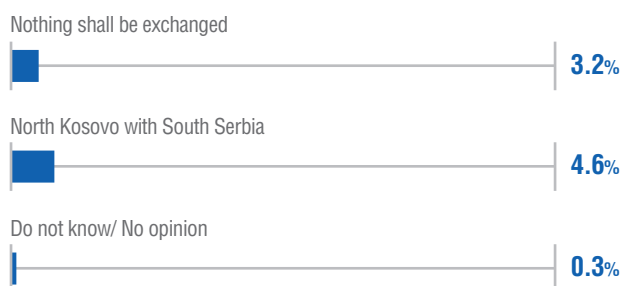
**Figure 22 - Do you think that the territorial swap will provide a long-lasting solution?**



For those who have answered yes to the territorial exchange idea, KCSS has provided an additional open-ended question to get more feedback and test the exchange of which territories is acceptable by the respondents. As seen in the graph below, there is tendency for confusion in relation to the territories that can be exchanged as this has direct influence in peoples lives. For some, the northern part of Kosovo is strategically important for Kosovo mainly because of the Trepça mine and the Ujman Lake – the main water source for Kosovo.

In general, the answers provided one key message, the strong role of the media and the influence that the political discourse of the President Thaçi has had over the respondents. A vast majority of those who supported this idea follow what has been transmitted to them since August, the northern part of Kosovo (with some limiting it to only Leposavic and Zvecan) with the Presevo Valley (or in some cases including Bujanovac as well). There are voices calling for protection of Trepça mine and Ujman Lake not exactly knowing what this agreement will exactly bring. Finding themselves in a gloomy situation, many respondents have shown hesitation to provide an answer to this question.

**Figure 23 - If yes, which territories should be exchanged?**





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## KOSOVO AND MULTILATERALISM: Are we ready?

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Since the declaration of independence Kosovo's foreign policy has been focusing its agenda in two different streams, the first one is gaining more international recognition, and the second one focuses on membership in international organizations and platforms of cooperation.

It is commonly believed that successful membership in multilateral organizations will further consolidate Kosovo's statehood internationally. The ambition to join these international multilateral and intergov-

ernmental structures, namely the EU and NATO, has been an integral part of the foreign policy agenda – albeit on paper only. Against this background, KCSS considered as highly important to measure the public perceptions toward the most relevant Euro-Atlantic structures. The results of the KSB 2018 confirm that the public opinion is in line with the government in Kosovo showing strong support for membership in international multi-lateral platforms.

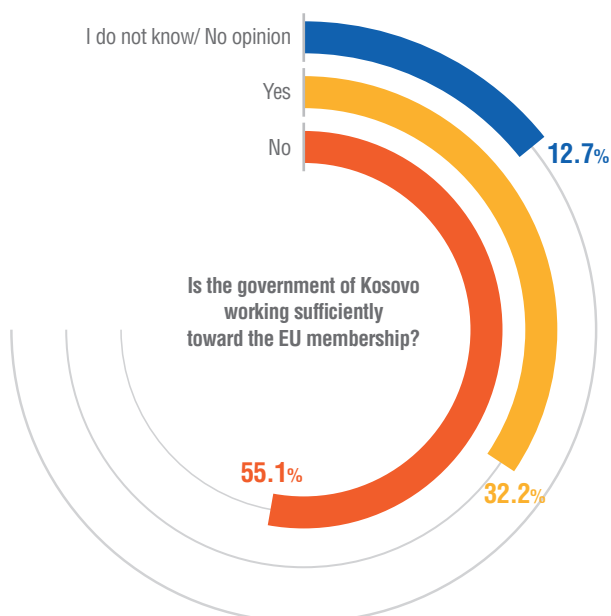
## 4.1. Kosovo and the EU: is the government doing enough?

Since the declaration of independence in 2008, Kosovo has made EU integration one of its key foreign policy priorities. Simultaneously, the EU integration process cannot be considered within the margins of the foreign policy due to its significant impact in the internal functioning of the country following the EU reform agenda and the process of alignment of policies with the EU.

Having made advancement over the past years in its efforts to get closer to the European Union – mostly referring to the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU – Kosovo struggled to continue paving its way toward EU membership. Yet, the EU strategy ‘A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans’, confirmed the EU perspective for other countries in the region whilst leaving Kosovo with unclear EU path allegedly to be opened once the objective circumstances allow.

The EU status neutrality, the unclear membership perspective of the country, paired with the inability of the EU to get the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia on track and the “dragging feet” approach in the visa liberalization process have caused some raised eyebrows among the respondents. Irrespective of the hurdles and obstacles, the EU is

**Figure 24 - Perception on the work of the government toward the EU**



perceived as the only alternative in spite of it being a “far-fetched” goal for Kosovo.

