

GALLUP

Balkan Monitor

Insights and Perceptions: Voices of the Balkans

Focus On:

Perceptions of the EU in the Western Balkans

Since the Kosovo crisis in 1999/2000, the EU has been committed to supporting the development of the Western Balkans region with the objective of integrating the regions' countries into the Union. That goal was re-affirmed at the 2003 Thessaloniki summit, where the then-Commissioner for External Relations, Chris Patten, addressed the Western Balkan states saying that the EU "will not regard the map of the Union as complete until you have joined us".

Since then, however, the EU has gone through difficult times that have had an impact on its relationship with its South-Eastern neighbours. Although all Western Balkan countries with the exception of the newly-born Kosovo have signed Stabilisation and Association Agreements, it seems as if the EU's love for its neighbours in South-East Europe has cooled off. Battered by institutional crises and "enlargement fatigue", the future of the Western Balkans has slipped down the EU's agenda and references to a quick integration of the region have become somewhat scarce. Indeed, it would appear that only Croatia looks likely to enter the EU in the short term.

The *Gallup Balkan Monitor* (GBM) shows that this development has had an impact on the people living in the countries in question: over the last two waves of the survey – 2006 and 2008 – it can be seen that while support for EU membership remains at a high level, in most countries it has slightly decreased. However, the majority of countries in the region still feel they would be welcomed by both the EU-27 and the European Commission; only Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina seem to feel that they would be greeted less warmly.

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Photo: © Tim Judah

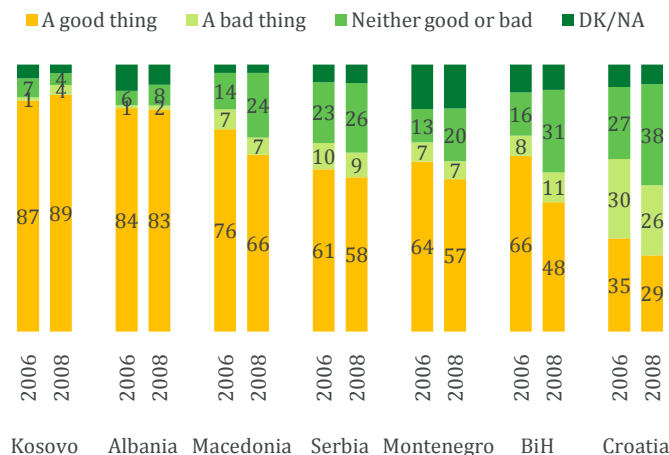
Overall, the Western Balkans is not a homogeneous region with uniform views of Europe: the GBM produces a complex picture that shows a vast range of perceptions about the EU at a country-level and below. Opinions recorded in the survey range from outright and even growing EU euphoria (e.g. in Kosovo and Albania) to the start of a feeling of alienation (e.g. in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina). The GBM results from Macedonia and Bosnia also reflect the often conflicting views of ethnic groups living within these countries; these situations make it difficult for both European and national policymakers to create an all-encompassing policy.

The "*GBM Focus On: Perceptions of the EU in the Western Balkans*" gives a first impression of how the people of the region feel about the EU. To dig deeper into this area and many other key issues, visit www.balkan-monitor.eu for the full GBM survey results and check out the other reports in this *Focus On* series.

The region

High support for EU accession

EU membership support is high, but slowly decreasing



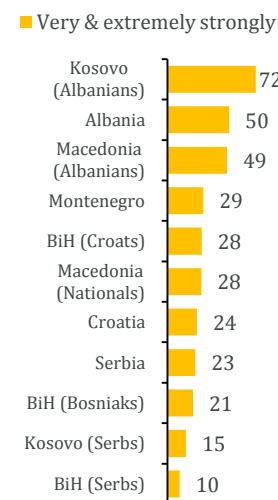
Support for EU integration remains high in the Western Balkans region. Although all countries – leaving aside Kosovo – have seen a decrease in the share of people that think of EU membership as a *good thing*, a relative majority of people in those countries are still convinced of the EU’s advantages. Croatia is the only exception to this rule: however, while the country had the lowest level of respondents perceiving potential membership as a *good thing* (29%), the country has not seen an increase of people who considered it to be a *bad thing* – the largest group of people in the country (38%) felt that EU membership would *neither be good nor bad*.

