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Kosovar youth perceptions of relations with Serbia, transitional justice, reconciliation and dealing with the past.



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KEY FINDINGS:

- ◆ Young people in Kosovo do not think that justice has been delivered for the war crimes committed in Kosovo in general, and especially against the Albanians;
- ◆ Overwhelming majority of the young people in Kosovo believe that the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), UNMIK and EULEX have failed to bring before justice war criminals;
- ◆ On relations with Serbia, only 34% of the young people believe that peace with Serbia is important. However, majority of them believe that “we should support the integration of Kosovo Serbs in political, social and economic life”;
- ◆ Majority of young people in Kosovo (67%) believe that justice for the victims of the Kosovo war is more important than peace with Serbia. This shows that for many young people a potential comprehensive legally binding agreement between Kosovo and Serbia that does not address war crimes would not be accepted;
- ◆ Over 90% of the young people believe that the issue of missing persons should be part of the normalization agreement between Kosovo and Serbia. Majority of them (46%) also believe that Kosovo and Serbia should work together to resolve the issue of missing persons;
- ◆ Majority of the young people in Kosovo believe that apology from Serbia for war crimes committed in Kosovo should be a condition for normalization of relations. However, also majority of them (67%) would not believe in an apology issued by Serbian government. Furthermore only 5% of the young agree that the government of Kosovo should apologize for the Serb civilian victims of the Kosovo war;

- ◆ On dealing with the past, majority of young people believe that we need a process of dealing with the past to establish the truth about what happened during the war. Additionally, overwhelming majority (93%) believe that “documentation of the truth about the Kosovo war can be established by an independent commission of experts.” However, only 23% of young people believe in establishing a process of reconciliation between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo;
- ◆ Also young people would trust most (35%) local experts to document the truth about the Kosovo war. Worth noting that only 4% of them would trust the European Union, compared to Government (1%), President (2%) and Kosovo Assembly (4%).

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ◆ The continued opposition of the independence of Kosovo by Serbia has enraged many people in Kosovo, including the youth. They see this as the restoration of a Serbian narrative that persisted in the '90s and therefore by extension a continuation of injustice against Albanian population in Kosovo. It is recommended to the Kosovo institutions to highlight the absolute relevance of the acceptance of the independence of Kosovo by Serbia for reconciliation;
- ◆ Young people in Kosovo are not included in the conversation about normalization of relations with Serbia and the need for reconciliation. Lack of an open conversation about the past and the future relations with Serbia is detrimental to peace in Kosovo. In this sense, it is recommended that the public institutions in Kosovo implement a campaign of engaging young people through debates and other activities on the issue of dealing with the past and future relations with Serbia;
- ◆ The issue of missing persons continues to remain a fundamental priority for Kosovo, and young people want this issue to be part of the potential normalization agreement between Kosovo and Serbia;
- ◆ Young people in Kosovo are skeptical about the potential of reconciliation between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo. This is the key concerning result from this report. Most reconciliation efforts seem to focus on youth from Serbia and Kosovo, often ignoring the domestic dimension. Kosovo government, and especially the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports, Ministry for Returns and Communities, and youth NGOs should implement awareness raising activities to ensure that Serbian and Albanian young people in Kosovo are involved in reconciliation initiatives. Most efforts of reconciliation so far have focused;
- ◆ While most young people support truth and reconciliation commission in Kosovo they are unaware of what has been done so far, and how it works.

