



KOSOVO SECURITY BAROMETER

Trends of Perception towards Kosovo's Foreign Policy
and Dialogue with Serbia

Covering period from 2013 – 2016





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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 towards 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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WHAT IS THE KOSOVO SECURITY BAROMETER?

The Kosovo Security Barometer (KSB) is a specific programme of Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS) designed to serve as an annual publication. The primary focus of the KSB is to measure the public opinion perceptions towards security and justice institutions. It also measures the public perception on the internal and external security threats to Kosovo, perceptions on Kosovo's foreign policy and dialogue with Serbia.

The KSB marks one of the largest and rather first initiatives designed, implemented, and communicated by a local think tank in Kosovo. KCSS has no political constraints in communicating the findings and messages. Finally, the KSB is unique for its methodological approach, such as the unique tailoring of the quantitative and qualitative methods aiming to offer realistic results on public perceptions towards security-related issues.

Whom do we target with this special edition?

In general, the KSB targets a wide variety of actors interested in the public opinion trends in Kosovo in the field of security and justice. It targets the following stakeholders: policymakers in Kosovo as well as the Western Balkans; the international organizations in Kosovo and their headquarters; local and international civil society organizations; academia and the media.

This Special Edition of the KSB targets a wide variety of actors interested to follow the trends of citizens' perceptions towards Kosovo's main strategic partners in the regional and international levels. More precisely, it targets an audience which is interested in following the public opinion trends in Kosovo, focusing on Kosovo's foreign policy, regional and international cooperation, as well as the perceptions towards political dialogue with Serbia. Generally, the KSB targets nation-wide policy makers; the international community presence in Kosovo; local, regional and international civil society organizations; academic community and the media

Impact

The impact of the KSB can be expected to multiply in the mid-term for a number of reasons, which include (a) KCSS's credibility as a politically non-affiliated and an independent think-tank; (b) KCSS's track record of employing appropriate scientific methods in its research; (c) the importance of local ownership; and (d) the professional capacities available at the KCSS. In its all previous editions, the KSB has achieved to fulfil the aforementioned aims.

Methodology

This special edition of the KSB reflects trends of citizens' perceptions towards the Kosovo's foreign policy, regional and international strategic partners, and dialogue with Serbia. It allowed the data interpreters an in-depth deconstruction of people's perception. Moreover, it provides the qualitative data obtained during three years period: from 2013 to 2016 offering trends and patterns of perceptions towards Kosovo's foreign policy. This edition highlights citizens' perceptions towards regional and international states, Kosovo's political and strategic partners and Dialogue with Serbia – being one of the most debatable and long-lasting process in Kosovo's foreign policy. The interpretation reflects upon the set of political and societal factors which influenced the opinion of the respondents. The deconstruction of opinion has been based on the direct involvement of the data interpreter in the face-to-face interviews with the respondents. Also, focus groups with the field researchers supported the endeavours of the KCSS team in further deconstructing and analysing the opinions contained in this special edition.

Answers to the KSB questionnaires were collected through face-to-face interviews conducted around Kosovo. Most of the questions were close-ended in the form of five-point Likert scales. Few questions were open-ended allowing respondents the opportunity to provide their opinions without predefined options. The sampling, piloting, and interviewing were conducted by the KCSS team consisted of 27 field researchers. The national sample from which the research was drawn featured 1,093 households, following a representative sample of the population above 18 years old in Kosovo. The ethnic breakdown of the interviewed respondents was as follow: 86.9 percent K-Albanian, 7.0 percent K-Serbian, and 6.1 percent involved other communities (1.4 percent Turks, 0.6 percent Bosnian, 0,9 percent Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians and the rest includes Gorans, Croats, and Montenegrins).

The sample frame was based upon telephone code areas, and, as such included the following 7 regions: Ferizaj, Gjakova, Gjilan, Mitrovica, Peja, Prishtina and Prizren. The first stage of geographical clustering was based on the 2011 Kosovo Census Report, while the second stage involved clustering samples by the respective municipal areas 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. Given the sample used for this study, the results of the survey project the mirror image of 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 95.0 percent.

Prior to the commencement of fieldwork, a pilot interview was conducted in mid-September 2016, in order to test the feasibility of the questionnaire. The research team

subsequently reported that the pilot interview was successful, and no problems were encountered with the questions asked to the pilot interviewees. All interviews were completed from during the first two weeks of October 2016. 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 solely demonstrates how people perceive Kosovo's foreign policy, attitude towards relevant states in the region and beyond, and dialogue with Serbia. Hence, this report does not represent a conclusive assessment on the quality of the work of the institutions subject to this study or level of threat. The KCSS team does not take responsibility for the outcome of the data, especially if and when this should trigger any reactions amongst specific actors. The team remains ready to make the entire process, and the methodology used, transparent should any subject be interested in these details.

KOSOVO SECURITY BAROMETER (KSB) TRENDS OF PERCEPTIONS FROM 2013 TO 2016: KEY FINDINGS

- The general trends in the past three years show that the respondents share different and rather distinct perceptions towards Albania and Serbia. The findings show that Albania is perceived as the greatest ally of Kosovo by over 90.0 percent of the respondents. Serbia on the other hand was listed as the most hostile state towards Kosovo by 90.0 percent of the respondents. While positioning to Albania and Serbia is very clear, there are mixed perceptions on two other neighbouring countries of Kosovo, respectively, Montenegro and Macedonia. Almost half of the respondents perceive these two countries as neutral towards Kosovo.
- The western states, mostly USA and Germany still remain Kosovo's biggest allies in the international arena, also seen as the main partners in Kosovo's state building process. On the other hand, Turkey is being perceived as a new potential ally, with a large portion of Kosovars believing that Kosovo should strengthen its partnership with Turkey. Croatia has been listed among the potential strategic partners for Kosovo as it is widely perceived as positive by the respondents. Croatia was seen as a military ally and a model for Kosovo on its path towards the EU.

- The citizens of Kosovo have shared positive perceptions in relation to the EU and NATO integration process by clearly showing a large level of enthusiasm and willingness to join such structures. On the other hand, a rather considerable amount of the respondents believe that the EU does not have a constructive approach towards Kosovo. A close examination of the trends in the past three years show that this positive approach has been boosted by the positive opinion on the visa liberalization process, albeit the process has stagnated ever since. In this regard, the unshaken perceptions towards the EU prove that the frustration has been directed more towards the government and the opposition in Kosovo due to failure to reach consensus on the demarcation issue with Montenegro.
- Almost a decade after the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia was launched, both in the technical and political level, this long-lasting and difficult process have triggered many heated debates among the political elite in Kosovo and its citizens. In this regard, almost half of the respondents believe that Serbia is benefiting more than Kosovo in this process by referring to the EU integration processes in both states. Similarly, the majority of the respondents believe that the dialogue is failing to reach the overarching goal - the actual normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia.
- The findings over the past three years show that the opinions towards one of the most heated debates in the framework of the Kosovo- Serbia dialogue, the establishment of the Association of Serb Majority Municipalities has been perceived negatively by a vast majority of the respondents. An overwhelming majority of the respondents, or over 80.0 percent of them share negative attitude with regards to the establishment of the Association of Serb Majority Municipalities by seeing it as harmful to Kosovo.