Generally speaking, do you think that [COUNTRY]’s membership of the European Union would be a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad? %, base: all respondents

When asked whether they thought that a majority in their country would support EU membership, people in most countries had few doubts: more than two-thirds of

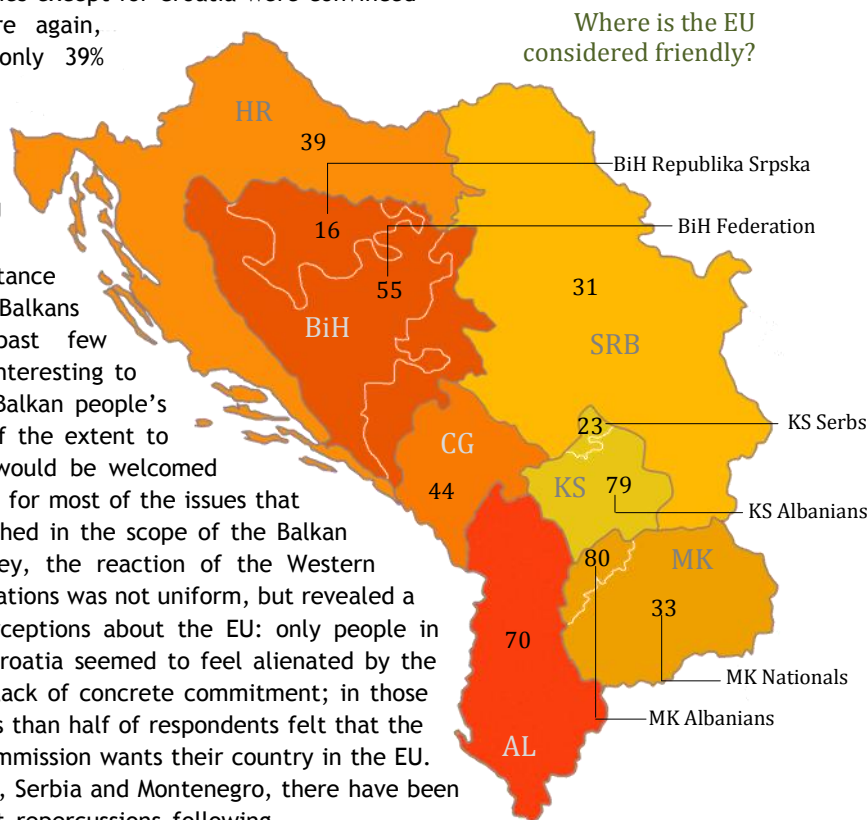
respondents in all Western Balkan countries except for Croatia were convinced that a majority is pro-accession. Here again, Croatia was the EU-sceptic outlier: only 39% thought that a majority supports EU accession, while 45% thought that most Croats are opposed to entering the EU.

Identification with Europe highest in Albanian areas



How strongly do you identify with Europe? %, base: all respondents

Given the EU institutions’ hesitant stance towards the Balkans over the past few years, it is interesting to look at the Balkan people’s perception of the extent to which they would be welcomed in the EU. As for most of the issues that were researched in the scope of the Balkan Monitor survey, the reaction of the Western Balkan populations was not uniform, but revealed a range of perceptions about the EU: only people in Bosnia and Croatia seemed to feel alienated by the EU’s recent lack of concrete commitment; in those countries less than half of respondents felt that the European Commission wants their country in the EU. In Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, there have been no significant repercussions following the latest developments at EU level; as many people (slightly above 50%) felt wanted by the Commission as did