- ◆ The Office of the President of the Republic of Kosovo should promote more actively its efforts of establishing a truth and reconciliation process and involve young people in that conversation;
- ◆ There is a grave need of the young people to be informed, as well as involved in an open discussion about the truth for the war and how to deal with the consequences of our past. The Kosovo Government should recognize this and take the necessary steps to develop a strategy for engaging young people in promoting reconciliation efforts

INTRODUCTION

During Kosovo's struggle for freedom and independence, major human rights violations, war crimes, crimes against humanity, including sexual violence, were committed by the Yugoslav as well as the Serbian military and police. Civil society in Kosovo has done an important job of documenting these violations. The Humanitarian Law Center (HLC) and the Kosovo Humanitarian Law Center state that: "during and in the context of the armed conflict in Kosovo, a total of 13,535 people were killed or disappeared. Albanians make up 10,812, Serbs 2,197, while Roma, Bosniaks, Montenegrins and other non-Albanians make up 526 victims." Despite the hard facts on what actually happened during the Kosovo war, Serbian government has not only failed to apologize for the killings of the civilians, but it has also engaged in an active campaign of revisionism, in an effort to undermine the quest for justice by the families of the victims of the Kosovo war.

Retributive justice mechanisms have been the main response to dealing with the war crimes in Kosovo, including the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) established by the United Nations, local courts in Kosovo and Serbia also prosecuted and convicted war crimes, and the recently established Specialist Chambers by the Kosovo Assembly, which is based in the Hague/Netherlands. However, the prevailing perception among the Kosovar-Albanian population is that retributive justice has failed. The data suggests that a total of 36 Kosovar-Albanians were convicted by local and international justice for war crimes committed in Kosovo, compared to 17 Serbs. Kosovo has an international obligation to implement a process of restorative justice as well. The 2007, commonly referred to as the Ahtisaari Plan requires Kosovo to implement "a comprehensive and gender-sensitive approach to addressing its past, which will include a wide range of transitional justice initiatives." In 2012 the Government of Kosovo established an Inter-Ministerial Working Group on Dealing with the Past and Reconciliation, however this initiative largely failed and it did not lead to any meaningful outcome in the context of dealing with the past or starting a restorative justice process. A more recent initiative, involves the proposal by the Office of the President of Kosovo to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was announced in 2017

by former President of the Republic Hashim Thaçi. The preparatory team for establishing the Commission was inclusive, and involved members of civil society, including from non-majority communities. One of the most important outcomes of this process has been the development of a Law on establishing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but it remains unclear if such a legislation will be sent to the Kosovo Assembly for approval.

Overall, the process of dealing with the past in Kosovo, has lacked sufficient transparency and public engagement, especially with the youth. In order to address this shortcoming, the Debate Center, with the support of the Office of the President of the Republic of Kosovo, organized a public opinion survey, mainly with young people in order to have a deeper understanding of their positions vis-à-vis the past and the important process of how to deal with it. The survey was implemented during the month of October and November and involved 253 people participated in this survey from 25 different municipalities of Kosovo. Due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the survey was conducted online, utilizing the google platform.

In terms of the demographics of the survey: 58 percent of the participants were female and 42 percent male, and 85 percent were between the ages 18 and 24 years old. 57 percent of the participants came from one of the seven main regions of Kosovo (Prishtina, Peja, Prizren, Gjilan, Gjakova, Ferizaj, and Mitrovica), while the remaining 43 percent came from other municipalities, such as Podujeva, Suhareka, Viti, Deçan, etc. 56 percent of the participants are university students, 19 percent are unemployed, 14 percent work in the private sector, while the remaining 11 percent are working in civil society, self-employed, employed in the public sector, etc. The participants are predominantly Kosovo-Albanians.