INTRODUCTION

The chapter on regional and international cooperation has been an integral part of the KSB since the launch of this programme. KCSS considered it necessary to launch the special edition and continue identifying the trends on public perceptions towards the most relevant states, which are also a matter of interest to Kosovo's foreign policy. The ongoing trends of establishing bilateral and multilateral ties, relations with neighbouring countries, and the events taking place in the EU facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia remain the key objects of analysis in this special edition.

Most importantly, this special edition provides trends of perceptions with special focus on Kosovo's foreign policy and dialogue with Serbia from 2013 to 2016 following the main events that have taken place in this regard, and their impact on citizens' perceptions. This KSB special edition aims to provide a detailed insight on trends of citizens' perceptions towards other states, potential strategic partnerships with other relevant states, international organizations including those domestically present with active missions in Kosovo.

The edition will also manifest the trend of citizens' perceptions towards regional and international actors, including the positioning towards neighbouring countries. Comparing to the two previous editions, here we provide a new list of issues pertaining political dialogue with Serbia, especially the agreements which have been reached between Kosovo and Serbia. Hereafter, the special edition covers the following dimensions:

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

CHAPTER I

1. TRENDS OF PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS RELEVANT REGIONAL STATES

The list of regional states considered in the KCSS survey remained unchanged from the previous editions, including Kosovo's neighbouring states, such as Albania, Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro. However, considering the latest trends of bi-lateral and multi-lateral relations in the region, the KCSS team considered important to measure perceptions towards Croatia – a country increasingly supporting Kosovo's state-building and Bosnia and Herzegovina – representing the only state in the Western Balkans along Serbia that did not establish diplomatic relations with Kosovo.

The respondents were asked to rate the relations and the attitude of these countries towards Kosovo starting from the negative scales such as very hostile, and hostile, continuing with the neutral scale, and the positive side with friendly and very friendly. It is of crucial importance to mention that when asked about regional states the respondents shaped their opinion based on their personal experience and opinions created over time, whereas the same does not apply for other non-regional states as it will be further elaborated in the next section. The states are clustered in a way that it reflects the key findings of this report, starting with the states having most intense relations with Kosovo such as Albania and Serbia, and it continues with two other neighbouring countries for which the respondents seemed to have neutral opinions, and two others that were added only in the last – 2016 KSB questionnaire.

1.1. Trends of public perceptions towards Albania and Serbia

The KSB trends reflect the fact that the respondents generally share different and rather distinct perceptions towards Albania and Serbia as two of the four surrounding countries. As shown in Figure 1, in the past three years, over 90.0 percent of the respondents have shared predominantly positive perception towards Albania. Contrary to this, and as one would expect, trends of perceptions towards Serbia have remained negative with some slight movement around the line of 90.0 percent, with some even considering as the biggest external threat to Kosovo.

With regard to Albania, the results of the KSB from 2013 to 2016 re-confirm the overall perception that Albania among all other neighbouring countries, is Kosovo's closest ally. Being considered as a friendly country by more than 90.0 percent of the respond-

ents, the key arguments behind positive positioning towards Albania - which indicates – predominantly, shared national, traditional, historical and cultural features. Moreover, the increasing mobility between citizens of Kosovo and Albania fostered an opinion purely based on personal experiences, but also grounded in ethnically based sentiment. Consequently, the positive perceptions does not happen to be the same among the Serbian respondents and other minorities residing in Kosovo, who remained neutral with their views towards Albania, with some even sharing negative perception.

When asked to rate the attitude of Albania towards Kosovo, the qualitative feedback from field researchers shows that besides the aforementioned factors, the respondents also based their positive perceptions on the joint cultural activities and events between the artistic elites from both countries. Although, a closer analysis to the results shows that the perceptions are based on the political events that have occurred in the past years. While, during 2014, Albania was consolidating the new government comprised by a new political party – the changing of political leaders- has had a considerable impact on the perceptions as well as expectations from Albania resulting in 90.7 percent of those sharing positive perception. Nevertheless, the slight increase in 2015 with around 94.6 percent listing Albania very positive, shows that the proactive approach of new Albanian leadership in foreign policy, particularly the political discourse in relation to Kosovo's independence, boosted the positive opinion. The leading role of Albania, the political discourse of the Albanian leaders showing support in numerous regional and international initiatives and taking a stronger stand in support of Kosovo's independence in the international arena was listed as one of the key factors behind positive approach towards Albania. Also, topped with the football match against Serbia, a period that marked a substantial increase of national identity among Albanians not just in Kosovo but those residing in the entire Balkan region.

This positive approach shows slight decrease in 2016, with 90.09 percent of the citizens sharing positive perception towards Albania. This decrease of almost four percent was highly fuelled by the debates over nation-building process in Kosovo, as such, 2016 witnessed a large-scale debates over the Albanian and Kosovar identity from both sides. In addition to this, the leading role of Albania in the region, and the "re-established 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 bi-lateral relations between Albania and Serbia.

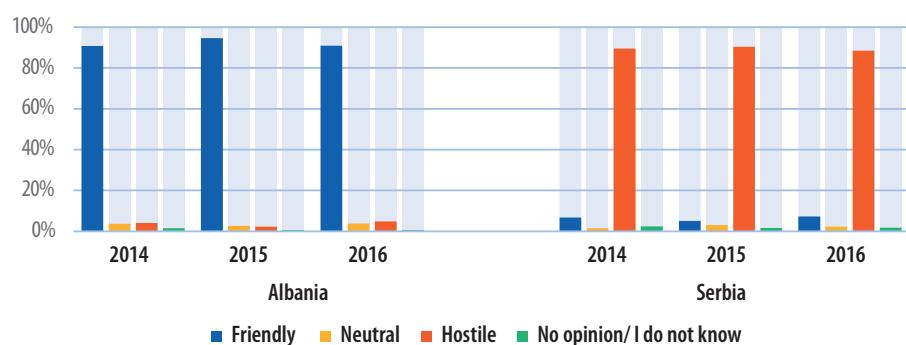
While the positive perception towards Albania continues to widely be increased, the opposite appears to be the case towards Serbia. As shown in Figure 1, when asked about the attitude of Serbia towards Kosovo, around 90.0 percent of the respondents explicitly declare negatively. The results extracted in the past three years show a negative trend of perceptions – especially among Kosovar Albanian respondents – towards Serbia. In the eyes of the Kosovar Albanian respondents, Serbia continues to be perceived as a very hostile state.

