

NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS BETWEEN KOSOVO AND SERBIA

CITIZENS' PERSPECTIVE



SHKURT 2018

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INTRODUCTION

The public opinion poll "Normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia: Citizens' perspective" is the fifth one that KDI has organized to highlight the citizens' perspective of the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue process.

The Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue launched in 2011, is expected to enter its third and final phase, under which the parties are expected to sign a legally binding agreement. ¹The pre-entry of this phase, as well as the earlier phases of the dialogue, has been accompanied by numerous controversies, lack of transparency and clarity.

It is not yet known what topics will be discussed or whether other international stakeholders, other than the EU as facilitators, will be directly involved in this process. What will be the negotiating team, what role the country institutions will have, including the Assembly, and what will be the epilogue of this process, are issues that still remain unanswered.

Kosovo's leadership has urged that this process be concluded as soon as possible, while stating that at the end of the dialogue Serbia will recognize the state of Kosovo. ²On the other hand, Serbia's top state officials have dismissed the possibility of recognizing the state of Kosovo by stating that the dialogue between the parties is a compromise process. ³It still remains to be seen as to what compromises Kosovo side will be willing to make⁴

The most recent case of the criminal act of murder of Oliver Ivanovic, leader of the civic initiative "Freedom, Democracy, Justice" (SDP) in Mitrovica North resulted in the withdrawal of the Serb side from the technical talks in Brussels. ⁵This event highlighted the persisting numerous problems of extending the sovereignty of Kosovo state throughout its territory, also warning that the final phase of the dialogue would be accompanied by a harsh diplomacy of competition as to which party would benefit most from this process.

In this poll, KDI addresses some of these issues from the citizen's perspective asking their opinion whether the US should be directly involved in this process, if they expect the dialogue to be concluded in 2018 and have formal recognition of the state of Kosovo by the state of Serbia.

Further, this poll highlights the attitude of the citizens about the role that the Assembly must have with regard to the future agreements and, above all, their overall assessment of the 6 years of dialogue - whether this process has really come to normalize relations between Kosovo and Serbia by improving them.

Based on the findings of the poll, KDI provides recommendations to the country's institutions to ensure a comprehensive and transparent process of Kosovo-Serbia dialogue.

These polls are organized under KDI's mission to promote transparency, accountability and responsive democracy. This project is funded by Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs to strengthen parliamentary oversight of the executive and increasing citizen participation in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue.

For more information about Kosovo-Serbia dialogue and preliminary polls click on www.votaim.org/Public/Dialog.

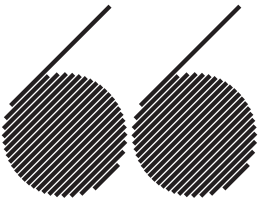
⁵ The meeting between the Kosovo and Serbia delegation, which was scheduled to take place on January 16, 2018 in Brussels, was canceled after the murder of Oliver Ivanovic in Mitrovica on that day. For more information see Kallxo's information portal, "Ivanovic's murder, canceled the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue meeting in Brussels", January 16, 2018 at <http://kallxo.com/vrasja-e-ivanoviqit-anulohet-takimi-dialogut-kosove-serbi-ne-bruksel/>



2. METHODOLOGY

The poll was developed at the country level using a systematic random method, with a sample of 1070 respondents designed to provide a representative sample, stratified by ethnicity: Albanian, Serbian and

non-Serb minorities, coverage by settlements (urban / rural). The poll was conducted during the period 12-20 December 2017. The margin of error is about + -3%.



These surveys are organized in frame of the KDI mission to promote transparency, accountability and responsible democracy



