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20 YEARS AFTER 1991: THE TALE OF TWO GENERATIONS

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The reality of the ongoing economic and political crisis absolutely shaped the European agenda in 2011 and is likely to do so again in 2012. In these conditions, when the possibility of disintegration of the European Union is no longer mentioned just in isolated circles, discussing enlargement is problematic as regards the Balkans. This point was made clear with the signing of the accession treaty between Croatia and the EU at the end of 2011. This historic event, overshadowed by negotiations on the future of the euro, did not stir any massive euphoria in the soon-to-be EU member state Croatia or in the region in general. The outcome of the Croatian referendum on entering the EU is likely to be positive, but nowhere near the joy over the “return to Europe” experienced by next-door neighbour Slovenia in 2004. These recent events largely confirmed that the people in the Balkans feel disillusioned with the EU, their own societies and the two-decade long transition.

At the regional level, 2011 marked the 20th anniversary of the dissolution of the Yugoslav federation. Those two decades left a deep scar on the Balkans, home to several wars, conflicts and redrawing of borders. As a result of this recent and infamous past, the region has been analysed on numerous occasions. Focused on specific events, systems, or leaders, most of these analyses overlooked the human dimension of the disintegrative and transitional processes. That period of 20 years also saw the development of a new generation – one born and raised in this period of “rebuilding the ship at sea”¹. Based on a generational cross-country survey of people born in 1971 and 1991 in all the Western Balkan countries, this opinion paper presents the “tip of the iceberg” of the two generations’ views on the regional past, present and future at this critical moment for Europe.²

1 Jon Elster, Claus Offe, and Ulrich Preuss, *Institutional Design in Post-Communist Societies: Rebuilding the Ship at Sea*, 1997 - Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

2 For info on the methodology of survey and the most significant results of the survey mentioned in the text, see Annex.

Why these two generations? The 1971 generation was one of the last Yugoslav generations which grew up in the former system and witnessed its end. These people entered their adulthood as the old system crumbled and had to carry the heavy burden of transition. In contrast, the generation born in 1991 is that of tomorrow, as they are too young to remember the wars, conflicts and fall of the old system. Ultimately, for the purpose of consolidating democracy in these societies, one would expect the younger generation to have more positive attitudes towards the current systems and to feel as “winners of the transformation processes” in comparison to the older generation studied. Yet, the complexity and personal experiences of the political and socio-economic transformations have caused the younger generation to be as disillusioned with their past, present and future as the older one. While there is no doubt that the systems in which these new generations were raised are based on values different than the ones of their parents, their attitudes and opinions appear not to differ significantly from that of their elders.

Our survey indicates that in the Balkans it is hard to talk about generational attitudes and differences. Country differences prevail, evidence that legacies of the past and national contexts have shaped individual opinions. The high importance assigned to language creates two loose groups of “Yugosphere” and “Albanian sphere”.³ Within these two groups, strong inter-country differences remain, highlighting the significance of the divergent courses these countries have navigated after the 1990s. Our data indicates that treating these countries as a single group is highly problematic due to the highest importance assigned to nationality, ethnicity and place by both generations studied. Bosnia and Herzegovina is especially interesting due to the ambiguities in the shape of identity among BIH residents. Similarly to the 2010 Balkan Monitor, this survey shows that members of the three major ethnic groups differ strongly in their identity profiles, relating most to their nationality and religion and still unable to agree on a common country of residence.⁴ These findings imply that there is likely to be resistance to identification with the region, even in the context of EU integration.

3 We borrow the term ‘Yugosphere’ from Tim Judah, “Yugoslavia is Dead. Long Live the Yugosphere”, LSEE Papers on South Eastern Europe, <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/europeanInstitute/research/LSEE/PDF%20Files/Publications/Yugosphere.pdf>

4 2010 Gallup Balkan Monitor: Insights and Perceptions: Voices of the Balkans http://www.balkan-monitor.eu/files/BalkanMonitor-2010_Summary_of_Findings.pdf

As for the future, the younger generation is equally disillusioned as the older one, albeit with some faith in democracy and the European project. Most importantly, the survey shows that although having no illusions, both generations and especially the young see Europe as the default option for the future of the region. Our study also confirms the conclusions of the Report of the third International Commission on the Balkans, which stressed that the dilemma regarding this region is no longer “what should be done”, since the future of the Balkans should clearly be in the EU.⁵

NOSTALGIA FOR THE OLD SYSTEM AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WARS

Not surprisingly, the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the wars that followed are the central facts in the lives of both groups studied, with the older generation having lived through them and the younger living with the consequences. The attitudes towards the former federation and the events that followed are rough indicators of the performance of the current systems as well as the likelihood of reconciliation in the future. Our data highlights that most of the people in the region still regret the loss of the common country and believe that had Yugoslavia survived, life in these countries would have been better. This is supported by an overwhelming majority in all the Yugoslav successors surveyed, with the exception of Croatia and Kosovo. Even in Croatia, 38% of those surveyed have positive associations with the Yugoslav federation even though that country made the strongest break with the past in the early 1990s. Nostalgia for Yugoslavia in the majority of countries and people surveyed best reflects the difficulties of the transition process and people’s dissatisfaction with the performance of their current states.