Following the pro EU integration discourse in Kosovo and the EU agenda that was widely pushed by each government – regardless of the political orientation of the parties in power - in the past ten years, KCSS included a specific question aiming to gather perceptions on the political efforts and proactive work of the current government to implement the necessary reforms within the margins of EU conditionality.

When asked whether the current government is undertaking the efforts and working adequately in fulfilling the key reforms in the EU integration process, more than half of the respondents or one in two respondents or 55.1 per cent precisely, have stated responded negatively. In the case of Kosovo, a vast majority of the reforms are linked to the implementation of the SAA and the visa liberalization process. The qualitative feedback from the field research shows that the negative perception is not directly linked to the implementation of the SAA due to the fact that the low levels of understanding this process among citizens. However, there is a perception that the government failed to inform the citizens on the tangible progress made since this milestone agreement was signed between the EU and Kosovo. Those who did respond negatively to this question have states that the concerning levels of corruption, weak performance of the government albeit the historical high number of ministers and deputy ministers.

On the contrary, 32.2 per cent of the respondents, believe that the government has been working proactively to move the country forward in the EU integration agenda. The positive approach has been stemming mostly from the EU Commission positive report on the fulfillment all the criteria included in the visa liberalization roadmap for Kosovo. In hindsight, those who answered positively believe that the EU approach in the visa liberalization is unjust. The failure of the EU to deliver in line with the promises, attributed to the “carrots” after the “stick” policy, following the political struggles to get through the demarcation agreement with Montenegro has been considered a failure at the EU end.

Around 13.0 per cent of the respondents were reluctant to give an opinion in this regard. The lack of solid information

on the overall EU integration agenda and the tasks of the government in relation to this process, have been listed as the key reasons behind their answer.

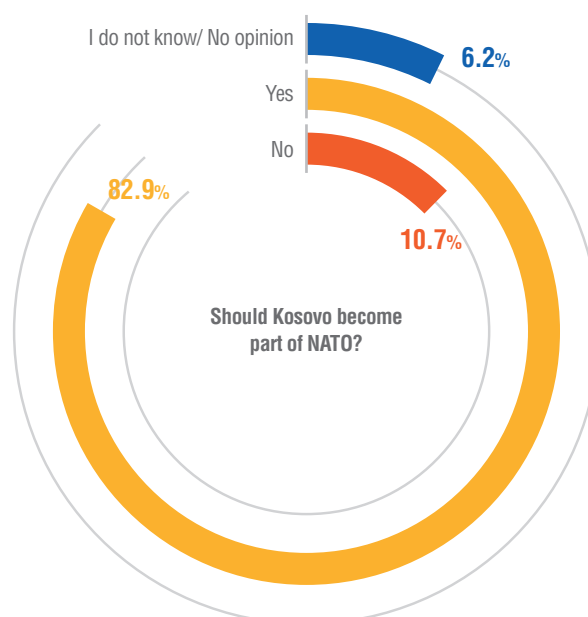
## 4.2. Kosovo and NATO: beyond enhanced interaction

In the framework of the Euro-Atlantic integration processes, Kosovo has placed NATO integration as a key national priority firstly in 2014 with the launch of the Strategic Security Sector Review of Kosovo. Since then, Kosovo has managed to make a very slight linear move in its overly complex NATO integration process. The enhanced interaction between NATO and Kosovo has been launched in early 2017 – a response far from the Partnership for Peace programme that Kosovo was aiming. In spite of its step forward to reaching the NATO integration objective, the enhanced interaction cannot be directly linked to the positive attitude of the citizens due to lack of information about this process among the respondents.

Similarly to the past editions, the overall public opinion toward NATO membership remains very positive. Over 82 per cent of the respondents have declared to be pro NATO membership. The positive attitude toward NATO is deeply rooted in the military intervention in Kosovo during the war of 1999, followed by the KFOR mission in Kosovo – still one of the most trusted security provider in Kosovo<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, the strong partnership with Croatia and Albania (both NATO members from the region) in the defense sector has further strengthened the positive approach.

On the other hand, around 11.0 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.

Figure 23 - Perceptions toward membership 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.

Around 7.0 per cent of the respondent have shown 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. Moreover, among those who did not want to share their opinion about NATO lacked information about the alliance seeing it through only the KFOR mission present in Kosovo.

3 Marku, D. (2018, November 23). Kosovo Security Barometer - Eighth Edition - Reports. Retrieved November 26, 2018, from <http://www.qkss.org/en/Reports/Kosovo-Security-Barometer-Eighth-Edition-1163>

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# METHODOLOGY

## WHAT IS KOSOVO SECURITY BAROMETER?

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The Kosovo Security Barometer (KSB) is a special program of the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS) which was established in September 2012. Its primary focus is to measure public's trust toward security, justice and central institutions in Kosovo as well as to measure citizens' perception of the internal and external security threats posed to Kosovo.