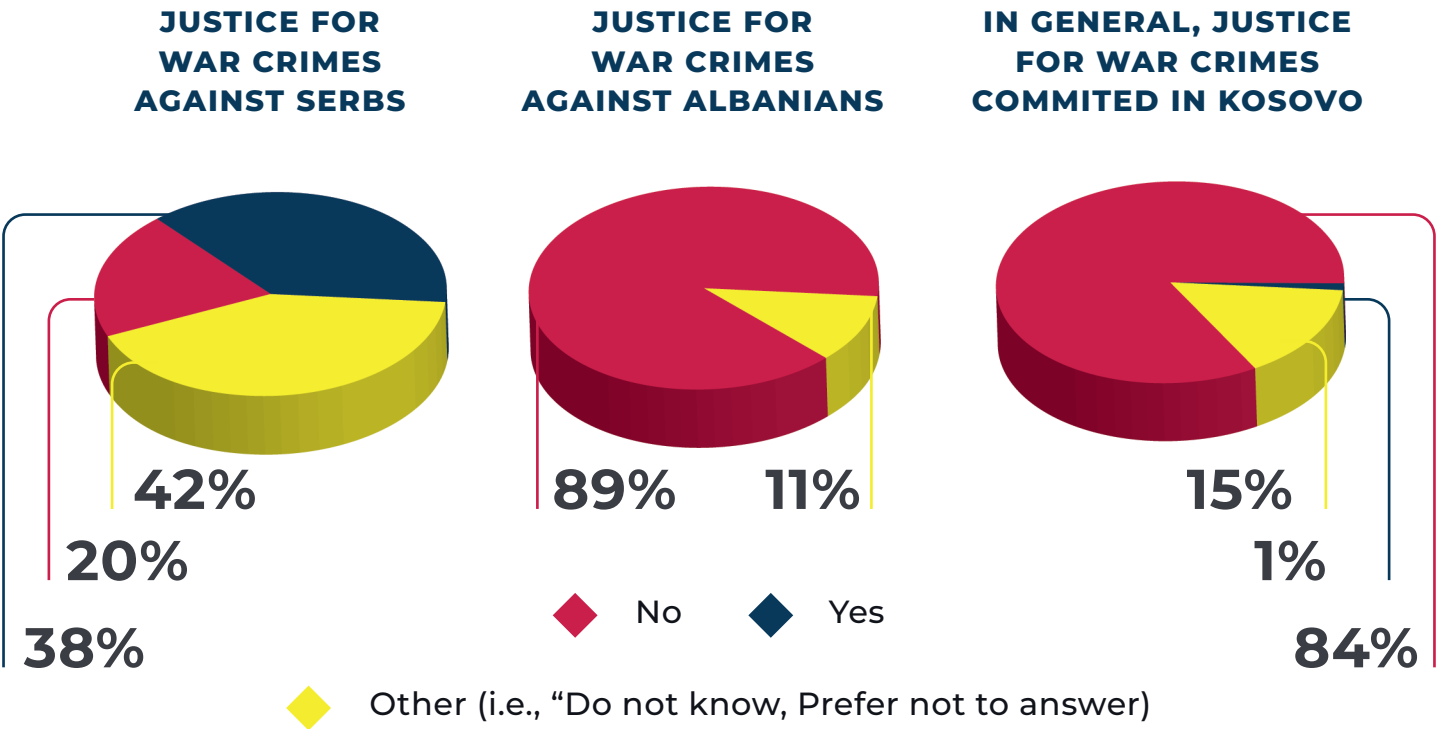
This report has three main sections. The next section discusses the results of the survey with respect to the perceptions of the youth about the past and the transitional justice. The next section examines the results concerning relations with Serbia, while the third section analysis the perceptions of the youth about dealing with the past and reconciliation between Kosovo and Serbia.