Nostalgia for the old system however, is not to be understood as support for authoritarianism, since that is usually linked to the performance of current systems.⁶ This has been a common case in other countries undergoing post-communist transition, in Eastern and Central Europe, for example. Age differences have also

5 The Balkans in Europe’s future, Report of the International Commission on the Balkans, Sofia: Centre for liberal strategies, <http://www.cls-sofia.org/uploads/files/Projects%20files/International%20Commission%20on%20the%20Balkans.pdf>

6 Recent academic articles on nostalgia for the past political regime reveal that it predominantly “embodies a utopian hope that there must be a society that is better than the current one”. See Mitja Velikonja, “Lost in Transition: Nostalgia for Socialism in Post-socialist Countries”, 23 (4) East European Politics & Societies (2009), 535-551. See also Maria Todorova and Zsuzsa Gille (eds), *Post-Communist Nostalgia* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010).

been important in studies on new member states, with nostalgia more common among the older generation.⁷ That is also the case in the countries of this survey, with younger generations believing only somewhat less that life in their countries would have been better had the SFRY survived. The only exception to this trend is Macedonia, whose youth are more inclined to support this claim than the older generation.

Examining the issue of the wars that accompanied the Yugoslav break-up brings in the outsider factor, or the “international community” phenomenon. External factors have historically been major players in this region, and their role is still highlighted in everyday life. Moreover, the widely recognised failure of the international community to deal with the wars associated with the Yugoslav dissolution in the 1990s still shapes the views and attitudes of the public. Most of the people interviewed for the purposes of our survey still believe that the international community is to blame for the warfare that took place. This surprisingly high rate of respondents who do not hold responsible their own political elites, but blame the international community for their countries’ failures, can be ascribed to the domestic misuse of transitional norms and conditions made by international organizations.⁸ The exceptions to this trend are Croatia and Kosovo, which place responsibility with the political leaders and the people respectively. In the case of Croatia, most of the blame (around 64%) is unsurprisingly still placed on Milosevic personally. Kosovo, on the other hand, has traditionally had trust in the international community, with 45% supporting the idea of a collective (nation-people) responsibility for the warfare.

THERE IS INTEREST, BUT STILL NO TRUST IN THE NEIGHBOURS

Nostalgia for the “better life of the past” is not easily transferable to everyday life in the Balkans today. Hence, even though people feel that life would have been better if Yugoslavia had continued to exist, at the same time they are distrustful of the people in their immediate neighbourhood. Distrust among people in the region prevails, and in some countries the younger generation is even more distrustful than those who lived through the war. Albanians from Albania are distrusted by people in the former Yugoslav countries, especially by young people in Serbia, which indicates that there is still a lot of work to be done in

7 Joakim Ekman & Jonas Linde, “Communist nostalgia and the consolidation of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe”, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* (2005), 21:3, 354-374

8 See also Jelena Subotić, *Hijacked Justice: Dealing with the Past in the Balkans* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

this region in bringing young people closer.⁹ On this note, distrust at a general level as well as between different ethnicities living within these countries is also common. For example, a recent study on social capital in Bosnia and Herzegovina showed that the general level of trust is even lower among people younger than 30, while the highest level of trust is connected to family and close friends.¹⁰

Quite contrary to our expectations, the people in the region do not believe that they share common cultural spaces. Interestingly enough, an extremely small number of people perceive all of these countries as one cultural region today. Rather than seeing the seven countries as a single cultural region, most people would group three or four countries together, which reinforces the existent barriers in the region. In terms of culture, both groups studied in Albania and Croatia believe that they share the least common cultural space with the region. At the same time, in these two countries, there is significant intra-generational difference in this regard – the younger generations feel more that they share a regional culture with the other countries, thereby setting positive conditions for a future regional cultural integration.

There is some interest in travel and knowing the neighbours, mostly in Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo, and somewhat less in Croatia and Albania. This reinforces the previous findings on the perception of Albania and Croatia of the experience of shared cultural space among the countries in the region. At the same time, the absolute majority of people in all the countries have expressed eagerness to travel to an EU country. In generational terms, the younger generation appears to be more eager to travel to other countries in the region, while the older appears to be more focused on extra-regional travel. One of the reasons for such findings may be the fact that the older generation has already experienced the region in their youth, and also have a living memory of its turbulent years, which reduces the general appeal of regional travel. By contrast, both generations are attracted to explore the EU countries as they associate them with prosperity and wealth.

9 See also Huma Haider, “(Re)imagining Coexistence: Striving for Sustainable Return, Reintegration and Reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, 3 *International Journal of Transitional Justice* (2009), 91-113.

10 The ties that bind – social capital in Bosnia and Herzegovina, National Human Development Report 2009, United Nations Development Programme in Bosnia, <http://europeandcis.undp.org/home/show/56BFEEB7-F203-1EE9-B097F40D1D71EE4F>.

REALISTIC YOUTH WITH A EUROPEAN VOCATION

Looking ahead, young people in the Balkans are sceptical, but still hold hope for a better future. Young people believe that they will live in a world that is worse than the world of their parents, which is a common occurrence in general European terms. Nevertheless, despite the economic difficulties these countries face, there is a high level of satisfaction with life in general. This is especially the case in Kosovo, in what demonstrates the power of hope in making sense of one’s life. The young generation also hopes for security, which is evident in the young people’s aspiration to find a job in the administration or public companies. The outlook is brighter in relation to the economy, as there is widespread awareness of the need to cooperate regionally. Still, for example, the younger generation in Serbia feels more strongly than the older one that there are political circumstances which would prevent regional economic cooperation.

In addition to their fears and hopes of a better future, people in the Balkans are also getting rid of the fear of a new conflict. As was also shown in the Brima Gallup Monitor of 2010, the number of people living in fear of a new armed conflict has been decreasing steadily. Our survey similarly showed that in all of the countries between 56% and 75% of the respondents think that a new conflict is unlikely. This is even the case with Macedonia, where the majority of people have traditionally feared the possibility of a new conflict. At the same time, countries with the most explicit experience of war, such as Bosnia, Kosovo and Croatia also consider that there is no significant likelihood of a new conflict in the region. In the three cases, an overwhelming majority of people (around 70%) think that a conflict is unlikely.