It is evident that the negative perception towards Serbia is influenced not only by the historic memory of conflict, repression and the war of 1999, but also by the reluctance of Serbia to soften its approach towards Kosovo – namely the destructive role towards the independence, and the continuous efforts to halt the state-building process in Kosovo. The respondents not only shared negative perceptions towards Serbia, but the KSB results in the past three years show that Serbia has been rated as the biggest external security threat to Kosovo and its citizens, by around 70.0 percent of the respondents.¹

The solid negative perceptions also reflects the positioning of Serbia towards Kosovo in 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 towards Serbia. Moreover, the latest aggressive discourse and approach of Serbia towards Kosovo sparked panic among Kosovars fearing the repetition of aggression by Serbia.

A minor percentage of the respondents, around 8.0 percent in average think that Serbia's approach towards 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 towards 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.

Figure 1: Trends of Public Perceptions towards Albania and Serbia



1 For detailed results and data please refer to previous KSB publication on the official KCSS website: www.gkss.org or contact the program coordinator if interested to know more about the methodology and database.

1.2. Trends of Public Perceptions towards Macedonia and Montenegro

While the respondents seem to share rather clear perceptions towards Albania and Serbia, the opinions gathered in the past three years concerning the attitude of Macedonia and Montenegro towards Kosovo appear to be mostly neutral. Seemingly, the perceptions towards these countries are rather mixed, thus showing a tendency to position them on neutral territory.

The overall positive perception towards Macedonia and Montenegro was shaped upon their government's decision to recognize Kosovo's independence immediately after the declaration, thus lining among the biggest allies, and clearly showing detachment from the attitude of Serbia. Although, there is a wide-range of factors contributing to those sharing rather sceptical approach towards Macedonia and Montenegro.

In the case of Macedonia, on average the results of the past three year show an increase of positive perception and a downsize of those perceiving Macedonia as a hostile country, a slight increase has been marked among those listing Macedonia as neutral as well. The percentage of those perceiving Macedonia as a friendly country has shown an increase for around two percent in each year, from 31.5 percent in 2014 to 35.3 percent in 2016. The economic cooperation and the increased mobility, mostly of Kosovars travelling to Macedonia for tourism purposes has had a huge impact on the positive approach. The past three years, for example, Macedonia has been the first address for Kosovars seeking good healthcare and the increased number of Kosovars using the international airport of Skopje due to competitive prices. In addition, the field researchers have observed the ability of the respondents to make a difference between the states of Macedonia with the Albanian community living in Macedonia, the positive attitude was also driven by the close ties of the Kosovar Albanians with the Albanian community in Macedonia.

Most of the respondents argued that there is a positive movement showing the increase of inter-ethnic tolerance in Macedonia, mostly driven by the massive protests showing unity of all ethnic groups against the government. A large portion of the respondents – 40.0 percent on average shared negative opinions or were reserved when asked to share perceptions towards Macedonia mostly due to the unfair treatment of the Albanian community in Macedonia, the wire-tapping showing negative discourse towards Albanians, and the skirmishes in Kumanovo in May 2015. These actions have been listed as the key factors behind the negative perception towards Macedonia as listed by around 20.0 percent of the respondents on average.

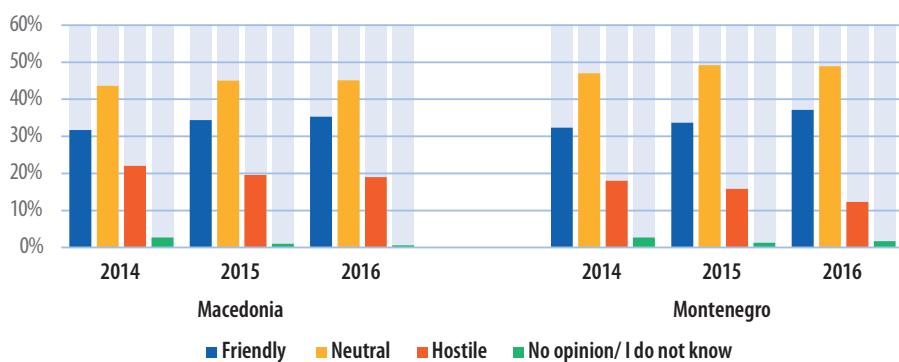
Similar to the case of Macedonia, the trend of the respondents sharing positive stance towards Montenegro has been increasing in the past three years. While, in 2014, 32.3

percent of the respondents believe Montenegro to be positive, these digits increased to 37.1 percent in 2016. Besides the positive approach established when Montenegro recognized Kosovo, the other factors behind the positive approach are believed to be the freedom of movement, and the Albanian ethnic community residing in Montenegro.

The negative perception and hesitation to share opinions towards Montenegro, on the other hand, has been largely attributed to the latest political events that have to do with the border demarcation between Kosovo and Montenegro. The negotiations regarding the border demarcation commenced in 2012, however, it was only in 2015 when the European Commission presented the final plan which made the Kosovar public opinion express disagreements. The negative political discourse and the feeling of “loosing lands” in the border with Montenegro led to protests, political debates and in the end stagnation of the entire process.

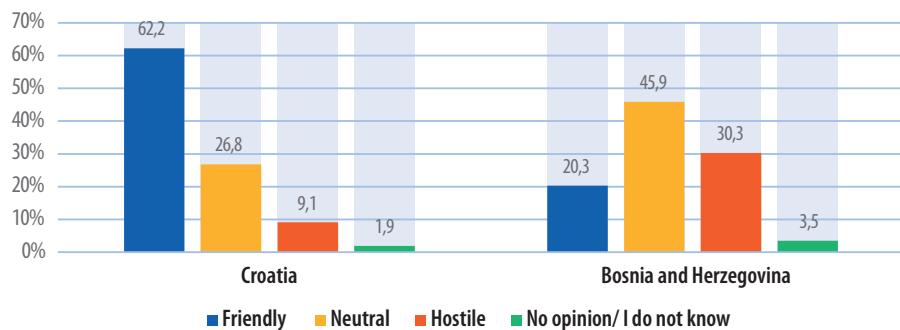
Most would agree that the demarcation issue is a problem that belongs to the political elite in Kosovo only, and some would put the blame on the EU for pressuring both parties – especially the Kosovars by using it as a pre-condition for visa liberalization, thus the result shows that these debates did not influence the attitude towards Montenegro as a state. Some even appreciate the neutral and “cold-headed” approach of the Montenegrin government toward this issue. As such, the negative perception towards Montenegro has decreased by 5.7 percent from 2014 to 2016.