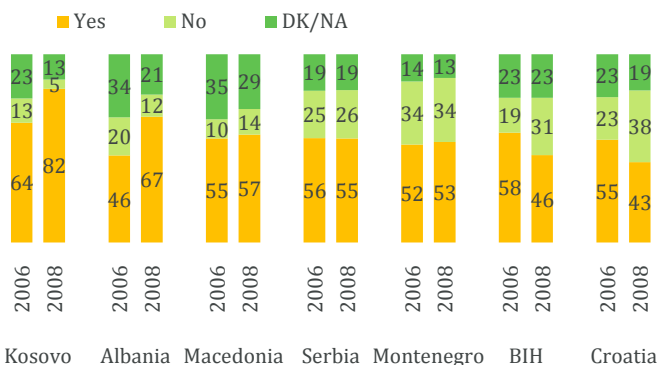


What do you think of the European Union: is it friendly, neutral, or hostile to [country/entity]? % friendly, base: all respondents

two years earlier. Albania and Kosovo even showed a positive development: with an optimism about integration probably fuelled by the EU's support for Kosovo's independence, far more people now thought that they were welcome than did in 2006. In 2008, slightly more than 8 in 10 respondents in Albania and two-thirds in Kosovo were convinced that the EU Commission wants their countries as members of the EU.

The strength of identification with Europe can be seen as a possible explanation for Balkan residents' attitude towards the EU: all areas with a high percentage of ethnic Albanian inhabitants – in Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo – showed both a close identification with Europe and strong support for EU integration. Regions with a low European identification – mostly areas with Serb populations – also had low EU support. An exception was the Bosnian Federation, where support for EU integration was high despite rather low identification with Europe.

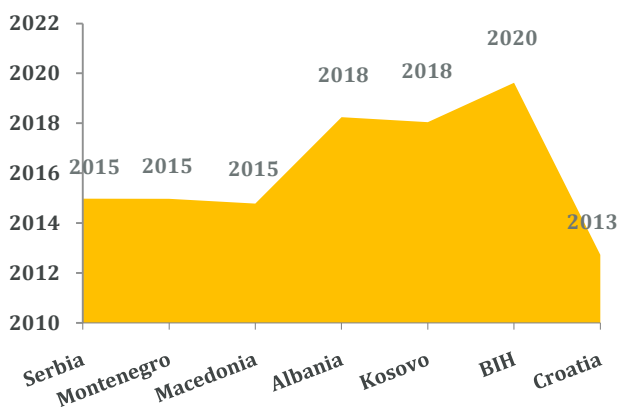
Most countries feel the European Commission wants them to join the EU



Do you think that the European Commission wants [COUNTRY] to join the European Union? %, base: all respondents

Expected year of accession to the EU

People in Bosnia most pessimistic about EU accession

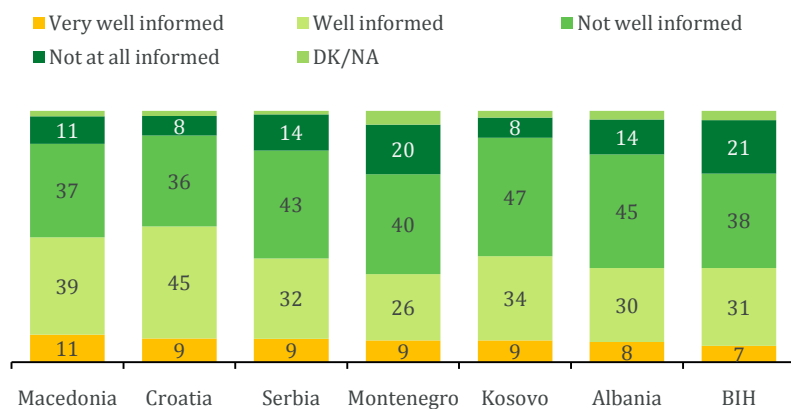


When, in which year do you think [country] will be a part of the European Union? Average of responses given in respective country, base: all respondents

People's (average) assessment of their countries' accession date reflects the respective countries' integration progress. Croatia, as the leader of the pack, has residents who thought it would accede to the EU in 2013, while the inhabitants of Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia, next in line in the EU negotiations, expected their country to join the EU in 2015. People in Albania and Kosovo were not so optimistic (or more realistic) and on average thought that they would become EU citizens in 2018. Respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina were most pessimistic and did not expect their country to enter the Union until 2020. It is also noteworthy that roughly one in six (16%) of people in Bosnia feared that their country would never join the EU – by far the highest percentage in the region.

