

Public opinion analysis No.02/2023

Europe in crisis.

The impact on the public opinion in

North Macedonia

Author: Anamaria Velinovska

Contribution by Ana Sofeska

February 2023

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Impressum

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Title: Europe in crisis. The impact on the public opinion in North Macedonia

Publisher: Konrad Adenauer Foundation
in the Republic of North Macedonia
Institute for Democracy "Societas
Civilis" – Skopje

Author: Anamarija Velinovska

Design: Dejan Kuzmanovski

This publication is available at:

<https://www.kas.de/en/web/nordmazedonien>

<http://www.idscs.org.mk>

Key points

- Two-thirds of the respondents (65%) do not agree with the constitutional changes necessary for completing of the phase for start of the accession.
- Firm majority of 80% of ethnic Macedonians are against Constitutional amendments. The majority of respondents (53%) identified as ethnic Albanians support these changes.
- Two-thirds of the respondents (69%) consider that the current official language definition should remain as such, more precisely it should be: The official language of the country is Macedonian and the one spoken by 20% of the population.
- Ethnic Albanians have divided opinions regarding the wording of the official language definition in the Constitution. Almost half of them (47%) think that it should be changed to "official languages are Macedonian and Albanian".
- The respondents are divided on the opinion that "the attack on Ukraine is a reaction to NATO provocations that Russia could not ignore". Half of the respondents agree with this statement (51% in total), against the 38% that do not agree.
- The majority of the respondents (55%) fully agree that negotiations are the only solution to the war.
- The European Union is referred to as main economic partner of the country (49%). USA are ranked second among the respondents (21%).
- Following a significant decline in 2021 (22%), this year almost a majority of respondents (46%) again consider the EU to be the biggest donor.
- The majority of citizens (53%) remain firm in their opinion that an alternative such as Eurasian Union is not desirable. This result has remained the same in the last 3 years.
- The USA is indicated as factor with greatest influence by the majority of respondents (52%), with an increase from last year (45% in 2021). There is an increase within the perceived influence for the EU as well (9% in 2021, 21% in 2022).

- Third of the respondents (32%) consider the EU as the greatest ally to the country, followed by the USA (17%). On the third place is Serbia with 10%, followed with Russia and Germany (9%) and Turkey (7%).
- The respondents highly value the opportunities provided by regional initiatives supported by the EU and Germany such as the possibility of long-term work in any country of the Western Balkans (59%), the possibility of freedom of movement within the Western Balkans (72%) and the acceptance of diplomas throughout the Western Balkans (72%).

Introduction

Since 2016, the Institute for Democracy (IDSCS) and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS) have been conducting a national survey with a representative sample on issues that are relevant to the integration process of North Macedonia in the EU. The questionnaire consists of questions that are recurring every year, but also new questions depending on the political developments. This edition of the survey specifically looks at the citizens' perception regarding constitutional changes as a condition for substantive start of the negotiation process, as well as the war in Ukraine and its implications at home and potential allies, impacts and benefits with regards to regional cooperation. The data allows us to make a comparative analysis of the trends present in the public opinion, and at the same time to understand the general attitude towards the most pressing issues in the particular year. Each question is controlled, among other parameters, from the aspect of political orientation according to the question 'which political party you voted for in the previous elections' and the ethnicity of the respondents. The findings of the analysis are summarized in a total of five categories: 1) *Constitutional amendments – the new challenge*; 2) *The impact of the war in Ukraine*; 3) *Reflection of the war in Ukraine on internal level*; 4) *Cooperation, allies and influences*; 5) *Western Balkans – a geographical reference or a new perspective?*

The 2022 survey was conducted through telephone survey from 17-30 November, with a nationwide representative sample that included 1,005 respondents.

Overview of political developments

The past year included a large number of developments at political level. In the area of the European integration process, the country faced another blockade that lasted until the first half of the year.

Externally, Bulgaria continued to pursue its demands¹ as a condition for lifting the veto on the negotiation framework. In June, the French presidency came up with a proposal to resolve this dispute, which was known to the public as the 'French proposal'².

This proposal, seemingly a kind of a solution to the problem, implies mirroring of a large portion of the Bulgarian demands in the negotiation framework, as conditions that must be met. The entry of these demands into the framework set a precedent in the negotiation process³, which, until now, meant leaving bilateral problems out of the negotiation framework between the Union and the candidate countries. Up until now, the resolution of bilateral issues was regulated through the Process of stabilization and association.

The French proposal inevitably affected the overall public opinion, contributed to the multi-year history of growth of Euroscepticism⁴ and created division between the citizens.⁵ The public space was overwhelmed by numerous debates between the experts, while the citizens were protesting on the streets every day. Not even, the several visits of high representatives of the European Union such as Ursula von der Leyen⁶ and Charles Michel⁷ did not distract the citizens from the daily protests nationwide against the acceptance of the French proposal.⁸

1 DTZ, Deutsche Welle, Bulgaria has five requests for North Macedonia, [Link](#)

2 The Government published the proposal of the French presidency <https://vlada.mk/node/29432>

3 Balkan Insight, (2022), North Macedonia doubts the French proposal for solving the Bulgarian dispute. [Link](#)

4 Damjanovski I., (2022), Analysis of the public opinion on the Macedonian process for accession to the EU [Link](#)

5 Recica V., (2022) Focus group report: Public perception of trust in political parties, public institutions and quality of life in North Macedonia [Link](#)

6 Radio Free Europe (2022) Ursula von der Leyen in Skopje [Link](#)

7 Channel 5, (2022) Charles Michel in Skopje in support of the French proposal, [Link](#)

8 Bitici F., (2022), Thousands of people protest before the vote on French proposal in North Macedonia, Reuters, [Link](#)

Opposing to the negative citizens reaction, the determination of the Government to accept this proposal grew.⁹ The opposition, together with some of the Government coalition partners strongly criticized the proposal and protested on daily basis together with the citizens. However, on July 16, 2022, the Assembly of North Macedonia, with 68 votes 'for' and without a single 'against' or 'abstention' vote, officially adopted the conclusions that obliged the Government to continue the process with the EU and adopt the negotiation framework on the accession negotiations with the EU, as proposed by the Presidency of France with the Council of the EU.¹⁰

On July 19, 2022, the first Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) was held¹¹ with the accent of this IGC being only a political one, without any formally legal decisions. The IGC is followed with the first phase of starting the negotiations. On the next IGC, a completion of the phase for starting the negotiation should be announced. This would only be possible with constitutional amendments to include the Bulgarian minority in the Preamble of the Constitution as a constituent people of the country. Without meeting this obligation, the country will not be able to open the chapters of the negotiation framework.

After the Intergovernmental Conference, the screening started between North Macedonia and the European Union. The screening is expected to end in November 2023, which would ideally correspond with a change in the Constitution for full start of the negotiations.

The divided positions between the Government and the opposition did not stop only in relation to issues related to the French proposal. In the aftermath of the Covid-19 crisis and at the beginning of the year, the world faced a war on European soil¹². The Russian aggression against Ukraine affected every other aspect of citizens' lives. Especially inflation and lack of resources¹³, as the fuel price increase contributed to the demands emphasized by the opposition for early elections.¹⁴ The increasing disappointment due to the crisis management resulted in many protests during the year.

9 Nikolovski, V. (2022), the French proposal is acceptable for the Government, the opposition will protest [Link](#)

10 Announcement of the Government of R. North Macedonia (2022) [Link](#)

11 European Commission (2022) First Intergovernmental Conference between Albania and North Macedonia for start of the negotiations. [Link](#)

12 Zinets N., Vasovic A., (2022) Missiles in Ukraine. [Link](#)

13 Announcement of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia (2022). [Link](#)

14 Nova Makedonija daily (2022), the Government calls for united stand, the opposition demands early elections. [Link](#)

The war in Ukraine also had a great impact on the enlargement policy of the EU. The European Commission proposed candidate status for two countries from the so-called Associational Trio - Ukraine, Moldova and a European perspective for the third country - Georgia. Apparently, the public support for the accelerated process for accession of these countries to the EU by the authorities and citizens of the countries of the Western Balkans quickly turned into their hidden frustration fueled by the neglect towards the Western Balkans.^{15 16}

Good neighborly relations remained a prerequisite for membership in the EU, and in addition, the economic and energy crisis confirmed the need for cooperation between the countries of the Western Balkans. Towards the end of the year, in November 2022, the Berlin Process, initiated by Germany was revived¹⁷ where members are all six countries of the Western Balkans. The Open Balkans initiative, in which members are Albania, Serbia and North Macedonia founded by the regional leaders also remained particularly relevant.

All these political developments directly shaped the public opinion of the people in the past year. In the part that follows, we explore all the developments through the lens of the respondents.