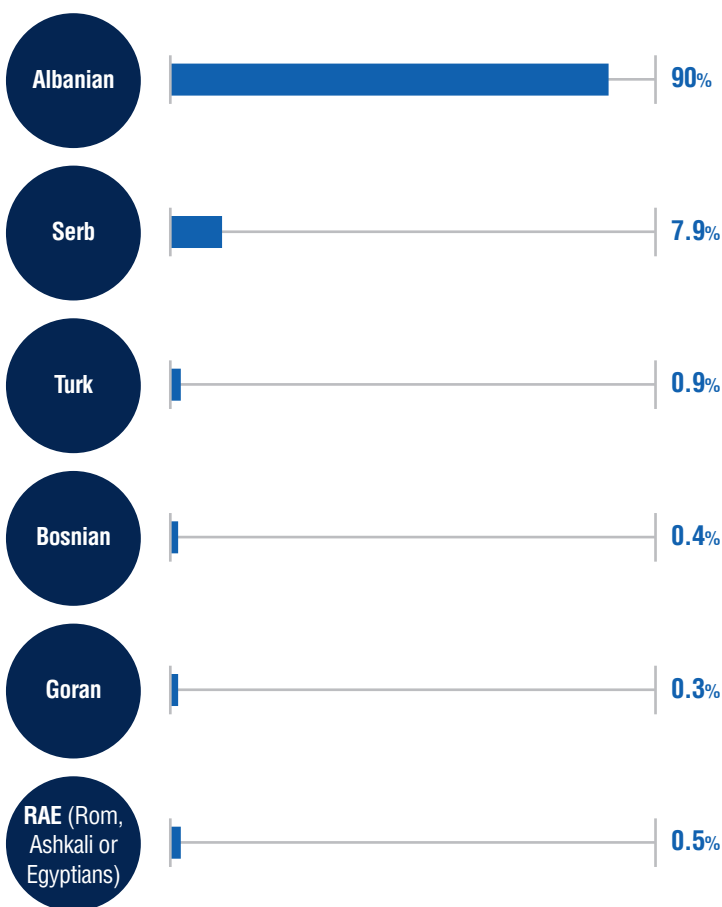
The KSB is the first and the largest undertaking of this kind designed, implemented, and communicated by a local think tank in Kosovo. The KSB's uniqueness in Kosovo is its political neutrality. As an independent think-tank, KCSS has no political constraints in communicating any of the findings and messages 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 28 field researchers conducted the sampling, piloting, and the interviews. The national sample from which the research was drawn featured 1085 households, following a representative sample of the population above 18 years old in Kosovo.

The ethnic background of respondents was 90% Kosovar Albanian, 8 % Kosovar Serbs, and 2% 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 districts: Ferizaj, Gjakova, Gjilan, Mitrovica South, Mitrovica North, Peja, Prishtina and Prizren.



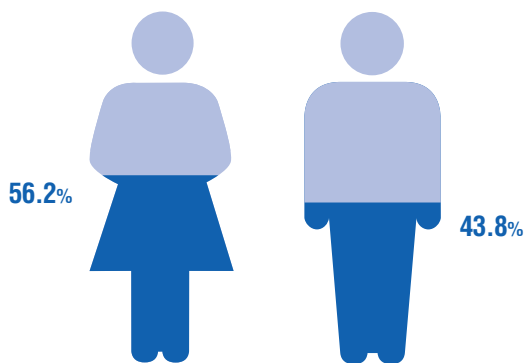
The first stage of geographical clustering was based on the 2012 Kosovo Census Report. The second stage involved clustering samples by municipal area with a stratified rural/urban sample as per the number of households. The last stage followed a random sampling method using the nearest 'birthday method.'

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% with a confidence interval of 95%.

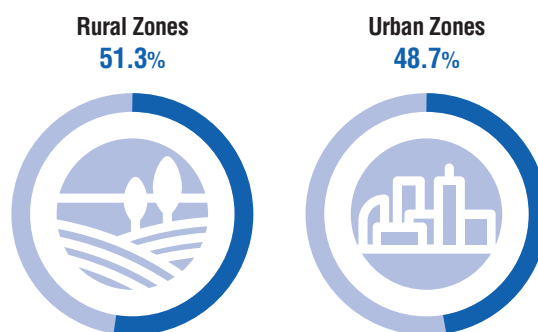
A pilot interview was conducted in mid-September 2018 to test the feasibility of the questionnaire prior to the commencement of fieldwork. The research team subsequently reported that the pilot interview was successful, and no problems were encountered with the pilot instrument. All interviews were conducted from 29<sup>th</sup> to fifth of October 2018. Furthermore, 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.

### Respondents by gender



### Respondents by zones



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