Knowledge about the EU

Not well informed about the EU



Please rate how much you are informed about the European Union. %, base: all respondents

The need for more effective communication about the EU remains high in the Western Balkans. Except for Croatia and Macedonia, a majority in all countries felt insufficiently informed about the EU. The number of those feeling *not well* or *not at all informed* ranged from 44% in Croatia to 60% in Montenegro.

However, people do not only blame the media for the situation: in all Western Balkan countries, a majority of people was convinced that *the media provides sufficient information about the EU and the road that leads to eventual accession.*

Praise for the media’s role was especially high in Kosovo, where almost 8 in 10 respondents were appreciative. Countries most critical about the media’s role in supplying EU-related information were Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia, where between 30% and 40% of interviewees felt that the media’s content on EU affairs was insufficient.

The countries

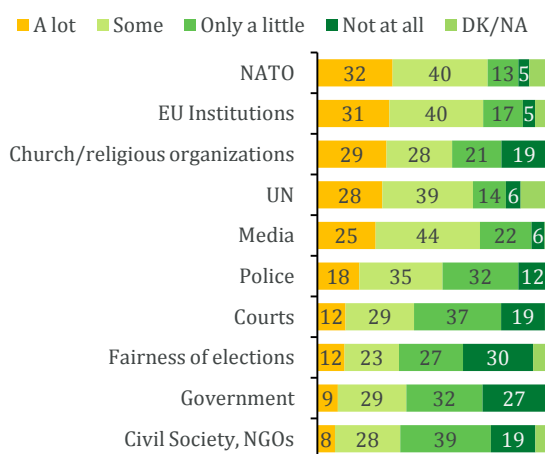
While often treated *en bloc* due to the countries' geographical proximity and common history, the Western Balkans is a diverse region. This is reflected in the respective countries' often heterogeneous views on the EU and their path towards integration. The following pages highlight the most pertinent findings for each of the Western Balkan countries.

Albania

The EU's decreasing commitment to Western Balkan enlargement has had no visible repercussions in Albania. In terms of support for EU accession and the feeling of being welcomed by the European Commission, the country has the second highest ratings of the region – and they have remained stable over the past two years. This positive attitude can be observed across all parts of the population, irrespective of age group, education level or place of residence – for example, in all these groups the conviction that EU accession would be *a good thing* was above 80%.

Albania's unbowed affection for the EU and the International Community in general is also visible in the figures for the most trusted institutions: the EU leads the list together with NATO, with 71% and 72%, respectively, of respondents in Albania saying that they put *a lot* or *some* trust in them. Again, these are among the highest figures for the region.

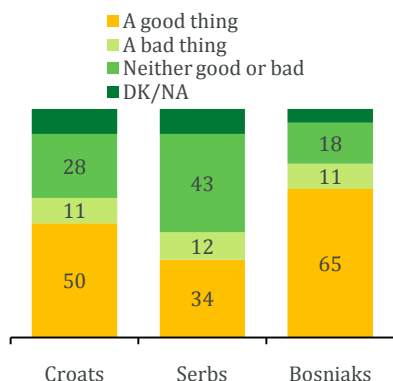
NATO and EU are the most trusted institutions in Albania



For each of the following institutions, please indicate how much trust you put in them. %, base: respondents in Albania

Bosnia and Herzegovina

BiH Serbs more EU-sceptic



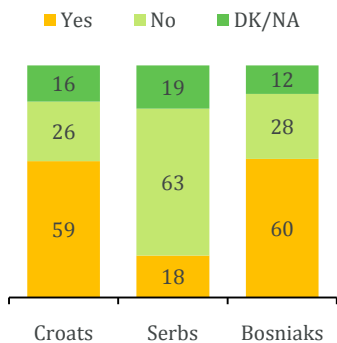
Generally speaking, do you think that Bosnia and Herzegovina's membership of the European Union would be a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good or bad? %, base: all respondents

The strongest drop in EU support was seen in Bosnia. While, in 2006, two-thirds of the population considered EU membership to be positive, this number has decreased to 48% two years later. A third of respondents were undecided about the EU's benefits in 2008 – twice as many as in 2006.