15 Murtezaj V., (2022), War in Ukraine: Is it time for EU enlargement? [Link](#).

16 Parker J., et al. (2022) EU grants candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova, BBS News. [Link](#)

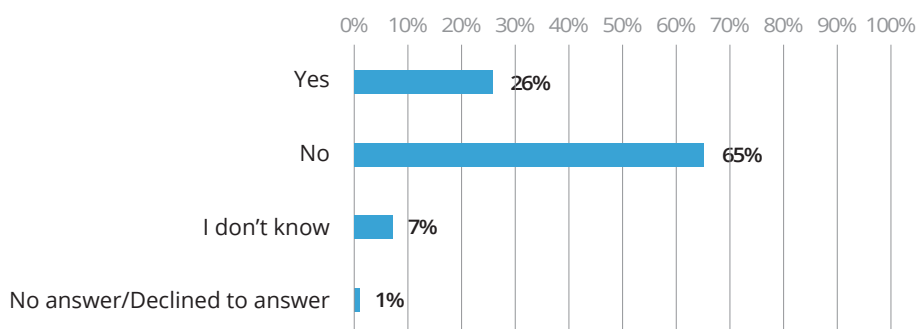
17 Berlin Process Announcement (2022) [Link](#)

Constitutional amendments - the new challenge

The imposing of a new condition for opening of the negotiation chapters caused a stormy reaction in the domestic public. Opening the Constitution for inclusion of the Bulgarian minority opens up the possibility of increased appetites of certain political actors for changes on other grounds as well - such as changing the wording for official language of the state in relation to the percentage threshold¹⁸. The possibility for additional demands from Bulgaria during the negotiation process, mostly related to revision of history, is also not excluded.

In the following part of this Report we investigate the opinion of the citizens on the constitutional amendments for inclusion of new minorities, including the Bulgarians, for uninterrupted flow of the EU accession process. We also investigate the agreement between the respondents for revision of history during the negotiations.

1. On the path towards the EU, do you think that North Macedonia should change the Constitution by including new minorities, including the Bulgarian minority?

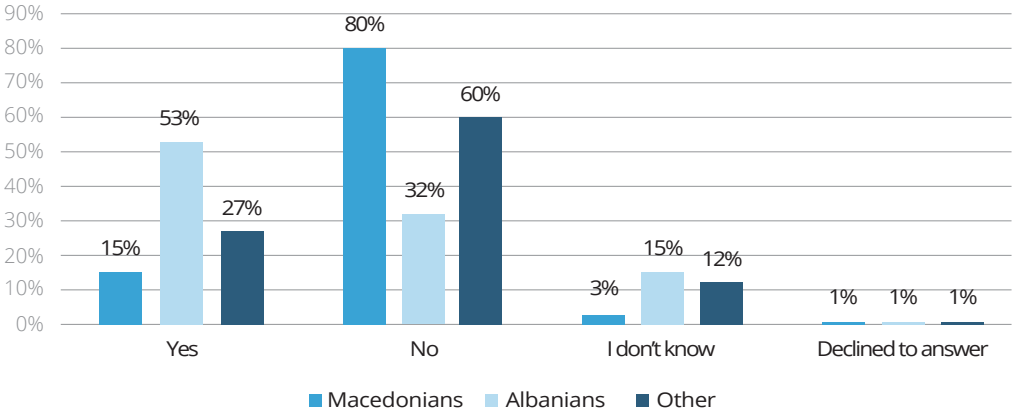


18 Blazevska D., (2022) Deutsche Welle, The jukebox has worked, increased calls for constitutional amendments. [Link](#)

Despite the fact that the constitutional amendments for including new minorities, especially the Bulgarians, are required for opening of the negotiation chapters, almost two-thirds of the citizens (65%) do not agree with them. In contrast, a quarter of the respondents (26%) believe that the concerned minorities should be included in the Preamble of the Constitution.

A similar question was asked to the respondents from the previous year when they were asked if they agree with the 'concessions related to Bulgarian minority in order to continue with the European integration process'. The percentage of 'No' answers remains approximately the same (64% in 2021, against 65% in 2022), which indicates that citizens have not changed their opinion much in the past year, although now the demand and the consequences are much clearer.¹⁹

1.1. On the path towards the EU, do you think that North Macedonia should change the Constitution by including new minorities, including the Bulgarian minority? (ethnicity) (%)

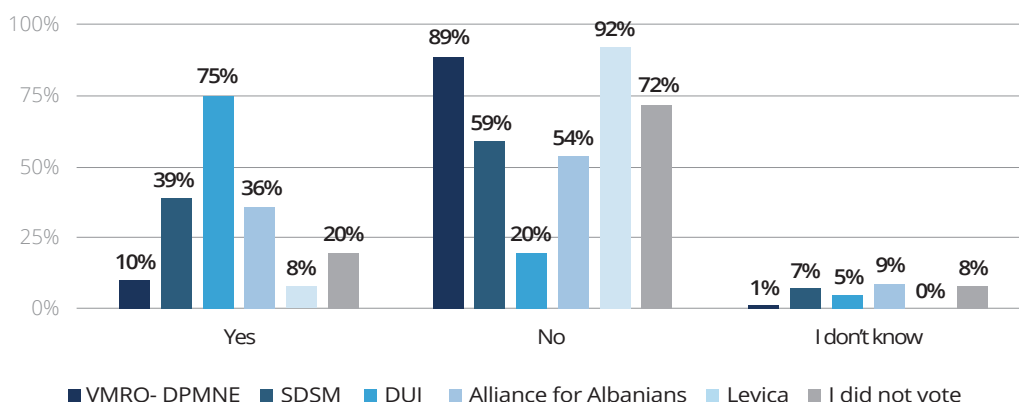


Analysed according to ethnicity of the respondents, a clearer picture is obtained of the group that makes up the majority of the 'No' and 'Yes' answers. Only 15% of the ethnic Macedonians believe that other minorities should be included in the Constitution, against 80% of them who believe that these constitutional changes should not be made.

¹⁹ Velinovska A., et al. (2022), From a poster to a foster child - 2021 Analysis of public opinion on the Macedonian process of accession to the European Union

In contrast to them, a little over half of the respondents belonging to the Albanian ethnic community (53%) believe that these constitutional amendments should be made. The number of ethnic Albanians who agree with this has increased compared to last year (35% in 2021)²⁰

1.2. On the path towards the EU, do you think that North Macedonia should change the Constitution by including new minorities, including the Bulgarian minority? (political affiliation) (%)

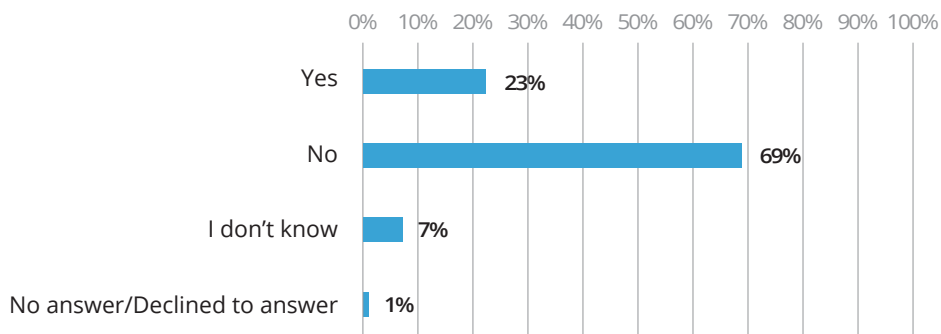


When observing according to the question ‘who did you vote for in the last elections’ we get a more detailed view of the attitudes among the voters of certain political parties. A total of 89% of respondents who voted for VMRO-DPMNE in the last elections say No to the proposed constitutional amendments, led only by the respondents who voted for Levica (92%). Slightly more than the majority (59%) of respondents who voted for SDSM do not agree with these constitutional amendments, at the expense of 39% of respondents from the same party who believe that these constitutional amendments should take place on the path towards the EU.

An interesting result is the 72% of the respondents who did not vote at the last elections who are in agreement that the Constitution should not be amended.

