

WHY STILL PRO-RUSSIA? MAKING SENSE OF HUNGARY'S AND SERBIA'S RUSSIA STANCE

BY DR HELENA IVANOV AND DR MARLENE LARUELLE



**CENTRE ON
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POLITICAL RISK**

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About The Centre on Social & Political Risk

The Centre on Social & Political Risk (CSPR) is a citizen-focused, international research centre, which seeks to identify, diagnose and propose solutions to threats to governance in liberal Western democracies. Its fundamental purpose is to underscore the potential harm that various forms of social, cultural and political insecurity, conflict and disengagement can pose to the long-term sustainability of our democracies.

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Executive Summary

In this report, Professor Dr Marlene Laruelle and Dr Helena Ivanov investigate the level and underlying causes of pro-Russian sentiment in Serbia and Hungary. Both countries have been noted for their approach to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. On one hand, Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán continuously frustrates the European Union's coordinated campaign against Russia and keeps calling for the cancellation of sanctions. At the same time, Serbia has not imposed any sanctions against Russia and is increasingly known for its balancing act in this conflict.

How should the EU react to these divergent approaches to Russia and try to protect its unity? To answer this question, this report examines the actual level of support for Russia among Serbian and Hungarian citizens, and what is driving this sentiment. It provides novel data – namely, the authors of the report commissioned two agencies to conduct polling on a representative sample in the two countries to investigate why we are seeing so much pro-Russian sentiment in Serbia and in Hungary.

The report concludes that public opinion in each country differs a lot in the perceptions of Russia, and that while we can talk of a genuine Russophilia in Serbia, Hungarians are much more polarised on their relationship to Moscow and the pro-Russian stance is limited to the Fidesz realm. But in both cases, the main finding is that a lot of this pro-Russian sentiment is driven by the general disappointment in the West.

To improve the perceptions held by Hungarians and Serbs about the West, the report proposes two novel policies. The first argues that the EU should provide direct financial help to Serbs and Hungarians to combat the energy cost crisis. The second suggests that EU and Western politicians need to change their tone when speaking to Hungarians and Serbs as well as their respective political representatives.

Introduction

3 April 2022 was an important date for Hungary and Serbia, as both countries held elections. Mr Orbán faced parliamentary elections in Hungary, while Serbia held presidential, parliamentary and local elections on the same day. Mr Orbán secured a fourth consecutive term in power, and his “Fidesz party strengthened their position in Parliament despite forecasts predicting a tight race. It won 53% of the vote ... enough for a commanding lead over a united coalition of opposition parties.”¹

In Serbia, Mr Vučić will be able to stay in power for another five years after securing a landslide victory in the presidential elections by winning a record “58% [of the vote with] his nearest challenger Zdravko Ponoš mustering only 18%.”² Vučić’s Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) also “scored a win in the simultaneous early parliamentary election, with about 43% of the vote ...”³ And in October 2022, Serbia officially got its new government – led by the SNS in coalition with the Socialist Party of Serbia.

In both countries, the Russian invasion of Ukraine overshadowed the election campaigns. In Hungary, “Orbán’s campaign was originally planned to focus on the LGBTQ referendum ... and other issues related to his long cultural war against liberals, migrants, the European Union and United States philanthropist George Soros.”⁴ Nevertheless, the news coming from Ukraine meant that Orbán had to refocus his campaign. In the end, his party established a different narrative: “Orbán is hailed as the guarantor of peace and stability for Hungarians as the threat of war looms.”⁵ Things were not that different in neighbouring Serbia with Mr Vučić adopting the slogan “Peace. Stability. Vučić” for his electoral campaign.

It seems that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine also had an impact on the results. In Serbia particularly, President Vučić, during his press conference after the elections, stated that: “The crisis in Ukraine had a huge effect on the results of the elections and Serbia has moved dramatically to the right.”⁶ While there are some disagreements about the actual state of affairs regarding the performance of far-right parties in Serbia, “Experts say that the likes of Dveri, NADA and the Zavetnici [three far-right parties in Serbia] have all benefitted from Russia’s war with Ukraine ...”⁷ Similarly, it is suggested that Orbán’s plea to keep Hungary out of the conflict aided his campaign which had initially been seen as a tight race.⁸ Thus, there are reasons to think that pro-Russian sentiment is thriving among Serbian and Hungarian citizens, although with a very different cultural context: pro-Russian sentiment is historically anchored in Serbia while it is a much more recent phenomenon in Hungary, with no shared positive historical memories, language or religious ties.

¹ Rob Picheta and Balint Bardi, “Viktor Orbán, Hungary’s authoritarian leader and key Putin ally, calls Zelensky an ‘opponent’ after winning reelection”, *CNN*, 4 April 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/04/03/europe/hungary-election-results-viktor-orban-intl/index.html>.

² “Serbian elections: Vučić wins second term as President, his party loses the overall majority”, *European Western Balkans*, 4 April 2022, <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2022/04/04/serbian-elections-vucic-wins-second-term-as-president-his-party-loses-the-overall-majority/>.

³ Dimitar Bechev, “Serbia’s Vučić proved he is here to stay”, *Aljazeera*, 5 April 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/4/5/serbias-vucic-proved-that-he-is-here-to-stay>.

⁴ Tim Gosling, “Russia’s war in Ukraine dominates Hungary’s election campaign”, *Aljazeera*, 17 March 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/17/russias-war-in-ukraine-dominates-hungarys-election-campaign>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ “Vučić says Serbia moved dramatically to the right”, *N1 Belgrade*, 4 April 2022, <https://rs.n1info.com/english/news/vucic-says-serbia-moved-dramatically-to-the-right/>.

⁷ Sasa Dragojlo, “BIRN Fact-Check: Did Serbia’s Elections Signal a Further Tilt to the Right?”, *Balkan Insight*, 8 April 2022, <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/04/08/birn-fact-check-did-serbias-elections-signal-a-further-tilt-to-the-right/>.

⁸ Robert Tait, “‘We shouldn’t get involved’: Ukraine a key issue as Hungary heads to polls”, *The Guardian*, 1 April 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/01/hungary-election-ukraine-a-key-issue-viktor-orban>.

Along the same lines, both countries have been noted for their approach to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Serbia, an EU candidate state currently in accession talks, while voting in favour of various UN resolutions (e.g. one condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine and one excluding Russia from the Human Rights Council), has not imposed sanctions against Russia – and it seems unlikely that it will do so in the foreseeable future. In Hungary, which, as an EU member, has imposed against Russia, Mr Orbán refused “to condemn President Putin or allow arms shipments to pass through Hungary to Ukraine.”⁹ Orbán also noted that “he does not agree with sanctions”¹⁰ and “rejected the idea of curbs on oil and gas imports from Russia, saying that would wreck Hungary’s economy.”¹¹

In both countries, pro-Russian sentiment is thriving, and this is partially reflected in the behaviour of the governments. Over the years, Hungary has become the main pro-Russian voice inside the European Union, and ever since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Budapest has continued to differentiate itself from the rest of the EU in terms of its relationship to Moscow. Yet the reasons for its foreign policy are complex and have much more to do with Hungary’s contrarian position towards the West than they do with a genuinely pro-Russian stance. Moreover, Hungarian public opinion is much more polarised on Russia and the EU than the regime’s official storytelling.

What exactly is causing or underlying this sentiment is unclear. While we can make educated guesses – for instance, Russia’s stance towards the independence of Kosovo may motivate Serbs to support Russia – those assumptions are not helpful in thinking about effective approaches that could push Hungary and Serbia to fall in line with the Western stance against Russia. In this report, we aim to provide clear answers to these questions by drawing on the data from the polling we have conducted. This novel dataset also informs the policy recommendations that we discuss towards the end of the report.

Methodology

To conduct this research, we examined the key literature that analysed the level and underlying causes of pro-Russian sentiment in Serbia and Hungary. We also conducted nation-wide polling on a representative sample in both countries with the aim of examining whether key assumptions of the literature are accurate, and also how Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 impacted people’s perceptions about Russia.

In both countries, we investigated how interested the citizens are in politics; which media channels they use for following political news; how they perceive Serbia’s and Hungary’s position towards the West and Russia; opinions about Serbian and Hungarian political leaders, parties and voting preferences; the state of democracy in Serbia, Hungary and other countries; Serbia’s and Hungary’s foreign policy and international relations; opinions about foreign political leaders and countries; attitudes towards the war in Ukraine; and views on sanctions against Russia.

In Hungary, we asked IPSOS agency to conduct the polling on our behalf, and in Serbia we contracted Sprint Insight agency to research public opinion. Both surveys were conducted during September 2022. In both countries, we insisted on having a representative sample both in terms of the number of respondents, and also in terms of gender; type of settlement (urban/rural); region of the country; education level; employment status; financial circumstances; religious views; and nationality.

⁹ “Russia’s invasion of Ukraine casts shadow over Hungary’s parliamentary poll”, *Euronews*, 1 April 2022, <https://www.euronews.com/2022/04/01/russia-s-invasion-of-ukraine-casts-shadow-over-hungary-s-parliamentary-poll>.

¹⁰ Natalia Zinets and Gergely Szakacs, “Tensions mount between Ukraine and Hungary over Budapest’s Russia stance”, *Reuters*, 7 April 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-urges-hungary-get-right-side-history-over-russia-2022-04-07/>.

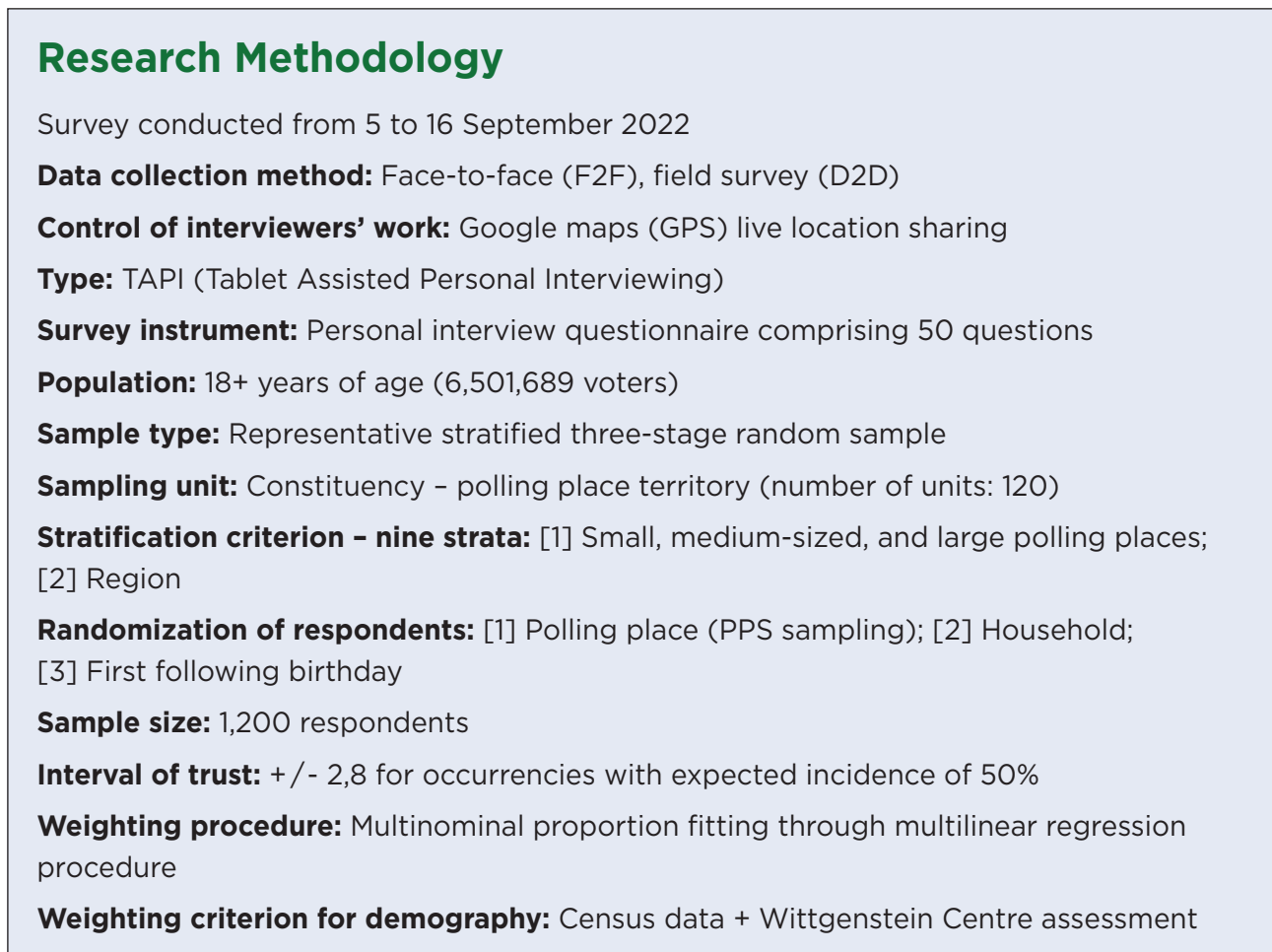
¹¹ *Ibid.*

Below are the details of the methodology used by the respective agencies.

Figure 1: Methodology used by IPSOS in Hungary



Figure 2: Methodology used by Sprint Insight in Serbia



In both countries, we have concluded that pro-Russian sentiment seems to be, at least partly, caused by the general disappointment in Western nations and the international community, although the reasons for such disappointment vary between Serbia and Hungary.

Hungary – A Contrarian Position

Hungarian public opinion is heavily polarised into two broad constituencies with contrasting views on the domestic situation and the country's foreign policy. Our survey confirms significant differences between the opinions of supporters of the ruling party (Fidesz and the Christian Democratic People's Party) and of the opposition (made up of the 'United for Hungary' coalition and several other smaller parties). These political differences, also rooted in different media consumption, have a serious impact on how respondents see Hungary's political actions, especially in relation to the war in Ukraine.

Overall, Hungarian society appears to be highly politically engaged, but it is also plausible that given the sensitivity of some of these issues, there is a strong social desirability bias. More than three-quarters (79%) of respondents indicated that they are interested in Hungarian politics (30% very interested, 49% mostly interested), a fairly high proportion that rises even higher among males (85%), those with university education (86%), and voters for large political parties (close to 90%).

Citizens get their news mostly from the internet (two-thirds), social media (particularly those under 30 years old) and television (still watched by 53%), as well as through personal conversations. Yet, as seen from Figures 3 and 4, media consumption is highly divided and directly correlated with political polarisation and voting preferences: Fidesz-Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP) voters rely mostly on television, partly because they are older, while supporters of the opposition rely more on internet news. The news websites index.hu and origo.hu are typically read by Fidesz voters, while telex.hu, 24.hu, 444.hu and hvg.hu are used by opposition voters. The TV channels M1, TV2 and Hír TV are typically watched by Fidesz voters, while RTL Klub and ATV are more watched by opposition supporters. In terms of written press, most of the regional local dailies share pro-government views, while many of the weekly magazines, for example HVG and Magyar Hang, share liberal or independent views.

Figure 3: Sources of political news for the Fidesz-KDNP voters

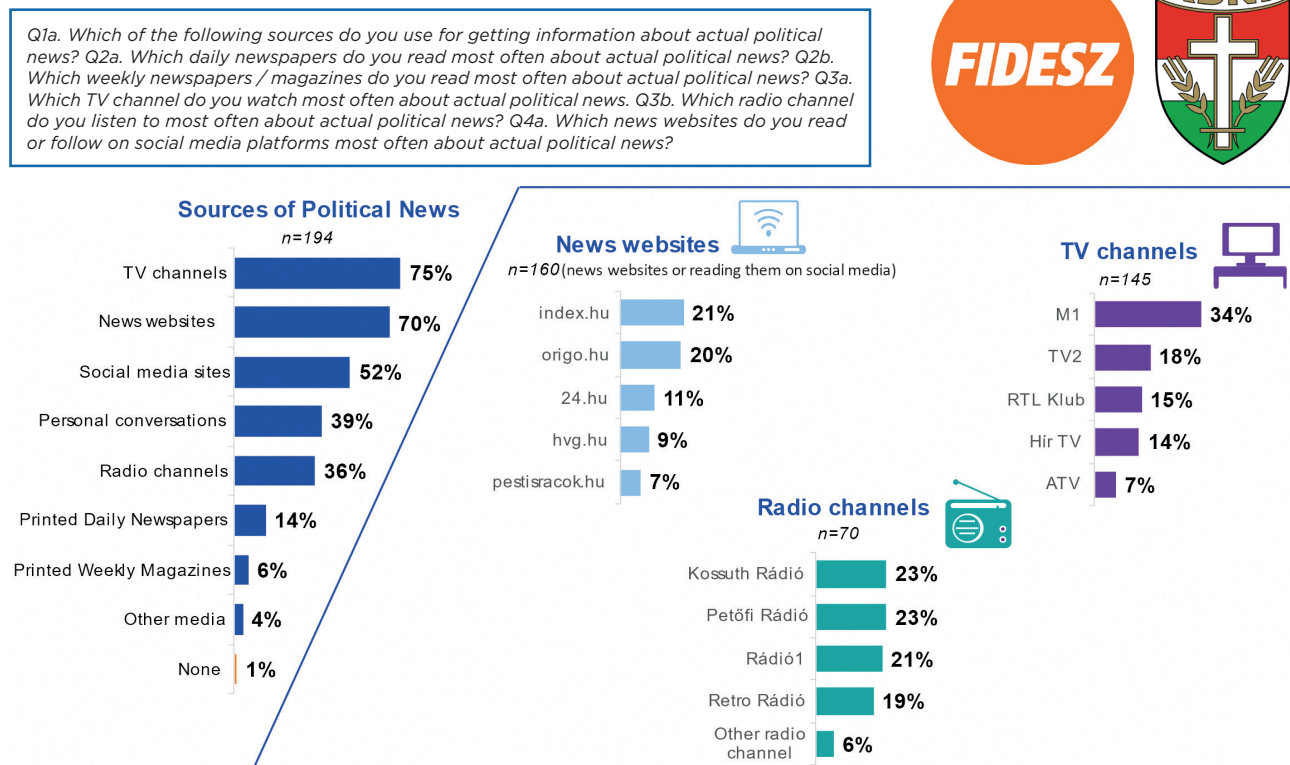
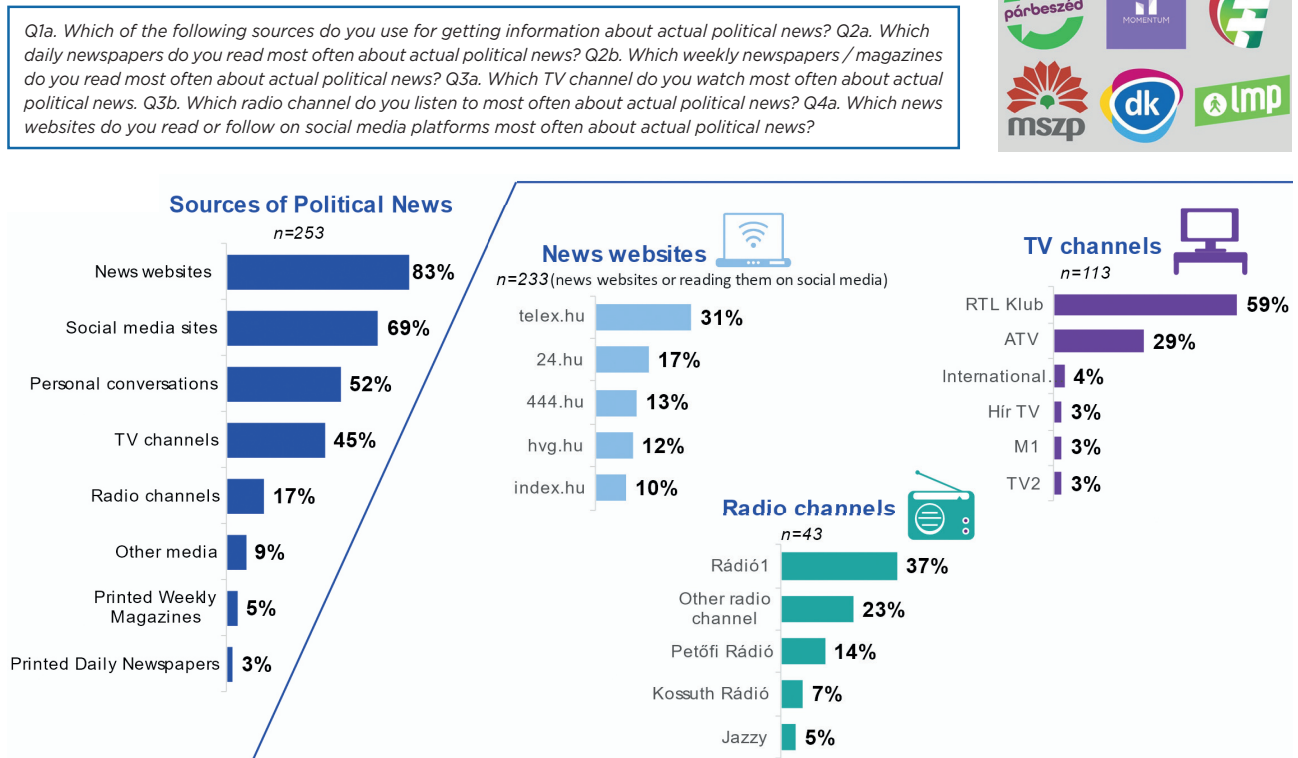


Figure 4: Sources of political news for opposition supporters

Public Opinion on the War: “Everybody Is Somewhat Guilty”

When asked about Russia’s war in Ukraine (see Figure 5), almost three-quarters of respondents believe that Russia is fully or mostly responsible for starting the war (significantly higher shares of Budapest inhabitants, university graduates and opposition supporters agree). At the same time, 50% consider Ukraine to be equally responsible (significantly higher shares of voters for Fidesz and the far-right party Our Homeland agree), 39% name the US as the primary culprit and around a quarter blamed NATO – again, these proportions rise significantly among voters for Fidesz and Our Homeland.