Figure 2: Trends of Public Perceptions towards Montenegro and Macedonia



Although not included in the past editions of the KSB, given the current political circumstances in the region, KCSS team measured the perceptions towards Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina as well. The results show that around 90.0 percent of the citizens perceive Croatia as a friendly country towards Kosovo, with some even considering it as the greatest strategic partner for Kosovo – both political and military ally. On the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, around 66.0 percent perceive it as neutral or friendly towards Kosovo, these perceptions are based on the shared past, especially with relation to the aggression experienced by Serbia. While some even mentioned the religious aspect as a factors behind positive approach with respect to Federation where the Bosnian entity is mainly concentrated. Around 30.0 percent shared negative perceptions when asked about Bosnia and Herzegovina, mostly referring to the Serbian influence, the lack of bi-lateral relations, no freedom of movement of goods and people and total refusal to recognize everything that reflect Kosovo statehood.

Figure 3: Trends of Public Perception towards Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina



CHAPTER II

2. TRENDS OF PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS MAJOR POWERS

Along with Kosovo's neighbouring states, the respondents were also asked to share their perceptions about other states, namely the main powers having direct or indirect influence in Kosovo's state-building and its future. While the perceptions towards neighbouring countries reflected a mixture of respondents' immediate political, social, cultural opinions, the perceptions towards major powers is predominantly based upon the attitude of these countries towards Kosovo's political status and statehood. The role of the media should not be ignored, since the respondents' opinions about major powers in the world are significantly shaped by the media and general public discourse. As will be seen in the section below, there is a clear distinction of perceptions towards the Western states including Turkey on the one hand, and Russia and China on the other hand. While the western states are seen through a positive lens, there is a lack of enthusiasm towards Russia and China, with small exception in the case of Kosovar Serb respondents.

2.1. Trends of Public Perception towards the United States of America and Germany

The KSB results since the beginning of the special edition on foreign policy show a very positive trend of perceptions towards the USA and Germany, these countries has topped the list being perceived as friendliest states towards Kosovo. Around 90.0 percent of the respondents have shared a positive perception towards these countries, mainly for the political support given during the war of 1999, peace building process in the aftermath, and the state-building process. As such, the perception towards these states are viewed beyond bilateral matters, both being seen as allies and partners in the state-building process, Euro-Atlantic relations and Kosovo's positioning in the international arena.

While in the case of the USA, the BKS results prove the perception that Kosovo remains the most pro-American state. When analysing the results of citizen's perceptions towards the USA, there is a wide range of factors contributing to the positive approach mostly originating from the pro-active approach before the military intervention, and political support in the past 15 years until nowadays. Nonetheless, a closer look to the results of the KSB 2016 show that the positive perceptions towards the USA has been

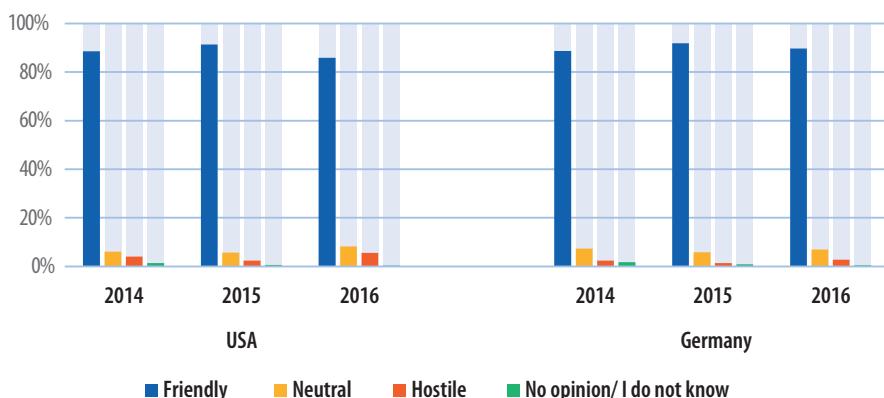
decreasing (from 91.4 percent in 2015 to 85.9 percent in 2016) – by 5.5 percent to be precise. This decrease can be explained by the overall scepticism towards main political allies – mostly due to presidential elections in the USA (uncertainty of the future leadership).

In the case of Germany, on the other hand, the trends show that the citizens of Kosovo perceive Germany as their main ally within Europe. Plainly, the German foreign policy towards Kosovo and Serbia (the EU membership conditionality) has contributed to this positive trend. Another contributing factor affecting the positive views on Germany is the Kosovar Diaspora in Germany and the remittances sent back home from Germany. In this respect, it is worth noting that the “zero tolerance” approach of the German Government towards economic asylum seekers from Kosovo during 2015 did not change the positive perceptions towards this state.

Similarly to the perceptions towards the USA, the trends of positive perceptions towards Germany have experienced a slight decrease (from 91.9 percent in 2014 to 89.7 percent in 2016) – by 2.2 percent. This decrease can be attributed to the overall EU approach towards Kosovo, which can potentially be translated into perceptions towards Germany – as the main EU leader – especially in the EU integration process for the Western Balkans.

The negative trends towards the USA and Germany are mainly attributed to the Kosovar Serbian respondents. The quantitative data gathered in the field indicate that in spite of their positive perception for the USA and Germany as friendly states towards Kosovo as a state, they still expressed reservations towards both USA and Germany

Figure 4: Trends of Public Perceptions towards USA and Germany



2.2. Trends of Public Perceptions towards UK, France and Turkey

Intentionally, the perceptions towards the UK, France and Turkey are put in a group, this lining has been made based on the results extracted from the three past KSB special editions, the type of partnership as perceived in the eyes of the respondents and also the similarity when it comes to rapid level of decrease in positive perceptions in the last year, KSB 2016.

The UK has enjoyed largely positive perception by Kosovar respondents over the past three years. Exactly, 82.2 percent of the respondents shared positive perceptions towards the UK in 2014, this trend continued to increase in 2015 to 83.9 percent. The key factors leading to the positive perception towards 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. However, this trend has decreased in 2016 when only 75.9 shared positive perception towards the UK. Of course this does reflect the overall decrease of trust towards the allies, but it also reflects the decision that the UK took to leave the EU. The results of the referendum in the UK brought uncertainty in the entire Europe, thus reflecting the scepticism of the respondents in general. Afraid to lose one of the biggest support 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.