The ethnic and political diversity of Bosnia and Herzegovina is strongly reflected in the population's attitude towards the EU: while 65% of Bosniak respondents and 50% of Bosnian Croats interviewed were convinced that EU accession would be *a good thing*, only 34% of Bosnian Serbs were of the same opinion. The latter group had a rather neutral view with a relative majority (43%) considering the EU to be *neither good nor bad*.

Bosnian respondents were also divided in their assessment of the International Community's involvement in national affairs: asked whether they considered a position such as the Office of the High Representative (OHR) necessary for the country to function, 60% of people in the Federation agreed, while only 16% in Republika Srpska

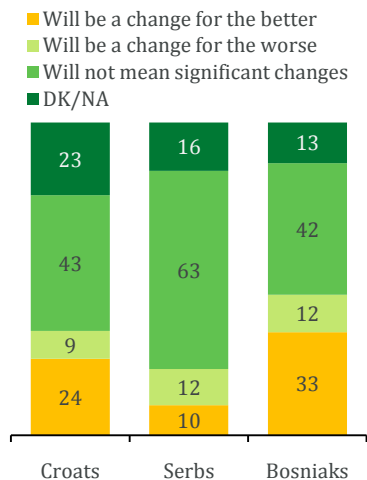
BiH Croats and Bosniaks consider OHR/EUSR necessary



In your opinion is there a need for a position such as the OHR in Bosnia-Herzegovina for the country to function? %, base: respondents in BiH

held that view. The difference between the entities was less pronounced in the expectations towards the change from OHR to EU Special Representative (EUSR) – scheduled for June 2008, but currently postponed without a new date having been set –: in both entities, the relative majorities did not expect significant changes emanating from the EUSR, but while 31% of people in the Federation expected a change for the better, this opinion was only shared by 9% of respondents in Republika Srpska.

Low expectations for arrival of EUSR

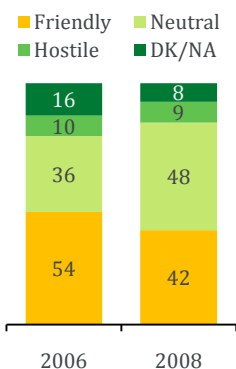


Would you say after the EUSR taking over the position of the HR... %, base: respondents in BiH

Croatia

While support for EU accession has decreased between 2006 and 2008 (from 35% to 29%), this should not come as a surprise: experience with earlier enlargements shows that countries that approach accession and become more aware of the sometimes uncomfortable reforms that accompany EU integration tend to view the Union more critically. Prior to the 2004 enlargement round the opinion that EU accession was a good thing decreased by 15 percentage points (from 58% to 43%) between spring 2003 and spring 2004 across all of the 10 acceding countries.¹

EU less friendly than in 2006



How about the EU: is it friendly, neutral, or hostile to Croatia? %, base: respondents in Croatia

Among the Western Balkan countries, Croatia shows the lowest percentage of people convinced that EU accession would be good for their country (29%), but opinions about this issue are unevenly distributed: support for the EU is higher among the urban population (35%) and people with a university education (51%).

Differences can also be observed between the different regions of Croatia: support for the EU is highest in the urban region around Zagreb (Zagrebacka Regija, 36%), while rather rural areas such as Istocna Regija and Središnja Hrvatska have rather low support with, respectively, 21% and 22%. It is interesting to note that lower support is observed in regions where people feel less informed: e.g. in Istocna Regija, 58% of respondents stated that they felt not well or not at all informed about the EU.