As we can see from these numbers, respondents consider several countries responsible for the February 2022 invasion, which corroborates the widespread view that the main external actors are all guilty to some degree. This result confirms Hungary’s deeply entrenched *contrarian* position, i.e., going *purposefully against whatever is identified as the view of the ‘mainstream’, the ‘establishment’ or the ‘system’ and attacking what is said to be the conventional wisdom.*

As we will see later, the popular idea that the world’s major countries are all, in some way, partly responsible for the war is mostly rooted in Hungary’s ambivalent position towards the West: in a question about favourability of the main foreign leaders, the European figures (both representatives of the EU like Ursula von der Leyen or NATO like Jens Stoltenberg, and national leaders such as Boris Johnson for the UK and Olaf Scholz for Germany) generate mostly ‘neutral’ views (between 37 and 51%), with a positive view of only between 12 and 21% (see Figure 6). Yet interestingly, the three countries viewed the most negatively in our survey are Russia, China and Ukraine, with Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelensky) collecting the most negative votes for state leaders.

This widespread anti-Ukrainian sentiment – shared by the regime and public opinion – can be explained by reference both to historical factors and to the effect of state media narratives. Transcarpathia, Ukraine’s western region, has historically been inhabited by a Hungarian

Figure 5: Who is responsible for starting the war in Ukraine?

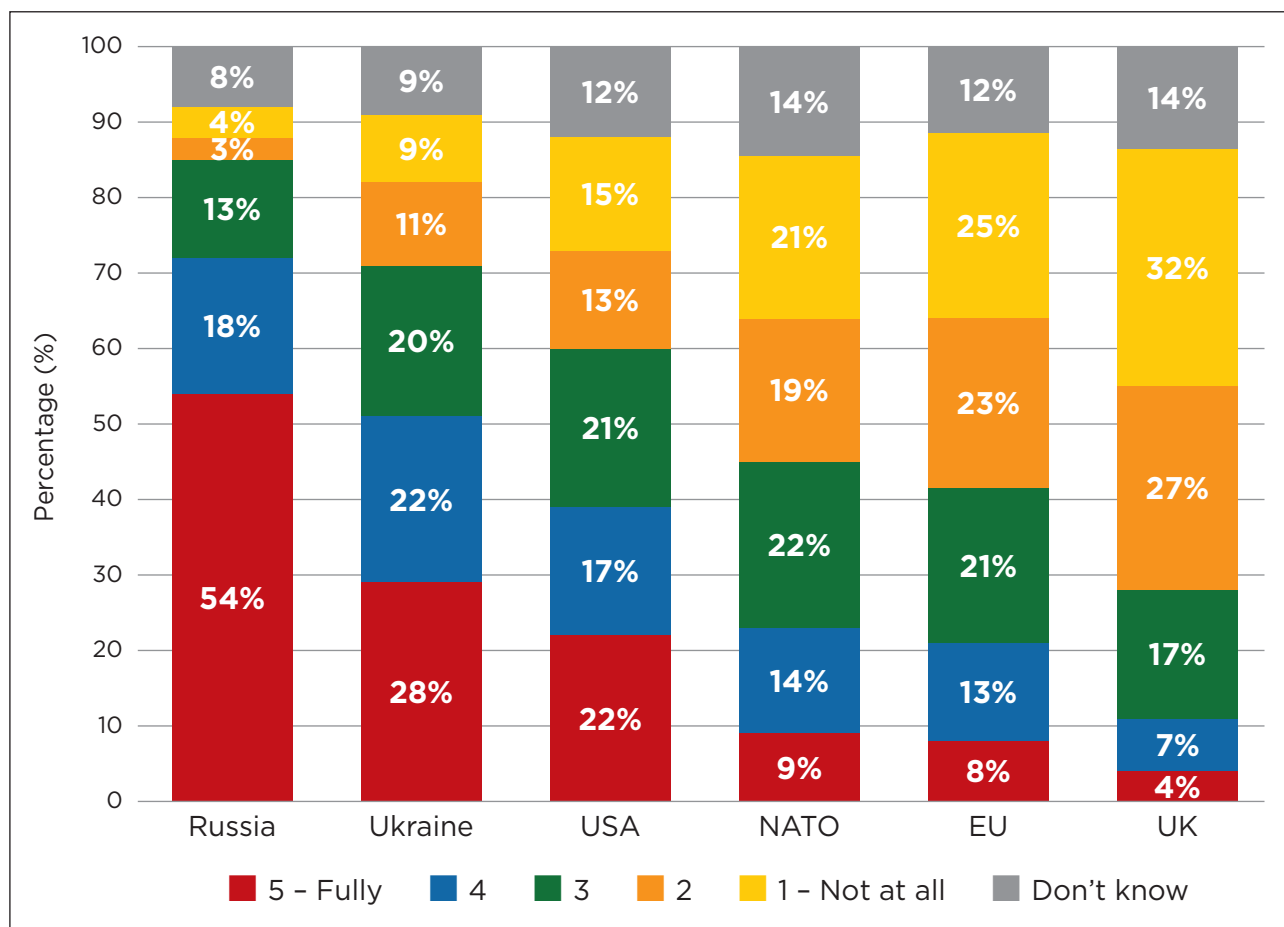
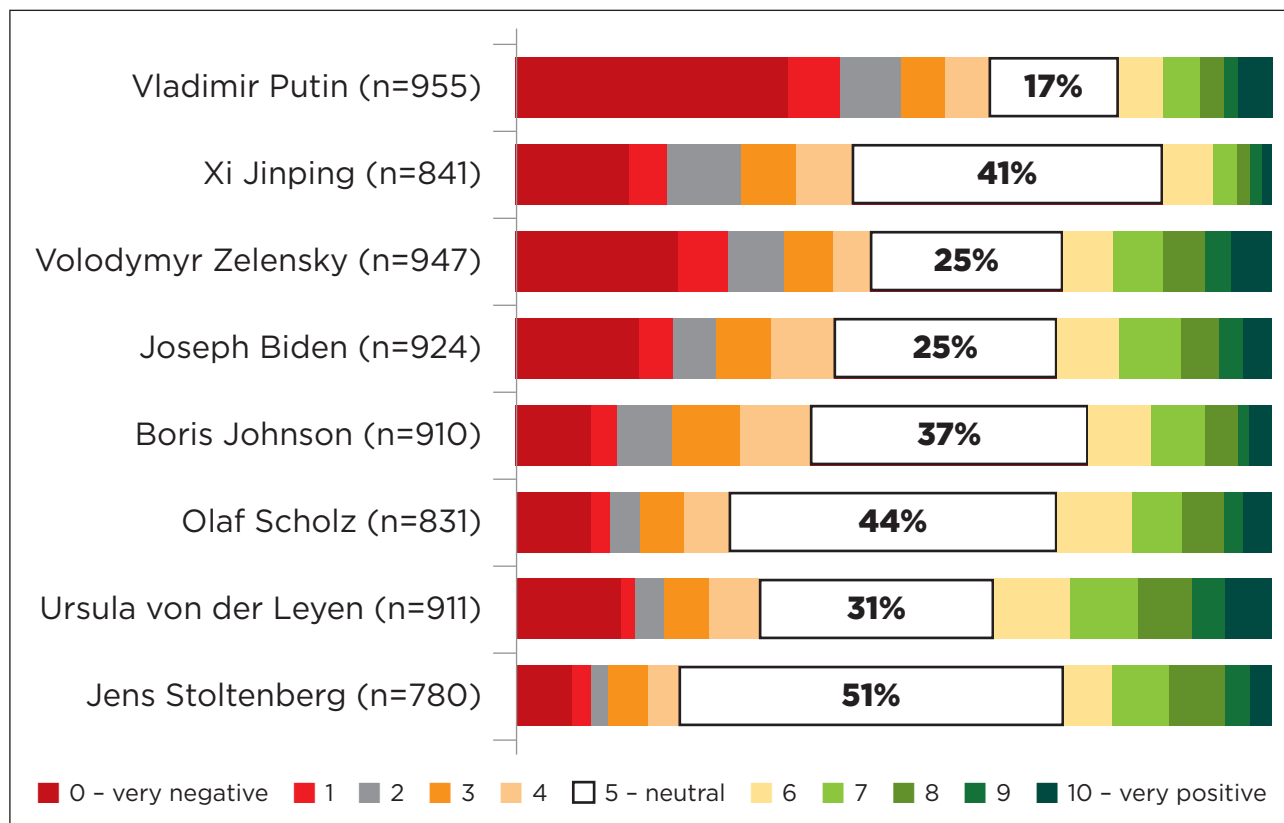


Figure 6: Views on main foreign leaders



minority, with regular tensions over the cultural and language-related rights of the minority. In May 2014, in the midst of the first Ukraine war and Russia's support for Donbas secessionism, Orbán claimed territorial autonomy for Transcarpathia, and since 2019 Hungary has blocked ministerial-level political meetings between NATO and Ukraine on the basis that the latter's government is violating the human rights of its Hungarian ethnic minority.¹² This context has helped to frame the current war as a conflict in which Kyiv is just as guilty as Moscow and to secure popular support for such a view. After his victory in April 2022, Orbán singled out Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy as part of the "overwhelming force" against which his party had struggled during the campaign, and the relationship between the two leaders has been poor ever since. In October, the Hungarian government launched a 'national consultation' on the sanctions, with highly provocative street billboards depicting the sanctions as EU bombs falling on Russia.¹³

Supporting Russia? Yea and Nay

It is important to differentiate between those who accuse Russia, Ukraine *and* the West of being responsible for the war – a contrarian but not necessarily pro-Russian position – and those who express support for Russia in the war. As we see in Figure 7, close to one-third of all respondents indeed believe that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is justified – and this proportion is significantly higher among Fidesz voters, at 58%, and among voters of Our Homeland, at 47%.

As shown in Figure 8, over half of those who believe that the war is justified indicate that Russia had to protect Ukraine's Russian-speaking population from the aggression of Ukrainian

Figure 7: Is the invasion of Ukraine by Russia justified?

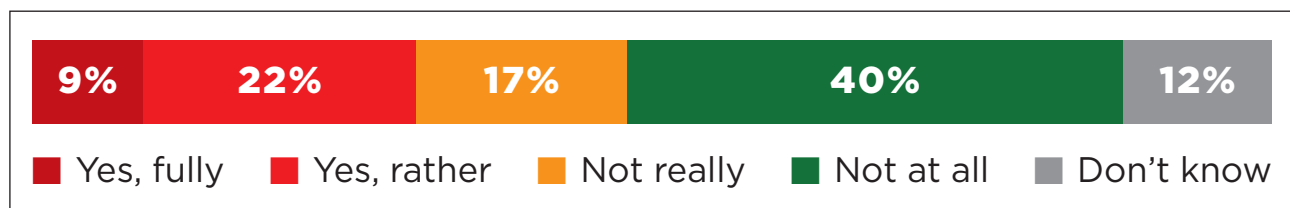


Figure 8: Which of the following reasons justify Russia invading Ukraine? (question asked among those who expressed support for Russia's invasion at the previous question)



¹² Kim Sengupta, "Ukraine's fears over close ties between Russia and Hungary stretch beyond Putin and Orbán", *The Independent*, 3 February 2022, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/hungary-ukraine-russia-war-zakarpattia-b2007146.html>.

¹³ Alice Tidey, "Ukraine war: Hungary comparing EU sanctions on Russia to bombs is 'inappropriate'", *Euronews*, 21 October 2022, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/10/19/hungary-comparing-eu-sanctions-on-russia-to-bombs-is-inappropriate-says-eu-commission>.

nationalists. Half of them believe that the Ukrainian government is working for NATO and the US, justifying Russia's invasion in the interests of its own security. Around one-third of them mention that Ukraine was historically part of Russia. One-fifth state that Russia has the right to protect its geopolitical interests in the region. This series of arguments aligns with the Russian regime's narrative on the reasons for the 'special military operation' and pins the blame on Ukraine's 'nationalist' government.

With only about one-third of the population supporting Russia's invasion of Ukraine (fully and rather, as seen in Figure 7), Hungary cannot rely on a large pro-Russian consensus of the kind we can see in Serbia (discussed below). Indeed, the roots of Russophilia in Hungary are, for the most part, tenuous. In the country's nation-building narrative, Russia occupies mostly a negative position: it helped Habsburg Vienna to repress the Hungarian Revolution of 1848; Hungary and Russia fought on opposite sides in both World Wars; and of course the country experienced 40 years of Soviet domination, including the repression of the Hungarian uprising of 1956.

Russophilia among the Hungarian far right

In such a context, it is not surprising that the pro-Russian segment of Hungarian society has long been quite small and limited to the far right of the political spectrum.¹⁴ In the 1990s and 2000s, most Hungarian right-wing nationalist movements did not share pro-Russian feelings, as they associated Russia with communist domination. The only exception was Alfred Szabo and his neo-Nazi, violently racist and antisemitic MNSZ party, inspired by the Arrow Cross party (*Nyilaskeresztes Párt*) that led Nazi-dominated Hungary in 1944. The MNSZ was the first party on the far right to speak of a Euro-Asian alliance.¹⁵ In 2015, Szabo organised an anti-Maidan protest in Budapest with the help of the Facebook group 'We Stand by Russia'.¹⁶

Much more successful was Jobbik, the Movement for a Better Hungary, which emerged in 2003 under the leadership of Gabor Vona.¹⁷ Around 2010, to distinguish itself from Fidesz, Jobbik adopted a so-called Turanian ideology that opened the way to some synergies with Russia, Turkey and Central Asia and celebrated Islam as a partner in fighting against decadent liberal values.¹⁸ Calling for the unification of the Turkic-Mongolian peoples, Jobbik emphasised the Eastern origin of the Hungarian people, their nomadic past, the prestige of the Scythians and the Huns under Attila, and their Finno-Ugric language. Turanism is not new to Hungary: the ideology found supporters after the First World War among nationalist circles that admired the Italian fascist experience and the honeymoon between Turkey and Nazi Germany.¹⁹

This distancing from Western civilisation and the current European construction in favour of an Eastern identity formulated through an innovative update of a faded ideology resonates with a pro-Russian position and mirrors some of the Kremlin's narrative about Russia's civilisational posture – as well as Turkey's. Vona cultivated both Turkey and Russia, connecting with the

¹⁴ Attila Juhász, Lóránt Györi, Péter Krekó and András Dezso, "'I am Eurasian': The Kremlin connections of the Hungarian far-right", *Political Capital*, Social Development Institute, March 2015, https://cz.boell.org/sites/default/files/pc_sdi_boll_study_iameurasian.pdf.

¹⁵ Attila Juhász, Lóránt Györi, Edit Zgut and András Dezso, "'The Truth Today Is What Putin Says It Is': The Activity of Pro-Russian Extremist Groups in Hungary", *Political Capital*, April 2017, https://www.politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC_NED_country_study_HU_20170428.pdf, p.28.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Bulent Kenes, "Jobbik: A Turanist Trojan Horse in Europe?" *ECPS Party Profiles*, European Center for Populism Studies, 3 August 2020, <https://www.populismstudies.org/jobbik-a-turanist-trojan-horse-in-europe/>.

¹⁸ Norbert Pap and Viktor Glied, "Hungary's Turn to the East: Jobbik and Islam", *Europe-Asia Studies* 70, Issue 7 (2018), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09668136.2018.1464126> and Zsolt Enyedi, "Paternalist populism and illiberal elitism in Central Europe", *Journal of Political Ideologies* 21, Issue 1 (2016), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13569317.2016.1105402>.

¹⁹ Umut Korkut, "Resentment and Reorganization: Anti-Western Discourse and the Making of Eurasianism in Hungary", *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 38 (2017): 71-90; Péter Balogh, "Clashing Geopolitical Self-Images? The Strange Co-Existence of Christian Bulwark and Eurasianism (Turanism) in Hungary", *Eurasian Geography and Economics* (2020).

infamous geopolitician Alexander Dugin.²⁰ Béla Kovács, his foreign policy advisor and then MEP – for a time even President of the European far-right parliamentary group Alliance of European National Movements (AENM) – was accused of funnelling Kremlin funds into the party's coffers and of spying on EU institutions for the Russians. In 2020, he was acquitted of charges of espionage but not of fraudulent activities.²¹ After the 2015 refugee crisis and the backlash against it in Hungary, Jobbik moved from a pro-Islam stance to a more classic anti-immigration rhetoric and, since 2018, has rebranded as a more moderate conservative yet still xenophobic party, Our Homeland.

Engineering the official-level Russophilia

Long limited to the far-right spectrum, a pro-Russian stance has gradually been promoted at the state level and spearheaded by political and business elites. Yet direct Russian media influence is limited, and pro-Russian positions and worldviews are channelled by local actors, mostly Fidesz.²² Any politically sensitive content is tightly controlled by public media management and its presentation is systematically shaped in line with government interests, particularly when it comes to pro-Russian stances taken by the government.²³

This official pro-Russian position has multiple roots, both pragmatic and ideological, that have been well studied. As early as November 2010, a newly elected Orbán made his first visit to Moscow and in 2011 proclaimed an 'Eastern Turn' or 'Opening to the East' (*Keleti nyitás*) with the aim of enhancing economic cooperation with countries like China, Russia and Turkey and developing new markets for Hungarian exports.²⁴

Since then, a major area of bilateral cooperation with Russia has been the energy sector. Russia is Hungary's dominant supplier of both gas and nuclear energy, which together account for about half of its energy mix. Hungary tops the list of countries most reliant on Russian gas (even importing more than required for domestic consumption).²⁵ Low energy prices have been key to securing Fidesz's voter base: Orbán's and Fidesz's popularity correlates with lower gas and oil prices.²⁶ In 2015, Hungary also secured a strategic loan of €10 billion to expand the Paks nuclear power plant – often described as 'camouflage' for Russia buying influence over the country.

Ideologically, Orbán has been using Russia in general, and Vladimir Putin in particular, as a 'brand' for his own political system. This ideological alignment should not be read only as Russian influence over Hungary, but as an endogenous construction by the Orbán regime and its main stakeholders in their search for references outside the Western liberal world. Orbán's infamous 2014 speech about Hungary being an illiberal state that borrows models from different countries promoted "systems that are not Western, not liberal, not liberal democracies, maybe not even democracies, and yet are making nations successful", specifically mentioning

²⁰ Lóránt Győri and Péter Krekó, "Russian Disinformation and Extremism in Hungary", *The Warsaw Institute Review*, 16 October 2017, <https://warsawinstitute.org/russian-disinformation-extremism-hungary/>.

²¹ "Former Jobbik MEP Béla Kovács Acquitted of Espionage to Russia, Sentenced Only on Fraud Charges", *Hungary Today*, 24 September 2020, <https://hungarytoday.hu/bela-kovacs-espionage-russia-court-acquitted/>.

²² Dániel Hegedűs, "The Kremlin's Influence in Hungary: Are Russian Vested Interests Wearing Hungarian National Colors?" *DGAP Kompakt* 8 (February 2016): 1-11, https://dgap.org/system/files/article_pdfs/2016-08-kompakt_5.pdf.

²³ Wirth Zsuzsanna, "'Please, don't report about this at all! Thanks!'—How the Hungarian state news agency censors politically unpleasant news", *Direkt36*, 7 March 2022, <https://www.direkt36.hu/en/ne-ird-meg-semmilyen-formaban-koszi-igy-hallgatja-el-a-kormany-nak-kinos-hireket-az-allami-hirugynokseg/>.

²⁴ "Hungary's Foreign Policy after the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, 2011, https://kki.hu/assets/upload/Foreign_Policy_Review_2011_01_Hungarys_Foreign_Policy_.pdf.

²⁵ John Szabo, Marton Fabok, "Infrastructures and state-building: Comparing the energy politics of the European Commission with the governments of Hungary and Poland," *Energy Policy* 138 (2020).

²⁶ Rico Isaacs and Adam Molnar, "Island in the neoliberal stream: energy security and soft re-nationalisation in Hungary," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 25, no. 1 (2017): 107-126.

Figure 9: What should Hungary do in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine?