On their future and EU integration, the younger generation sees a more positive image of the EU, creating a climate conducive to the involvement of international players in the region. While the generation of 1971 tends to view the EU as vulnerable and fragile, this is not the predominant view of the younger generation. The younger generation also feel less than the older that the international community interferes too much in the internal affairs, especially in Croatia and Serbia, a finding especially relevant for the general regional role of international players, having in mind the significance of these two countries.

20 YEARS ON: THERE IS NOSTALGIA, DISTRUST, BUT ALSO HOPES FOR A EUROPEAN FUTURE

In the early 1990s, Ralf Dahrendorf argued that it takes six months to replace a political system, six years to transform an economic system, and sixty

years to change a society.¹¹ From this perspective, 20 years is probably not enough time to expect dramatic changes in societal attitudes. Still, having in mind the radically different systems in which the two generations examined in this survey lived, differences were to be expected. However, if there was a hope that 20 years after the war the youth in the Balkans will cherish distinct values and views from the 1971 generation, it did not materialize. The survey shows that the differences between nations and between ethnic groups are still playing a bigger role in shaping attitudes than the generational differences.

While there are differences between countries and ethnicities, the two generations studied share a lot of similarities. Regarding the past, the majority of people felt that the situation would have been better for them had they continued to live together in the former Yugoslavia. We would argue this view is predominantly linked to the disillusionment with the performance of the current states. Today, the people in the region are still distrustful of each other and, contrary to recent emphasis on regional inter-relatedness, do not see the region as a single cultural space. As for the future, there is a lot of realism and worry, but also hope. While the youth fear that they will be worse off than their parents, they still believe in a European future. Furthermore, in all of the countries of the Western Balkans, especially Croatia and Serbia as major regional players, the youth do not believe that the international community interfered too much in the internal affairs. Hence, the survey also demonstrates that while the EU has lost its magic, it has not lost its power of attraction. Though many in the region are critical of the Union, the EU is still the best future that the new generation can envision.

11 Ralf Dahrendorf, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe: In a letter intended to have been sent to a gentleman in Warsaw* (New York: Random House, 1990).

ANNEX

METHODOLOGY

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Realisation: | Field research conducted in the period from 25 September to 17 October, 2011 |
| Countries: | Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia |
| Sample frame: | The countries' citizens born in 1971 and in 1991 Quota sampling; Dispersed quotas |
| Type of sample: | Geographic and by type of settlement (urban / rural) with defined starting points (varying between countries depending on the sample size, from minimum of 32 to 42 starting points); app. 7 to 8 respondents per starting point |
| Type of survey: | Face to face in respondents' households |

METHODOLOGY – SAMPLE SIZE

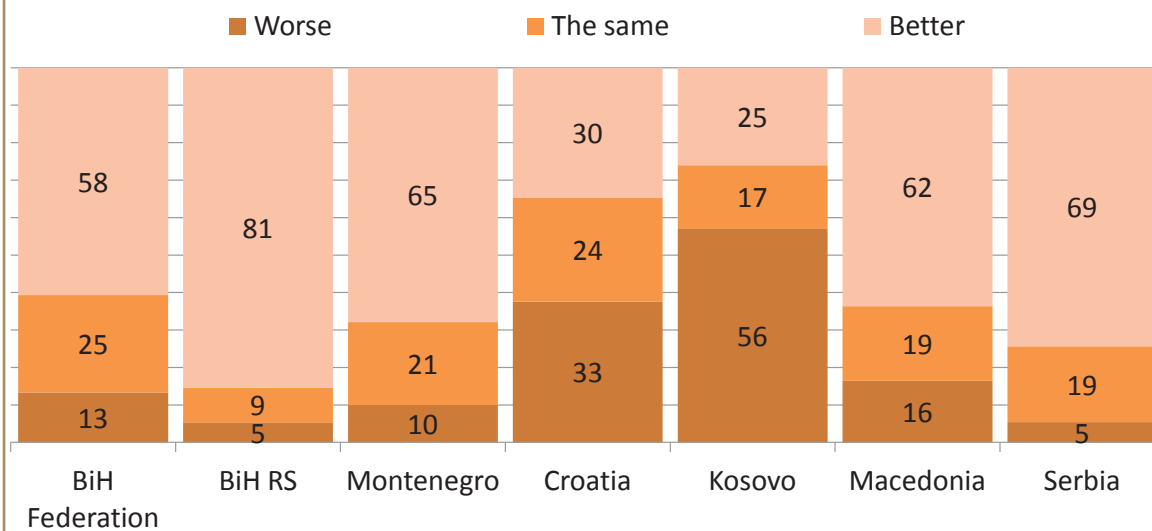
| SAMPLE SIZE | ALB | B&H | CRO | KOS | MAC | MNE | SRB | Total |
|----------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Planned sample size | 240 | 720 | 320 | 240 | 240 | 240 | 320 | 2320 |
| Realised sample size | 251 | 770 | 320 | 260 | 263 | 262 | 342 | 2468 |

| SAMPLE SIZE per generation | ALB | | B&H Bosniak | | B&H Croats | | B&H Serbs | | CRO | | KOS | | MAC | | MNE | | SRB | |
|----------------------------|-----|-----|-------------|-----|------------|-----|-----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Generation | 71 | 91 | 71 | 91 | 71 | 91 | 71 | 91 | 71 | 91 | 71 | 91 | 71 | 91 | 71 | 91 | 71 | 91 |
| Realised sample size | 128 | 123 | 127 | 129 | 131 | 130 | 125 | 128 | 160 | 160 | 129 | 131 | 131 | 132 | 127 | 135 | 178 | 164 |

NOTE: Due to noticeable differences in the attitudes between the three ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the results for this country are presented separately for each of the ethnic groups generation-wise, and separately for Bosnia and Herzegovina Federation and Bosnia and Herzegovina Republic of Srpska, on the level of the total for the country.