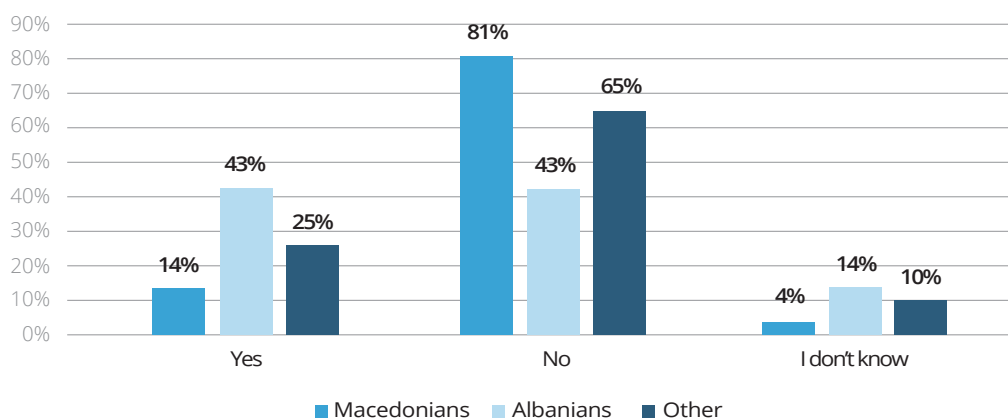
²⁰ Velinovska A., et al. (2022), From praise to disappointment - Analysis of public opinion on the Macedonian process of accession to the European Union

2. On the path towards the EU, do you think that North Macedonia should revise the history?



In terms of these changes, a strong two-third majority (69%) says that changes that include revision of history are not acceptable on the path towards the European Union. These data show partly the same attitude compared to last year, when citizens were asked if they would agree to concessions related to historical narratives in order to deblock the negotiation process. This perception is corresponding with the results in 2021 when a total of 71% of the respondents also did not agree to such concession.²¹

2.1. On the path towards the EU, do you think that North Macedonia should revise history?

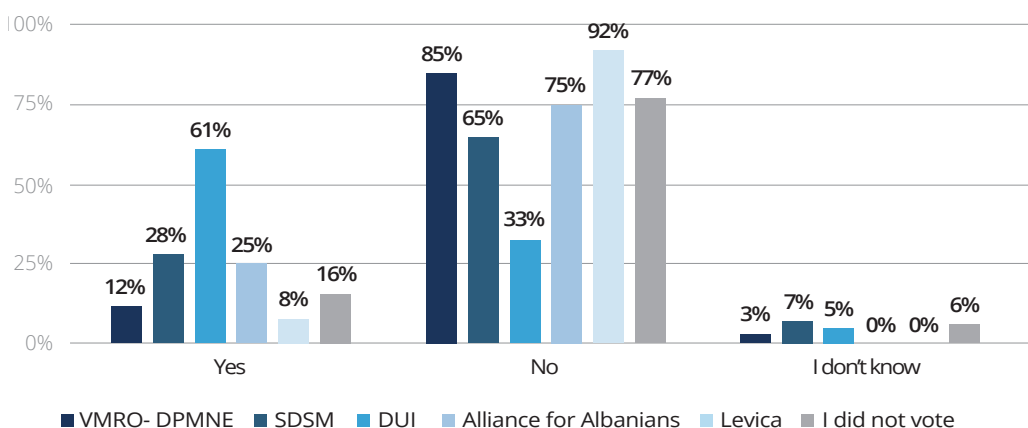


21 Velinovska A., et al. (2022), From a poster to a foster child - 2021 Analysis of public opinion on the Macedonian process of accession to the European Union

According to ethnicity, a full division can be observed between the opinion of ethnic Albanians, 43% of whom say they agree and also oppose these changes. Last year, the respondents of ethnic Macedonian origin were more determined that there should be no historical concessions (51%), as opposed to those who agreed to them (35%).

The picture is clear among the ethnic Macedonians - a firm 81% do not agree with such changes, just like last year (81% in 2021).²²

2.2. On the path towards the EU, do you think that North Macedonia should revise history? (political affiliation) (%)



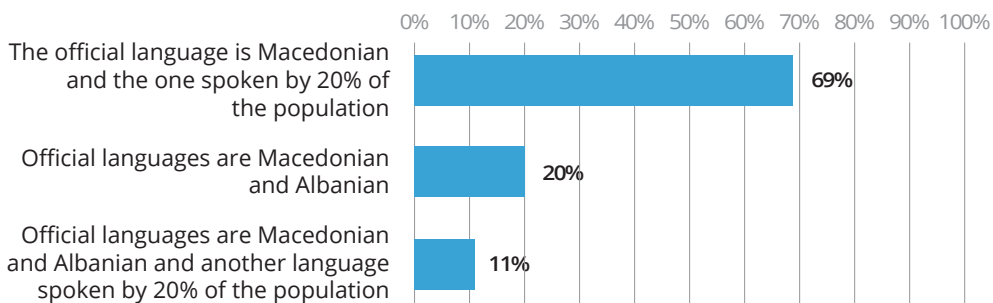
If we probe into details, DUI supporters are the only respondents who overwhelmingly agree with revision of history (61%). In all other political parties, we notice a strong stance against such changes.

The inclusion of new ethnic communities in the Constitution opens the internal discussion on additional constitutional amendments related to language and minorities²³. The question arises now as to how the definition of what is official language should read. In relation to this dilemma, we investigate the perception of the respondents on how should the official language be defined in the Constitution.

22 Velinovska A., et al. (2022), From a poster to a foster child - 2021 Analysis of public opinion on the Macedonian process of accession to the European Union

23 Kalinski V, (2022) Opening the Constitution is like walking a wire, Radio Free Europe [Link](#)

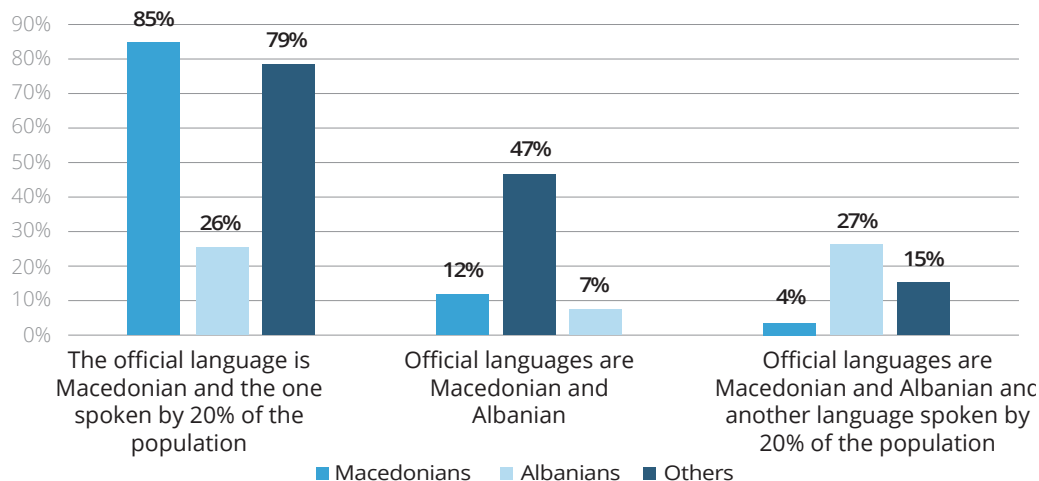
3. In your opinion, the wording for official language in the Constitution should be:



The results show that more than two-thirds (69%) of the respondents believe that the wording or description of the official language should be kept in its current form, or rather the official language is Macedonian and the one spoken by 20% of the population. A smaller, but still significant percentage (20%) are respondents who believe that the definition should read that ‘official languages are Macedonian and Albanian’. About 11% of the respondents believe that the description should read ‘official languages are Macedonian and Albanian and another language spoken by 20% of the population’.

These results indicate a certain consensus regarding the current definition of official language according to the Constitution, however almost a third of the respondents would agree with change of the current wording of the official language in the Constitution.

3.1. In your opinion, the wording for official language in the Constitution should be: (ethnicity) (%)

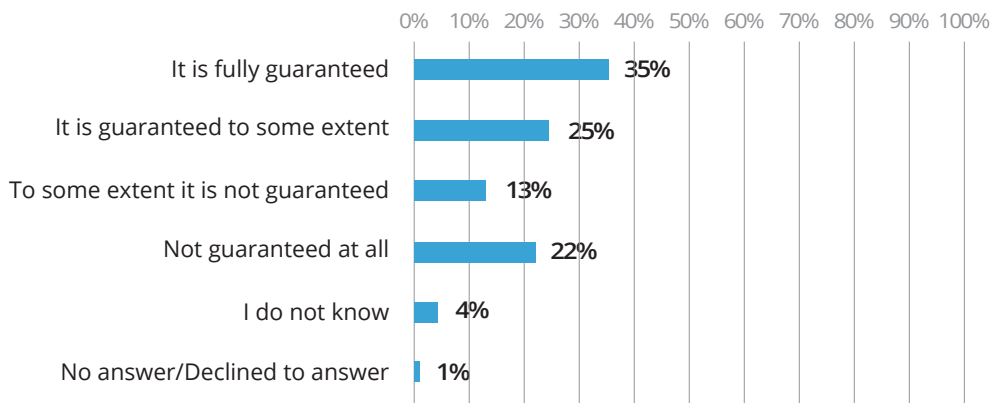


Analysing this question on an ethnic basis, it can be noted that 85% of ethnic Macedonians believe that the description should remain the same.