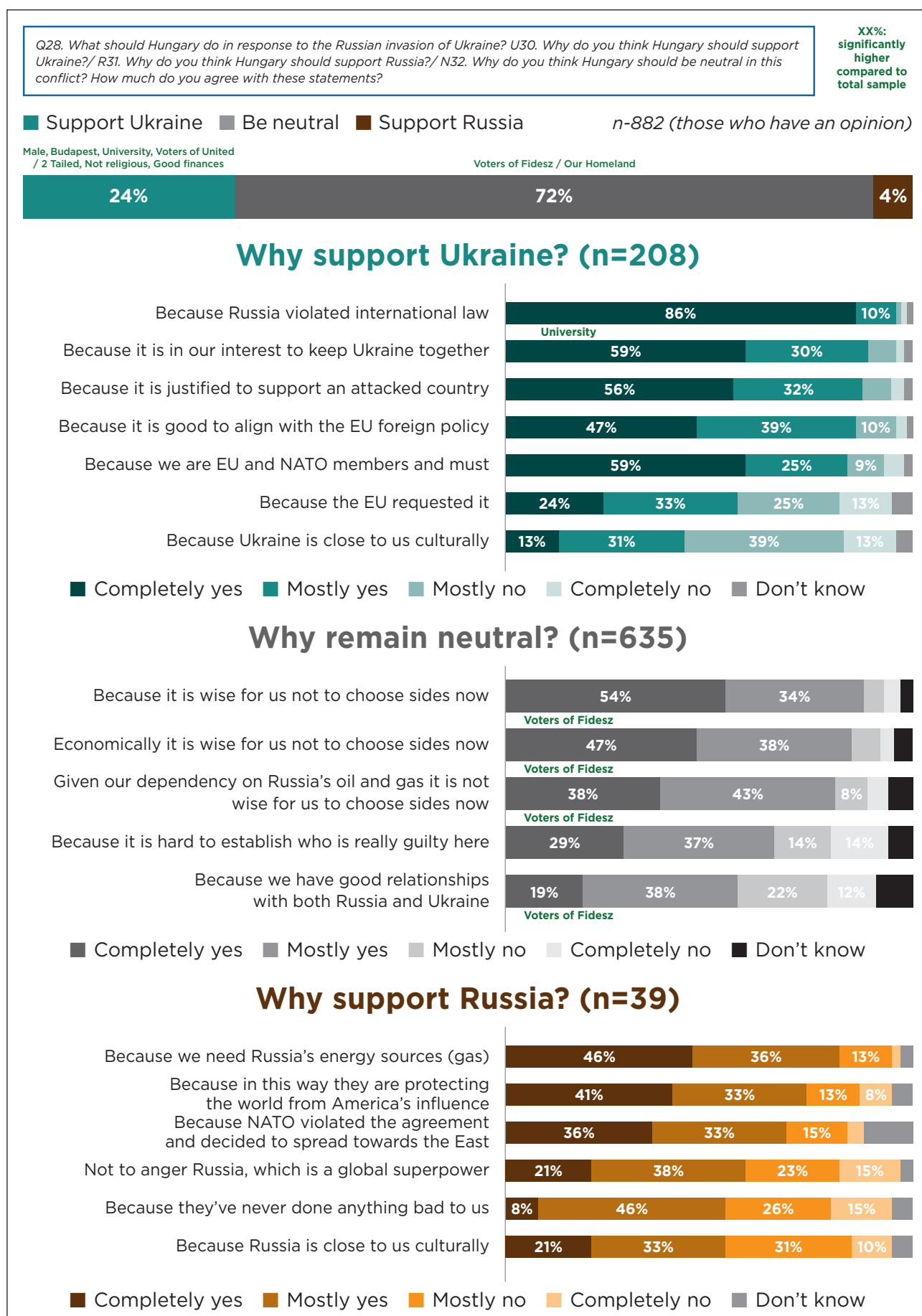
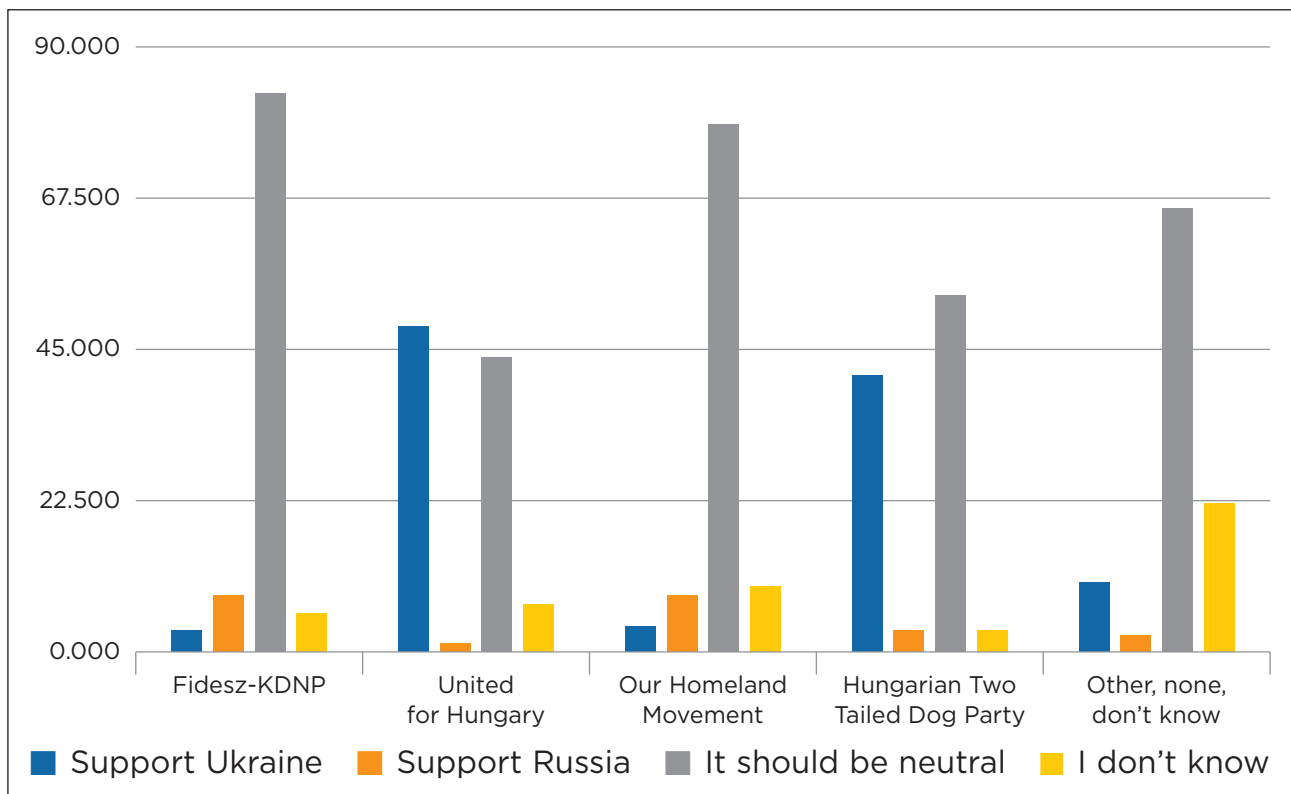


Figure 10: Support Ukraine, support Russia or remain neutral, based on voting preferences

Russia as an example of such a system.²⁷ Yet referring positively to Russia or Putin does not automatically translate into effective geopolitical alignment and popular support for it.

Expressing Sovereignty Through Neutrality

Indeed, ambivalence towards Russia among Hungarian public opinion emerges when respondents are asked about the country's position on the conflict. Almost three-quarters of them believe that Hungary should remain neutral in the war (see Figure 9). Being male, living in Budapest, voting for the opposition and having good finances correlate with those who think Hungary should support Ukraine while those wanting Hungary to remain neutral are closer to Fidesz and pro-government parties.

Among those who think Hungary should remain neutral, the main argument is that it is not wise for Budapest to choose sides, mostly for economic reasons, although more than a quarter contend that Budapest should avoid backing either side because it is hard to establish who is really responsible for the war. Another quarter of respondents indicate that Hungary should support Ukraine (significantly more males, Budapest inhabitants, university graduates and opposition supporters agree), while only 4% say that Hungary should support Russia (see Figure 9). This confirms that genuine support for Russia – to the point of publicly and officially supporting Moscow – remains minimal.

The pre-eminence of neutrality should be read as a sign not of a pro-Russian position, but of defiance towards the West. For instance, more than one-third of respondents (in particular 40–49-year-olds and voters for Fidesz and Our Homeland) say Hungary should rely on itself and not on EU decisions. This neutral position reflects the contradictory signals sent by the Orbán regime since the beginning of the war. As the war broke out, Hungary's messaging was in chaos

²⁷ Aron Buzogány and Mihai Varga. 2018. "The Ideational Foundations of the Illiberal Backlash in Central and Eastern Europe: The Case of Hungary", *Review of International Political Economy* 25 (6): 811–828.

for about a week. Orbán initially supported the sanctions placed on Russia, called the Ukrainian president to offer support, and let Ukrainian migrants in.²⁸ However, the government gradually changed its tone, condemning the sanctions against Russia and calling for Hungary's neutrality. Yet Budapest agreed to grant EU candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova and supported all the EU sanctions on Russia (albeit using its veto power to carve out major exceptions, most notably to the bloc's oil embargo, and saying gas sanctions would be a "red line"). At the same time, the country agreed to pay for Russian gas in rubles, refused to deliver weapons to Ukraine or allow other countries to transit weapons via Hungarian territory,²⁹ and declined to implement specific sanctions against such high-level Russian figures as Patriarch Kirill.³⁰

This neutral posture was already promoted as Hungary's flagship during the 'vaccine diplomacy' of the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, Hungary was the only EU member state vaccinating its population against COVID-19 mostly with the Chinese and Russian vaccines Sinopharm and Sputnik V,³¹ and has since been accused of favouring both by restricting access to Western-produced vaccines.³² The country has even received Moscow's authorisation to start producing the Sputnik V vaccine for the European market, even though it has not been approved by the European Medicines Agency.³³ Hungary has been used as a tool in Russian vaccine propaganda, with the Russian news agency TASS often releasing articles interviewing high-ranking Hungarian diplomats or politicians, such as Peter Szijjarto, who sing the praises of Sputnik V.³⁴

This ingrained support for neutrality as a way to express Hungary's sovereignty is confirmed by the country's and the public's polarised view of the sanctions issue. As shown in Figure 11, close to half of all respondents agree (20% definitely and 29% partly) with the sanctions on Russia (significantly more males, inhabitants of the capital, university graduates and opposition supporters agree). Yet when the 39% who are against sanctions were asked why they opposed them, they offered mostly economic reasons about the cost of sanctions to themselves and their failure to impact Russia, rather than any political support for Russia itself.

Hungary's Fundamental Contrarianism is Towards the West, Not Russia

The central element to Hungary's contrarian position and its ambivalence is its relationship to the West, not to Russia. According to a 2021 survey, when asked about their preferred geopolitical orientation, only 32% of Hungarians chose a Western orientation, although 80% of them support their country's NATO membership and 78% support membership of the EU. This paradox can be disentangled if one looks in a more granular way at the framing: NATO and EU memberships have concrete contents, while the 'West', as a broader conceptual category, is an empty signifier filled in with everything that the Orbán regime considers contentious (liberalism, nihilism, 'cultural Marxism', moral decadence...).³⁵

²⁸ Péter Krekó, "Viktor Orbán Is the West's Pro-Putin Outlier", *Foreign Policy*, 20 March 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/20/viktor-orban-is-the-west-pro-putin-outlier/>.

²⁹ Meera Suresh, "These 2 EU Countries Refuse To Supply Weapons To Ukraine", *International Business Times*, 23 August 2022, <https://www.ibtimes.com/these-2-eu-countries-refuse-supply-weapons-ukraine-3604747>.

³⁰ "Vetoing the Sanctions against Patriarch Kirill: Orbán Responds to Luxemburg's PM Criticism", *Daily News Hungary*, 7 June 2022, <https://dailynewshungary.com/vetoing-the-sanctions-against-patriarch-kirill-orban-responds-to-luxemburgs-pm-criticism/>.

³¹ Lili Rutai, "The Young Hungarians Who Got Vaccinated with Sputnik and Sinopharm and Now Wish They Hadn't", *RFE/RL*, 14 November 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/hungary-covid-sputnik-sinopharm-orban/31560829.html>.

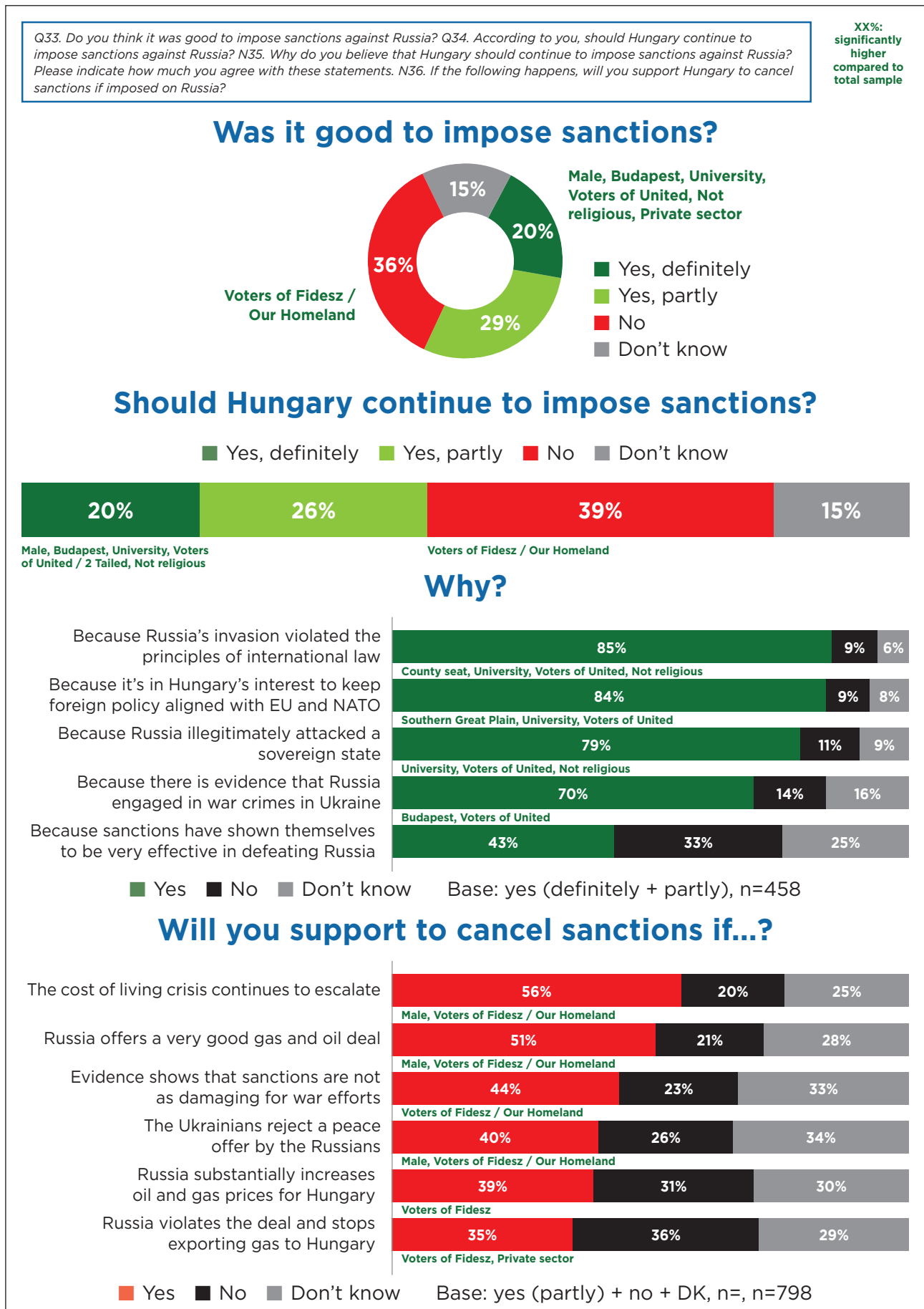
³² Ibid.

³³ "Hungary will receive technology to produce Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine – foreign minister", *Reuters*, 14 October 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/hungary-will-this-year-receive-technology-produce-sputnik-v-covid-19-vaccine-2021-10-14/>.

³⁴ "Hungary has 'very positive experience' of Sputnik V use – top diplomat", *TASS*, 3 December 2021, <https://tass.com/world/1370425>.

³⁵ Dominika Hajdu, "GLOBSEC Trends 2021: Central and Eastern Europe one year into the pandemic", *GLOBSEC*, 3 June 2021, <https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/publications/globsec-trends-2021-central-and-eastern-europe-one-year-pandemic>.

Figure 11: Do you think it was good to impose sanctions on Russia?



In our survey, when asked to position Hungary on a global geopolitical scale West-East, the dominant answer is that Hungary belongs to neither West nor East (44%, with an even higher share among voters for Fidesz), with only 32% saying Hungary belongs to the West and 13% that it is part of the East. We can thus see that the 'Eastern' orientation – whether towards Russia, China, Turkey or the 'Turanian cradle' – enjoys a relatively small percentage of popular support. Meanwhile, the dominant 'neither West nor East' position does not mean being pro-Russian, but suggests a sovereign Hungary able to make decisions without pressure from Brussels, Washington or Moscow.

This cannot be read purely as a top-down opportunistic construction on the part of the Orbán regime, but rather reflects the capacity of the latter to anchor its political system into Hungary's long-term political culture and identity: Hungary is the only country in Central Europe to have existed continuously since its foundation (the Turkish invasions and Habsburg rule notwithstanding), meaning that elite nationalism may be closely intertwined with the cultural representation of the masses.

Obviously, voting preferences are closely correlated with the vision of Hungary's place between the West and Russia: as seen in Figure 12, anti-Orbán voters tend to judge their country as closer to Russia in a negative sense (low level of democracy, living standards, quality of institutions) while Fidesz voters tend to see Hungary as closer to the West but also more neutral, with very few of them (between 5 and 9%) seeing it as close to Russia – once again confirming that the level of genuine Russophilia remains low.

Perceptions of Western partners are polarised. In our survey, the EU and NATO are both viewed positively by around one-third of all respondents (35% and 30% respectively), while NATO has a similar rate of neutral opinions (30%). More than one-third of all respondents recognise that the EU has made a significant effort to improve its relations with Hungary in the past 10 years, but one-third said the same about Russia and China. While Germany is viewed very positively, the UK and the US get less recognition, with less than one-fifth of respondents saying the two countries have made a significant effort in the past 10 years. As of 2022, high-level US-Hungarian relations are virtually non-existent, as Orbán's pro-Trump positioning leaves him lacking friends in Washington, DC.³⁶

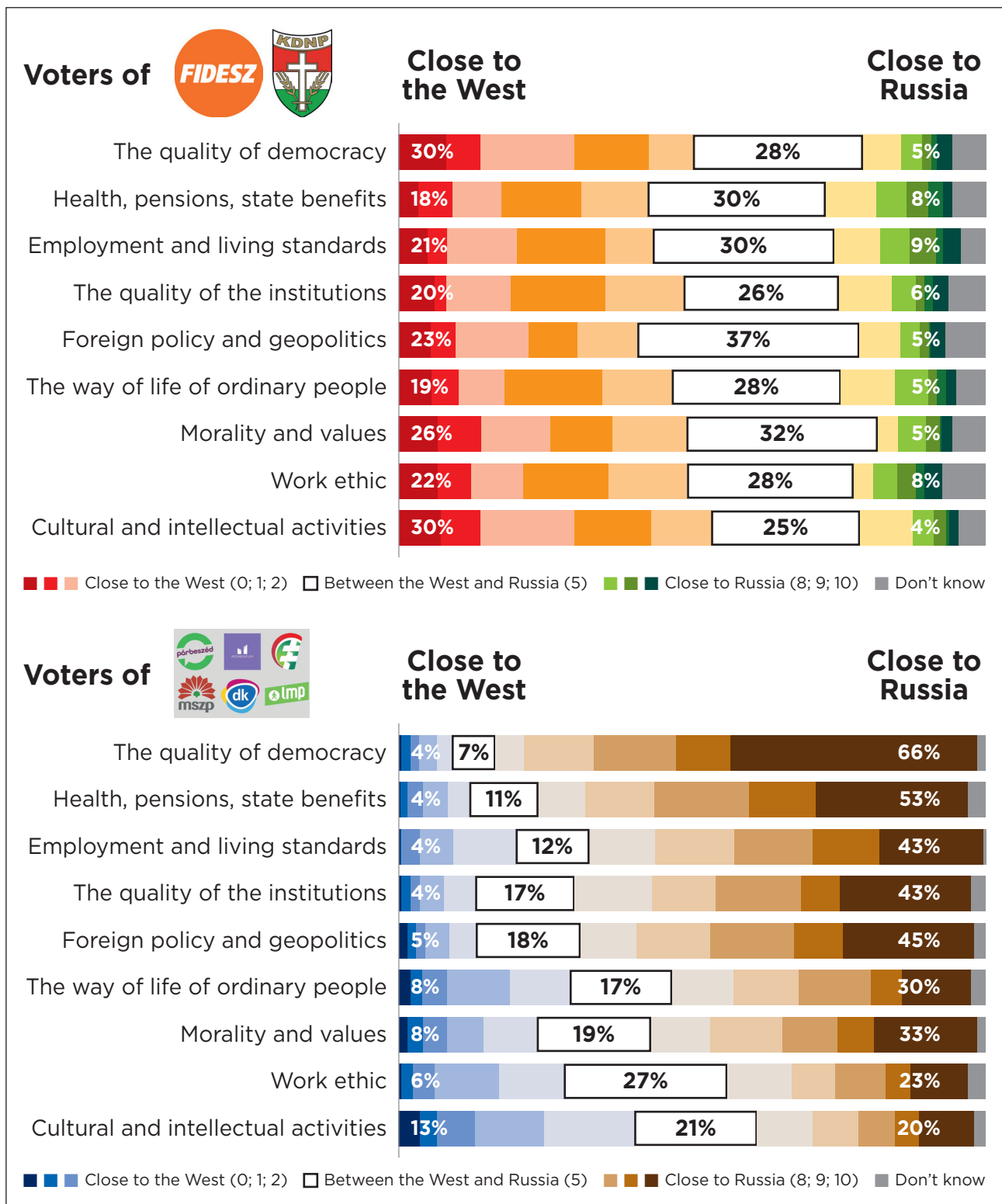
While the EU is seen positively by only one-third of respondents, Hungarians do not favour their country's exit from the European construction. If a referendum were held tomorrow, 69% of all respondents would vote to stay in the European Union (this percentage is significantly higher among males and university graduates) and only 19% would vote to leave, a stance that draws significantly more Fidesz and Our Homeland voters (see Figure 13).

This result should be considered quite high given the rise in tensions between EU institutions and the Hungarian government. Indeed, over the years, the EU has increasingly been pressured to address Orbán's dismantlement of democratic institutions.³⁷ More recent points of dispute have included the forced retirement of judges, government influence on the media, and Hungary's undermining of EU energy laws.³⁸ In Fidesz's second term (2014–2018), besides the usual issues of democracy and media freedom, conflicts were fuelled by Orbán's support for introducing the death penalty, his immigration and refugee policy, and a rise in cases of

³⁶ Nick Thorpe, "Viktor Orbán alone in Europe but among Friends at CPAC in Texas", *BBC News*, 3 August 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-62408368>.