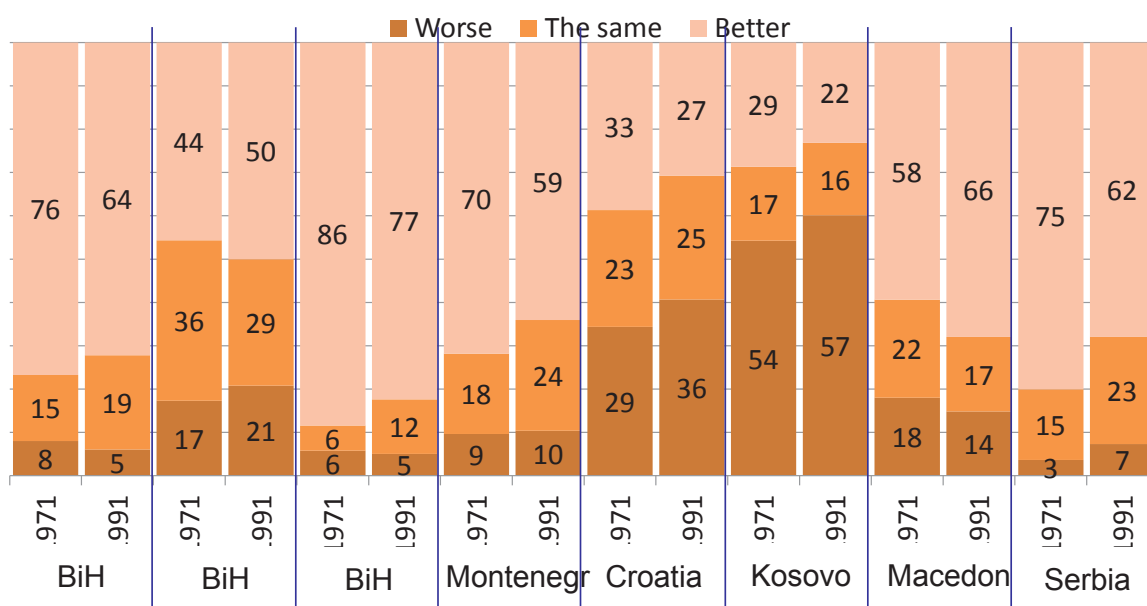
With the exception of Croatia and Kosovo, the majority of people in the former SFRY countries believe that life would be better if the SFRY had survived with the same political system as in Tito's time

In your opinion, what would life in our country be like if Yugoslavia (SFRY) had survived with the same political system and the same relationships between republics (current independent countries) as existed in the period of Tito's reign



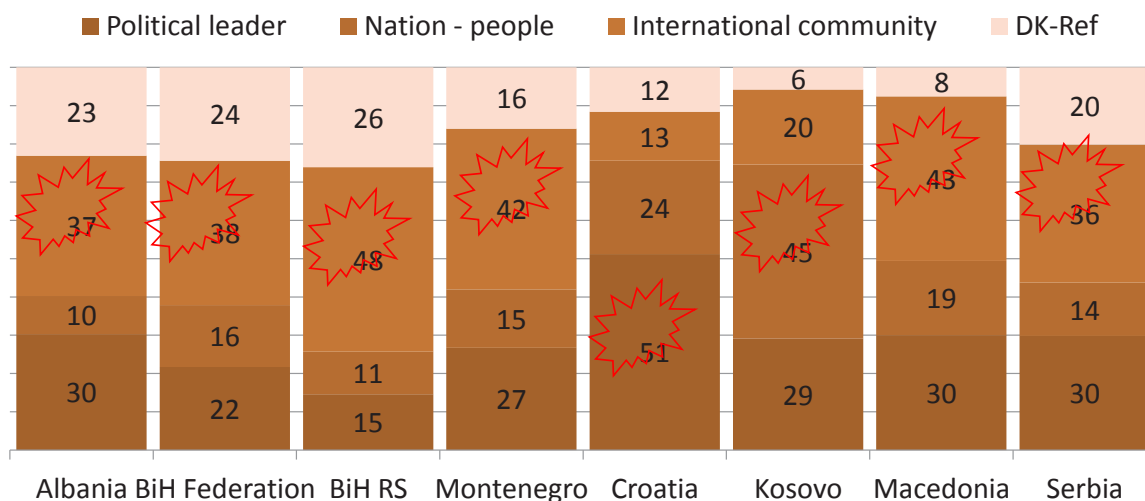
With the exception of Macedonia to some extent, younger generations believe somewhat less that life in their countries would be better if the SFRY had survived

In your opinion, what would life in our country be like if Yugoslavia (SFRY) had survived with the same political system and the same relationships between republics (current independent countries) as existed in the period of Tito's reign



Respondents are divided in their opinions as to where the blame lies for the warfare – in Croatia, the majority blame the political leaders; in Kosovo, they predominantly blame the people; while in Albania, B&H, Macedonia, and Serbia, most lay the blame on the international community