A small percentage of Albanian respondents believe that the description should remain the same (26%). The remaining part is divided between the other two options which would mean changing the description for official language. Almost half of the Albanian respondents (47%) believe that the official languages should be Macedonian and Albanian, while 27% of the Albanian respondents believe that the official languages should be Macedonian, Albanian and the language spoken by 20% of the population. An almost equal percentage of Albanian respondents believe that the description should remain as it is.

Last year the issue of language was often called into question. Despite all doubts, the Government of North Macedonia emphasizes that the adopted negotiation framework achieves full protection and guarantees equality of the Macedonian language with all other European languages in the European institutions.

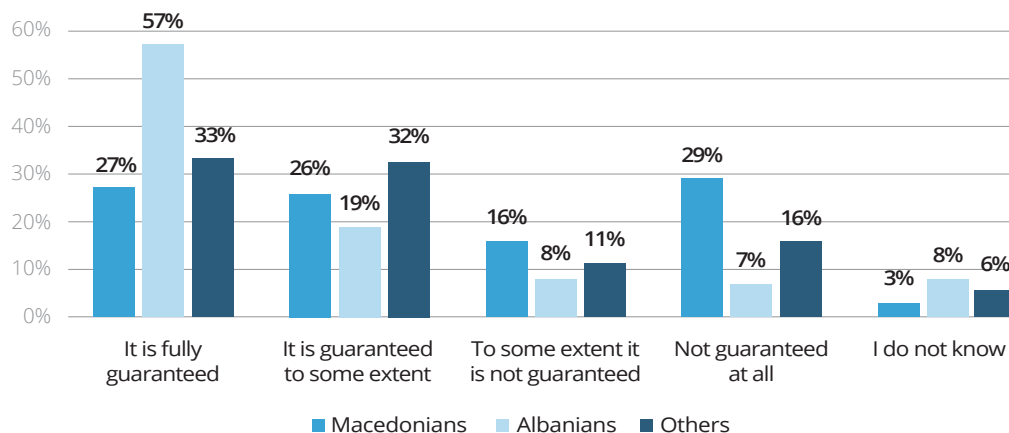
4. After the start of negotiations with the EU, how much do you feel that the Macedonian language is guaranteed and protected?



A third of the respondents (35%) agree with this statement - they believe that the language, after accepting the negotiation framework, is fully guaranteed. This percentage is supplemented by additional respondents (25%) who see it as somewhat guaranteed. Against these positive thoughts about the protection of the Macedonian language, there are also citizens who think the

opposite. A total of 22% of the citizens believe that the Macedonian language is vulnerable after the acceptance of such a proposal and the absence of an explicit mention of the existence of the language.

4.1. After the start of negotiations with the EU, how much do you feel that the Macedonian language is guaranteed and protected? (ethnicity) (%)



Majority (57%) of the Albanian respondents believe that the Macedonian language is fully guaranteed, as opposed to the division between the Macedonian population of those who believe that it is guaranteed to some extent (26%) and those who believe that it is not guaranteed to some extent (29%).

Analysed by age, the youngest respondents (18-24 years old) are the strongest believers that the language is protected. Only 10% of the group of respondents between 18-24 years of age believe that the language is not guaranteed at all, against the average of 23% among the other generations.²⁴

24 Database 2023

The impact of the war in Ukraine

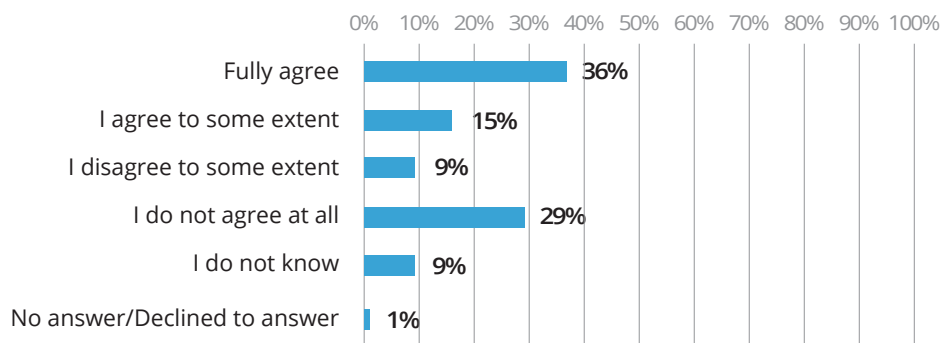
On February 24, 2022, the world, and especially the European continent, was affected by the Russian aggression that happened on Ukrainian soil. From that moment, the foreign policies of every country in the region and beyond were defined by the (lack of) support towards Ukraine. North Macedonia immediately condemned the act of aggression by Russia and harmonized its foreign policy with that of the countries of the European Union and NATO, as a member state of the Alliance.

On the other hand, this war had a direct impact on the European integration of the so-called «Associative Trio» - Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova. In June 2022, the European Commission proposed candidate status for Ukraine and Moldova. Indirectly, this move brought about by geopolitical motives increased the debates in the region about the real intentions of the EU for membership of the Western Balkans countries in the Union.

The war began with strong condemnation in the Macedonian public discourse. The official position of the country was strong condemnation of Russia's act and strong support for Ukraine. However, during the past year, North Macedonia, as well as the region, faced numerous fake news that took over the media space and thereby influenced the shaping of public opinion.

Within that framework, we investigate the perception among the respondents.

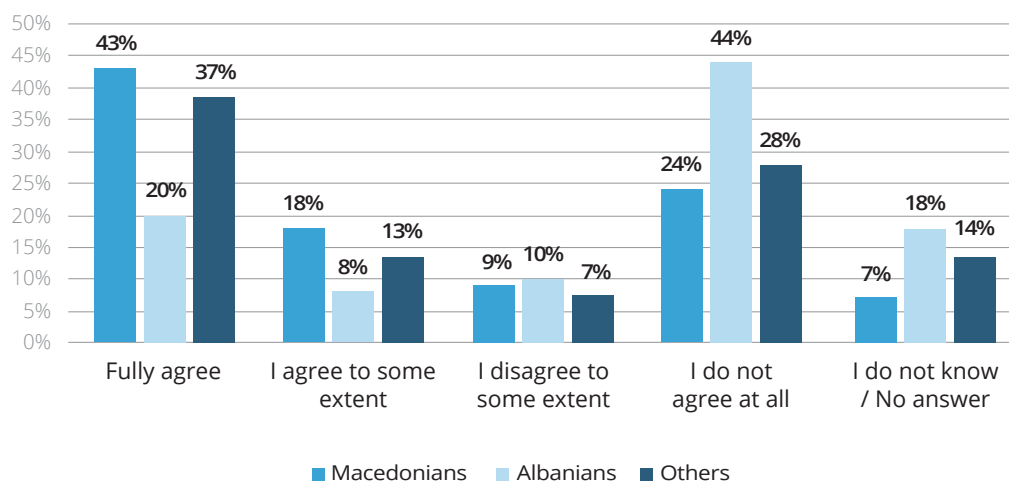
5. The Russian attack on Ukraine is reaction to NATO provocation that Moscow could not ignore



In terms of statement that Russian attack on Ukraine is a reaction to NATO provocations that Moscow could not ignore, the results show that the respondents agree to a certain extent with this statement (36% completely; 15% to some extent). On the other hand, 29% do not agree with this statement at all.

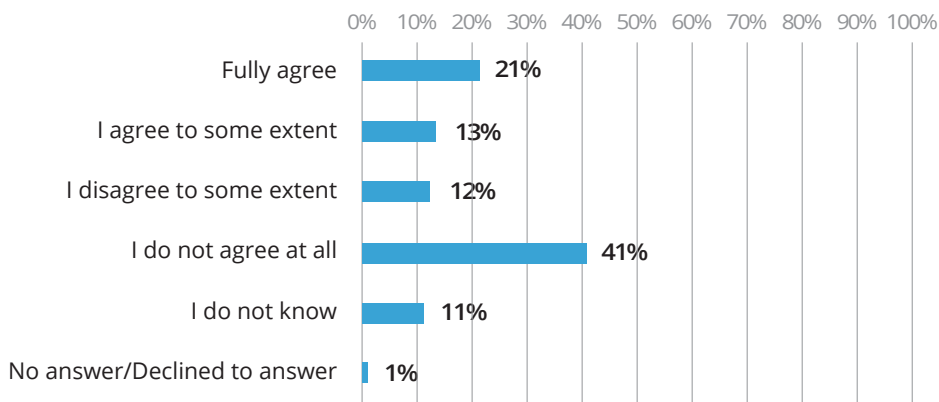
These data show that the majority of respondents still believe that the reason Russia attacked Ukraine are the NATO provocations – a thesis that is contrary to the majority of opinions presented in the expert public.