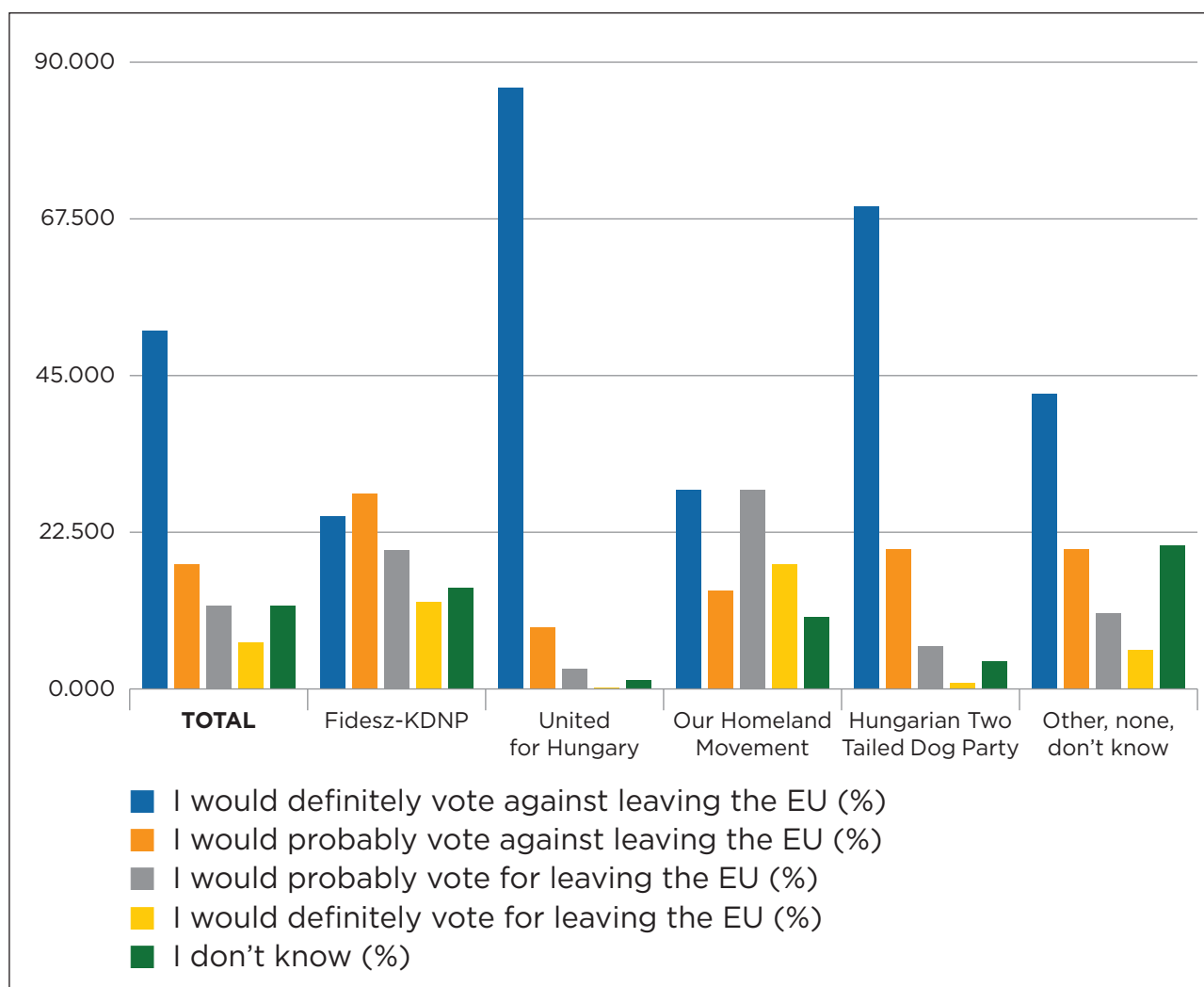
³⁷ "Wrong Direction on Rights: Assessing the Impact of Hungary's New Constitution and Laws", *Human Rights Watch*, 16 May 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/05/16/wrong-direction-rights/assessing-impact-hungarys-new-constitution-and-laws>.

³⁸ "Conflicts between the EU and Hungary between 2010-2020", *ECLJ*, 2021, <https://eclj.org/geopolitics/eu/conflicts-between-the-eu-and-hungary-between-2010-2020>.

Figure 12: Perception of Hungary's position on a West–East scale by voting preferences

high-level corruption. The third term (2018–2022) crystallised around the issues of the rule of law and the new law banning the depiction of homosexuality, as well as the highly controlled media ecosystem (since 2018, nearly all pro-government private media have merged into a conglomerate, the Central European Press and Media Foundation).³⁹

³⁹ Maia de la Baume and Lili Bayer, "EU's top court rejects Hungary's bid to halt punishment proceedings", *Politico*, 3 June 2021, <https://www.politico.eu/article/ecj-ruling-hungary-rule-of-law-article-7/>.

Figure 13: Perceptions about EU membership among various voting groups

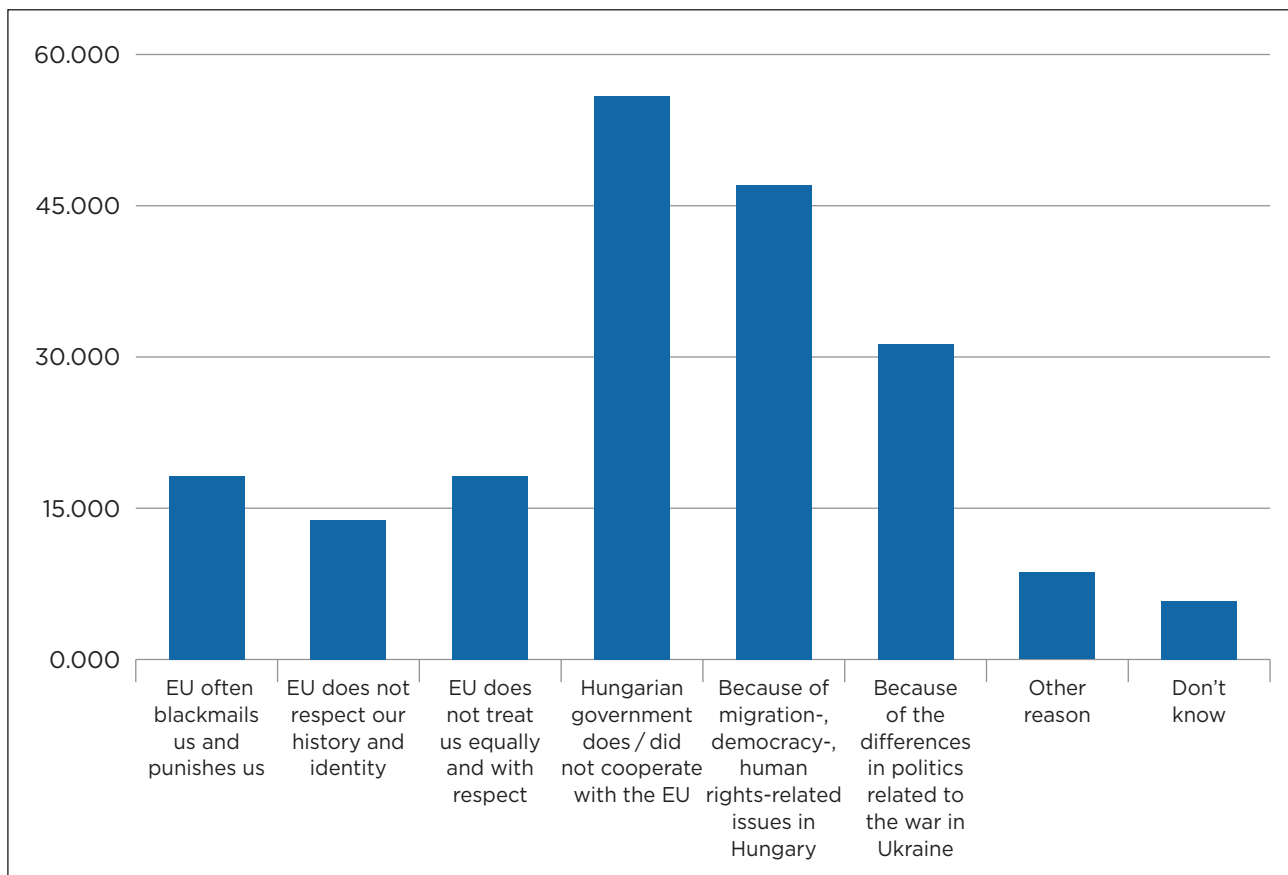
The war in Ukraine has aggravated these tensions. In early 2022, the European Commission launched a conditional mechanism that could freeze €24 billion of EU funds allocated to Hungary in its 2021–2027 budget due to concerns about the rule of law and corruption.⁴⁰ Just after Orbán's re-election, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, announced that the suspension of funds had begun, fuelling discontent in Budapest.⁴¹ In a leaked speech in September 2022, Orbán expressed doubts about the EU's ability to survive and develop as a united entity and even broached the possibility of leaving it (potentially with the other Visegrad countries) by 2030.⁴² While a potential exit from the EU remains a politically motivated fiction, Orbán's narrative nonetheless confirms the risk of further escalation, both rhetorically and legally, up to a point of no return.

Yet Orbán's position has to be moderated by Hungary's very solid economic anchoring in Europe and, as we see in the survey, public opinion that supports remaining part of the EU construction. Indeed, despite the tense context, when asked to indicate the main reasons

⁴⁰ Sam Meredith and Natasha Turak, "EU struggles to reach an agreement on Russian oil embargo as Hungary holds firm", *CNBC*, 30 May 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/05/30/eu-to-discuss-watered-down-oil-embargo-on-russia-as-hungary-holds-firm.html>.

⁴¹ Edit Inotai, "EU Triggers Mechanism to Strip Hungary of Billions Worth of Budget Funds", *Balkan Insight*, 5 April 2022, <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/04/05/eu-triggers-mechanism-to-strip-hungary-of-billions-worth-of-budget-funds/>.

⁴² Hetzmann Mercedesz, "Leaked speech: Orbán said when Hungary should consider leaving the EU", *Daily News Hungary*, 17 September 2022, <https://dailynewshungary.com/will-hungary-leave-the-eu-by-2030/>.

Figure 14: What are the reasons for deteriorating EU-Hungary relations?

why relations between Hungary and the EU are deteriorating, the majority of the population mentions the Hungarian government not cooperating with the EU (56%); issues relating to migration, human rights and democracy in Hungary (47%); and political differences related to the war in Ukraine (31%). Less than 20% of all respondents consider the EU's actions to be a driver of the deteriorating relations, although this percentage goes up substantially among Fidesz voters (see Figure 14).

Our survey corroborates that, in contrast to Serbia, the supposed Hungarian pro-Russian stance should be qualified and nuanced. First, Hungarian public opinion is heavily polarised into two broad constituencies, and while a pro-Russian reading of the war dominates among voters for the Fidesz coalition and the far-right Our Homeland party, it cannot conquer the more pro-EU part of the population that supports the opposition. Yet, while this more pro-EU segment of the population is clearly anti-Russian, it does not make it supporting a pro-Ukrainian stance.

Second, the granular questions posed by the survey allow us to capture the contrarian position of Hungary's foreign policy ('all guilty'), which should be differentiated from genuine Russophilia: those calling for Hungary's geopolitical alignment with Russia are a very small minority, even among Orbán's supporters. Putin's Russia has provided a model of ruling for Orbán's government, but is not a geopolitical role model for the country. There is a confluence of interests and narratives between Russia and the Orbán regime, rather than a direct influence – in the sense of manipulation – by Moscow, and Orbán keeps his own full-fledged agency in the relationship to Russia.

Third, the point of tension for Hungary is the West, not Russia: the claim of sovereignty, neutrality and the right to a transactional relationship that privileges the country's and the regime's interests over collective solidarity in the name of EU values confirms that Orbán's

position is essentially a message to the West to 'stop patronising us'. This popular feeling is both grassroots, through the lived experience of some segments of the population, and carefully crafted and cultivated by the political regime and its media for its own interests.

Serbia – The Balancing Act

Serbia's Never-Ending Balancing Act

Balancing between the East and the West is not uncommon for Serbia. Indeed, its roots can be traced back even to Tito's times and the creation of the Non-Alignment Movement.⁴³ Throughout its turbulent history, Serbia has often struggled to align itself with either of the two sides. Even during the 2000s – a period in which Serbia was decisively committed to joining the EU – traces of pro-Russian sentiment were present.

The approach Serbia has taken since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 has been no exception to the balancing act approach. On one hand, Serbia has not imposed sanctions against Russia, and to date refuses to do so.⁴⁴ In addition, President Vučić and President Putin negotiated an advantageous gas deal between Russia and Serbia back in May 2022.⁴⁵ Finally, at the 77th UN General Assembly, Serbia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Nikola Selakovic, signed a Plan of Consultations between the MFA of Serbia and the MFA of Russia for 2023–2024.⁴⁶

At the same time, Serbia continues its accession talks with the EU and refuses to recognise the results of the referenda held in four regions of Ukraine.⁴⁷ Moreover, Serbia has also voted in favour of several UN resolutions – notably, one which condemns Russia's invasion of Ukraine,⁴⁸ one which excludes Russia from the Human Rights Council⁴⁹ and one which demands Russia reverse course on the “attempted illegal annexation” adopted in October 2022.⁵⁰

The Serbian government continuously argues that this balancing act is in Serbia's political and economic interests. Politically, Serbia aspires to join the EU and maintaining good relations with the block is, thus, crucial for the continuation and quality of accession talks. At the same time, Russia's stance on Kosovo remains highly important for Serbia – as neither state, to date, has recognised Kosovo as an independent state.

Economically, Serbia remains dependent on both Russia and the West.

The European Union is the origin of 70% of investments in Serbia, followed by Russia, Switzerland and Hong Kong.⁵¹ Moreover, EU companies are the biggest investors in the Western Balkans with over €10 billion of Foreign Direct Investment according to an EC report from 2018.⁵²

⁴³ Hakki Öcal, “Not non-alignment but alignment with principle”, *Daily Sabah*, 26 September 2022, <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/columns/not-non-alignment-but-alignment-with-principle>.

⁴⁴ “Vučić: Serbia will not impose sanctions on Russia or recognize Kosovo”, *N1*, 6 July 2022, <https://rs.n1info.com/english/news/vucic-serbia-will-not-impose-sanctions-on-russia-or-recognize-kosovo/>.

⁴⁵ “Serbia's Vučić says he agreed a three-year gas supply contract with Putin”, *Reuters*, 29 May 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/serbias-vucic-says-agreed-3-year-gas-supply-contract-with-putin-2022-05-29/>.

⁴⁶ “Opozicija u Srbiji osuđuje diplomatski dokument potpisan sa Rusijom”, *Radio Free Europe*, 24 September 2022, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/opozicija-selakovic-lavrov-dokument/32049325.html>.

⁴⁷ “Serbia won't recognise results of Russia's referendums in Ukraine – Vučić”, *Reuters*, 28 September 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/serbia-wont-recognise-results-russias-referendums-ukraine-vucic-2022-09-28/>.

⁴⁸ Helena Ivanov, “The Ukraine crisis is dividing the Balkans”, *UnHerd*, 8 March 2022, <https://unherd.com/thepost/the-ukraine-crisis-is-dividing-the-balkans/>.

⁴⁹ Snezana Bjelotomic, “Serbia votes in favour of expelling Russia from the UN Human Rights Council”, *Serbian Monitor*, 8 April 2022, <https://www.serbianmonitor.com/en/serbia-votes-in-favour-of-expelling-russia-from-the-un-human-rights-council/>.

⁵⁰ “Ukraine: UN General Assembly demands Russia reverse course on ‘attempted illegal annexation’”, *UN News*, 12 October 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/10/1129492>.

⁵¹ “Serbia: Investing in Serbia. Foreign direct Investment in Serbia (FDI) in Serbia”, *Lloyds Bank*, November 2022, <https://www.lloydsbanktrade.com/en/market-potential/serbia/investment>.

⁵² “EU-Western Balkans: Economic relations – investing in people, infrastructures and reforms”, *European Commission*, May 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/economic-relations_en.pdf.

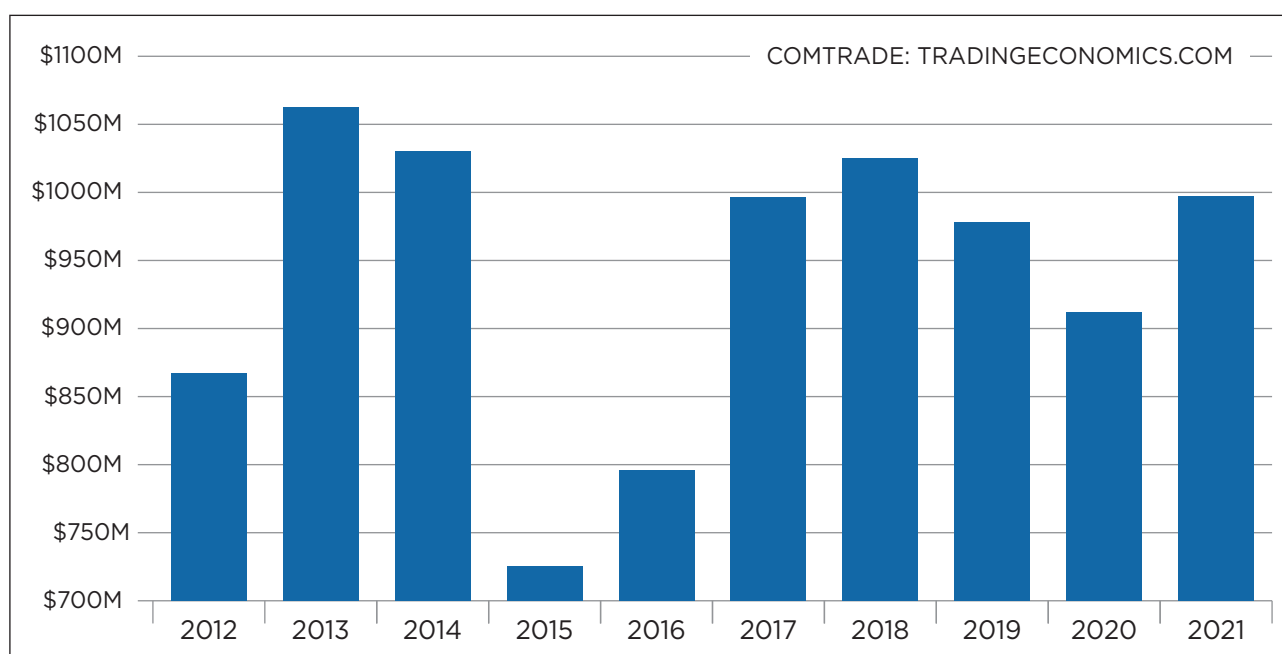
Additionally, from the EU, Serbia has also received:

- €2.5 billion in EU pre-accession funds between 2007 and 2020;
- €5 billion in European Investment Bank loans since 1999;
- €116.4 million in Western Balkans Investment Framework grants, leveraging investments of €2.25 billion;
- €28 million to build two modern border crossings and a terminal on the Danube, to facilitate movement of goods and people.⁵³

Thus, to break away from the EU would carry very obvious costs for Serbia.

Similarly, cutting ties with Russia would not come without a high cost. To illustrate, Serbia's exports to Russia were \$996.16 million in 2021 with two main categories of exported products: edible fruits, nuts, peel of citrus fruit and melons (\$159.51m) and machinery, nuclear reactors and boilers (\$117.13m). In 2021, Russia was the sixth country for Serbia's exports with a share of 3.9%.⁵⁴

Figure 15: Serbia's exports to Russia 2012–2021 (US \$)⁵⁵



The picture of Serbia's dependency on imports from Russia is rather similar. Serbia's imports from Russia totalled \$1.81 billion in 2021, making Russia the fourth import country for Serbia with 5.3% of its imports. Serbia mainly imported mineral fuels, oils and distillation products (\$890.95m).⁵⁶ The exports of Russia to Serbia have decreased at an annualised rate of 3.48% since 2006.⁵⁷ A small part of the imports from Russia to Serbia are services, with construction services and travel being key areas.⁵⁸

⁵³ "EU-Western Balkans: Economic relations – investing in people, infrastructures and reforms", European Commission, May 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/economic-relations_en.pdf.

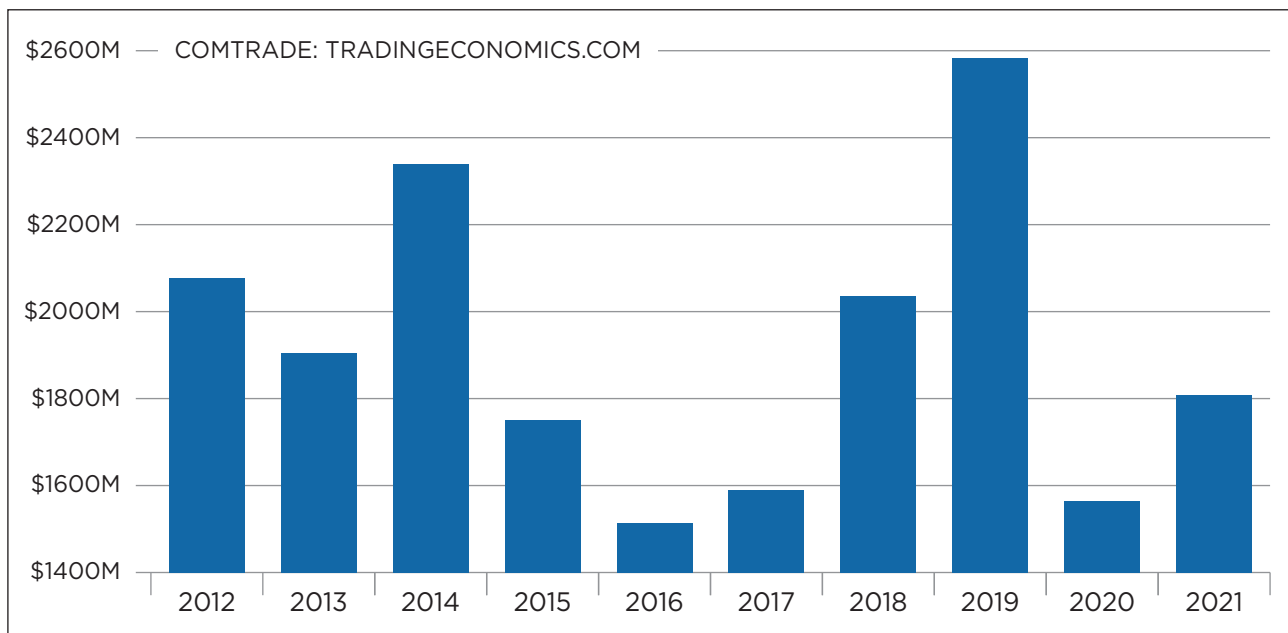
⁵⁴ "Serbia Exports to Russia", Trading Economics, November 2022, <https://tradingeconomics.com/serbia/exports/russia>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ "Serbia Imports from Russia", Trading Economics, November 2022, <https://tradingeconomics.com/serbia/imports/russia>.