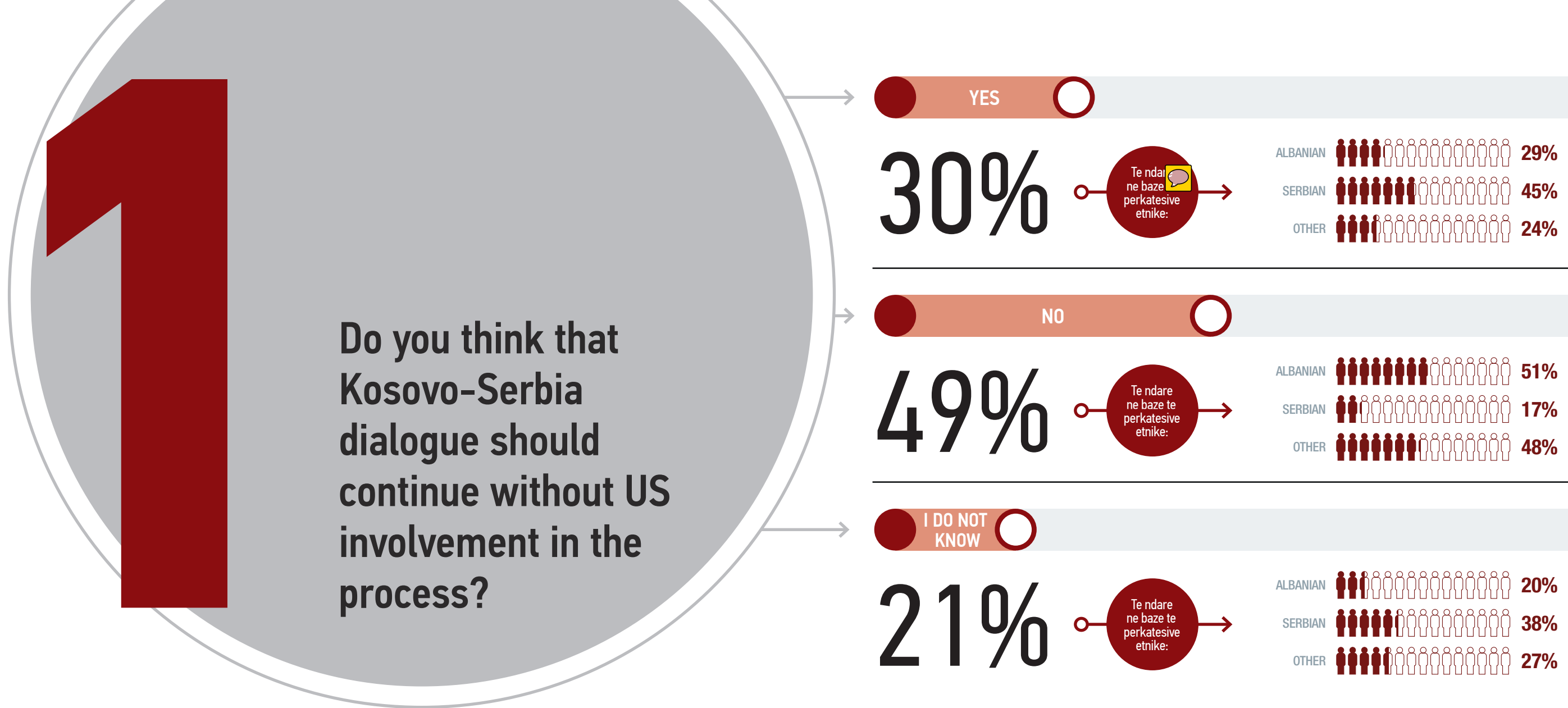
7 See the full statement of the U.S. Secretary Hillary Clinton, 31 October 2012 at, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/20092013/clinton/rm/2012/10/199899.htm>

|||||

10 President Thaçi made this statement in other events as well, including the discussion organized by KDI on 14 September 2017, where he stated that he requested the US direct involvement in the final phase of this process and that the benefits of this long-lasting peace in the Balkans is to affect the whole continent. See the discussion with President Thaçi organized by KDI at: <http://votaimre.org/Public/DialogActivity/Detail/130>

12 At the Assembly session of 7 December 2017, Prime Minister Haradinaj once again mentioned this issue, stating that the US involvement is a necessity considering that the EU has a neutral status towards Kosovo, and Serbia does not recognize Kosovo. See the declaration of Prime Minister Haradinaj in the transcript of the Kosovo Assembly session, 7 December 2017, p.67, at http://www.kuvendikosoves.org/common/docs/proc/trans_s_2017_12_07_10_7114_al.pdf

14 See the statement of the EU High Representative Federica Mogherini, 11 October 2017, at, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_mt/33753/Remarks%20by%20EU%20HR/VP%20Federica%20Mogherini%20following%20meeting%20with%20Ms%20Ana%20Branbani%C4%87%20Prime%20Minister%20of%20Serbia