5.1. The Russian attack on Ukraine is reaction to NATO provocation that Moscow could not ignore (ethnicity) (%)



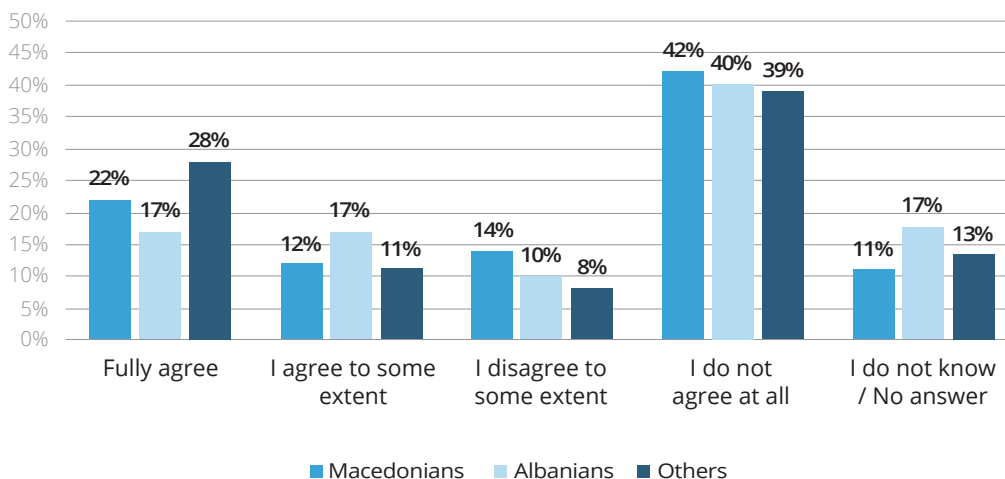
In terms of ethnicity, the results show a divide. A total of 43% of Macedonians completely agree that the Russian attack on Ukraine is a reaction to NATO provocations, which is completely the opposite from the 44% of ethnic Albanians who do not agree with that statement at all.

6. Russia aims to conquer Ukraine and it will not stop here



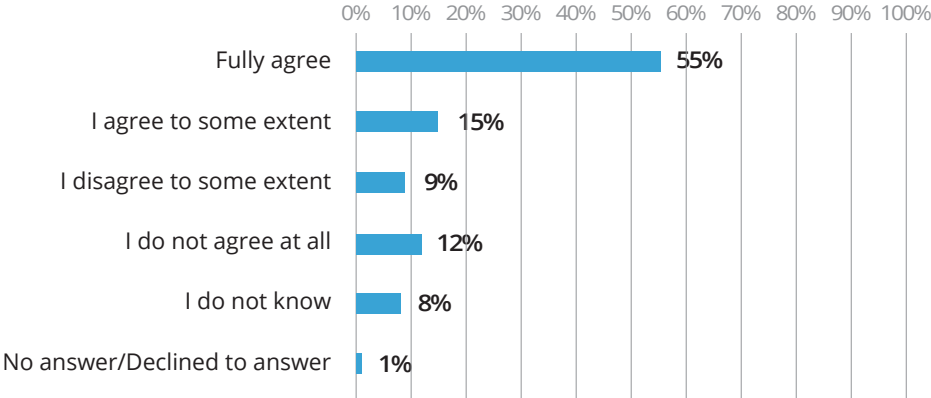
The majority of citizens do not agree to some extent that Russia aims to conquer Ukraine (41% - does not agree at all, 13% to some extent), while 21% of the respondents completely agree. Similar to the first statement, this opinion shows that the majority of citizens believe that Russia reacts preventively, as a reaction to provocations, without the intention of actually conquering Ukraine. These messages are an example of the type of information Moscow sends through its media.

6.1. Russia aims to conquer Ukraine and it will not stop here (ethnicity) (%)



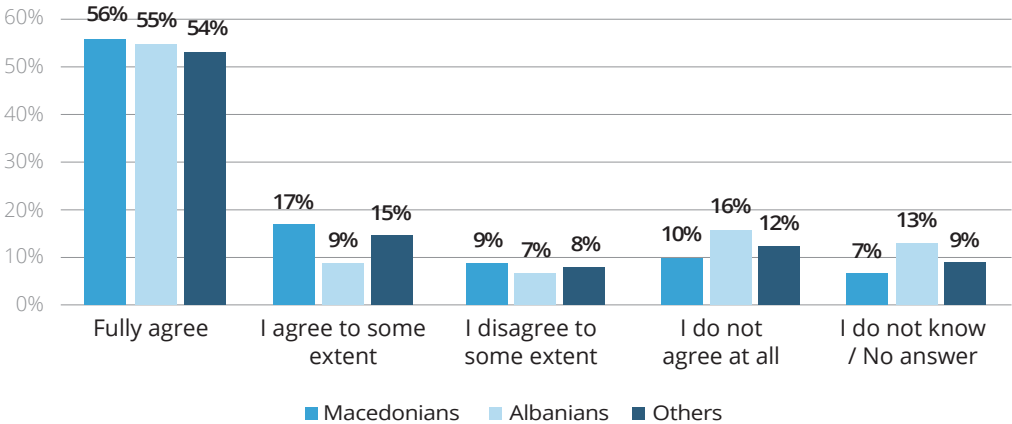
There is a consensus among different ethnicities in terms of disagreement with this issue. Macedonians (42%) and Albanians (40%) do not agree at all that the goal of Russia is to conquer Ukraine.

7. Negotiations are the only solution to the war, not military victory of Ukraine or Russia(%)



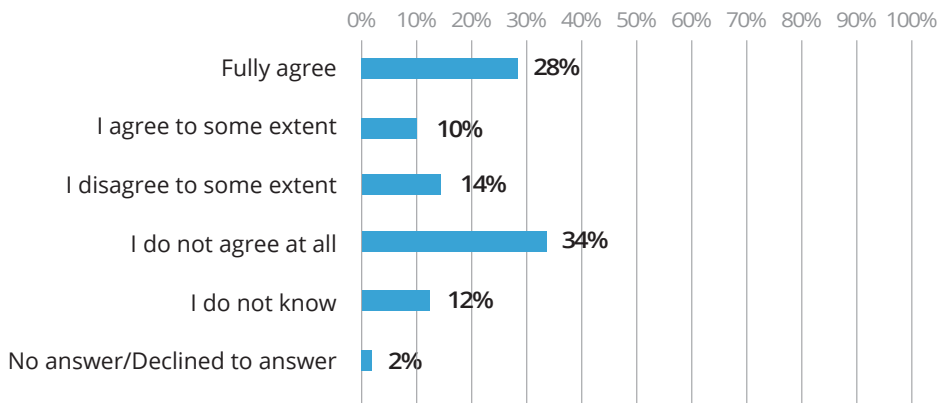
The majority of the respondents (55%) fully agree that only negotiations, and not a military victory of Russia or Ukraine, are solution to the war.

7.1 Negotiations are the only solution to the war, not military victory of Ukraine or Russia (ethnicity) (%)



In terms of ethnicity, the majority of both Macedonians (56%) and Albanians (55%) completely agree that only negotiations and not a military victory of Russia or Ukraine are solution to the war.

8. Victory of Ukraine means victory of Europe



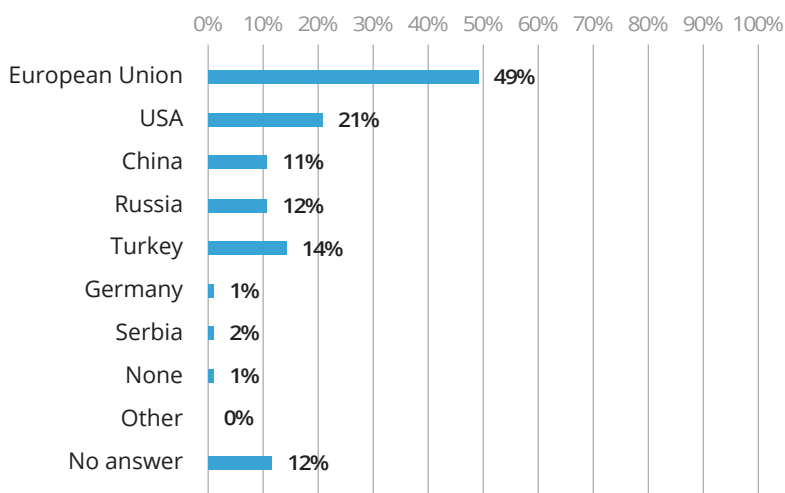
After World War II, Europe was a synonymous for reconciliation and peace. The establishment of the European Union also created the European values, which in their core mean freedom, rule of law, democracy and dignity. The war on the European continent disrupted that synonym of the European continent and threatened the values and security that ruled in the past decades. However, the respondents have a somewhat divided view of this analogy. In the results, there is a majority (34% - fully, 14% to some extent) of those who do not agree with this statement, and also with the statement that the victory of Ukraine also means victory of Europe.