⁵⁷ "Serbia-Russia", OEC, <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/srb/partner/rus?redirect=true>.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Figure 16: Serbia's imports from Russia 2012-2021 (US \$) ⁵⁹

In addition, there are two rather important ways in which Serbia depends on Russia. First is Russia's natural gas. As it stands, Serbia remains heavily dependent on importing gas from Russia.⁶⁰ And while the government is working to figure out the alternatives, in May 2022, President Vučić and President Putin negotiated another three years of a rather beneficial and cheap gas deal for Serbia.⁶¹ To break away from Russia would cause a significant energy crisis in the country.

As well as gas, Russia's economic influence in Serbia can also be observed through its involvement in Serbian energy companies. The most significant example of direct investment is Gazprom Neft, a subsidiary of Gazprom, which has had a controlling stake in Serbia's Naftna Industrija Srbije (NIS) oil and gas company since 2008.⁶²

Hence, when thinking about making economic choices, Serbia finds itself between a rock and a hard place. Loosing either of its two economic allies would carry significant costs.

If Forced, What is Serbia Likely to Choose?

As the war escalates and the stakes get higher, it is likely that Serbia will be forced to choose – either to align its foreign policy with the EU and impose sanctions against Russia, or to continue cooperating with Russia but at the cost of possibly stalling accession talks with the EU. And indeed, the pressure from the EU is mounting – reflected in an increased number of calls to stall accession talks with Serbia⁶³ and a rather critical EU report on Serbia published in October 2022.⁶⁴ However, choosing a side is likely to be very difficult and politically costly for the current Serbian government.

⁵⁹ "Serbia Imports from Russia", Trading Economics.

⁶⁰ Vladimir Afanasiev, "Serbia looking for alternatives to Russian gas", *Upstream*, 18 July 2022, <https://www.upstreamonline.com/production/serbia-looking-for-alternatives-to-russian-gas/2-11262267>.

⁶¹ Talha Ozturk, "Serbia secures new 3-year deal with Russia for gas supply", *AA*, 29 May 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/serbia-secures-new-3-year-deal-with-russia-for-gas-supply/2600651>.

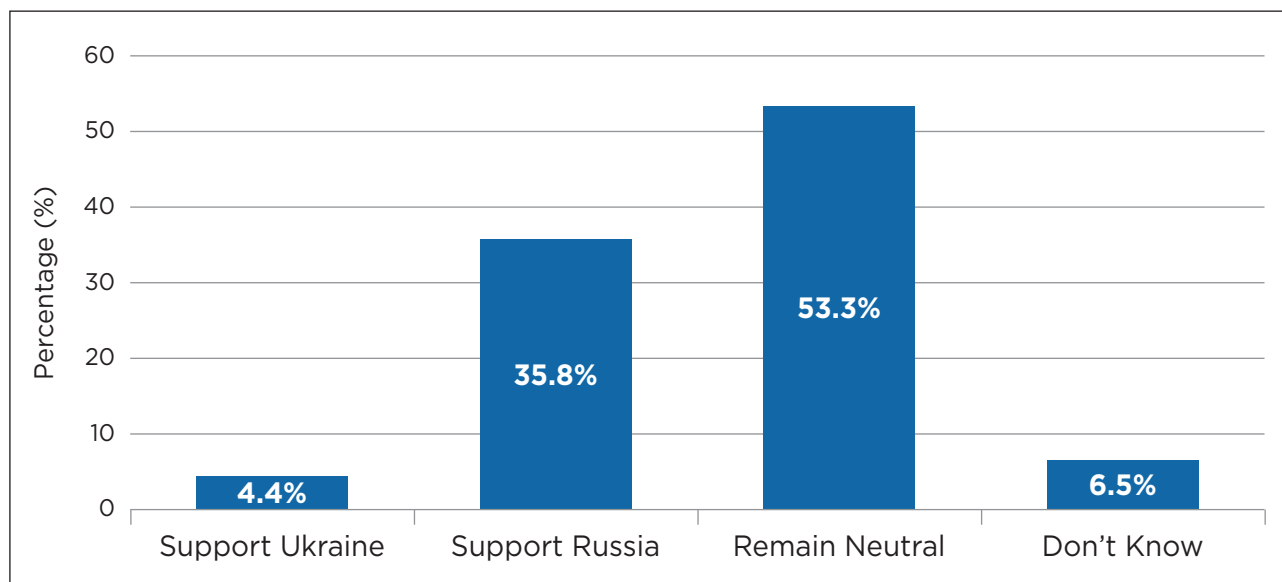
⁶² Paul Stronski and Annie Himes, "Russia's Game in the Balkans", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 6 February 2019, pp.5-16.

⁶³ "EP to request suspension of EU accession negotiations with Serbia", *N1*, 28 September 2022, <https://rs.n1info.com/english/news/ep-to-request-suspension-of-eu-accession-negotiations-with-serbia/>.

⁶⁴ "Key findings of the 2022 Report on Serbia", European Commission, October 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/COUNTRY_22_6089.

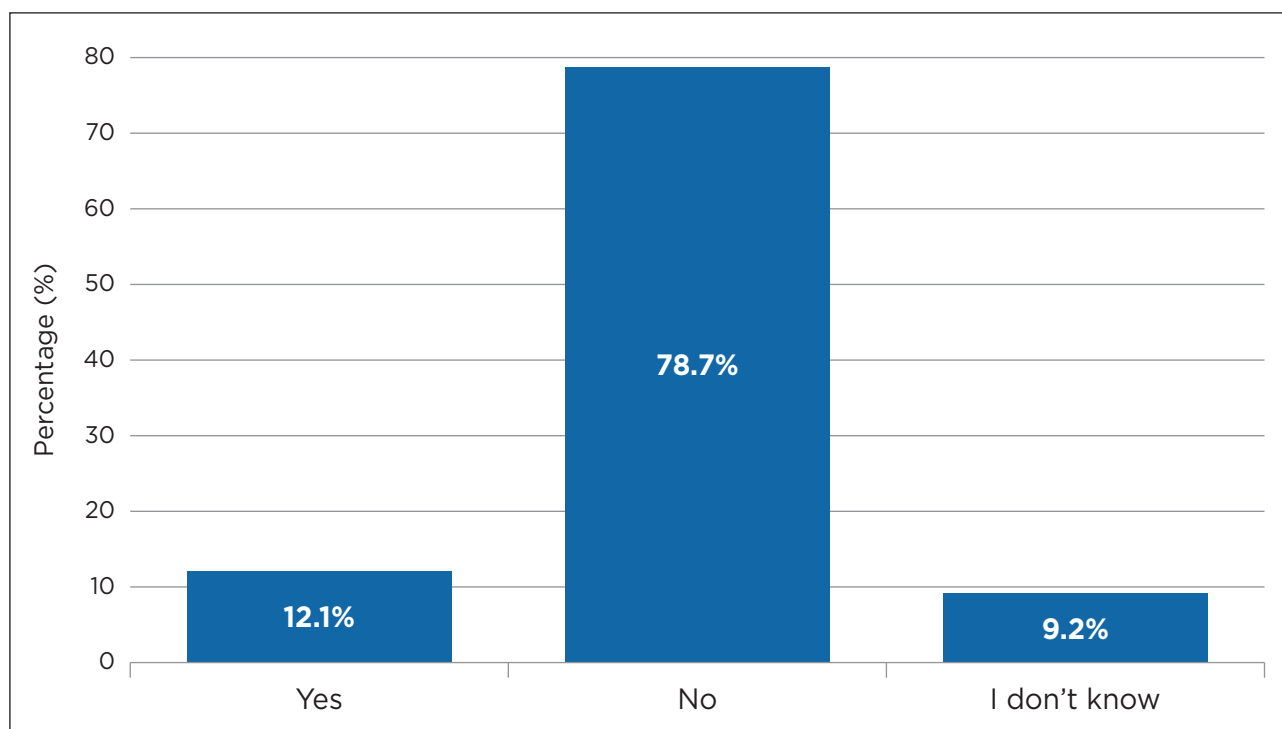
The balancing act adopted by the Serbian government in light of the invasion seems to be heavily supported by the Serbian people. According to the polling we conducted on a representative sample, 53.3% are in favour of Serbia remaining neutral in the Russo-Ukrainian war. Similarly to Hungary, we can see that most Serbs think that, rather than supporting either of the two sides, Serbia should remain neutral. This serves as an indicator that pro-Russian sentiment in Serbia may be rooted more in disappointment towards the West than in genuine love for Putin or the Russian regime.

Figure 17: What should Serbia do in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine?



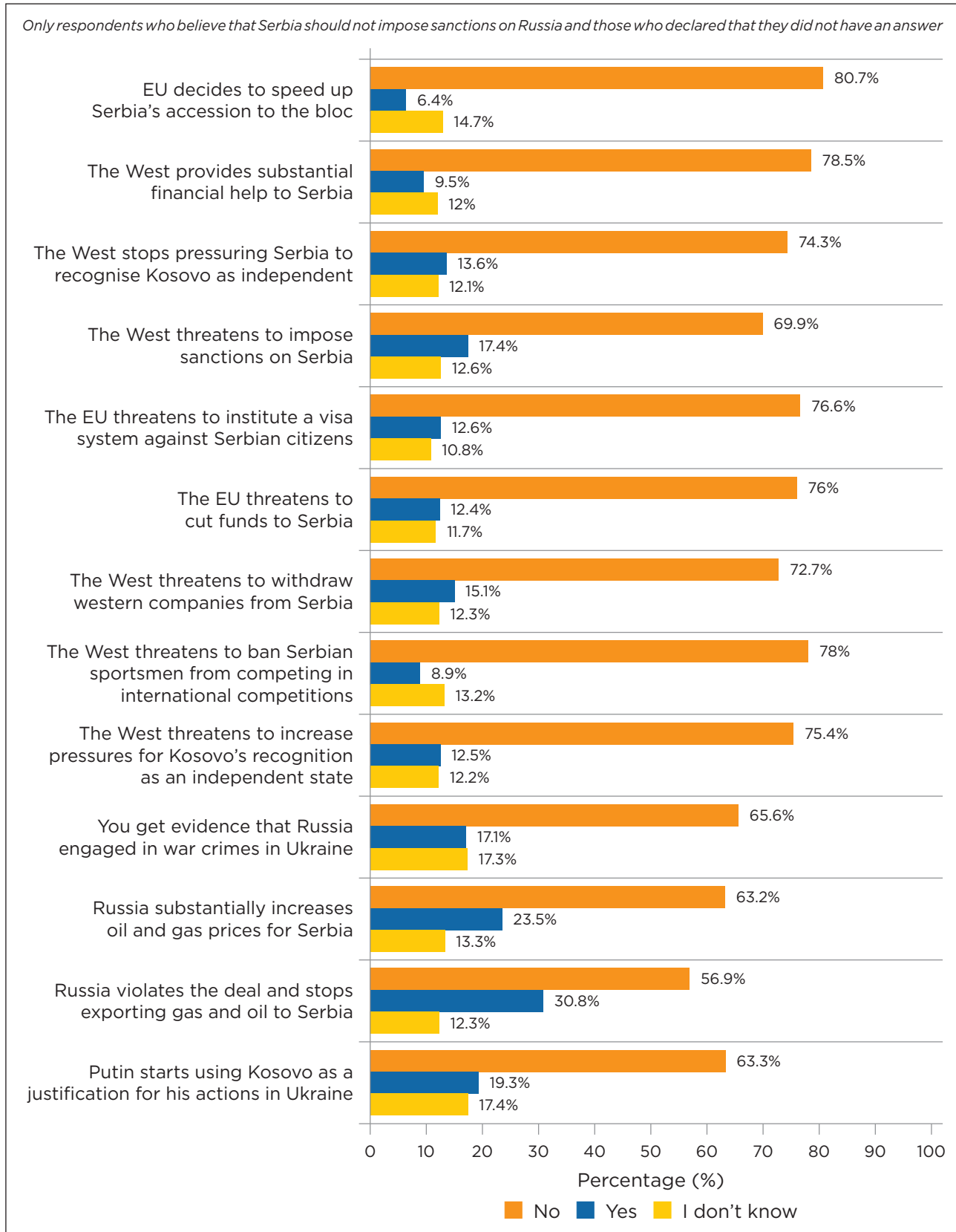
Perhaps more problematically, according to our latest polling, the EU's leverage over the country seems to be decreasing and the West has little manoeuvring space to persuade the Serbs to cut ties with Russia, since a staggering 78.7% of Serbs are against introducing sanctions.

Figure 18: According to you, should Serbia impose sanctions against Russia?



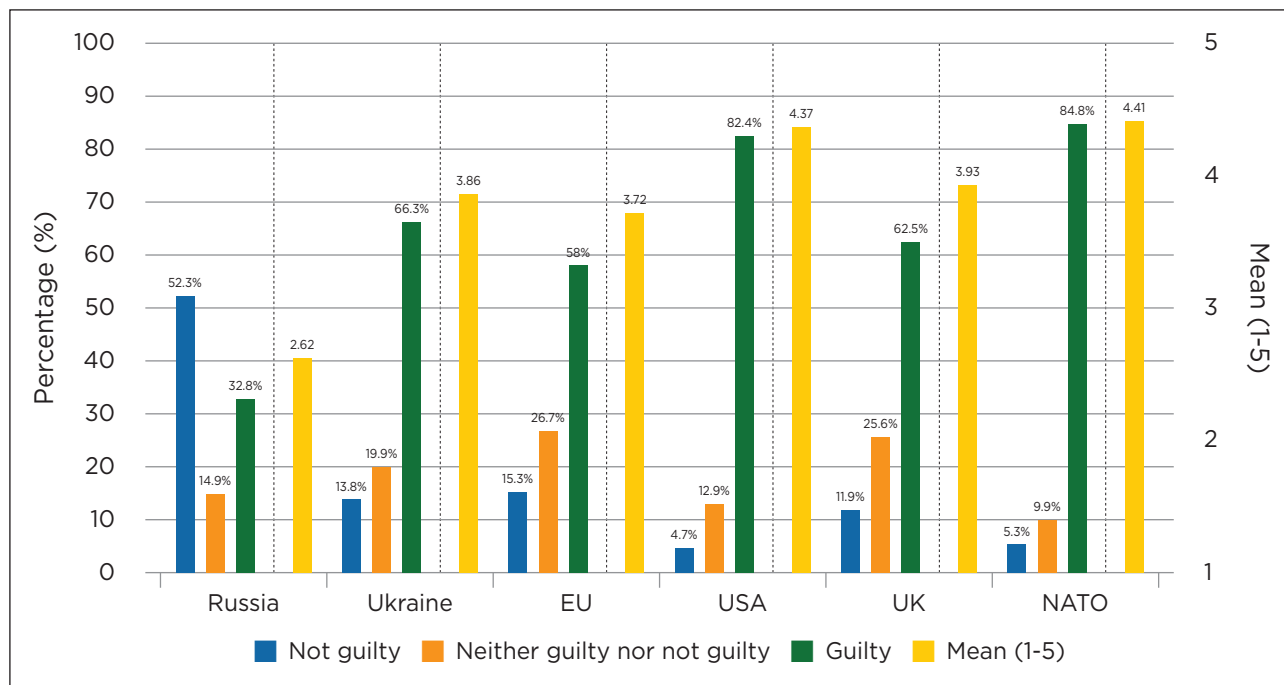
Even more concerning is the fact that there seem to be few, if any, pressure points that the EU could use. We asked all of those who were either against sanctions or undecided (amounting to 87.9% of our sample) under what conditions they would reconsider their position.

Figure 19: If the following is offered to Serbia (in exchange for imposing sanctions) will you support imposing sanctions against Russia?



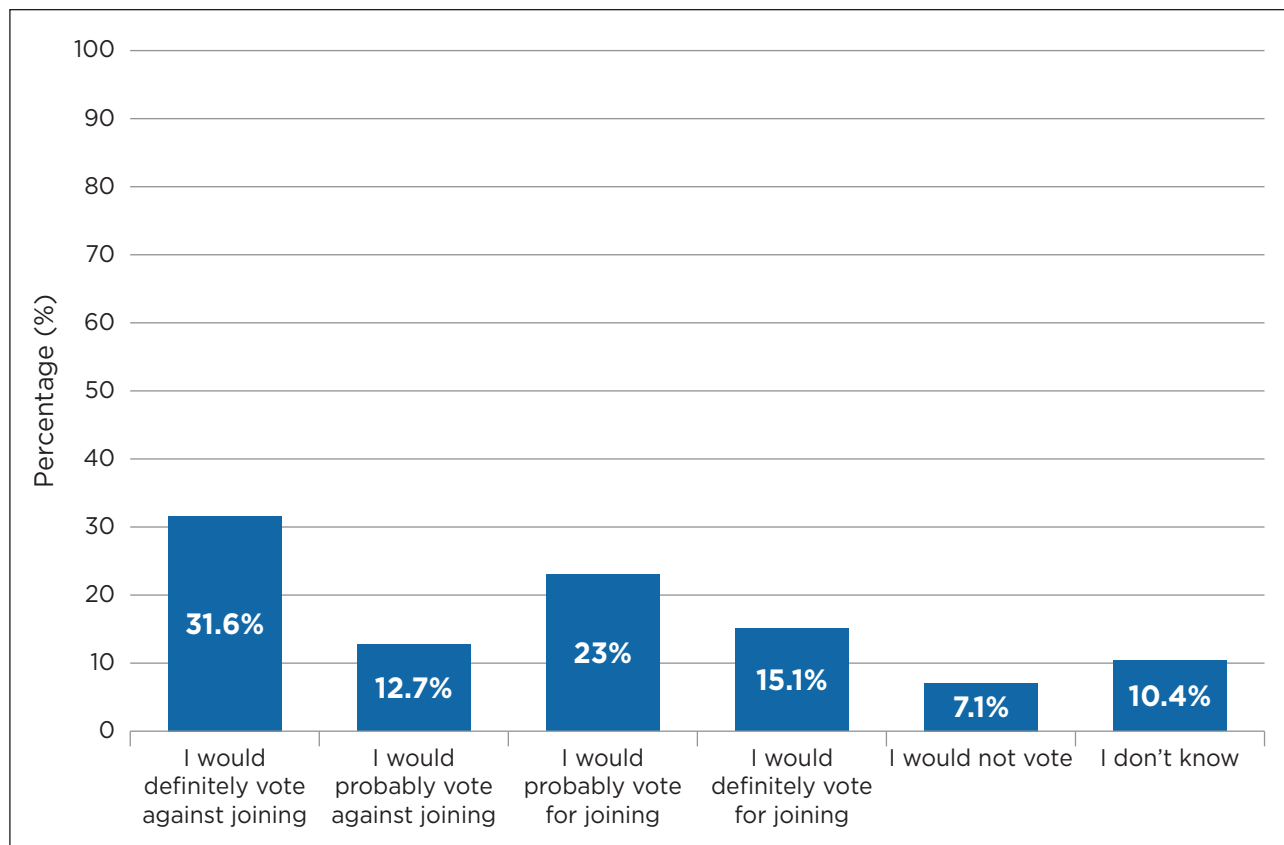
The situation becomes even more concerning when looking into the perception of Serbs about the responsibility for the war in Ukraine.

Figure 20: On a scale 1 to 5 (1 being not guilty, 3 being neither guilty nor not guilty, 5 being guilty), rate to what extent the following actors are to blame for the war in Ukraine



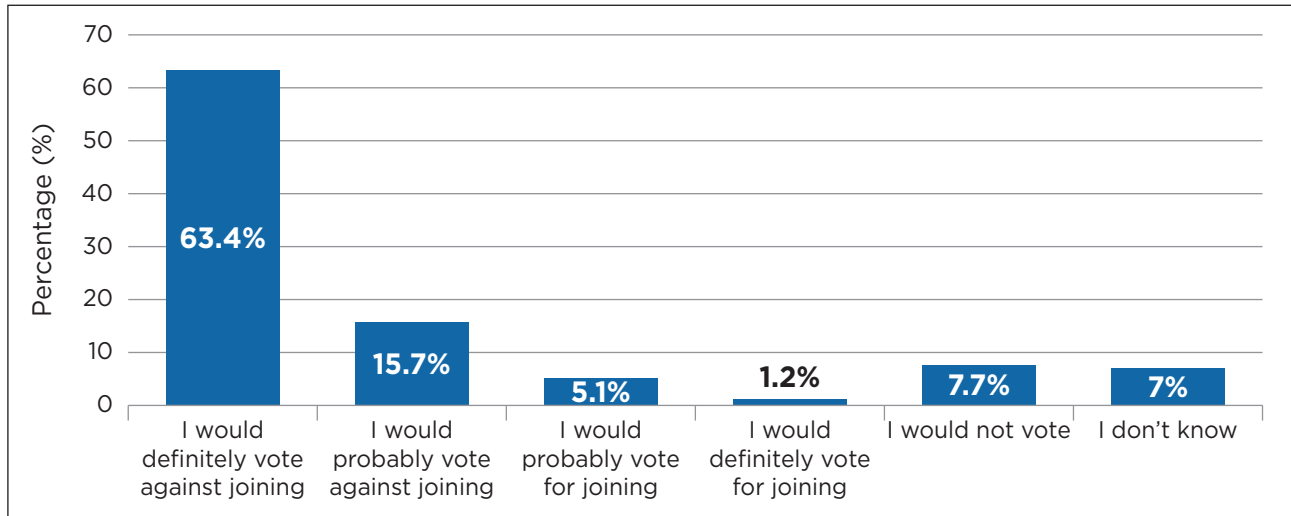
Support for EU membership also seems to be lower than preferable.