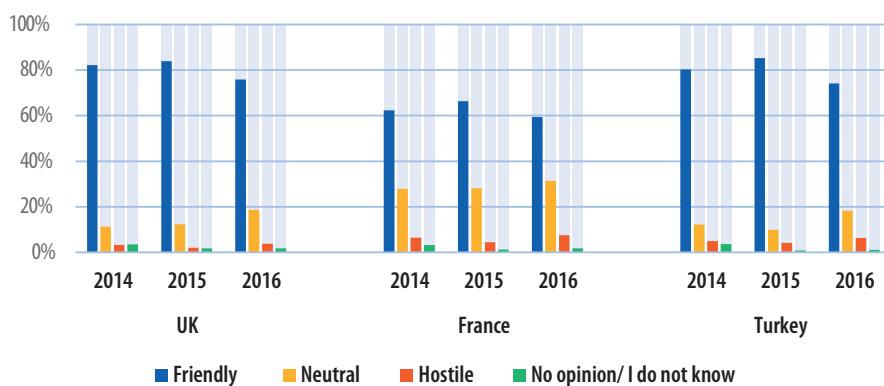
Among all other EU states, France is the one that has received the lowest level of positive perceptions by the respondents. As shown in Figure 4, the perceptions towards France have slightly moved along the line of around 60.0 percent of those ranking it as positive towards Kosovo. The percentage of those listing the attitude of France towards Kosovo as positive moves from 62.4 percent in 2014, to 66.3 percent in 2015 – thus marking the highest positive trend – although it dropped to 59.4 percent in 2016. There is a slight increase in those who believe that France is neutral towards Kosovo. While, the positive approach can be rooted in the support during the war and the positioning of the French diplomacy in the post declaration of independence period, there is still a group of the respondents who remain dissatisfied towards France due to the inefficiency of French troop's (part of KFOR) in preventing the division of Mitrovica back in 1999. The rest of the group does not see France as a relevant partner in the EU integration process, or other events related to the international positioning of Kosovo in general.

Intentionally left for the end, Turkey, the non-EU potential strategic partner for Kosovo has been widely seen from a positive prism by the respondents in the past three years. Differently, from other states, the positive perception can be rooted in the religious

features, but also on the economic cooperation between Turkey and Kosovo – mostly through Turkish investments in Kosovo.

The increased mobility between Kosovo and Turkey – one of the least states where Kosovars can travel freely without visa. The increased trade volume between both countries, and investments from Turkish companies – which are not necessarily higher than those from the EU – but has been given a large attention by the media and was more explicit, has led to an overall perception that Turkey is the biggest investor in Kosovo. The positive trend towards Turkey was comprised of 80.3 percent in 2014, to continue with 85.2 percent – marking the peak of positive perceptions towards this state. Nonetheless, this trend marked a rapid decrease in 2016, with only 74.2 percent believing that Turkey has positive approach towards Kosovo. This decrease by 11.0 percent can be explained on the factors driven by the fear of the perceived and alleged Turkey's Islamist agenda in Kosovo and the spread of religious extremist ideas. We could comfortably conclude that certain media reports in this regards may have helped to shape such an opinion. On the other hand, the airport concession, the possession of the right to distribution of electricity as the biggest PPP projects may have led to suspicion on corruption affairs involving the government of Kosovo on the one hand, and dissatisfaction with the services provided on the other hand.

Figure 5: Trends of Perceptions towards the UK, France and Turkey



2.3. Trends of Public Perceptions towards Russia and China

Among all states included in the survey, Russia and China are those lined alongside Serbia in the eyes of the respondents. While the western powers and Turkey are seen from a positive perspective, the same does not occur for Russia and China – which are perceived as negative towards Kosovo by a large percentage of the respondents. It is worth noting that the perceptions towards these countries differ from the Kosovar Albanians who see these countries as obstacles for the Kosovo's statehood, while the Kosovar Serbian respondents share predominantly positive approach, precisely for their negative approach towards Kosovo's independence.

In spite the fact that these countries are geographically located far from Kosovo, and the diplomatic relations are practically nonexistent, the perceptions towards these states have been mainly built according to their approach towards Kosovo's independence and political status in international arena. There is an exception in the case of Russia, which is also rated based on the political support given to Serbia and the political influence over the Balkans in the general.

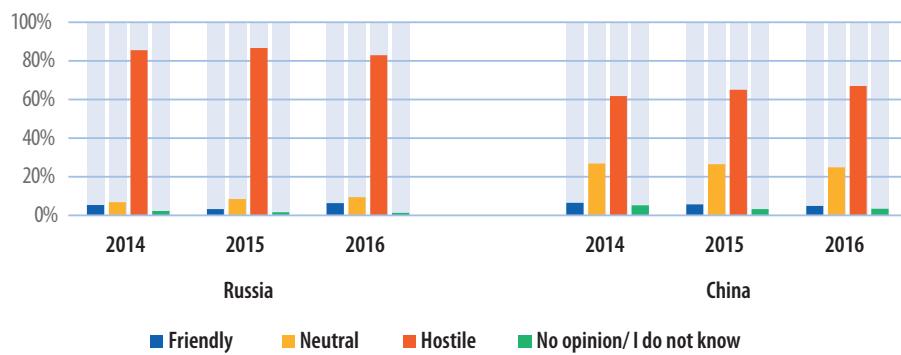
The positive opinions about Russia are reflected among the Kosovar Serbian respondents taking part in this survey, the positive trend has marked a 3.0 percent increase, also reflecting the Russia presence especially in the northern part of Kosovo. It is the support given to Serbia – and Serbians residing in the northern part of Kosovo - that stands behind the negative perceptions among Kosovar Albanian towards Russia, mainly by around 85.0 percent in the average who believe that Russia is a hostile country towards Kosovo. Being perceived as the largest Serbian ally in international arena, Russia has been qualified as the "hand of Serbia" predominantly used to block Kosovo's membership in international organizations. This is also seen in any attempt Kosovo makes in its aspiration to become a member of the UN or of any of its agencies; Russia in these cases has been a staunch supporter of Serbia using its power as the permanent member of the Security Council to veto any initiative that would support Kosovo's international legitimacy.

Similarly, China has been perceived as a hostile country towards Kosovo as well, around 65.0 percent of the respondents on average have considered China's approach towards Kosovo as hostile. China, too, has been seen as an obstacle in the international arena. China's reluctance to recognize Kosovo's independence and its veto power in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has highly influenced the opinion of the citizens of Kosovo towards China.

In general, the opinions towards China are built based on its influence and position within the UN, and not necessarily on any track of practice or personal experiences that Kosovars have with them. Despite a general negative opinion on China, it still

ranks better than Russia, and this could be explained by two factors. First, China is not perceived as a staunch supporter of Serbia as Russia is. Second, there are higher trade and commercial relations between Kosovo and China, and there are reports that Kosovars can still travel to China to do business, while they have no chance to do so when it comes to Russia. Thus, it reflects on the results showing that on average in the past three years China has been perceived as neutral by 25.0 percent of the respondents.