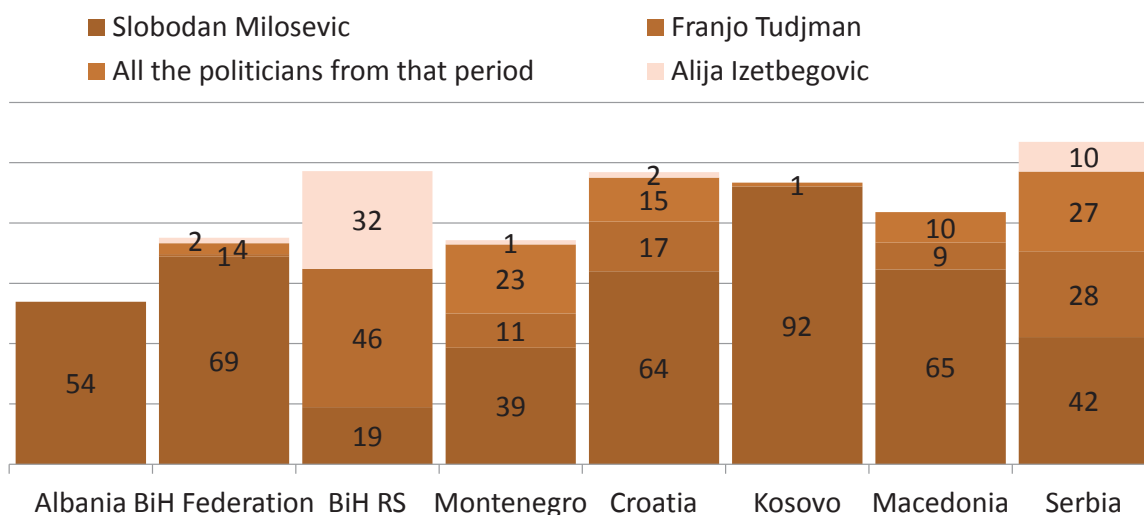
In your opinion, who is the most responsible for the outbreak of conflicts and warfare on the territory of the ex-SFRY in the 1990s?



Most of those who think that political leaders were the responsible ones lay the blame on Slobodan Milosevic, with the exception of respondents from Republic of Srpska, who more often place the blame on Tudjman

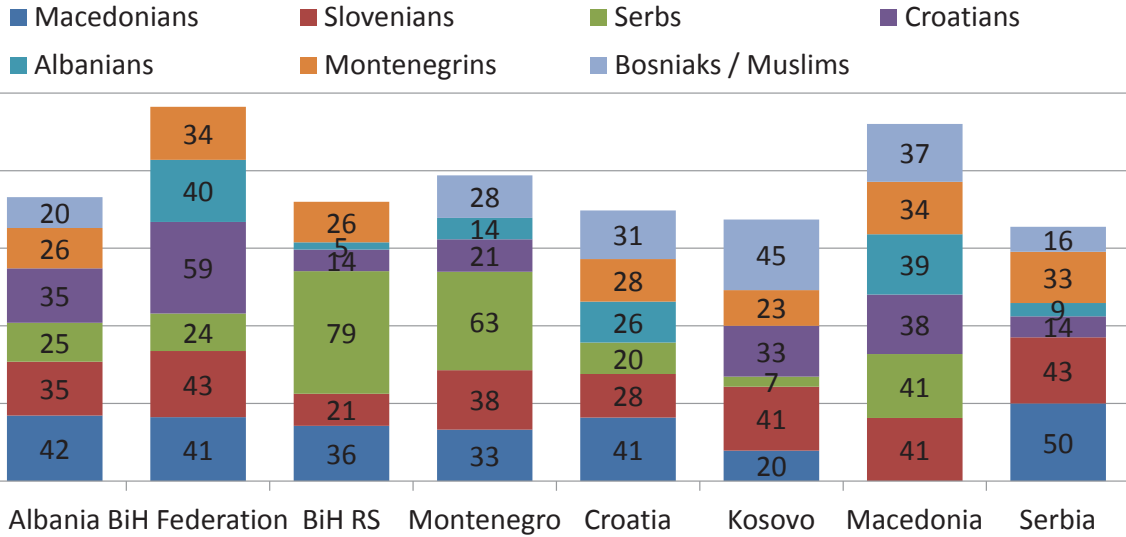
Political leader

Multiple answers; Base: those who think that a political leader is the most responsible for the outbreak of conflicts and warfare on the territory of the ex-SFRY in the 1990s % of the most frequent answers



In general, there is a lot of mistrust among people of different ethnicities that lived together in the former SFRY

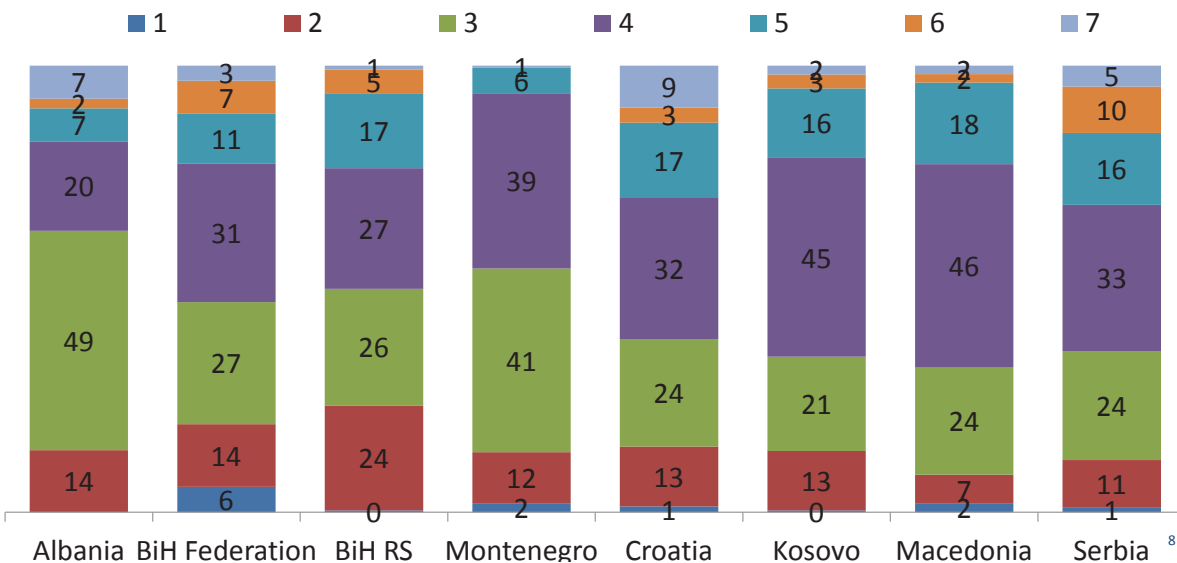
In your opinion, to what extent can the peoples that lived together in the ex-SFRY be trusted today? – % CAN BE TRUSTED (mainly + completely)