Figure 21: If the EU membership referendum was held in Serbia tomorrow how would you vote?



The situation gets even more grim when thinking about the possibility of joining NATO.

Figure 22: If the NATO membership referendum was held in Serbia tomorrow how would you vote?



Thus, it does really seem that offering EU and/or NATO membership just isn't going to cut it for Serbia anymore. We attempted to understand why this is the case and, more specifically, how ordinary Serbs think Serbia should position itself. The data is rather clear – Serbs seem to hold very anti-West views across the board.

Figure 23: Opinions about the following countries and leaders (0 – negative, 10 – positive)

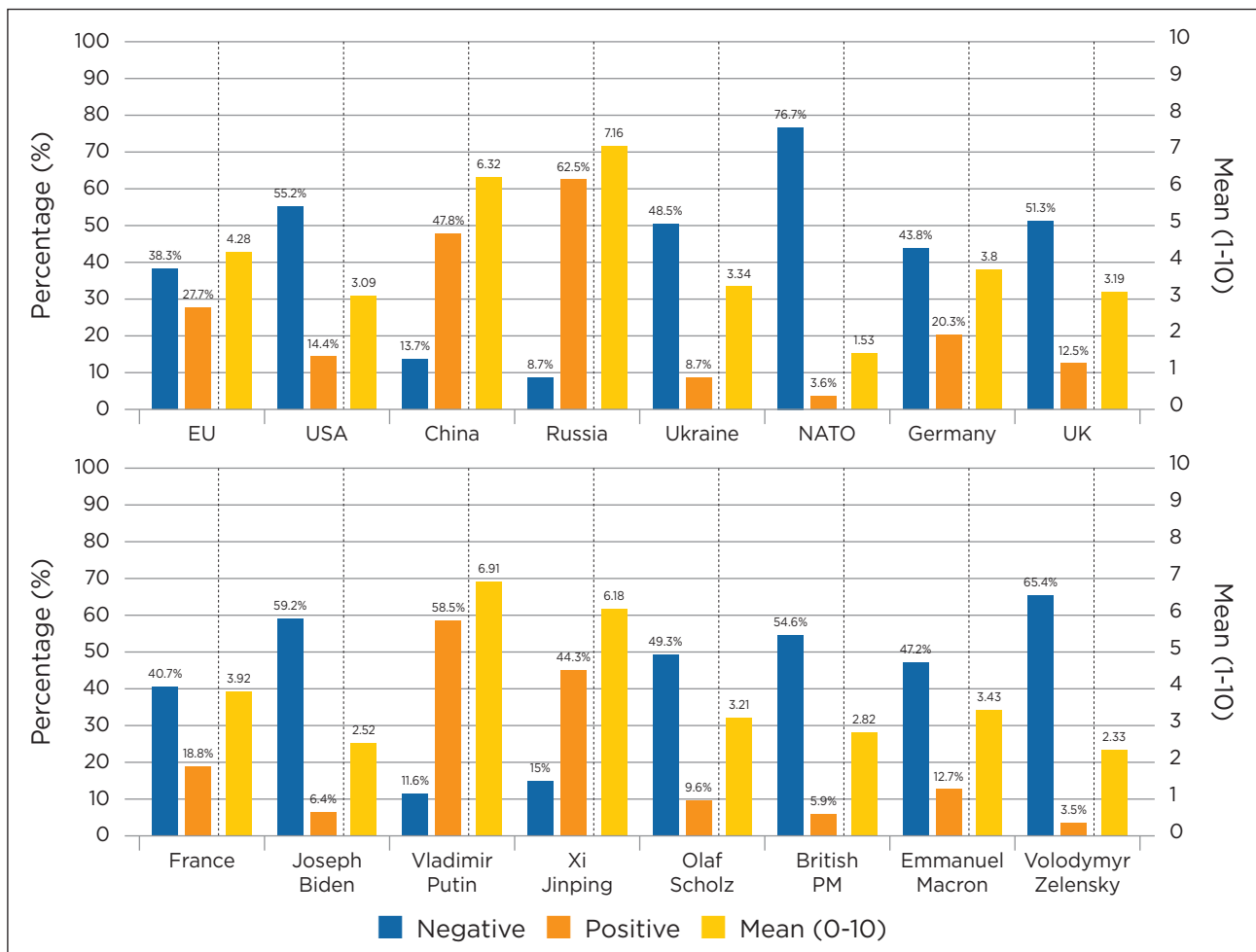


Figure 24: Whom should Serbia rely on when it comes to foreign policy issues?

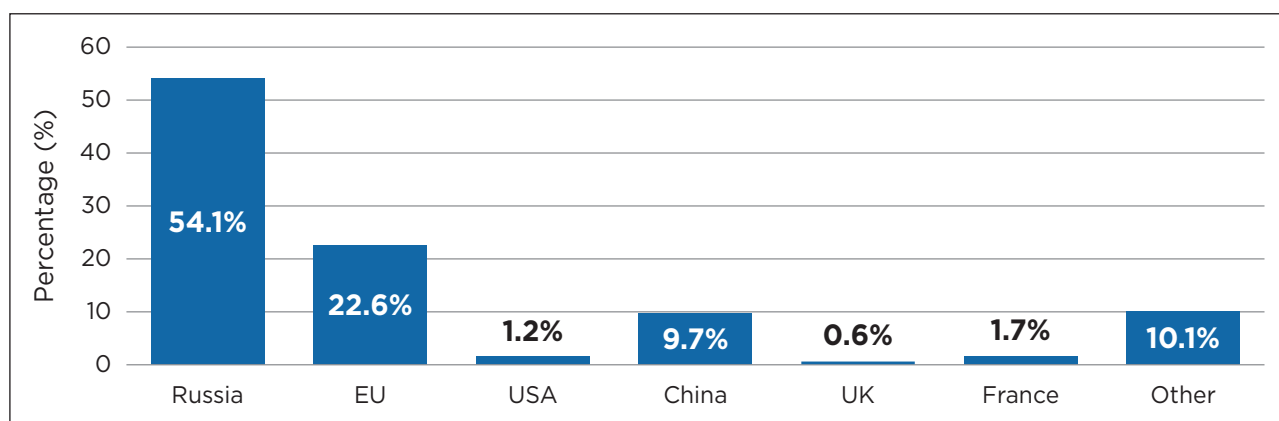
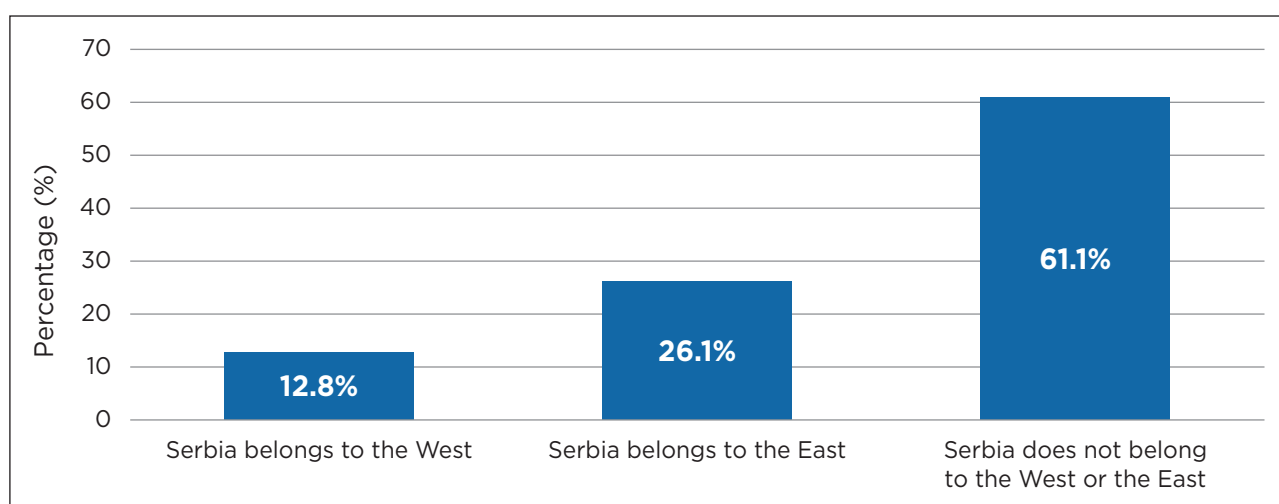


Figure 25: Which statement is the closest to your personal opinion?



One could argue that Vučić's popularity could be used to push Serbia towards accepting sanctions. However, Mr Vučić's popularity does not come without its own limitations. While the government remains popular (see Figure 26 below), it seems that, at least in part, such popularity is dependent upon the balancing act of Mr Vučić and Serbs' confidence that sanctions will not be imposed (see Figure 27 below). Hence, it is possible that even the current government has no power to alter people's views about the legitimacy of sanctions against Russia.

Figure 26: Do you support the current government led by president Aleksandar Vučić?

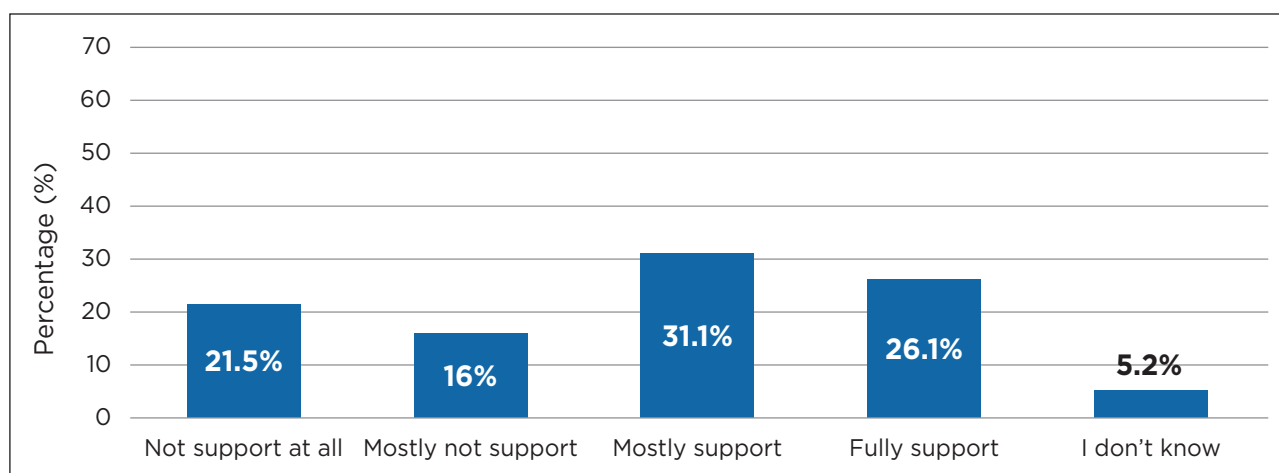
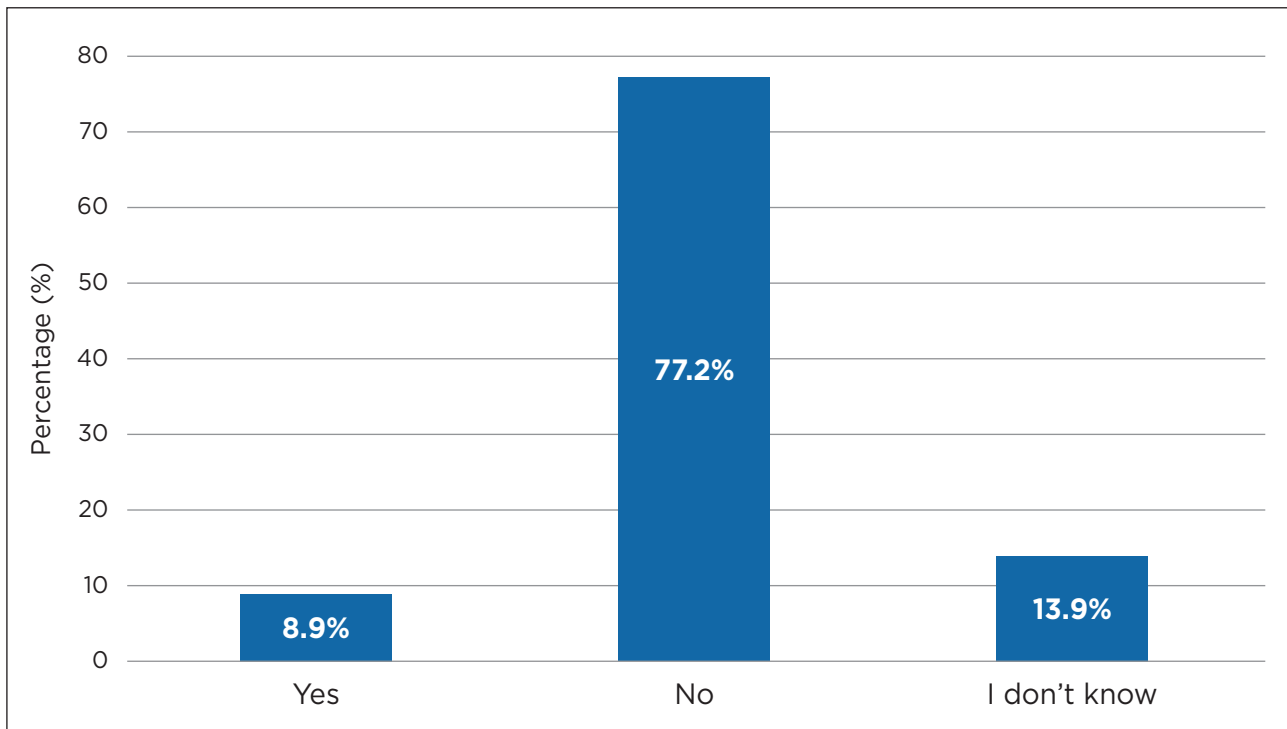


Figure 27: What do you think, will Serbia impose sanctions against Russia?

The current situation is troubling for the West. Now more than ever, it remains important for the West to find ways to change the perceptions currently held by the majority of Serbs. Otherwise, it risks losing a strategically important ally in the Western Balkans. Should Serbia abandon its European path, we are likely to witness a serious destabilisation of the entire Western Balkans region. For one, Serbia is known to have a substantial influence in Bosnia, Montenegro and Kosovo – if for no other reason than due to the large number of Serbs who live there.

However, before thinking about the ways in which the West could try to push Serbia towards a united stance against Russia, it is important to understand how we found ourselves in this situation in the first place – i.e., why do so many Serbs support Russia?

Context

We argue that there are two crucial causes of the pro-Russian sentiment in Serbia. First, the political legacy of the 1990s keeps playing an important role in maintaining the perception that Russia always supported Serbia while the West always stood against it. In particular, as illustrated by the data on NATO membership (see Figure 22) and the data regarding the view most Serbs have about NATO (see Figure 23), the legacy of the 1999 NATO campaign in Yugoslavia (that would have been vetoed by Russia, and thus, never received the UNSC approval) seems to play a pivotal role in this anti-Western sentiment. Second, most Serbs seem to think that culturally they are closer to Russia than to the West.

Political legacy of the 1990s

To understand the pro-Russian sentiment in Serbia and why it keeps on thriving, it is necessary to go back to the past. A full analysis of the relations between Serbia and Russia on one hand, and Serbia and the West on the other, exceeds the scope of this report. Nevertheless, highlighting a few crucial events that have taken place over the last three decades might shed light on this rather complicated picture.

The contemporary sources of pro-Russian sentiment can be traced back to the 1990s, the violent breakup of the former Yugoslavia, and the attitudes that Russian politicians and their Western counterparts deployed during these horrific wars. As Bowker tells us:

As Yugoslavia collapsed into war in 1991-92 Moscow had its problems closer to home and paid relatively little attention to events in the Balkans. Initially, Moscow was prepared to play a largely passive role in support of Western diplomatic efforts, but from 1993 Moscow showed a greater willingness to adopt a more independent pro-Serb line ...⁶⁵

Most notably, when violence surged again in 1998 in Kosovo, Western countries overwhelmingly supported the NATO bombing campaign against Yugoslavia (at the time comprising Serbia and Montenegro). Importantly, NATO intervention in the region was technically illegal as the intervention did not have the UNSC backing, in part because Russia vetoed any such intervention in Yugoslavia, in another clear act of support for Serbia.⁶⁶ And as shown by the data above, despite the number of years that have passed, the Serbs continue to hold extremely negative views of NATO, with only a very small number of Serbs thinking Serbia should join the Alliance.

Nevertheless, following the 5 October Overthrow, it seemed like the tides were turning in Serbia. "The pro-Western coalition, which came to power after the presidential elections in Serbia, gave the highest priority to the European integration of Serbia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia."⁶⁷ The cooperation between the EU and Serbia went beyond mere financial assistance, and also included "the initiation of the process of Serbia's joining the European Union."⁶⁸

However, the unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo in 2008 has, yet again, pushed Serbia into Russia's arms.

When Kosovo declared independence, most Western countries quickly recognised it as an independent state⁶⁹ – to the great frustration of most Serbs. In the following years, the US, the UK and the EU⁷⁰ have exerted pressure on Serbia to recognise Kosovo as an independent state – which, to date, Serbia has not done. Serbia's leverage in negotiations in part lies in the fact that just a little over 50% of UN member states have recognised Kosovo as independent. UNSC members, Russia and China are among those who haven't.⁷¹

To date, the issue of Kosovo has not been resolved, and in fact the region has seen multiple flare-ups⁷² – almost every time a substantial move towards sovereignty is made by the Kosovo authorities, tensions rise, with the international community usually getting involved to calm the situation down.⁷³ In almost all such instances, Russia is a vocal supporter of Serbia, whereas

⁶⁵ Mike Bowker, "The Wars in Yugoslavia: Russia and the International Community", *Europe-Asia Studies* 50, No. 7 (November 1998), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/153958>.

⁶⁶ Vesko Garcevic, "NATO's Intervention Changed Western-Russian Relations Forever", *Balkan Insight*, 22 March 2019, <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/03/22/natos-intervention-changed-western-russian-relations-forever/>.

⁶⁷ Petar Dragisic, "Serbia and European Union: A View from Brussels", *L'Europe en Formation* 349-350, no. 3-4 (2008), <https://www.cairn.info/revue-l-europe-en-formation-2008-3-page-147.htm>.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ It should be noted though, that to date, five EU member states have not recognised Kosovo as an independent state: Spain, Slovakia, Cyprus, Romania and Greece. For further details see: "Koje države nisu priznale jednostrano proglašenu nezavisnost Kosova?", Kancelarija za Kosovo I Metohiju, Vlada Republike Srbije, <https://www.kim.gov.rs/lat/np101.php>.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Note that just in the last year, multiple flare-ups have occurred regarding travel documents and car registration plates; for further details see: Helena Ivanov, "Will peace in the Balkans last?" *UnHerd*, 1 August 2022, <https://unherd.com/thepost/will-peace-in-the-balkans-last/>.

⁷³ Ibid.

the West is perceived to be asking Serbia to make more uncomfortable compromises – as seen in the last flare-up in Kosovo, caused by travel documents and car registration plates.⁷⁴

Finally, on top of these issues, there is little confidence that Serbia will ever join the EU – a sentiment somewhat boosted by the never-ending process of Serbia's accession to the EU.

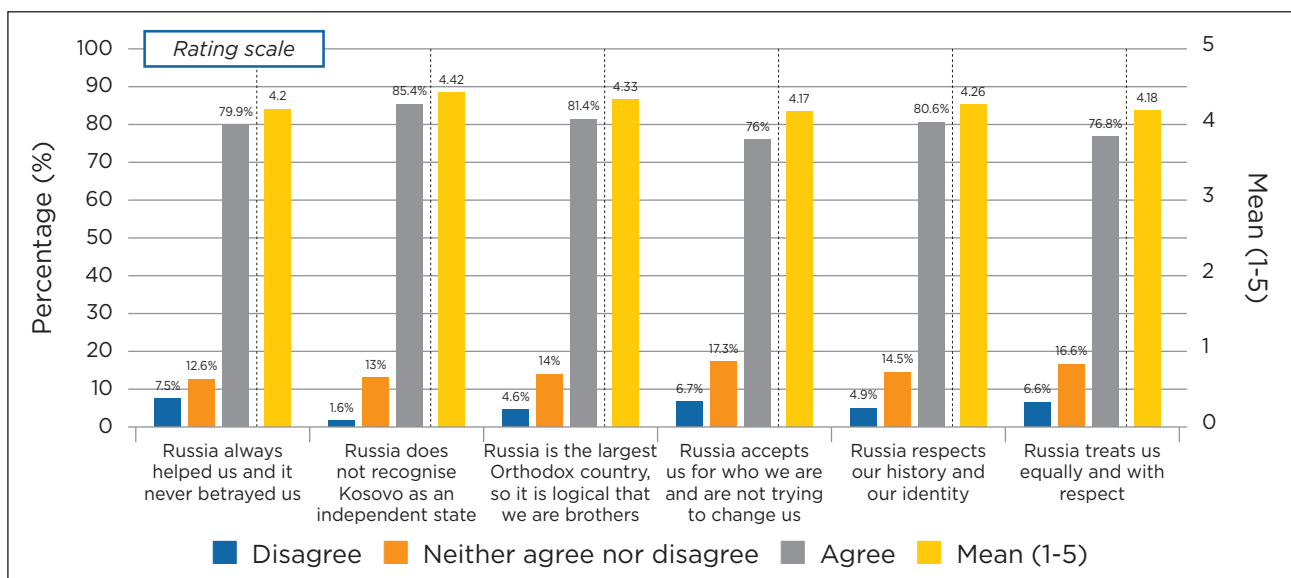
To illustrate, Serbia was identified as a potential candidate for EU membership during the Thessaloniki European Council summit in 2003.⁷⁵ Five years later, in 2008, a European partnership for Serbia was adopted; and in March 2012, Serbia was granted EU candidate status.⁷⁶

Serbia signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU in 2008, which came into force in 2013, confirming the prospects of Serbia to become a member of the EU and regulating mutual relations between the two parties until the achievement of full membership.⁷⁷

However, except for the opening of a new cluster in 2021,⁷⁸ not much has happened and Serbia has not made any substantial progress towards joining the block in recent years. The delay in accession is, to a great extent, self-inflicted – as Serbia is yet to institute a significant number of reforms. Nevertheless, the EU's lack of willingness to enlarge in foreseeable future – as illustrated by, for example, Macron's statements in the past⁷⁹ – also contributes to the Serbs' lack of confidence that it will ever join the bloc (even if it implements the required reforms).