Figure 6: Trends of Public Perceptions towards Russia and China



CHAPTER III

3. TRENDS OF PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS KEY INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND KOSOVO'S EURO ATLANTIC PERSPECTIVE

Alongside the most relevant regional states and key global powers, the respondents were asked to share their opinion towards the most relevant international organizations in which Kosovo is clearly aspiring membership into. The overall positive trend of perceptions shows that the citizens are in line with the government aspirations when it comes to membership into the most relevant trans-Atlantic organizations/ structures. In addition, the opinions and perceptions given in this section are highly influenced by the missions these organizations lead and represent in Kosovo, having some still present in Kosovo with active missions. 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 mission without knowing the details or seeing the broader picture.

3.1. Trends of Public Perceptions towards Kosovo's membership into the EU

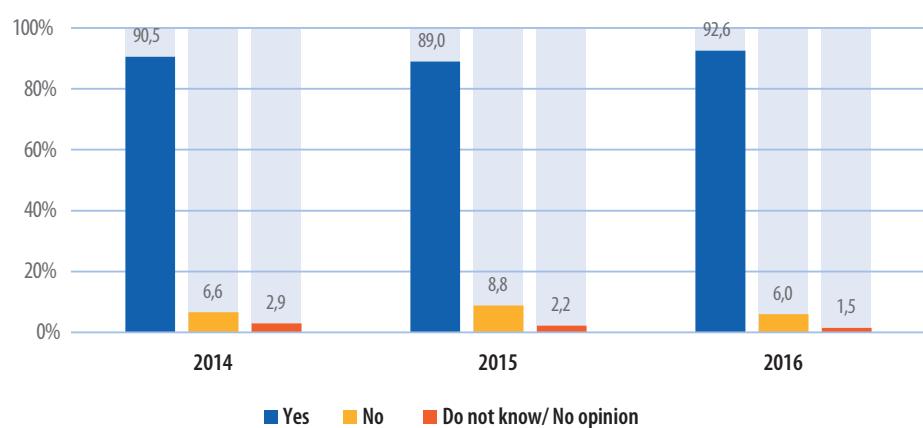
As the EU integration and membership represents one of the main pillars of Kosovo's foreign policy, as such it is reflected in almost every policy making process, and the overall policy agenda in Kosovo that aspires to be in line with the EU legislation and standards. Consequently, measuring the perceptions towards the EU integration process has been one of the key questions of all KSB editions. Moreover, the respondents were asked to rate the EU approach towards Kosovo in the visa liberalization process, and the political will to accept Kosovo as a potential member.

Evidently, the citizens of Kosovo have shared positive perceptions in relation to the EU integration process over the past three years of the KSB by clearly showing a large level of enthusiasm towards EU membership. This positive approach did not fade albeit, the overall decrease of positive perception in the surrounding countries, and the clear statements by the EU officials showing reluctance towards the enlargement process for the Western Balkan countries in general. Furthermore, the results show that in spite of the overall perception that the EU approach towards Kosovo – especially in the visa liberalization process – has been not fair or constructive by almost 60.0 percent of the respondents, the positive perceptions towards the EU has shown a slight increase over the past years.

A positive trend and attitude towards EU integration has been shown throughout the years, with a slight increase by 3.6 percent compared to the previous year, 2015. On average around 90.0 percent of the respondents believe in and are willing to join the EU in spite of it being a “far-fetched” goal for Kosovo considering the reforms and the number of conditions to be fulfilled, as well as the fact of dim chances because of the EU non-recognizers. The positive perception was also rooted on the positive decision given by the commission with regard to the visa liberalization process, a decision that did not put Kosovo on the “white Schengen list” per se, but it sparked optimism among the respondents. In addition to this, the Stabilization Association Agreement, marked a turning point as the first contractual agreement signed between Kosovo and the EU – also showing a milestone on the path towards the EU - as the first compromise made among non-recognizing states in relation to the case of Kosovo.

On the other hand, on average around 8.0 percent of the respondents oppose Kosovo’s membership into the EU considering that before seeking membership Kosovo should reach political ripeness and internal stability, or simply seek other potential strategic partners outside of the EU.

Figure 7: Trends of Public Perceptions towards Kosovo’s membership into the EU



3.2. Trends of Public perception towards membership into NATO

Following the Euro-Atlantic agenda and the states aspirations to join NATO, the respondents were asked whether Kosovo should join NATO. 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 opinions are also shaped by the presence of the KFOR mission in Kosovo. Taking these into consideration, there is a trend of positive perception towards membership into NATO,

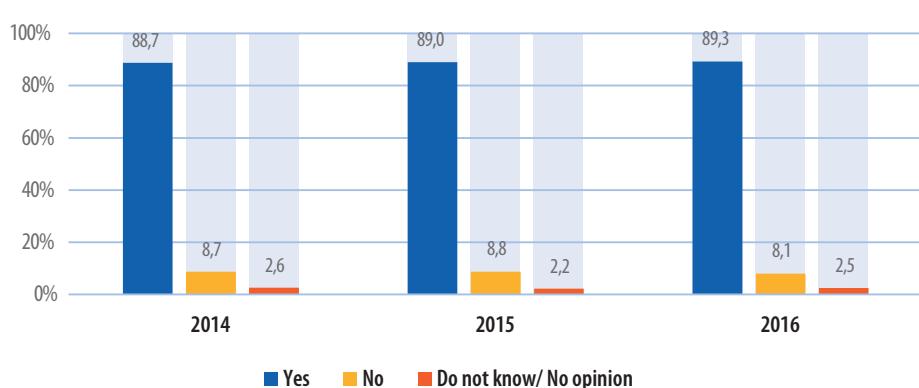
Vast majority of the respondents or 89.0 percent believe that Kosovo should also become a NATO member. In spite of NATO's neutral approach towards Kosovo and lacking any official relations with Kosovo, the desire to become part of this structure is rather high. Moreover, the membership in NATO seems to be linked with the aspiration to possess a solid armed force that will work along with other NATO members in international arena.

The trends of perceptions towards NATO membership – as shown in the figure 7 - has remained quite solid, with a slight increase on the positive side. This steady positioning towards NATO can also be explained by the fact that most of the respondents believe that KFOR presence in Kosovo indicates strong ties and future membership into NATO. Nevertheless, the qualitative feedback from the field shows that the vast majority of the respondents have limited knowledge on the structure and functioning of the alliance, and the political decision-making process that limits contractual and official relations between NATO and Kosovo – mostly due to persistence of the non-recognizers within NATO.

In spite of NATO's neutral approach towards Kosovo and lacking any official relations with Kosovo, the desire to become part of this structure is rather high. This has been partially linked to the desire to transform the Kosovo Security Force into Kosovo Armed Forces, a process that will complete Kosovo's security architecture and the state-building process. Moreover, the alliance has been seen as the only strategic partner in the defence sector, thus joining NATO will also imply lining among Albania, Croatia and soon Montenegro.

On the other hand, around 9.0 percent of respondents on average strongly 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.