Reflection of the war in Ukraine in the internal context

The internal disputes between the Government and the opposition did not stop only at European integrations. The Russian aggression against Ukraine caused an economic crisis in the country, the highest inflation of 20%²⁵ which was reached in November 2022, lack of raw materials and increased fuel prices²⁶. All this contributed to growing discontent among the population and efforts by the opposition to call for early parliamentary elections in response to the Government unwillingness to deal with the crisis²⁷. From that aspect, the domestic economy and the allocation of finances are the things that are primarily affected by the current global situation.

In the next chapter, we investigate the opinion of the citizens about the Macedonian economic partner and which external entity they think contributes significantly to the budget of the country.

9. Who you think should be the main economic partner of the country?



* multiple answers possible

25 Nova Makedonija daily (2022), Macedonia has the highest inflation in the last 25 years. [Link](#)

26 Besimi F., Ministry of Finance. [Link](#)

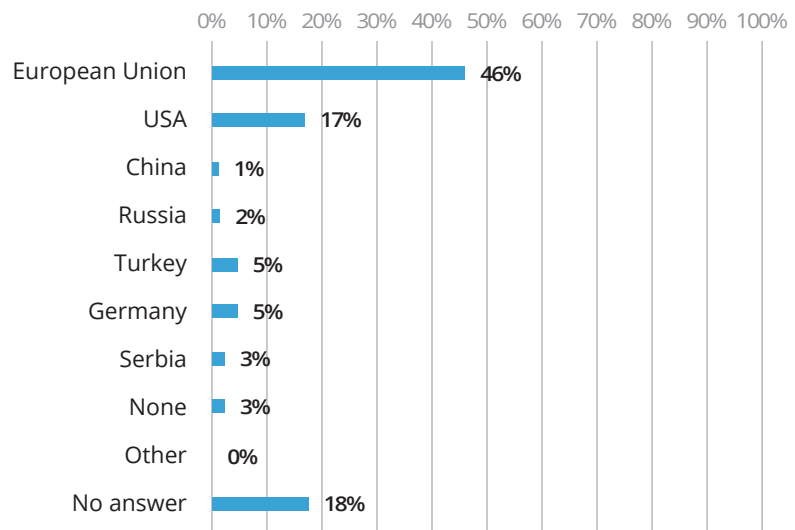
27 Radio Free Europe (2022) VMRO calls for early elections. [Link](#)

In terms of main economic partner of the country, the majority of citizens agree that the EU should be on the first place. The USA follows with 21% and Turkey with 14%. An almost equal number of citizens consider Russia (12%) and China (11%) to be preferred partners.

An equal percentage of respondents do not have an answer (12%) or they consider Russia (12%) and China (11%).

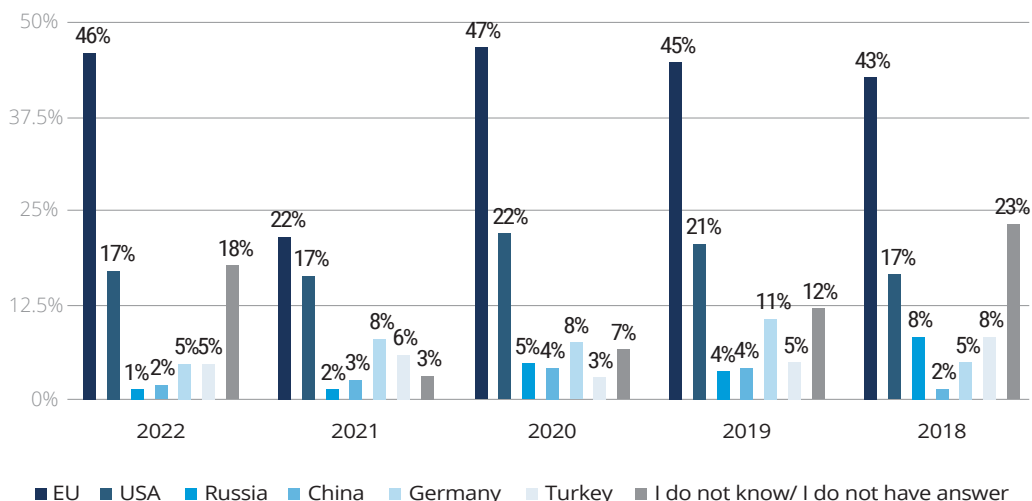
As an important part of the economy, we investigate the donor recognized in the eyes of the respondents.

10. Who is the biggest donor (providing development funding) in North Macedonia?



Apart from the belief that the EU should be the biggest economic partner, by far the majority of respondents (46%) believe that the EU is realistically the biggest donor to North Macedonia. The second-ranked donor of funding for development, according to citizens, are the United States with 17%. There is also same percentage of those (18%) who cannot identify the biggest donor.

10.1 Who is the biggest donor (providing development funding) in North Macedonia? (compared with previous years)



Following last year’s decline in the opinion that the EU is the biggest donor in the country, the respondents again put it in the first place. This opinion, with the exception of 2021, prevails among all respondents.

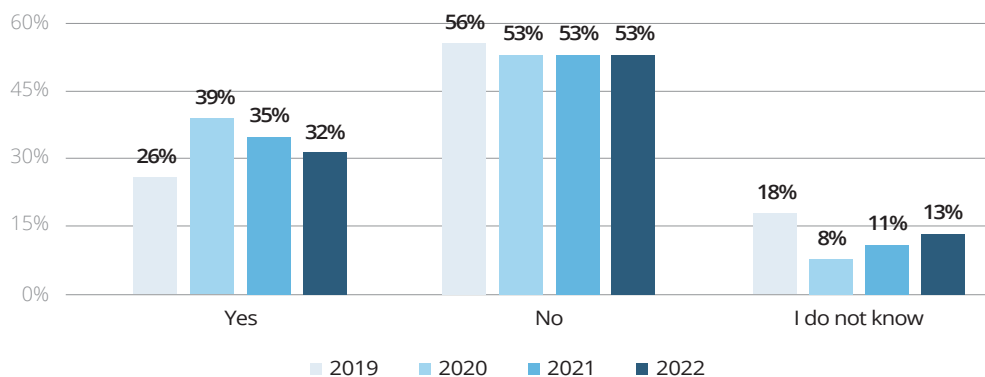
What is important to single out is the number of respondents who cannot identify the largest donor. Such tendencies show that the money for development is often not sufficiently visible or felt by the citizens in order for them to be able to identify their origin later.

Allies, influences and alternatives

The war in Ukraine, the economic crisis and the bilateral problems with Bulgaria indicate that it is necessary for the country to have cooperation with other countries and initiatives. North Macedonia is not immune to outside influences, especially in years featuring major political events. Hope is often sought in regional initiatives, but ideas for another type of global alliances are also alive.

For those reasons, we are investigating public opinion regarding support for another alternative to membership of the EU (Eurasian Union), the largest ally and most influential entity in the country.

11. Would you support another alternative to European Union membership, for example Eurasian union membership, lead by Russia? (historical perspective)

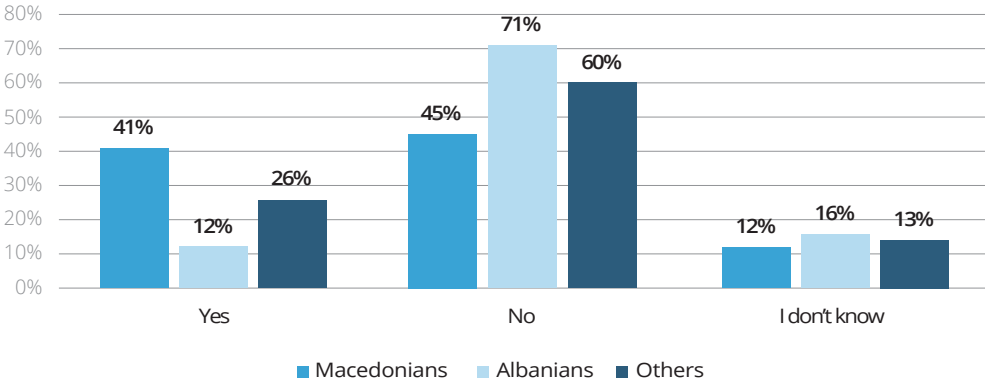


For a fourth year in a row, IDSCS and KAS has surveyed public opinion on support for an alternative to the EU such as the Russian-led Eurasian Union.