The critical stance of people in Croatia towards the EU is illustrated by the fact that they don't expect many benefits from EU integration: while, in other Western Balkan countries, a majority was convinced that with EU accession the situation in

Zagreb region most supportive of EU membership



Generally speaking, do you think that Croatia's membership of the European Union WOULD BE a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good or bad? % good thing, base: respondents in Croatia. Please rate how much you are informed about the European Union. % not well informed & not at all informed, base: respondents in Croatia

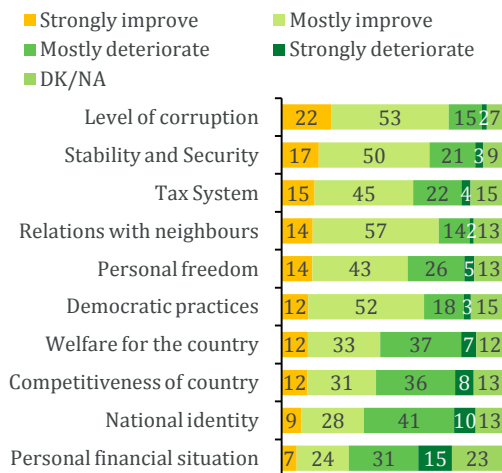
¹ See Eurobarometer 2004.1, Public opinion In the Candidate Countries, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb61/eb61_en.pdf, p. C 51

many societal, administrative and political domains in their countries would improve, people in Croatia were much more critical. In regard to welfare, the country's competitiveness, national identity and their personal financial situation a relative majority of people believed that Croatia's situation would deteriorate.

Another explanation for such concerns about joining the EU could be Croats' strong identification with their own country: 65% of interviewees identified *very or extremely strongly* with Croatia; this was one of the highest percentages in the region. This might indicate that, 17 years after independence, residents in Croatia are still more interested in establishing their national identity than in looking towards Europe.

But some of these feelings about the EU are likely to be related to the difficult accession negotiations: both the border dispute with Slovenia and the slow and complicated progress in moving towards full membership might have taken their toll. This mood shift can be illustrated by the percentage of Croatian respondents that consider the EU to be friendly: the figure dropped from 54% to 42% between 2006 and 2008.

EU expected to not only bring benefits

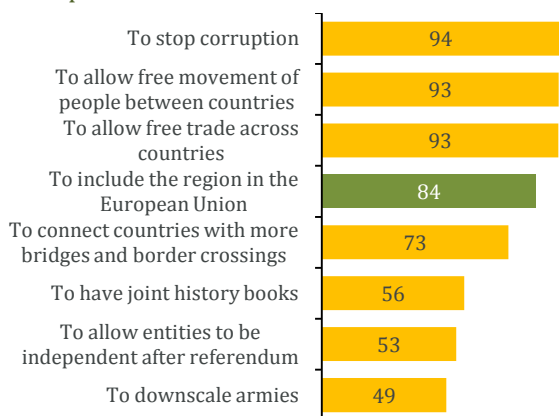


After joining the European Union, how will the situation change in each of the domains I am going to read out? %, base: respondents in Croatia

Macedonia

The most striking finding of the GBM survey for Macedonia is the difference in attitudes towards the EU between its ethnic groups. The opinions of Macedonian nationals in EU matters differ significantly from those of the country's largest minority, the Albanians, who constitute around 25% of the population. Just as the other Albanian groups interviewed in the survey – in Albania and Kosovo – , Macedonian Albanians are very supportive of the EU and other international organisations. While 57% of Macedonian nationals approved of their country joining the EU, the figure is much higher (84%) for Macedonian Albanians. Joining NATO and EU has such a high priority for the Albanian part of the population that 67% would even give up the country's name in the dispute with Greece in order to attain that goal. The ethnic majority, the Macedonians,

EU considered vital for Balkan peace and development

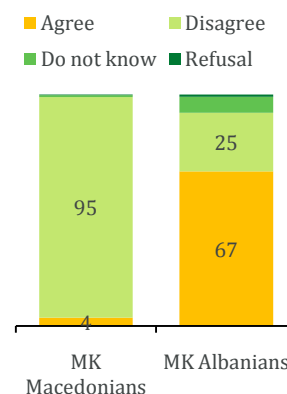


In order to preserve peace and facilitate development, what do you think, which of the followings are worth to achieve, even if it is contrary to some or many people's wishes? % "necessary", base: respondents in Macedonia

is opposed to such a strategy: 95% did not agree with changing the name for this purpose.