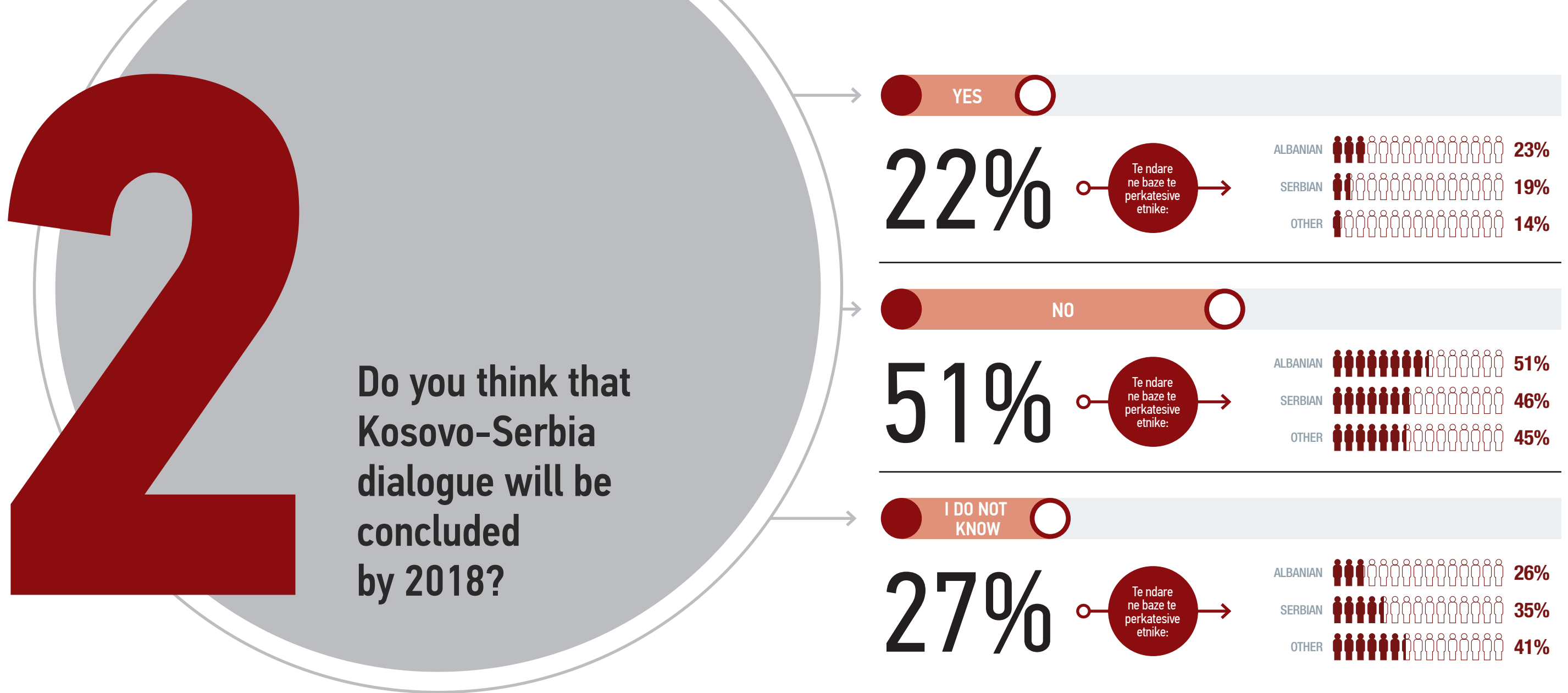
Considering the official statements of Prishtina, Belgrade and EU regarding the US direct involvement in Kosovo-Serbia dialogue, KDI has asked the citizens' stance whether Kosovo-Serbia dialogue should continue even if the US is not directly involved in the dialogue, regardless of the attitude of Kosovo leadership for the necessity of US participation in this process.

The survey results show that about half of the citizens surveyed (49%) think that Kosovo-Serbia dialogue should not continue unless there is direct involvement of the US in this process.

On the other hand, 30% of the citizens said they support the continuation of the dialogue with Serbia even without the direct involvement of the US, while 21% of them said they do not know whether or not the dialogue should continue if the US is not directly involved in this process.