Figure 8: Trends of Public Perceptions towards Kosovo's membership into NATO



CHAPTER IV

4. TREND OF PUBLIC PERCEPTION TOWARDS THE POLITICAL DIALOGUE WITH SERBIA

Almost a decade after the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia was launched, both in the technical and political level, this long-lasting and difficult process has triggered many heated debates among the political elite and the wider public opinion in Kosovo. The first editions of the KSB have been focused on the questions debating whether Kosovo should continue the dialogue with Serbia, whether Kosovo should change the bargaining position, and so on. Many doubts regarding the process were raised from different standpoints by both the Kosovo Albanians and the Kosovo Serbs. However, at this point, the dialogue is a political reality and rather irreversible process, and any potential withdrawal from this process might produce critical political consequences in both countries paths towards the EU.

The question whether normalization is really happening or just being artificially pushed by the political elites to “trick” the EU leaders thus gain advantages on their paths towards the EU. The other ultra-questionable issue on the actual winner of this process, or whether Kosovo or Serbia is benefiting more from the dialogue have triggered many debates among public opinions in both countries.

The debate over the benefits of this dialogue have led to major division between the government and opposition in Kosovo, and sparked many debates on the issues that should be discussed, the agenda of the government of Kosovo in relation to this process, and the possible re-structuring of the dialogue. The Kosovo Serb minority, on the other hand, perceives the dialogue as a positive process, expecting it to improve their lives in Kosovo – albeit refusing to implement agreements signed in Brussels. On the other hand it is considered as a costly process taking into consideration that it does represent a step forward in the recognition of Kosovo’s statehood by Serbia - according to their perception.

4.1. (Mis) carrying out normalization

Whether the dialogue is considered a success or failure depends largely on the people's expectations and interpretation from both sides. However, due to lack of transparency alongside the process, namely on the agreements reached between both parties and

the overly diplomatic language in the agreements left enough gaps on both sides to interpret the agreements differently.

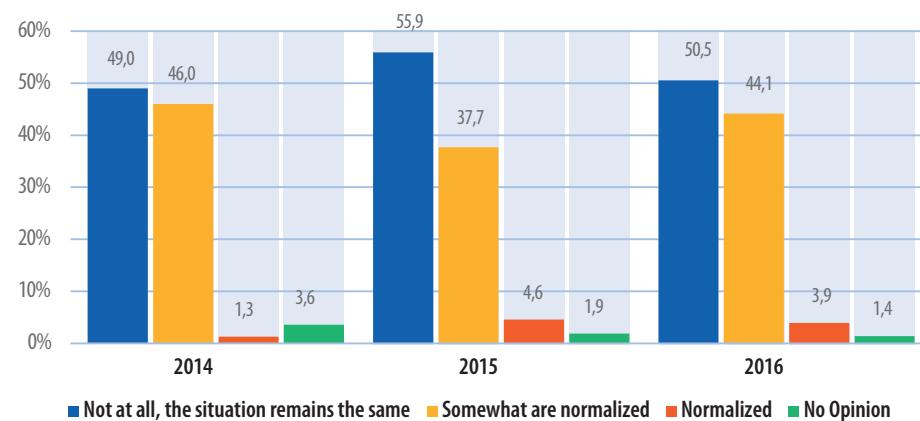
When asked whether the dialogue has contributed to the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, the trends shows that half of the respondents – around 50.0 percent on average - believe that the dialogue is failing to reach the overarching goal - the actual normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia. Half the respondents are pessimistic in this regard, believe that the situation has not changed from prior to the commencement of the dialogue, and that the relations are not normalized at all. The vast majority of the respondents believe that the dialogue is a political process detached from the reality in Kosovo; hence it has failed to ensure progress in the lives of the citizens, both Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs.

This scepticism towards the dialogue is rooted on the failure to see a softer Serbia towards Kosovo, mostly in relation to the positioning of Kosovo in regional and international arena, the lack of political will to implement the agreements reached in Brussels – some even failing due to high resistance from Serbia to create a favourable environment for better implementation of agreements. On the other hand, in the eyes of the Serbian respondents, the failure to reach a political consensus over the Association of the Serbian Municipalities in Kosovo has largely contributed to the increase of scepticism towards this process.

The trends of perceptions among those who believe that the relations are somehow normalized between Kosovo and Serbia have slightly increased. While in 2014, 46.0 percent of citizens believed that there was a positive move towards normalizations, this number decreased to 37.7 in 2015 – when the football match sparked serious debated over nationalist identities in the Balkans. In 2016, this situation seem to be a little bit neutralized, by 44.1 who believe that the normalization was taking place, albeit this was relevant in October when the field research took place, the latest aggressive political discourse of Serbia towards Kosovo – the wall build in Mitrovica ethnically dividing the city, would heavily influence the perception of the respondents.

On the other hand, only a small number of respondents, or around 5.0 percent on average stated that the relations between Kosovo and Serbia are normalized. This perception was justified by the increased mobility due to the agreement on the freedom of movement of the citizens – albeit with some limitation from the Serbian, mainly on the Kosovar car registration plates.

Figure 9: Trends on Public Perception on the Normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia



4.2. Political dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia: Who is the winner?

Almost all the agreements that were reached between Kosovo and Serbia have been interpreted differently from the parties involved in the process, each post-agreement period has been manifested by three different interpretation of the agreement reached in Brussels, one on the Kosovar side, one on the Serbian – each listing themselves as winners – while the overly diplomatic language on the EU side served as a tool to soften the negative perceptions created on both sides. The lack of transparency throughout the process, and behind the “closed doors” decision-making, left room for misinterpretation, misuse of the content of the agreements by the political elites in both states, as well as it hampered many aspects of its implementation and its potential impact on the lives of citizens.

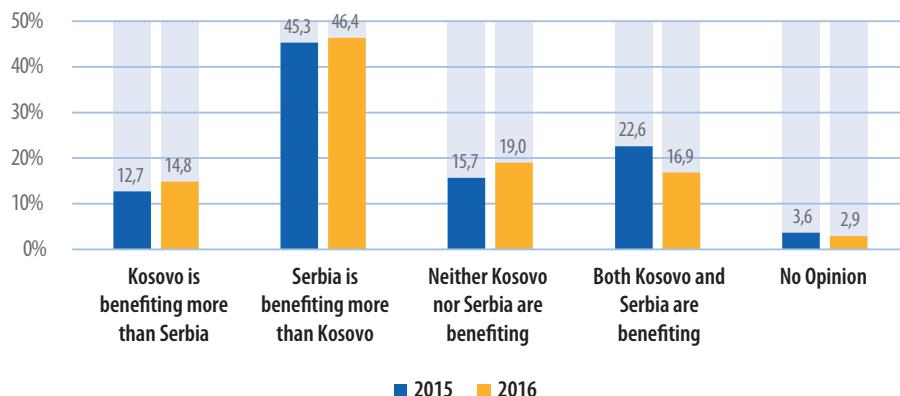
The answers provided when asked about the potential winner of the dialogue vary on the interpretation and the positioning of the respondent. The long lasting debate aiming to find out whether this process will result in a win-win situation – meaning both countries reaching the overarching goal, the EU membership, the circumstances created after six years of dialogue leave room for different interpretations.