An extremely small number of people perceive the seven countries of the Western Balkans as a single cultural area: 6% in B&H Federation, 2% each in Montenegro and Macedonia, and 1% each in Croatia and Serbia. The most frequent number of groups in which the countries were classified is 3, in Albania and Montenegro, and 4, in most of the countries.

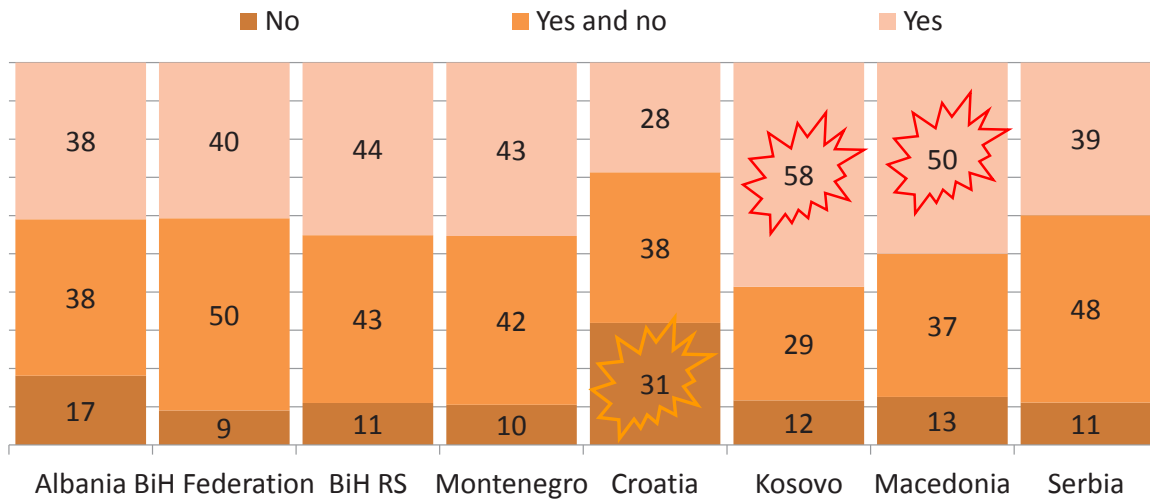
If you were to group Western Balkan countries according to how close they are culturally, how would you group them? Which countries, in your opinion, are close enough culturally to be classified in the same group?

Number of groups in which countries were classified



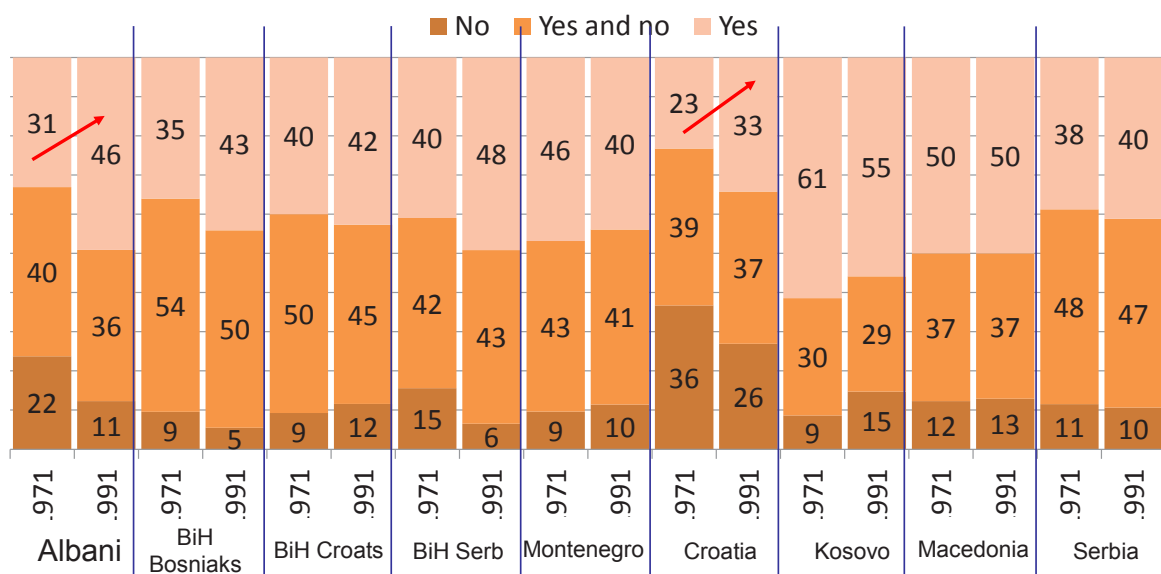
Cultural identification with other Western Balkan nations when it comes to music, literature, art, and entertainment is the strongest in Kosovo and Macedonia and the weakest in Croatia

When it comes to culture, i.e. music, literature, art, and entertainment in general, to what extent would you say that you share the culture with the other Western Balkan countries?