Regarding the results by ethnicity, 51% of Albanian respondents and 48% of respondents from other communities believe that Kosovo-Serbia dialogue should not proceed without the direct involvement of the US, compared to 17% of Serb citizens sharing the same opinion. On the other hand, 45% of respondents from this community believe that dialogue should continue without US involvement in this process, compared to only 29% of Albanian citizens

and 24% from other communities sharing the same opinion. Meanwhile, 20% of Albanian respondents, 38% of Serbian respondents and 27% of respondents from other communities said they do not know whether or not the dialogue should continue without the direct involvement of the US in this process.



During the past year, there were many discussions about the new and concluding phase of dialogue, whereby a fast conclusion of this process was requested through a binding agreement between the parties.¹⁵ Despite the fact that the Kosovo side has not yet come up with a state strategy on the future of this process and a large number of agreements that are still not implemented, 2018 was often considered as the deadline for this process to come to an end.¹⁶

KDI has asked citizens if they believe the process of dialogue with Serbia will be concluded by 2018 and received the following responses:

About 51% of respondents do not expect that the process of dialogue with Serbia will be concluded by 2018, with only 22% of them believing that this process will be concluded by 2018. On the other hand, 27% of the respondents said they do not know whether or not the dialogue will be concluded during this year.

Regarding the opinion of citizens by ethnicity, the responses to the concerned question have been almost the same from respondents of all communities. Thus, about half of the citizens of all communities, respectively, 51% of the Albanian respondents, 46% of Serbian respondents and 45% of the respondents from other communities do not expect that the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue will be concluded in 2018. On the other hand, only 23% of Albanian respondents, 19% of Serbian respondents and 14% of respondents from other

communities believe that the dialogue will be concluded during this period. Meanwhile, 26% of Albanian respondents, 35% of Serbian respondents and 41% of respondents from other communities responded that they do not know if the process of dialogue will be concluded or not during 2018.

¹⁵ The above-mentioned statement of President Thaçi, published in his official profile on Facebook, 26 January 2018, in the framework of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, at: <https://www.facebook.com/HashimThaciOfficial/>

¹⁶ See the statement of the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Ramush Haradinaj, in "Zëri" newspaper, "Dialogu Kosovë-Serbi në fazën përfundimtare" (The Kosovo-Serbia dialogue is in the final phase), 26 November 2017, at: <http://zeri.info/aktuale/173822/dialogu-kosove-serbi-ne-fazen-perfundimtare/>



Despite the parties' expressed willingness to dialogue and reach a final agreement, their expectations about the epilogue of this process vary drastically. Last year, President Vucic stated in an article that the time has come to deal with the Kosovo issue and stated, among other things, that the dialogue should continue, otherwise we will conserve the conflict.¹⁷ However, on 25 January 2018, he stated that "if somebody thinks that the idea of the process of normalizing relations between Belgrade and Pristina means merely Serbia having to recognize Kosovo, and that's that, then thanks, goodbye".¹⁸ Vucic has also initiated an internal dialogue in Serbia for resolving, as he said, the Kosovo issue by including the

17 See the statement of the Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic in Koha.net "Vuqic për Kosovën: Të jemi realë, mos të fshehim kokën si struci" (Vucic for Kosovo: Let's be realistic and not hide our head as an ostrich), 24 July 2017, at: <http://www.koha.net/arberi/33635/vuciq-per-kosoven-te-jemi-reale-mos-te-fshehim-koken-si-struci/>

18 See the statement of Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic in Koha.net "Vuqic: Nëse dialogu zhvillohet vetëm për ta njohur Kosovën, atëherë mirupafshim" (Vucic: If dialogue means merely Serbia having to recognize Kosovo, then goodbye", 24 July 2017, at: <http://www.koha.net/arberi/71523/vuciq-nese-dialogu-zhvillohet-ve-tem-per-ta-njohur-kosoven-atehere-mirupafshim/>

Serbian Government, civil society, political parties, the Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Church.