However, the number of supporters of this Union is decreasing at the expense of those who 'do not know', while respondents who do not agree with this alternative remain in a constant percentage (53%).

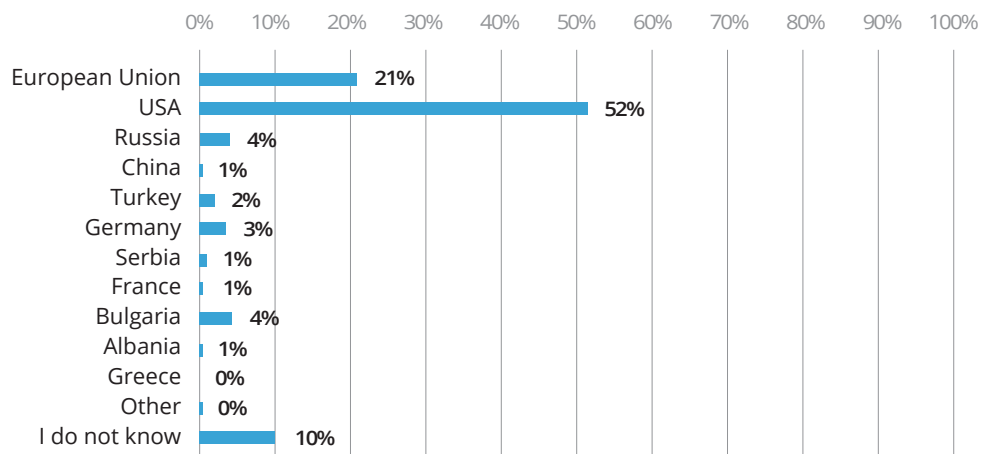
Once again, the results prove that the majority of citizens remain firm in their opinion that an alternative such as the Eurasian Union is not desirable.

11.1. Would you support another alternative to European Union membership, for example Eurasian union membership, lead by Russia? (ethnicity) (%)



However, despite the constant majority, ethnic Macedonians are very divided in their assessment of such an alternative. Both groups (Yes/No) gravitate around 40%. The ethnic Albanian population, on the other hand, remains very determined in its negative view that such membership is not an option for North Macedonia (71%).

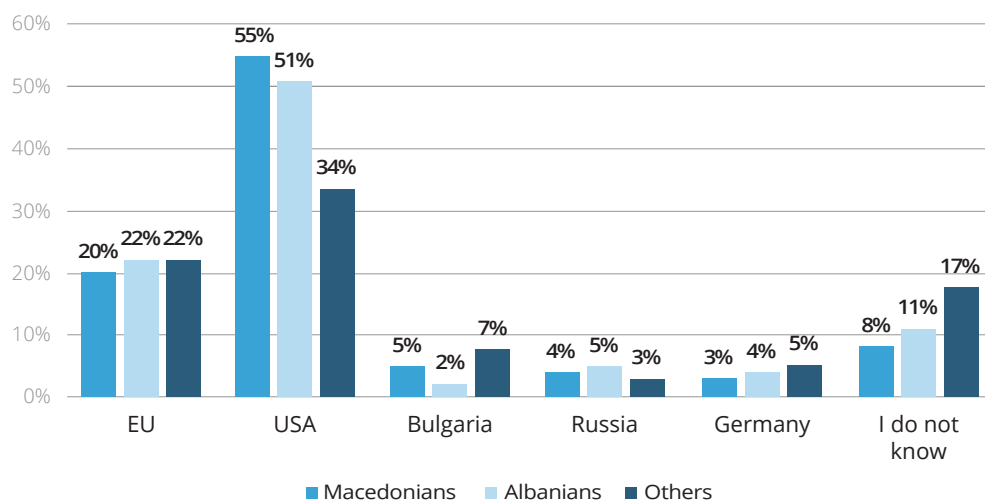
12. In your opinion, which external factor has the most influence in our country?



When it comes to influence perceived by the citizens, the USA remain the factor that is considered the most influential in the country (52%). They are followed by the EU (21%), and by respondents (10) who do not know how to identify the most influential factor.

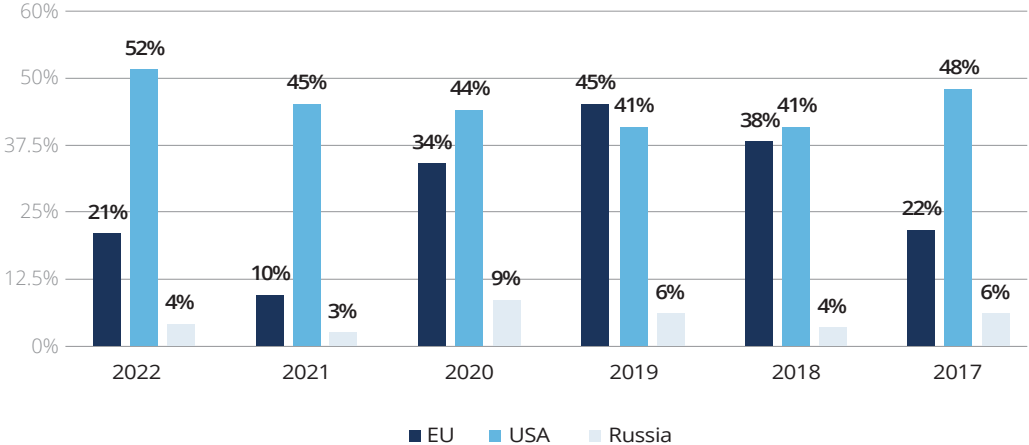
This year, due to the negative role in the European integration process because of the use of veto on the negotiation framework in 2020, 4% of respondents point to Bulgaria without this country being offered as a possible answer. The same percentage of respondents think that Russia has the greatest influence (4%).

12.1. In your opinion, which external factor has the most influence in our country? (ethnicity) (%)



Contrary to the traditional opinion that Albanians consider the USA as the most influential factor that was prevailing in the polls of the past years, this year the majority of ethnic Macedonians (55%) are those who rank the USA in first place (55%), with a slight advantage over like-minded among ethnic Albanians (51%).

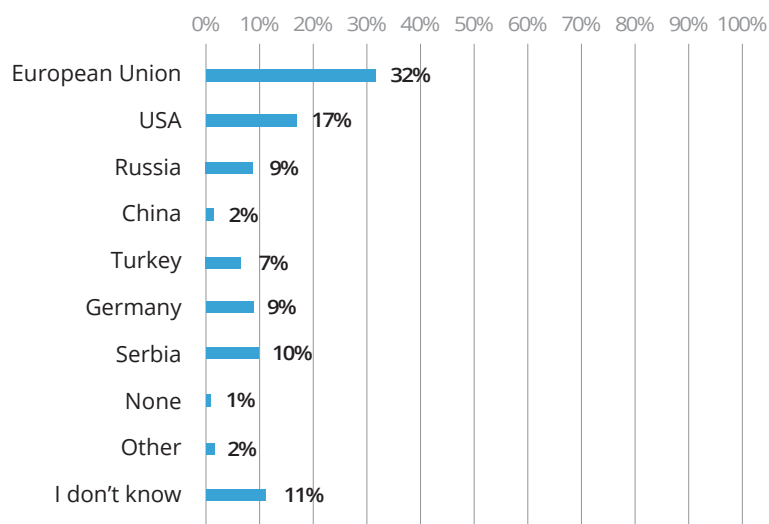
11.2 In your opinion, which external factor has the most influence in our country? (compared to previous years)



This year’s analysis shows a growth in the perception of the EU (21%) as a factor of influence compared to the huge decrease. Yet, this year perception is still far from EU position among the respondents in 2020 when 34% saw it as the major factor of influence.

The greatest influence from the EU was perceived in 2019 (45%) after the Prespa Agreement signed with Greece to resolve the decade-long dispute and the timely promises that the same agreement made for the complete unblocking of the process. In 2022, we see a halved perception (21%). It seems that in the eyes of the public, EU still cannot fully regain its credibility lost after Bulgaria’s veto on the negotiating framework. EU did not manage to keep its promises to North Macedonia after the Prespa Agreement and the change of the name.