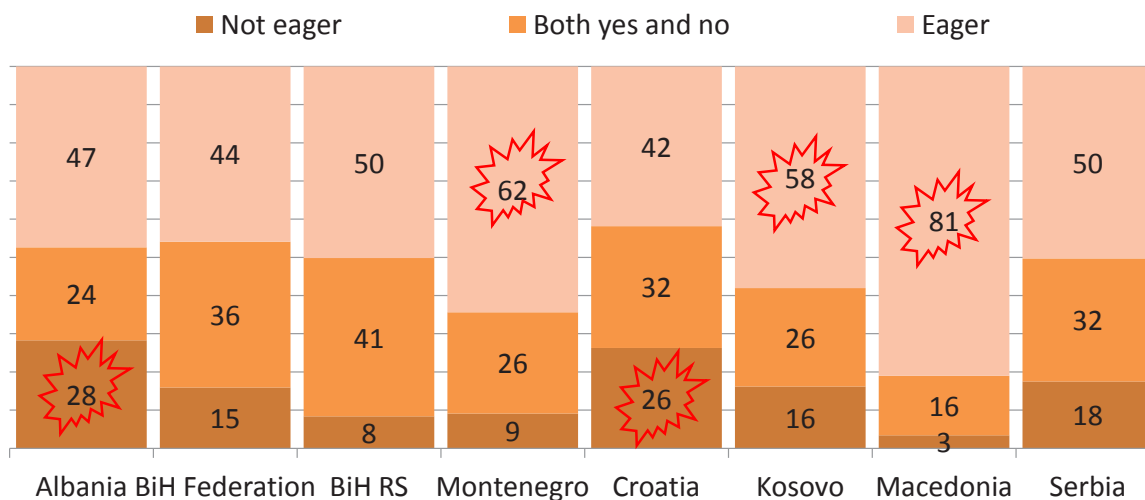
The most noticeable generational differences are seen in Albania and Croatia, where younger generations feel more that they share the culture in terms of music, literature, art and entertainment with the other Western Balkan countries

When it comes to culture, i.e. music, literature, art, and entertainment in general, to what extent would you say that you share the culture with the other Western Balkan countries?



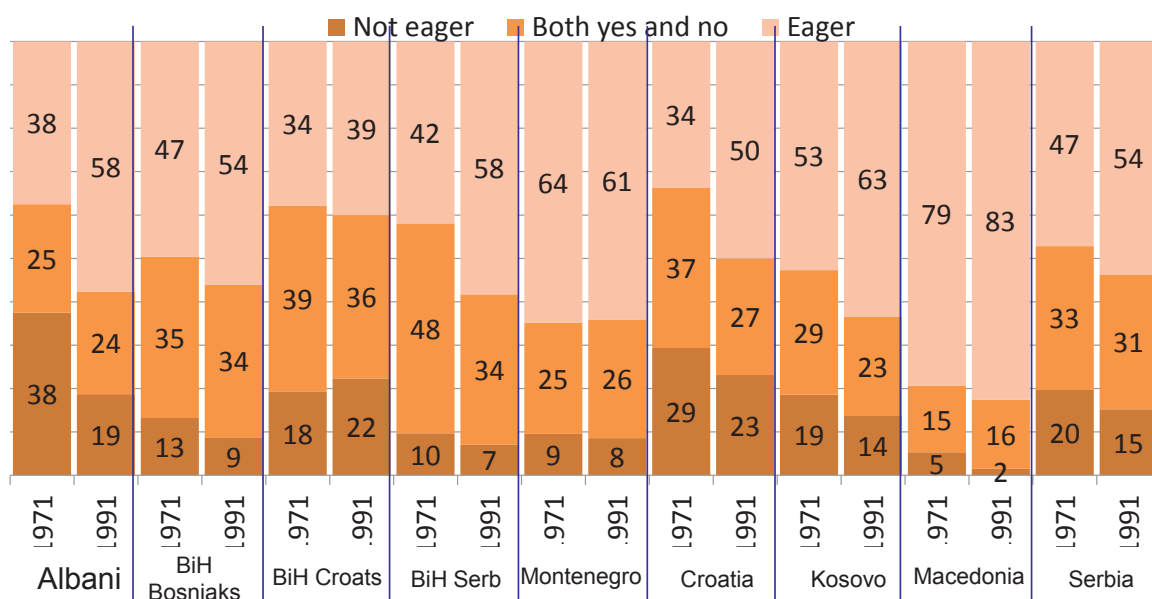
Quite a substantial number of people express eagerness to visit the ex-SFRY countries have not had the chance to visit yet - most of whom in Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo and the least in Croatia and Albania

And how eager are you personally to visit the other ex-SFRY countries and Albania (the question for respondents that visited some of the countries referred to the countries they have not already been to) and to meet people who live there?



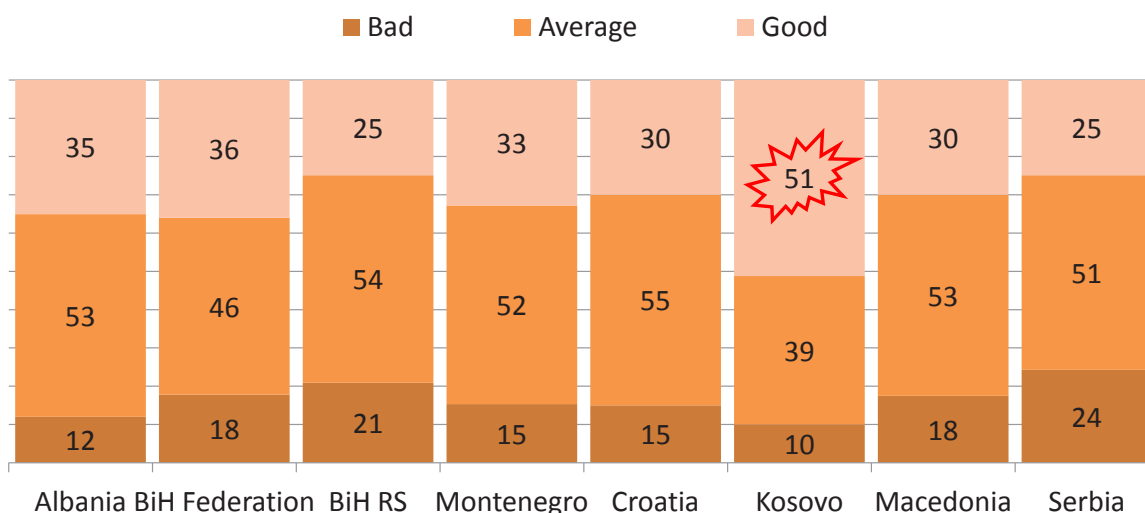
The younger generation in all of the countries is at least somewhat more eager to visit the other countries in the region