On the other hand, the President of the Republic of Kosovo, Hashim Thaçi, in an article dated 17 August 2017, stated among other things that "we believe that the breakthrough would be the signing of an Agreement on Normalization and Reconciliation between our two countries and the historic agreement between Kosovo and Serbia should include mutual recognition as the only way to end all disputes once and for all."¹⁹ Similar stand was shared by the Prime Minister of Kosovo who, during an Assembly session, stated that "there is no reason and logic to continue a dialogue that does not result in mutual recognition with Serbia."²⁰

19 See the article written by President Thaci "Treni i fundit për një paqe të qëndrueshme" (The last train for a sustainable peace), 17 August 2017, at: <http://www.president-ks-gov.net/sq/oped/treni-i-fundit-per-nje-paqe-te-qendrueshme>

20 See Prime Minister Haradinaj's statement at the Assembly session of 17 December 2017, p. 41, at: http://www.kuvendikosoves.org/common/docs/proc/trans_s_2017_12_14_10_7135_at.pdf

Even the President of the Assembly, Kadri Veseli, stated that mutual recognition with Serbia is inevitable.²¹ It can be concluded that the entire political spectrum share a common position on Serbia recognizing Kosovo.

Statements of various international officials who have had different opinions on whether or not Serbia will recognize Kosovo at the end of this process have also contributed to the uncertainty about the epilogue of this process, while the office of the EU's high representative or the EU itself has not articulated a clear position with the exception of the call for the so-called 'comprehensive normalization' which is also foreseen in chapter 35 of Serbia's negotiations with the EU.²² When asked in an interview whether there would be a bright future for Kosovo and Serbia without recognizing each other, the representative of the EU office in Kosovo said that the EU has a basic principle, that of good neighbourly relations.²³

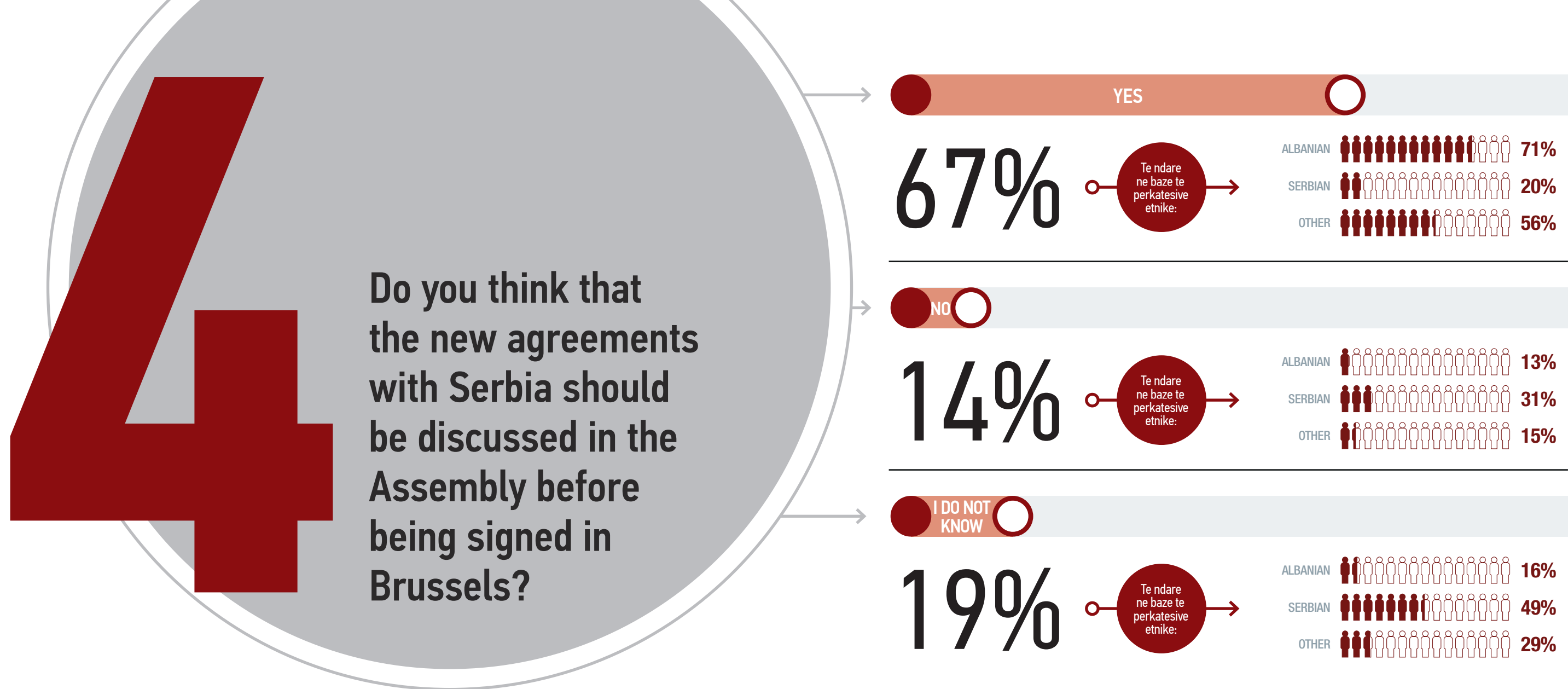
21 See the statement of the President of the Assembly of Kosovo, Kadri Veseli, posted in the Kosovo Assembly News, 14 November 2017, at: <http://www.kuvendikosoves.org/?cid=1,128,9130>