When asked about who is benefiting more from the dialogue Kosovo or Serbia, almost half of the respondents or 45.3 percent of them believed that Serbia is benefiting more than Kosovo in 2015, the same trend continued in 2016 with a slight increase to 46.4 believing so . Most of the arguments used by the respondents were related to Serbia's accelerated path towards the EU, while at the same time Kosovo is stagnating, and the large number of benefits that Serbia has been extracting from this process. With Kosovo having been left outside the visa free regime, and Serbia, on the other hand, opening the chapters in the EU accession process, the Kosovar Albanian respondents believe that Kosovo is becoming Serbia's *stepping stone* in its path to EU membership. The leading role of Serbia in the region has created the perception that there is a discrepancy in the EU attitude towards Serbia and Kosovo.

Alternatively, only 12.7 percent of the respondents believed that Kosovo is benefiting more than Serbia in this process, this trend has shown a slight increase to 14.8 percent believing so. The factors behind such standpoints are mostly related to the SAA, thus believing that it marks the first contractual relation between Kosovo and the EU and a landmark agreement in Kosovo's path towards the EU. In addition, many of the respondents who believe that Kosovo is benefiting more than Serbia claimed that the dialogue will eventually result in the recognition of Kosovo's independence by the Serbian authorities. This is problematic, because this indicates that even this small percentage of people who believe that Kosovo is benefiting more than Serbia, can easily shift their opinion on the opposite direction when it becomes clear that the process is actually not leading towards what they are hoping for - a likely chance in the near future. On the other hand, this positive opinion may further strengthen in the future depending on the content of the Chapter 35 in EU's accession negotiations with Serbia, which mostly refers to the normalization of relations with Kosovo prior to entering the EU. This process is, however, too long for such a positive opinion to hold ground.

On the other hand, during 2015 less than a quarter of the respondents or 22.6 percent of them believed that the dialogue is a win-win situation for both Kosovo and Serbia, and that both are benefiting equally by gaining a lot in the EU integration process. This perception has had a slight decrease in 2016 with 16.9 believing that the dialogue is a win-win situation, that it is being used by the EU aiming to buy time and keep the region stable. Having this in mind, the group of respondents believing that the dialogue is a zero-sum game has shown an increase from 15.7 percent in 2015 to 19.0 percent in 2016. This group of the respondents believed that both parties are sacrificing a lot and that the results of this dialogue will lead nowhere.

Figure 10: Trends of Public Perceptions on the Outcome of the Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia



4.3. Trends of Public Perceptions on the establishment of the Association of Serb Majority Municipalities

The agreement on the establishment of the Association of Serb Majority Municipalities (ASMM) was reached and signed by the Kosovo and Serbian authorities in August 2015, as a part of the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue in Brussels (Commission, 2015).

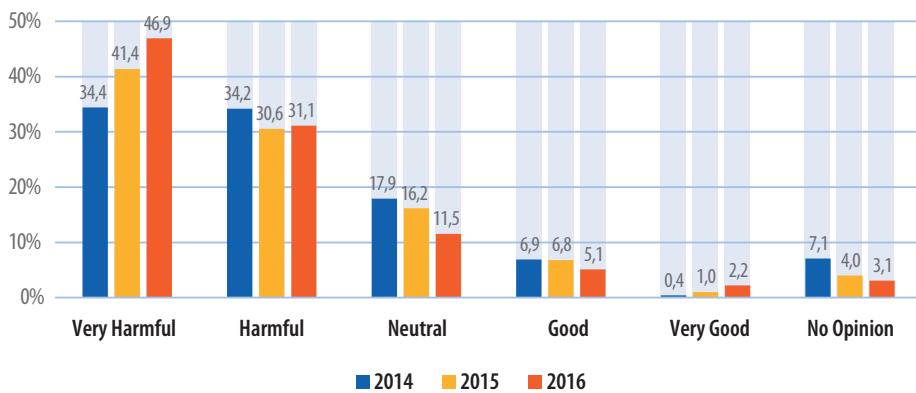
It did not take too long before it reached the peak of heated political debates among the government and opposition in Prishtina over the content of the agreement. Consequently, it became one of the reasons which led to the political deadlock in Kosovo and increased dissatisfaction with the government in Kosovo, the benefits of the talks, and the future of the multi-ethnic state created in 2008.

In general, the findings reflect the political situation in Kosovo; an overwhelming majority of the respondents, or 71.7 percent of them shared negative attitude with regards to the establishment of the ASMM by seeing it as very harmful and harmful to Kosovo in 2015, this negative trend continued to increase to 78.0 percent believing so. It is worth noting that the finalization of the agreements and the published details of its contents have outraged the Kosovar Albanian respondents. In addition, the increase of awareness on this matter, being the most discussed issue on the media and among politicians, contributed to a an increase in the negative perceptions by almost 15.0 percent when compared to the results extracted in 2014. It is worth noting that this discourse, the lack of transparency and the uncertainty in this process is one of the leading factors why the citizens of Kosovo have assessed this issue by inertia, and not based on the content of the agreement. Furthermore, the continuation of this de-

bate and the lack of political consensus in the Kosovar side will further fuel negative perception towards this agreement. On the other hand, the pressure exercised by Serbia – Belgrade political elites- have been intensified lately, with even threatening an ultimatum for the Kosovar authorities, otherwise it will be created unilaterally by the Serbian side only.

On the other hand, the balanced perception towards the ASSM from 17.9 percent in 2014 marked a continuous decrease over the years to 16.2 percent in 2015 and 11.5 percent in 2016. While only around 8.0 percent believe that its implementation is positive. From the qualitative feedback of the respondents, it appears that the Kosovo Serbs generally share positive views, while the Albanians believe that the establishment of the ASMM seriously violates Kosovo's constitutional order and its stability. There is a fear that the ASSM does not promote a multi-ethnic society – as it is stated in the constitution, but it will rather contribute feed an ethnically divided society. Furthermore, the negative perception does not derive from the fear that the ASSM will give additional rights to the Serbian minority, but from the fear that it will serve as a tool to deteriorate the majority. In general, a 7.0 percent on average in the past three years, from all the ethnicities did not want to answer nor had no information on the matter.

Figure 11: Trends of Public Perceptions on the Establishment of the Association of Serbian Municipalities in Kosovo



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