The political decisions made over the last three decades seem to make a difference when it comes to how Serbs think of Russia and the West. As our polling results show, the political stance of Russia in the 1990s and its views on Kosovo's independence remain impactful to date. We asked the Serbs to tell us why we often hear that Russians are Serbian brothers, to which they responded:

Figure 28: In lay discourse we often hear that Russians are our brothers, why do you think that is?



⁷⁴ Note that just in the last year, multiple flare-ups have occurred regarding travel documents and car registration plates; for further details see: Helena Ivanov, "Will peace in the Balkans last?" *UnHerd*, 1 August 2022, <https://unherd.com/the-post/will-peace-in-the-balkans-last/>.

⁷⁵ "European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations: Serbia", European Commission, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/serbia_en.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ "Political relations between Serbia and the EU", Republic of Serbia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <https://www.mfa.gov.rs/en/foreign-policy/eu-integration/political-relations-between-serbia-and-eu>.

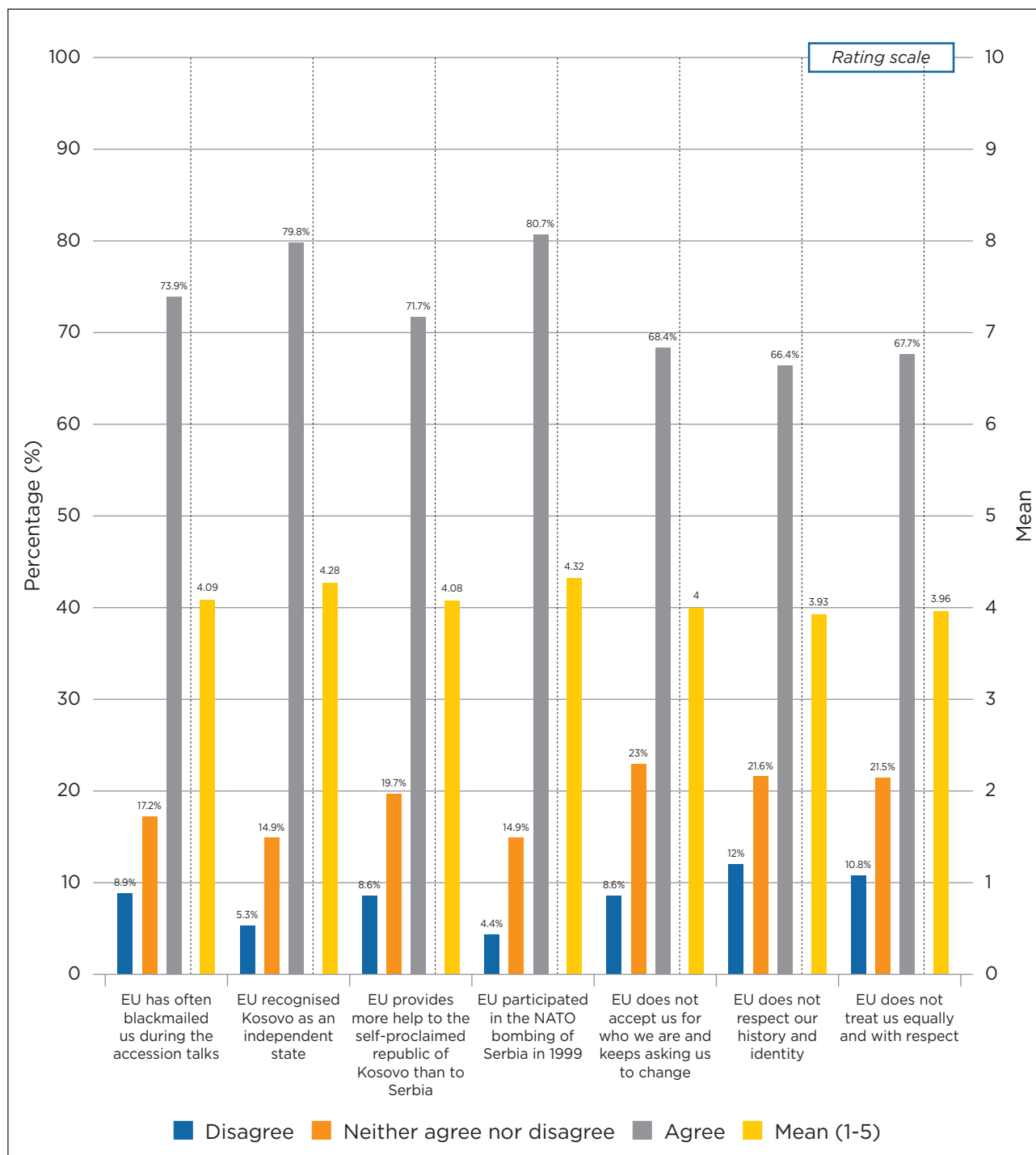
⁷⁸ "Serbia opens cluster 4 in accession negotiations with EU", The Government of the Republic of Serbia, 14 December 2021, <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/182521/serbia-opens-cluster-4-in-accession-negotiations-with-eu.php>.

⁷⁹ Erwan Fouéré, "Macron's 'Non' to EU enlargement", *CEPS*, 22 October 2019, <https://www.ceps.eu/macrons-non-to-eu-enlargement/>.

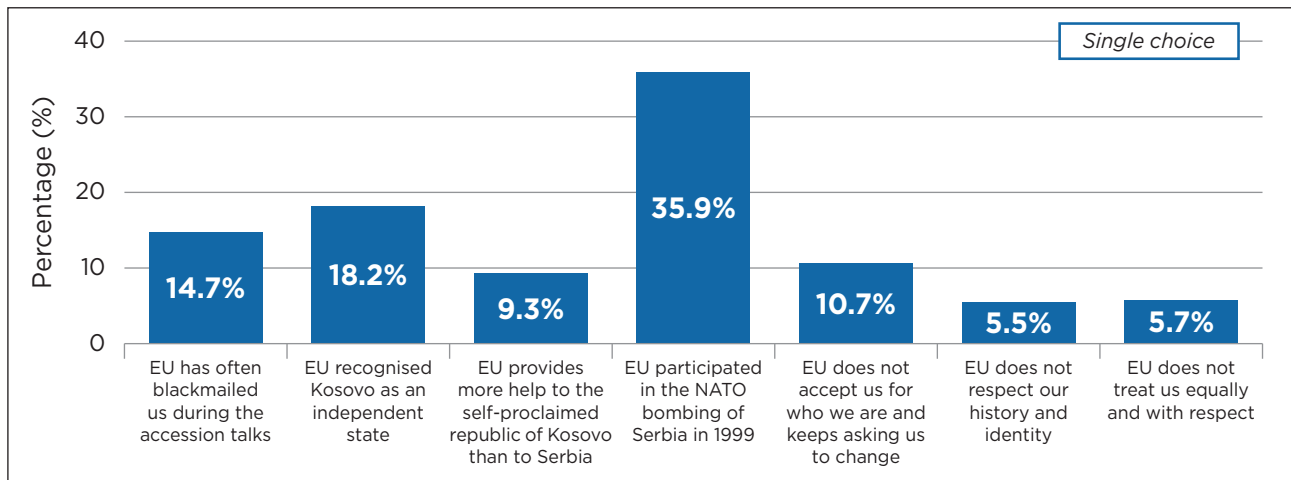
In addition, we asked the Serbs to clarify which of the above responses is crucial for thinking of Russians as their bothers – and 26.4% voted in favour of “Russia always helped us and it never betrayed us” (for further details see Figure 32).

Conversely, from the perspective of an ordinary Serb, Western countries have mostly aligned themselves with those who Serbs perceive as their enemies.

Figure 29: In the last 10 years, support for the EU has declined in Serbia. Why do you think that is?



When asked which one of these reasons matters most, the Serbs made it clear that EU participation in the NATO bombing is by far the most important factor, with the status of Kosovo and the EU's position towards it coming a clear second.

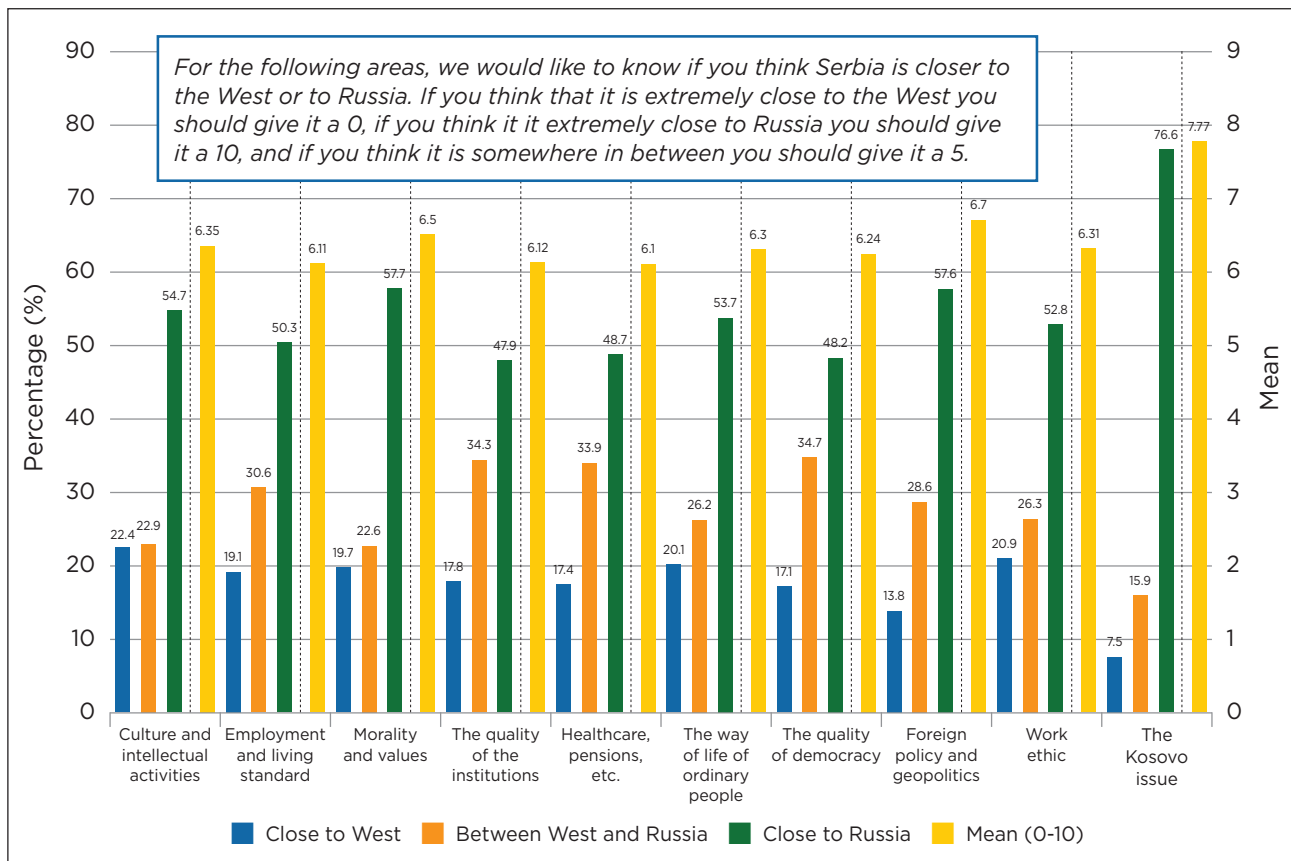
Figure 30: In the last 10 years, support for the EU has declined in Serbia. Why do you think that is?

On the basis of the data, it seems rather clear that part of the pro-Russian sentiment is caused by the different stances adopted by the West and Russia towards the violent break-up of the former Yugoslavia, the NATO bombing in particular, and Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in 2008.

Cultural similarities: The West vs Russia

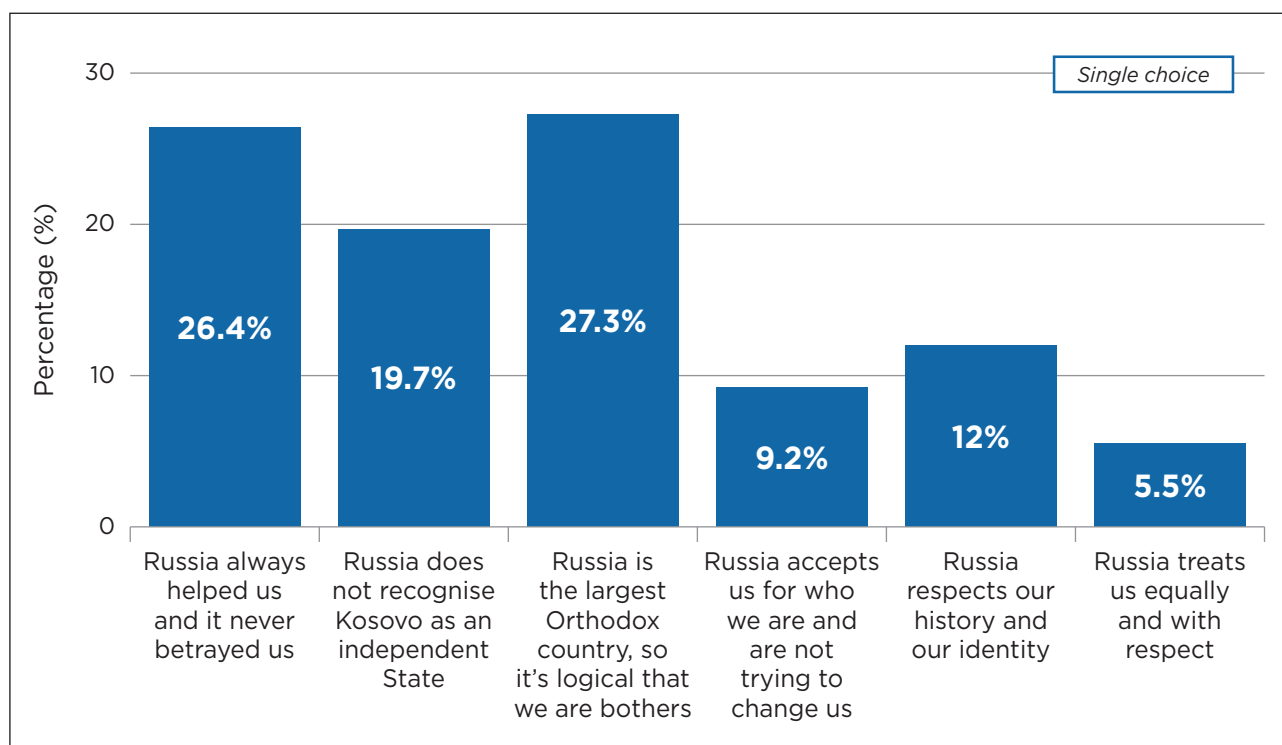
Most Serbs think that closeness with the Russians stems not just from political alliances and support, but also from the cultural overlaps between the two countries and its peoples.

We asked the Serbs to provide more insight into this.

Figure 31: Is Serbia closer to the West or Russia in the following areas?

Moreover, it is not just that the Serbs think they are overall closer to Russia in the aforementioned areas; religious closeness also seems to play an important role in how Serbs think about Russians. When prompted to explain why we often hear in Serbia's lay discourse that "Russians are Serbian brothers", religion came up as the most important factor.

Figure 32: In lay discourse we often hear that Russians are our brothers, why do you think that is?



Most importantly, cultural arguments also seem to play an important role in how Serbs think about its government's approach to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In Figures 34 and 35 respectively, you can see which arguments appear the most important for those who argue that Serbia should support Russia in the conflict and those who think it should remain neutral (the two groups amount to a total of 89.1% of the population).

Figure 33: What should Serbia do in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine?

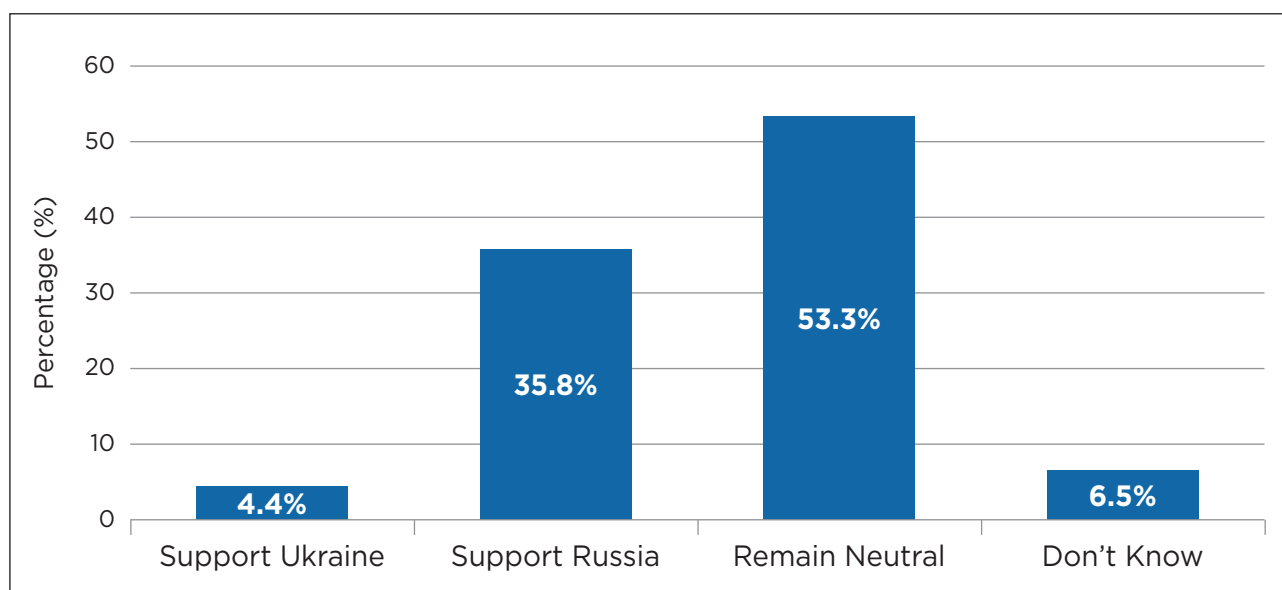
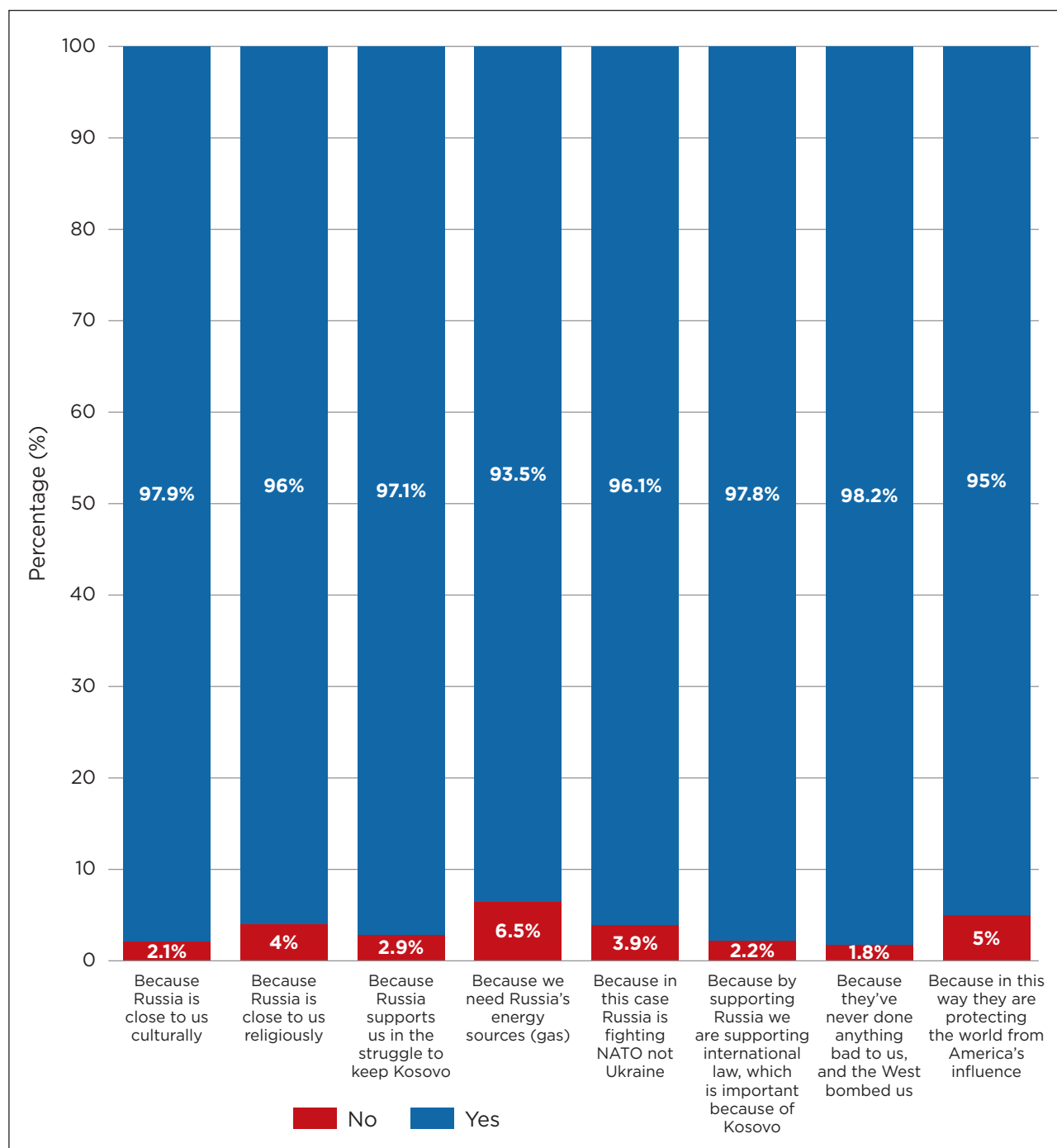


Figure 34: Why do you think Serbia should support Russia? Only applicable to people who said that Serbia should support Russia, thus 35.8% of the sample.