22 See the EU document published on 30 November 2015 at <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/AD-12-2015-INIT/en/pdf>

23 See the interview of the EU Representative in Kosovo, Nataliya Apostolova, 22 September 2017, at: https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/kosovo/32628/interview-nataliya-apostolova-zeri-newspaper_sq

Regarding this issue, KDI asked for the view of the public opinion where it turns out that about half of the citizens surveyed (48%) said that they do not expect recognition from Serbia at the end of this process, compared to 31% of citizens who expect that, at the end of the dialogue, Serbia will recognize Kosovo. Meanwhile, 21% of citizens do not know whether or not this will happen.

The survey results by ethnicity have highlighted a high percentage of surveyed citizens of the Serb community (68%) who said they do not expect Serbia to recognize Kosovo after the dialogue is concluded, compared to 47% of Albanian citizens and 38% of citizens from other communities who also do not expect this to happen. On the other hand, only 1% of Serb respondents expect that Serbia will recognize Kosovo at the end of this process, compared to 33% of Albanians and 23% from other communities who expect such a thing to happen. Meanwhile, 20% of Albanian citizens, 31% of Serbian citizens and 39% of citizens from other communities have said they do not know whether or not Serbia will recognize Kosovo after the dialogue is resumed.



By means of resolutions, Assembly of Kosovo,²⁴ and²⁵ has authorized the Kosovo Government to negotiate with Serbia in the framework of Kosovo-Serbia dialogue, urging the Government and the negotiating team to regularly report on this process. Moreover, these Resolutions foresee the direct involvement of the respective parliamentary committees in the framework of the dialogue discussions.

Despite the fact that the Resolutions are not legally binding acts, they nevertheless express the will of people's repre-

sentatives and therefore must be respected. In reality, Resolutions in general and those related to the dialogue issue in particular have not been implemented.

²⁴ Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, "Resolution for dialogue between Republic of Kosovo and Republic of Serbia", adopted on 10 March 2011, at:

²⁵ Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, "Resolution on normalization of relations between Republic of Kosovo and Republic of Serbia", adopted on 18 October 2012, at:

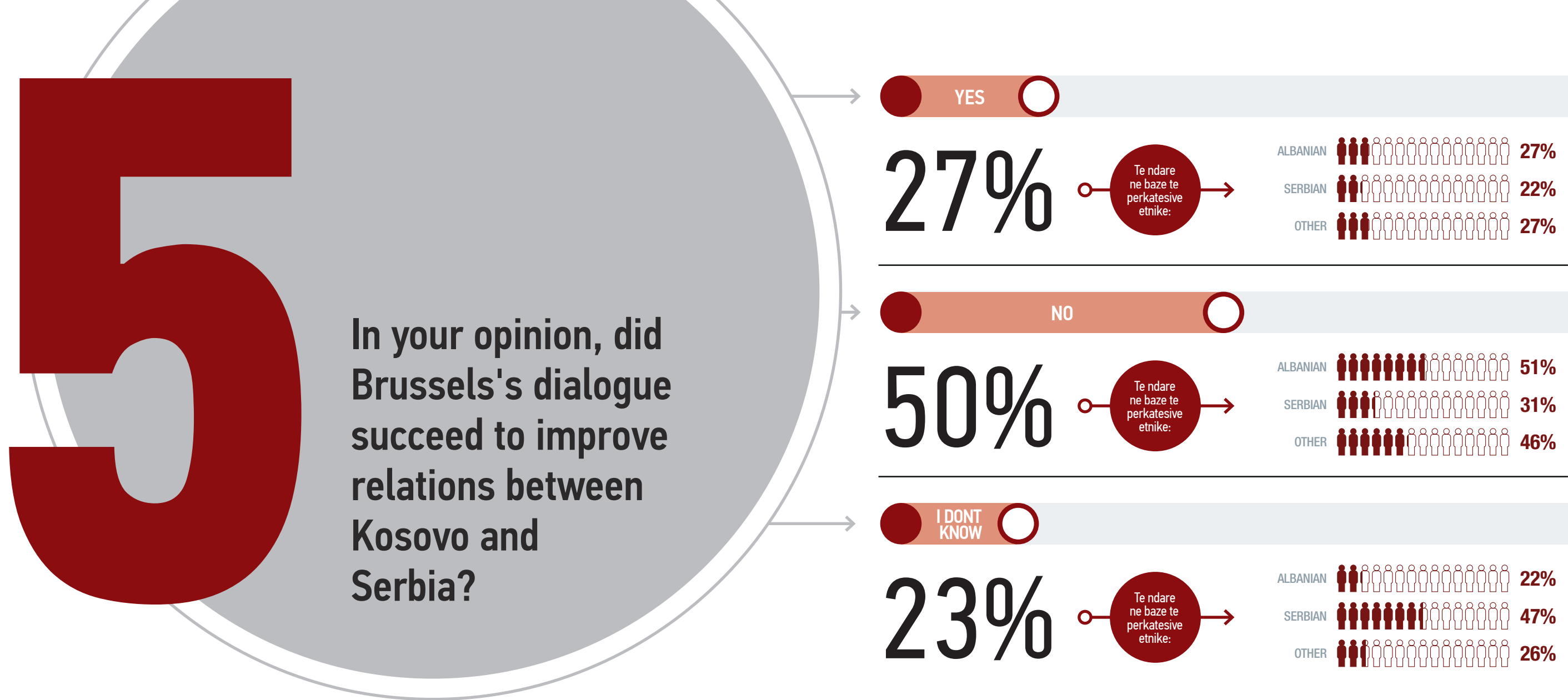
²⁶ Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, "Resolution on granting the consent to sign the First Agreement on Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations between the Republic of Kosovo and the Republic of Serbia", adopted on 21 April 2013, at: http://www.kuvendikosoves.org/common/docs/Rezoluta_per_marreshje.pdf

Based on the numerous statements of Kosovo Assembly deputies and the public opinion analyses organized by KDI, there has been a low level of transparency about the dialogue process.²⁷ The involvement of the Assembly in this process has been considered as extremely important based both on the individual statements of MPs requesting that the agreements be discussed in the Assembly and on the meetings between the parliamentary committees, where it was proposed the need for a Resolution for a more active role of the Assembly in this process.²⁸ It remains to be seen how this process will further develop and what will be the role of the Assembly in the dialogue process.

KDI has asked citizens whether they believe that the new agreements with Serbia should be discussed in the Assembly before being signed in Brussels.

²⁷ KDI has organized 4 surveys about the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue. The results can be found on the My Vote website at: <http://votaime.org/Public/Article?PollDialog=true&PollDialog=false&SelectedTab=Polls&PollSelectedMonthID=&PollSelectedYear=#polls>

²⁸ See the statements of MPs in two meetings of parliamentary committees organized by KDI during 2017, at: <http://votaime.org/Public/DialogActivity/Detail/147> and <http://votaime.org/Public/DialogActivity/Detail/125>



In essence, all this process is aimed at normalizing relations between the parties, improving the lives of citizens of both countries and their path towards the European Union.

The first agreement on the principles of normalization of relations, which was ratified by the Kosovo Assembly on 19 April 2013, was considered as historic by the Kosovar side²⁹ and that of the EU³⁰ towards building good relations between the two states.