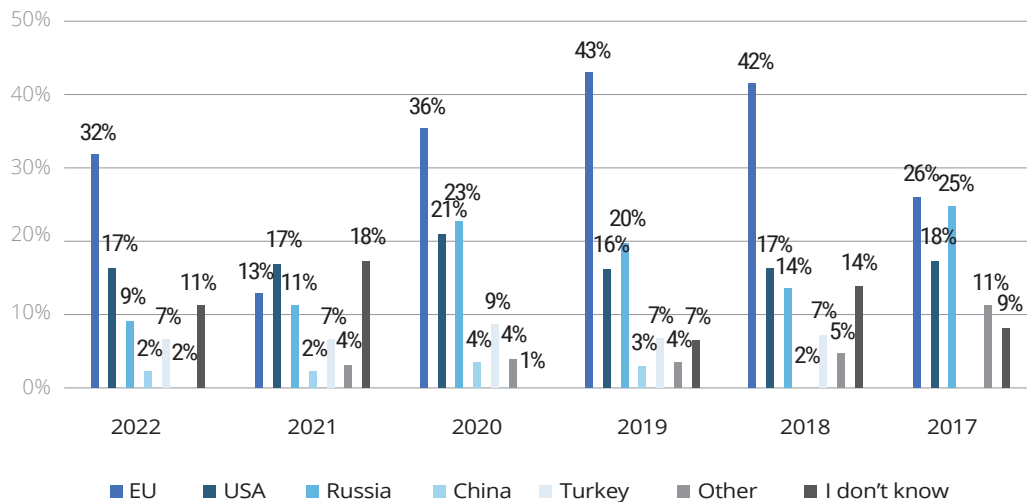
12. In your opinion, who would be the best ally of our country?



In terms of allies, citizens still mostly count on the EU (32%), followed by the USA (17%). These data do not come as a surprise considering the long-term support the EU and the USA have been providing to the country. In addition to the EU and the USA, the respondents also consider Serbia (10%), Russia (9%), and Turkey (7%) as allies. Germany (9%) is singled out by the citizens from the European Union family. We should also mention that there were citizens who did not name an ally (11%).

All these data stage a vague picture of the citizens' perception. Although the EU is ranked at the first place, all other countries are partially or equally valued the same by the citizens. The respondents continue to see the Western countries as our strongest allies, but the set of «do not know» answers and of respondents who see an ally in Russia, Turkey, Serbia should also not be neglected

12.1. In your opinion, who would be the best ally of our country? (historical perspective)



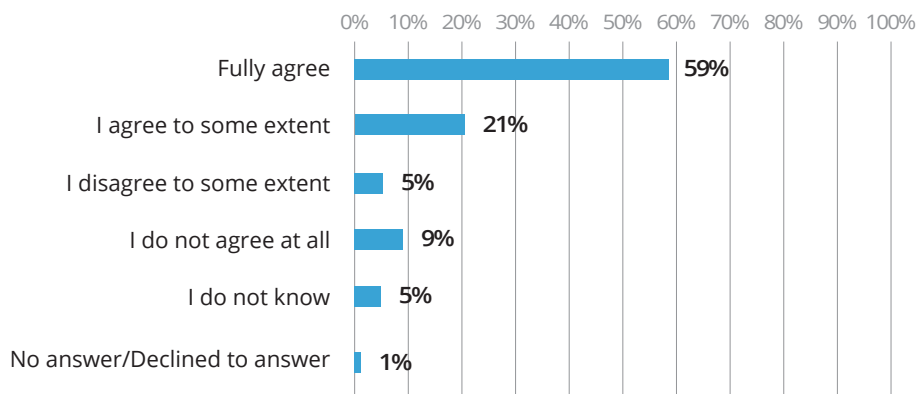
The biggest change this year is in the opinion of EU as the best ally of North Macedonia. This percentage has increased dramatically from 13.1% in 2021 to 32.06% in 2022. Similar to the question related to the biggest influence in the country, the EU is slowly regaining the public trust it had before the Bulgarian veto.

Western Balkans – a geographical reference or a new perspective?

Regional cooperation remains in the focus of the countries in the region, but also a priority mandated by the EU for the Western Balkans. The Open Balkans initiative takes most of the public space and is often the most frequently mentioned regional initiative. This year, the German-led Berlin Process has been revived as a hope for cooperation between the countries of the Western Balkans.

In the next section, we explore the opinions of the citizens on some of the most mentioned benefits of these initiatives .

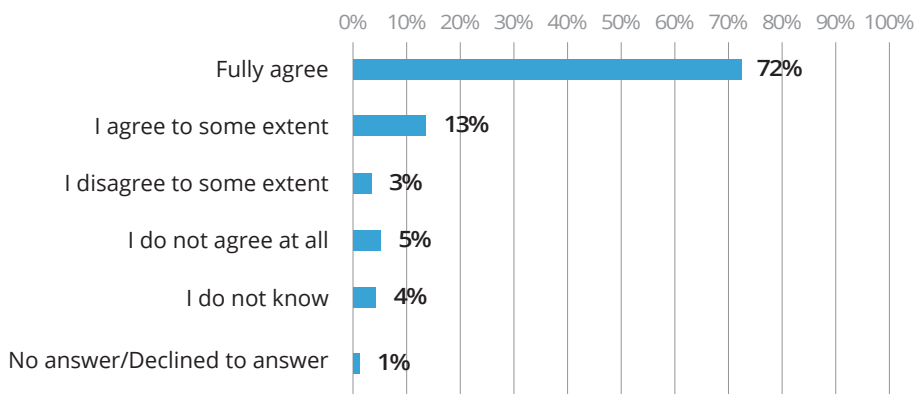
13. Possibility for a long-term work in any country of the Western Balkans is useful for everyone.



The possibility for a long-term work in any country from the Western Balkans is an attractive opportunity for the majority (59%) of the surveyed citizens. They are followed by those who have a certain dilemma, but still somewhat agree with this statement (21%).

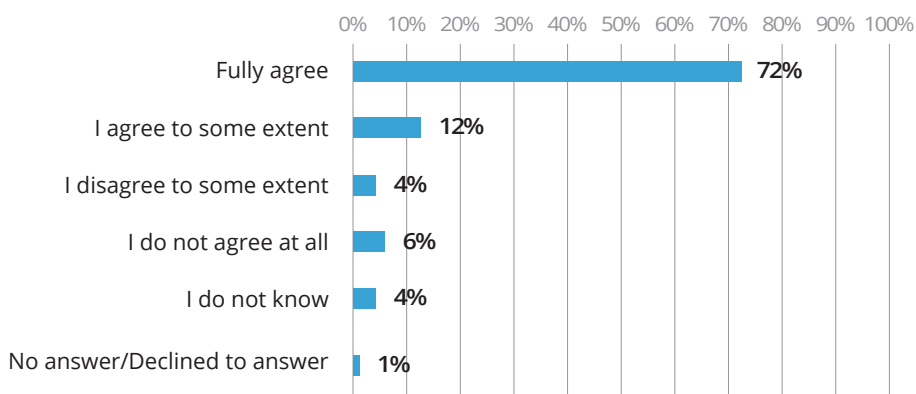
These results show that the majority of citizens look positively on this opportunity, against 9% who would not see any benefit from such an opportunity.

14. Possibility for freedom of movement in the Western Balkan countries is useful for everyone



The opening of borders between the Western Balkans countries similar to open borders within the EU are the most widespread benefits of the regional initiatives. Undoubtedly, the results confirm the benefit of this possibility among the respondents. A high percentage (72%) think that the possibility of freedom of movement would be useful for everyone.

15. Acceptance of diplomas in all Western Balkans is useful for everyone



Finally, the possibility of using one's own education in the Western Balkans countries for the purpose of common labor market, and thus migration at the regional level, is a statement with which more than two-third of the respondents agree. (72%).

Information about KAS

Freedom, justice, and solidarity are the basic principles underlying the work of the Konrad Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS). The KAS is a political foundation, closely associated with the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) of Germany. We conduct education programs for the society and cooperate with governmental institutions, political parties, civil society organizations and handpicked elites, building strong partnerships along the way. Together with our partners, we make a contribution to the creation of an international order that enables every country to develop in freedom and under its own responsibility.

Contact information about KAS

Address: Risto Ravanovski No 8,
1000 Skopje
Phone number: +389 2 321 70 75
+389 23 21 70 76
E-Mail: Skopje@kas.de

Information about IDSCS

IDSCS is a think-tank organisation researching the development of good governance, rule of law and North Macedonia's European integration. IDSCS has the mission to support citizens' involvement in the decision-making process and strengthen the participatory political culture. By strengthening liberal values, IDSCS contributes towards coexistence of diversities.

Contact information about IDSCS

Address: Str. Miroslav Krlezha No.
52/1 /2, 1000 Skopje
Phone number: +389 2 3094 760
E-Mail: contact@idscs.org.mk

Information about the author

Anamarija Velinavska is a junior researcher and a project manager at the Centre for European integrations within Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" – Skopje. Velinavska holds a Master Degree in Public Policy from the University of Edinburgh. She is a Chevening Scholar of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). Her areas of expertise include regional cooperation, European integrations and foreign affairs.