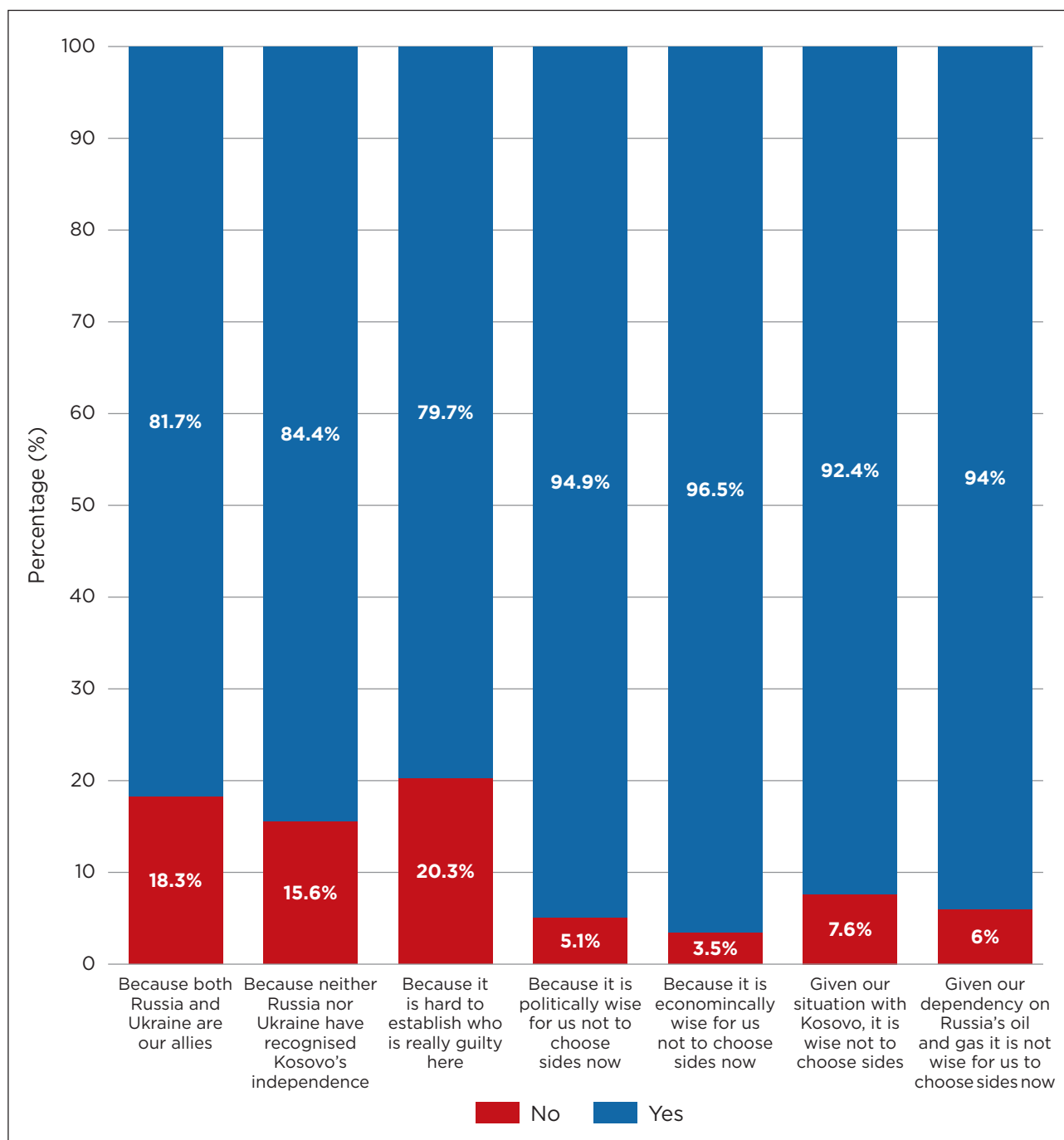
Thus, the perceptions about religious and cultural closeness play a role in both perceptions held about Russia generally and also in the decision-making process regarding this specific conflict.

What Is To Be Done

As we write this conclusion, news is breaking that Russia Today is launching a news service in the Serbian language in November 2022. On 15 November, Ms Symoniyana, the editor in chief of RT, tweeted: "We launched RT in the Balkans because Kosovo is Serbia."⁸⁰ On the very same

⁸⁰ "Russia Today počeo sa emitovanjem na srpskom uz poruku 'Kosovo je Srbija'", *Radio Free Europe*, 15 November 2022, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/russia-today-srbija/32131807.html>.

Figure 35: Why do you think Serbia should remain neutral in this conflict? Only applicable to people who said that Serbia should remain neutral, thus 53.3% of the sample.



day, President Vučić “met in Belgrade with Turko Daudov, advisor to head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov ...”⁸¹ and posed in Chechen traditional clothing. At the end of this meeting, Mr Vučić said: “Therefore, Russian-Serbian relations cannot be destroyed under any kind of pressure.”⁸²

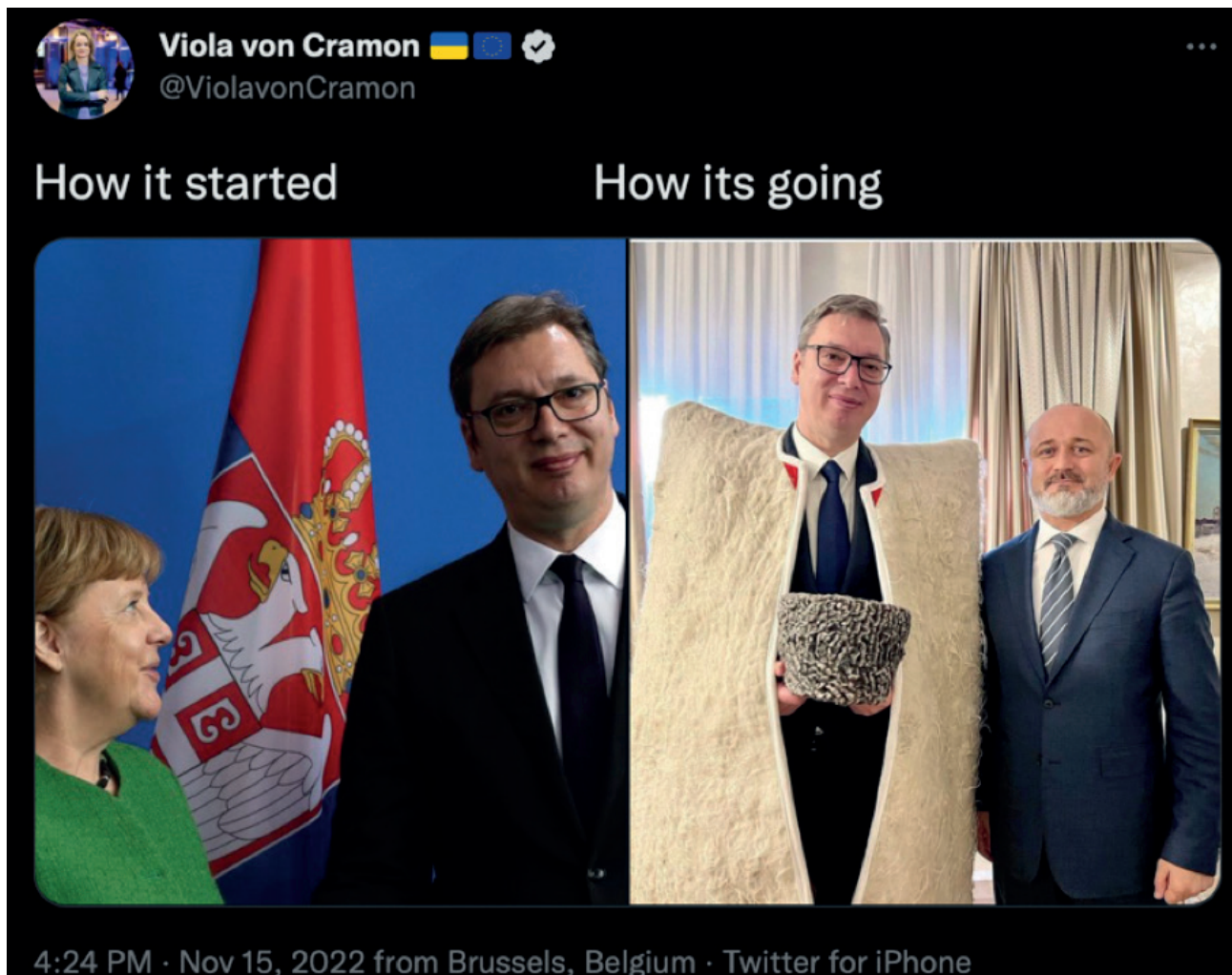
Both of these moves were immediately criticised by EU representatives. The European Parliament’s Standing Rapporteur on Serbia, Vladimir Bilcik, tweeted: “Actions speak louder

⁸¹ “Vučić poses in Chechen traditional clothing with Kadyrov’s advisor”, *N1*, 15 November 2022, <https://rs.n1info.com/english/news/vucic-poses-in-chechen-traditional-clothing-with-kadyrovs-advisor/>.

⁸² Ibid.

than words. To see Russian propaganda making a grand comeback in Serbia via the launch of Russia Today is contrary to Serbia's commitment to work on alignment with EU foreign policy. A serious EU accession country should not be a disinformation hub for the Kremlin.”⁸³

Viola von Cramon, MEP, did not fall short in commenting on Vučić's fashion choices and the political implications thereof, as illustrated by her Tweet below:⁸⁴



But whether these criticisms yield results is yet to be seen. On one hand, the EU does have some tools at its disposal to force Serbia into a corner. At the same time, as evidenced in this chapter, imposing sanctions against Russia remains highly unpopular and could even put Vučić's government in jeopardy. More concerning is the fact that even pressure points that the EU has at its disposal are of limited value. For instance, stalling accession talks – the usual threat used by EU representatives – no longer seems to have as much impact given the number of people who actually support Serbia joining the bloc (see Figure 21).

However, the EU cannot afford to do nothing for multiple reasons. First, the EU is already facing internal challenges – including Brexit and the election of Euro-sceptics like Meloni in Italy. Thus, coming across as weak and incapable of adequately responding to challenges could fuel the Euro-sceptic sentiments even more and create a domino effect whereby, in

⁸³ “Bilcik: Launch of Russia Today in Serbia contrary to alignment with EU policy”, *N1*, 14 November 2022, <https://rs.n1info.com/english/news/bilcik-launch-of-russia-today-in-serbia-contrary-to-alignment-with-eu-policy/>.

⁸⁴ Viola von Cramon (@ViolavonCramon), *Twitter*, 15 November 2022, 3.24pm, <https://twitter.com/ViolavonCramon/status/1592538997209063424>.

the coming years, we could see more Euro-sceptic governments in the EU. Second, some countries, notably Hungary, could further frustrate Europe's response to Russia if they see that EU candidate states like Serbia can get away with maintaining the balancing act.

Nevertheless, Europe must also be very careful how it responds to this – as it cannot afford to lose Serbia as an ally either. Should Serbia abandon its EU path, we are likely to see further destabilisation in the Western Balkans, if for no other reason than due to the strong Serbian influence in Bosnia, Kosovo and Montenegro. Thus, the EU is in desperate need of policies that are likely to work in Serbia and be deployed by the relevant Serbian audiences, but also policies that would prevent the domino effect of Euro-scepticism across Europe. While no policy is likely to be perfect in these adverse times, in the next section we present two policies which, we argue, should help the West achieve its aims with as little cost as possible.

Policy Proposals

As evidenced by the data above, it seems unlikely that any policy the EU could adopt will result in a quick and swift change in Hungary's and Serbia's attitude towards Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Potentially, extremely restrictive measures or punishments could bear fruit in forcing Serbia to impose sanctions. However, there are two problems with a 'stick' approach. First, it is no longer as certain that such policies would, in fact, lead to the imposition of sanctions. Instead, it is possible that the government could decide to distance itself from the EU even more – as Russia and China seem to be viable alternatives, heavily supported by the voters of the leading party, and the public more generally. Second, and more problematically, even if such policies did force Serbia to implement sanctions, it would also likely alienate the Serbs from the West even more, thereby straining this (already damaged) relationship long-term.

The situation is not much different in neighbouring Hungary. The EU's ability to respond to obvious breaches of its policies by the Hungarian government is limited. The European Parliament has been urging the European Commission to use new tools such as cutting some budgets allocated to Hungary due to concerns about corruption and backsliding over democracy. The European Commission indeed proposed to suspend about €7.5 billion of funds destined for Budapest but will need to get the approval of the State Council at a qualified majority voting (at least 15 member state governments representing at least 65% of the total EU population).

But just like with Serbia, introducing sanctions is a policy with serious caveats. First, concretely, it could push Hungary into becoming even more of a spoiler, blocking any further sanctions on Russia, which requires the EU member states' unanimity. Second, it rarely delivers the hoped-for result: it may push the population to side with their leader and, as we know from studies on contrarian mindset, external pressure usually reinforces a contrarian position. As the state controls the media, it can generate negative narratives on the EU whatever Brussels is doing or not doing. Yet Hungarian society is so polarised into two camps that penalising the whole country may be counterproductive to the EU mission.

Thus, we suggest that the West should take an alternative approach – one which would make Serbia and Hungary feel more equal and welcomed by the Western community. We do concede that such an approach is likely to be time-consuming, and is unlikely to lead to any major policy shifts in the short, or perhaps even medium, term. Nevertheless, we argue that changing the perceptions currently held by Serbian and many Hungarian citizens is a marathon, not a sprint, and as such requires long-term forward-looking policies. More specifically, we propose the following two measures, applicable to both countries, one which is more concrete, and the other which focuses on storytelling and engagement with the two countries.

1. 'The EU is helping YOU' solidarity fund to be implemented for winter 2022/2023 (and extended for one more year if needed)
2. Changes to the style of communication when attending conferences with a high-level Serbian delegation

The EU is helping YOU

We propose that the EU offers direct help to the citizens of Serbia and Hungary who are likely to struggle to pay their energy bills during the 22/23 winter, and for an additional year if needed. Whilst the EU has committed to paying €165 million to help Serbia deal with the energy

crisis, we suggest that the method currently proposed by Ursula von der Leyen⁸⁵ is unlikely to change the perception of Serbia's citizens. Thus, we propose a slight shift in the policy.

Instead of providing financial help to the country itself through various funds (as the EU currently does), we argue that the help should be provided directly to the bank accounts of Serbian and Hungarian citizens who are very likely to struggle to pay their energy bills. More specifically, each Serbian and Hungarian citizen should receive the same amount of money per month, designated to cover their energy bills, directly from the European Union. Importantly, this aid should come with no strings attached – for instance, it should not condition Serbian citizens to support sanctions on Russia. Rather, it should be promoted as an unconditional good-will policy promoted by the EU that wishes to help the Serbian and Hungarian people.

We argue that such a direct and unconditional way of providing aid will be more successful in pushing people towards the West for three key reasons. First, this way of distributing assistance will be *directly* felt by the citizens – which is likely to create the sense of a direct relationship between the EU and Serbia's and Hungary's citizens, which is desperately needed for improving perception about the EU. Second, sending money directly to citizens (as opposed to using the government as the intermediary) prevents the governments from abusing the aid for any corrupt purposes. Finally, this policy must be coupled with a strong PR campaign in which it is clearly communicated that this is an EU initiative. Otherwise, local governments may present this aid package as their own success – which would limit the potential for improving perceptions about the EU. Thus, it is very important that this is seen as a solely EU-led initiative.

Second, this type of help will provide a direct sense of relief for many families who will struggle to pay their energy bills, and will continue to do so. Instead of the government deciding how and who gets to spend the aid von der Leyen offered, the hardest-hit families will have the capacity to decide how to manage their finances in light of this aid and will feel on a month-to-month basis that they benefit from the EU.

Finally, providing help for energy bills is hitting Russia exactly where it has the biggest leverage over the two countries. Offering help that specifically targets energy (which whilst cheaper for Serbia thanks to the gas deal from May 2022, is nevertheless going to be quite expensive for many Serbian households) will show that Serbia and Hungary can indeed rely not just on Russia, but also on the West to help out; it may perhaps even show that Russia's cheap gas deal is not so cheap after all. Similar logic can be applied for Hungary.

Changing the tone

More often than not, when Western representatives go to Serbia or Hungary for high-level visits, or meet with Serbian or Hungarian delegations, the style they deployed is overly bureaucratic and too critical. As evidenced in Figures 29 and 30 (of the Serbian chapter), this style of communication has contributed to the perception that the EU keeps asking Serbia to change, which in turn has resulted in a deterioration in relations between Serbia and the West. Thus, a small but visible change in communication styles could be crucial for changing the perceptions of both Serbs and Hungarians.

For example, Western politicians could engage in more friendly and direct gestures when visiting Serbia – akin to Mr Putin visiting the St Sava Temple during his visit to Belgrade, an event which attracted over 120,000 Serbs.⁸⁶ Visiting monumental places of Serbia, while

⁸⁵ Rade Ranković, "Ursula Fon der Lajen u Nišu: Podrška Srbiji od 165 miliona evra zbog energetske krize", *VOA News*, 28 October 2022, <https://www.glasamerike.net/a/srbija-fon-der-lajen-poseta-pomoc/6809234.html>.

⁸⁶ "120,000 Serbians welcome Putin in Belgrade/PHOTOS, VIDEO", *b92*, 17 January 2019, https://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?nav_id=106015.

also using language that is more down-to-earth and creates a feeling of closeness, is very likely to resonate well with the Serbian people, as opposed to overly organised bureaucratic conferences only attended by the highest government officials.

Just like in Serbia, the EU should get its storytelling to the Hungarian population right. Talking about human rights and minoritarian democracy to Fidesz's voters won't help. But there are other sides of the EU metanarrative that would better fit Orbán supporters' worldviews: the EU construction as a history of the independence of European nations from external great powers and empires, respect for sovereignty against the influence of great powers (including Russia), and a shared European historical past. A conservative nation-building narrative may be uncomfortable in the EU context but does not have to be read as a fundamental challenge to EU membership.

To put it bluntly, in both Serbia and Hungary, the West should aim to not seem as remote and distant as it does at the moment. And finally, the West must come across as being respectful towards the countries' sovereignty – otherwise, its style of communication might backfire like it did in the run up to Italian elections. Notably, a few days before the elections in Italy took place, “Italian politicians asked European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen not to intervene in domestic politics after she warned that Europe has ‘the tools’ to deal with Italy if things go in a ‘difficult direction’.”⁸⁷ As it stands, and given the election results across Europe – from Italy to Sweden – the EU is not in a position to afford many more backfires like this one. Thus, the change in tone and style of communication remains of utmost priority for European and Western politicians.

⁸⁷ Wilhelmine Preussen, “Von der Leyen's warning message to Italy irks election candidates”, *Politico*, 23 September 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-election-candidate-warning-ursula-von-der-leyen/>.

Conclusion

In the last few years, the West has increasingly found itself between a rock and a hard place. Brexit, the rise of Euro-sceptic and far-right parties, the rise of China as a geopolitical power, COVID-19, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine all pose serious challenges and threaten Western unity and its dominance over the global order. Internal divisions, and an inability to deal with them, could carry significant costs for the West but also for the rest of the world.

Serbia and Hungary serve as very good case studies for understanding how democracy-aspiring countries can turn to the right of the political spectrum, and that restrictions and threats of punishment may not always be the best course of action and can backfire. Perhaps more importantly, these two countries could serve as good test cases on how to improve the perceptions about the West in any country currently experiencing the rise of Euro-sceptic and/or far-right political parties. Whilst the two policies we propose are likely to take time to make a difference, we argue that they are a much better alternative than anything else on the table. Nevertheless, these policies seem more likely to yield some results whilst also being realistic from the perspective of the EU. As argued above, any restrictive measures are likely to further deteriorate relations between Serbia and the West, and do not provide any guarantees that they will work even in the short term. Other, perhaps more positive policies – such as, for example, mellowing down the attitude towards Kosovo (likely to be viewed positively by most Serbs) – remain unrealistic from the Western point of view and, as such, cannot be reasonably proposed.

TITLE: "WHY STILL PRO-RUSSIA? MAKING
SENSE OF HUNGARY'S AND SERBIA'S
RUSSIA STANCE"

By Dr Helena Ivanov and Dr Marlene Laruelle

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