Of all the countries surveyed, Macedonia is the one fearing war the most – almost 3 in 10 respondents said that there will certainly or probably be an armed conflict in the region within the next five years. Against this background it is remarkable to see that 84% of Macedonian respondents were convinced that EU accession is needed for peace and development in the region, which is the highest figure for the Western Balkans.

Disagreement between Macedonian ethnic groups on importance of country name

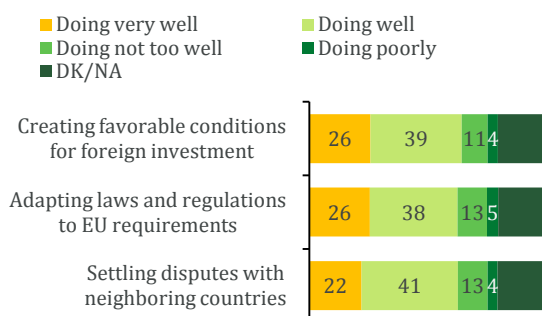


Should Macedonia join NATO and the EU even if it would mean losing / changing its official name? %, base: respondents in Macedonia

Montenegro

The large inflow of foreign capital into Montenegro has led to an economic boom in the country and seems to have had a strong impact on its residents' mood. In a region-wide comparison, Montenegrins are among the most satisfied with their life and their material situation. They are also some of the most optimistic about their future.

Positive assessment of EU-bound reforms



How well is your country doing with respect to these preconditions to joining the EU? %, base: respondents in Montenegro

This high level of contentment is reflected in people's satisfaction with their national institutions – the Montenegrins' assessment of their government's performance is the most positive in the region.

It is therefore not surprising that the interviewees see their country as being on the right road towards EU membership: in three of the key areas that are preconditions to EU accession – attracting FDI, adapting laws and regulations, and settling neighbourly disputes – around 60% of Montenegrin respondents were convinced that their country is doing well or even very well. Across the region, this rate of satisfaction with necessary reforms is only exceeded by Kosovo.

Another factor that people believe will help towards a speedy integration into the Union is the secession from Serbia in 2006. Just less than 6 in 10 Montenegrin respondents were convinced that it has helped their territory's chances of becoming an EU member.

Of the largest ethnic groups living in Montenegro, Montenegrins, Bosniaks and Albanians mostly share the same opinions and are rather positive about the EU and future accession. The Serbs, the second largest group constituting approximately one-third of the population, are much more critical. While roughly 6 in 10 respondents in the other groups supported EU accession, only 36% percent of Montenegro Serbs considered it to be a good thing.

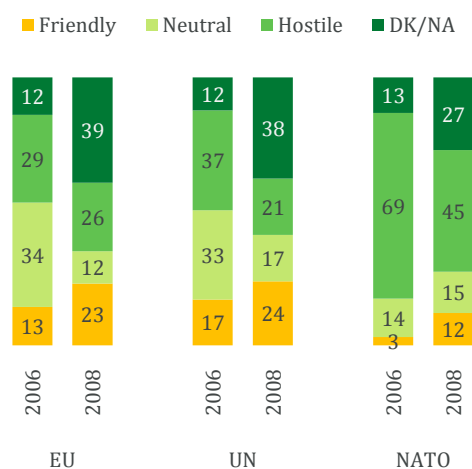
Kosovo

In general, the GBM results from Kosovo suggest that the country's population is going through a phase of general satisfaction with life and optimism fuelled by the 2008 independence.

The EU's strong involvement in the independence process naturally strongly affects Kosovo resident's views on the Union: across the Western Balkans, they were the most supportive of EU accession and they were the most certain about the welcome they would receive from the European Commission. However, looking at the various ethnic groups, it becomes clear that this EU euphoria is confined to the Albanian part of the population: 95% of Kosovo Albanians supported EU integration, while only 9% of Kosovo Serbs were convinced that Kosovo should join the EU.