Despite the achievement of this agreement and a number of other agreements, relations between the two states were followed by numerous critical incidents, such as the launch of the

train from Serbia to Kosovo containing provocative elements³¹, the construction of the wall at the Mitrovica Bridge³², arrests of Kosovo state officials by Serbia³³, their detention as a result of arrest warrants of the latter³⁴ and recently the criminal act of the assassination of Oliver Ivanovic, which was used as an argument by Serbia's side to withdraw from the meeting of technical dialogue scheduled to be held in Brussels.³⁵

31 Kallxo "Train with Serb Symbols Arrives in Raska (Video)" 14 January 2017, <http://kallxo.com/treni-simbolet-serbe-mberrin-ne-rashke/>

32 Koha Net, "The wall is built near the Iber bridge, the Government of Kosovo reacts", 7 December 2016, <http://archive.koha.net/?id=27&l=146134>

33 Kallxo, "Police Director Nehat Thaci Arrested in Serbia" 29 September 2016, <http://kallxo.com/arrestohet-ne-serbi-drejtori-policise-nehathaci/>

34 Koha Net, "Ramush Haradinaj arrested in France", 4 January 2017, <http://archive.koha.net/?id=27&l=150339>

35 Kallxo, "Ivanovic's Assassination, Canceled Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue Meeting in Brussels", 16 January 2018 <http://kallxo.com/vrasja-e-ivanoviqit-anulohet-takimi-dialogut-kosove-serbi-ne-bruksel/>

Moreover, most of the agreements reached since the beginning of the dialogue process in 2011 remain unimplemented, while Serbia continues the lobbying and propaganda campaign against Kosovo in the international arena.³⁶ All these developments that have conveyed conflicting messages to the general public about the effects of dialogue between the parties and the real impact on improving the lives of citizens. To highlight citizens' opinion about this, KDI has asked them whether they think that the Brussels dialogue has succeeded to improve Kosovo-Serbia relations, on which question it has received the following responses.

Half of the respondents (50%) do not think that the Brussels dialogue has succeeded to improve relations between Kosovo and Serbia, as opposed to only 27% of those who think that relations between the two states have improved as a result of the dialogue. On the other hand, 23% of citizens said they did not know whether Brussels' dialogue has succeeded to improve relations between the two states.

36 Zëri, "Here's how Serbia is lobbying against Kosovo in UNESCO, <http://zeri.info/aktuale/162354/ja-se-si-lobon-serbia-kunder-kosoves-ne-unesco-video/>

As far as opinions based on ethnicity are concerned, half of the Albanian respondents (51%) think that the Brussels dialogue has failed to improve the relationship between Kosovo and Serbia. A large number of citizens from other communities (46%) share the same opinion with the latter, including 31% of respondents from the Serbian community who think the same thing. On the other hand, 27% of Albanian and other communities' respondents and 22% of Serb respondents think that Brussels's dialogue has in fact improved relations between the two states. Meanwhile, 21% of Albanian respondents, 47% of Serb respondents and 26% of respondents from other communities do not know whether or not the dialogue has improved relations between Kosovo and Serbia.

CONCLUSION

The results of this public opinion poll disclose the following findings:

- 01

About **49%** of citizens think that Kosovo-Serbia dialogue should not continue without the direct involvement of the US in this process. There are 45% of respondents from the Serb community who share the view that dialogue should continue without US involvement in this process, as opposed to only 29% of citizens from the Albanian community and 24% from other communities who think the same thing.
- 02

Over half of the **51%** of the respondents do not expect the process of dialogue with Serbia to be concluded in 2018. All citizens share similar attitude regardless of their ethnicity.
- 03

About half of the respondents (**48%**) responded that they did not expect recognition from Serbia at the end of the dialogue process. Only 1% of Serbian community citizens expect that Serbia will recognize the state of Kosovo at the end of this process, compared to 34% of Albanian citizens and 23% of citizens of other communities.

- 04

A very high percentage of citizens, respectively **67%** of them, think that new agreements with Serbia should be discussed in the Assembly before signing them in Brussels. While 71% of the Albanian community and 56% of other communities share this opinion, only 20% of the Serb community considers that the Assembly should play this role.
- 05

There are **50%** of citizens who think that the Brussels dialogue has failed to improve Kosovo-Serbia relations. This attitude is shared by the majority of citizens from the Albanian community and other communities, and Serb community, respectively 47% of them do not know what consequences the dialogue has had in relations between the two states.



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