And how eager are you personally to visit the other ex-SFRY countries and Albania (the question for respondents that visited some of the countries referred to the countries they have not already been to) and to meet people who live there?



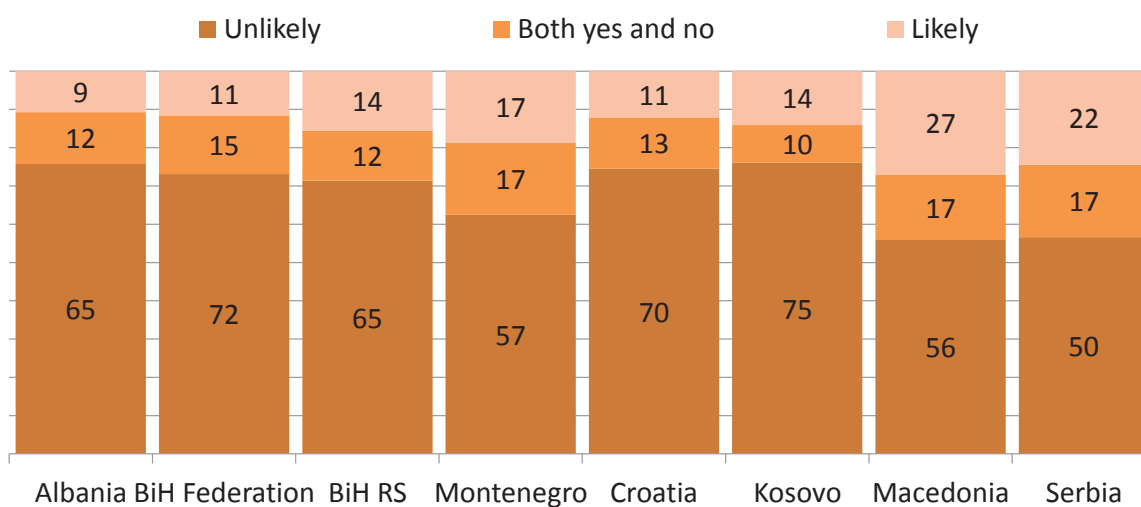
'Average' is the most frequent evaluation of one's own living standards in all of the countries except Kosovo, the only country where a majority of respondents evaluated their living standards as good

How would you evaluate your own and your family's living standards?



A majority of respondents think that it is not likely a new armed conflict between countries of the Western Balkans could break out, but those from Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro are less sure of it than those in the other countries

And how likely or unlikely do you think the outbreak of new armed conflicts between certain Western Balkan countries is in the coming three to five years?

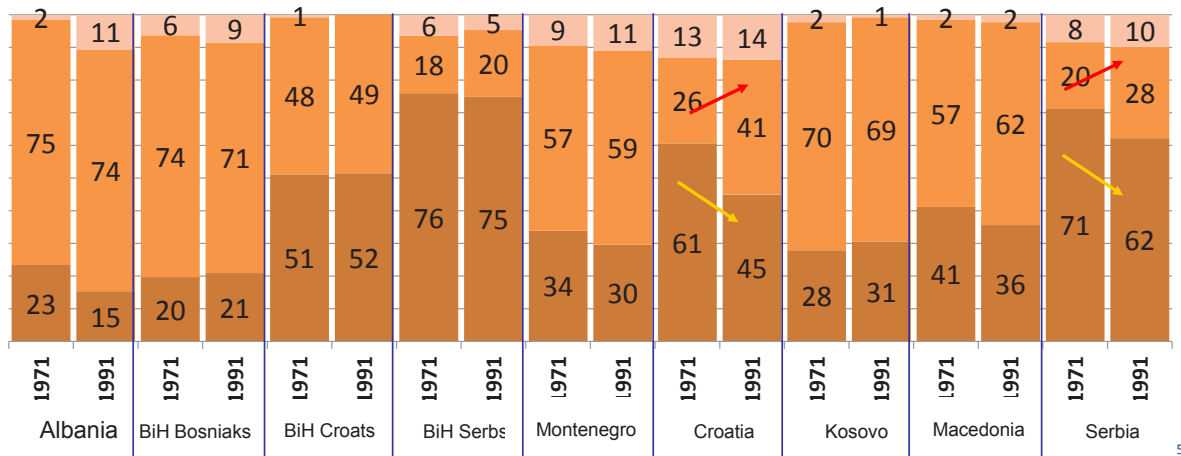


The younger generations in Croatia and Serbia have more positive attitudes towards the international community's role in their countries than the older ones, and this difference is especially noticeable in Croatia

And what is your opinion about the international community's current role in our country? Some people think that the international community interferes too much in their country's internal affairs, while others think that the international community has a positive role in the country when it comes to the development of democratic institutions and the launch of reforms. Which opinion is closer to your own?

DK-Ref

The International Community in our country has a positive role in the development of democratic institutions and introduction of reforms



5