While it is not surprising that Kosovo Serbs don't share the Albanian's total enthusiasm for the international community, there are signs that international actors are slowly regaining the Serbs' trust: while, for example, the EU was considered friendly by only 13% of Kosovo Serbs in 2006, this number had risen to 23% two years later.

Kosovo Serbs more supportive of International Community



How about these organisations: are they friendly, neutral, or hostile to Kosovo? %, base: Kosovo Serbs

Serbia

Given the importance to Serbia's eventual accession to the EU of the country's need to fully cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), respondents' opinions about the Hague Tribunal can shed light on their attitudes towards the EU. Only a few Serbian respondents were supportive of the ICTY's proceedings: a mere 19% thought that the Tribunal *helps the reconciliation and strengthens peace*. And asked what they thought about the fairness of the trials 70% thought that *the proceedings are simply ceremonial and the verdicts are known before the process is complete*.

This critical view of the ICTY, however, does not seem to affect Serbs' positive view of the EU: around 60% were convinced of the benefits of accession to the Union and a slightly lower percentage (55%) felt wanted by the European Commission. EU support is even higher among young people and university graduates (67% and 78%, respectively).

People in Serbia find ICTY least useful

- It helps the reconciliation and strengthens peace
- It does not serve the interest of the region and just keeps past conflicts alive
- DK/NA



In your views what is the role the ICTY plays in the future of the region? %, base: all respondents

Conclusions



It has recently been stated by Balkan experts that it seems as if the international community – and therefore the EU as its most visible example – is ignoring the region. For instance, *Le Monde*'s Piotr Smolar argued that international bodies “have left the Balkans to its own devices”. Given the EU's strong engagement in the region, this seems to be an exaggeration; the Gallup Balkan Monitor shows that not all inhabitants of the Western Balkans acknowledge such a development – people in Albania and Kosovo are much fonder of the EU now than they were in 2006, they also feel much more wanted as potential members of the EU. It is only in Croatia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina that one can speak of a feeling of being “left to one's own devices”: people in these countries perceive the EU as less friendly and the European Commission as less welcoming than they did three years ago. The remaining countries, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, have had rather unchanged and positive views of the EU over the past three years.

The main findings of the survey concerning the Western Balkan people's perceptions of the EU can be summarised as follows:

- In all countries, except Croatia, support for the EU remains high and people are convinced that EU accession would have positive consequences for their state's society and overall administration
- A relative majority in all countries is convinced that both the European Commission and EU citizens want them to join the Union
- **Albania** has seen a strong increase in EU support and the EU's institutions are among the most trusted
- The biggest drop in EU support can be observed in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** with the Serb population being the least supportive of membership
- People in **Croatia** are the most critical of the EU. The country is the only one where a relative majority are not supportive of EU membership and where a majority do not consider the consequences of EU accession to be beneficial for the country.
- **Macedonian** Albanians are significantly more supportive of the EU than Macedonian nationals and would even consider giving up/changing the country's name for EU membership - a measure to which almost all Macedonian Nationals are strongly opposed
- **Montenegrin** respondents are among the most upbeat in the region and are convinced that their country is doing well in EU-related reforms
- **Kosovo** Albanians are the most enthusiastic EU supporters in the region; Kosovo Serbs' opinions, while slowly improving, are critical of the Union
- While **Serbs** have little trust in the proceedings of the ICTY this has not weakened their strong support for EU accession.

Methodology of the Gallup Balkan Monitor

- Multi-year comparative project in all Western Balkan countries
- A stratified random sample of 1,000 respondents per country
- Stand-alone samples of ethnic minorities and other entities
- Fieldwork in September and October 2008
- Face-to-face methodology
- Comparative questions allowing for time series (comparison with 2006)
- Margin of error: +/- 3%

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Consult the results of the Gallup Balkan Monitor at
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