THE PAST AND THE TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

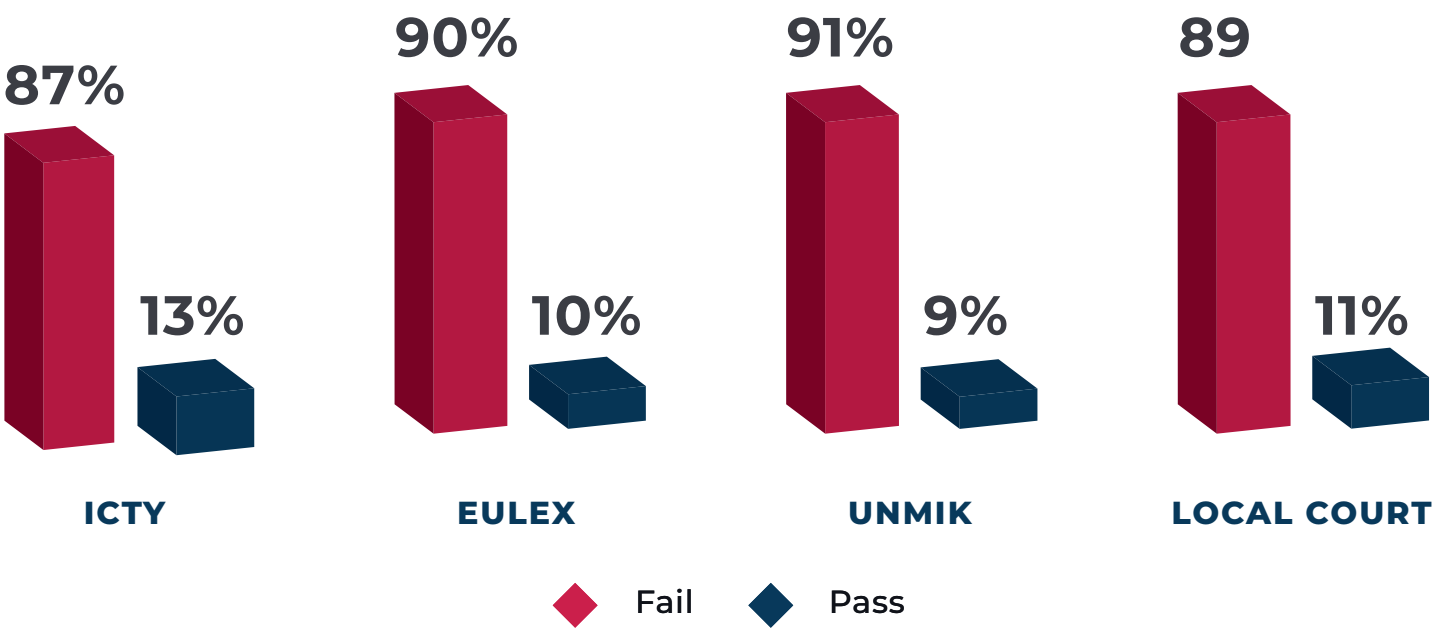
Overwhelming majority of the youth in Kosovo (84%) seem to believe that justice has failed with respect to war crimes committed in Kosovo. A slightly higher percentage of them (89%) believe that there was no justice for war crimes committed against Albanians in Kosovo. The rather strong cohesion in perceptions among the youth concerning delivery of justice for the war crimes, is disrupted when they are asked if they think there was justice for war crimes committed against Serbs in Kosovo? The results on this question are contrary to the conventional wisdom, which would imply that the youth in Kosovo would overwhelmingly agree that there was justice for the war crimes committed against Serbs. However, only 38% percent of the participants of the survey answered that question with a 'yes' of 'sufficiently' and 20 percent with a 'no' or not-sufficiently. This suggests that the youth in Kosovo is more open minded and an important portion of them also see the Serbs as lacking justice for the crimes that happened during the Kosovo war. This is an indicator of a youth in Kosovo that does not accept one side of the story as an established fact.

The overwhelming majority of the youth in Kosovo, 88 percent of them, in general gives the work of the international community in bringing to justice the war criminals a 'fail'. Concerning the work that specific justice institutions did to bring before justice the war criminals, 87 percent give the ICTY a fail, which is slightly better when compared to EULEX, with 90 percent of the participants view its work as a fail and UNMIK 91 percent respectively. The work of the local courts is not seen as better, with 89 percent of the youth giving their work to bring before justice war criminals a fail.

**DO YOU THINK JUSTICE WAS DELIVERED FOR THE WAR
CRIMES COMMITTED IN KOSOVO?"**



**HOW DO YOU SEE THE WORK OF THE
RESPECTIVE INSTITUTIONS IN BRINGING
BEFORE JUSTICE WAR CRIMINALS?**



RELATIONS WITH SERBIA

Concerning relations with Serbia majority of the participants of the survey, 61 percent believe that an apology for the war crimes from Serbia should be a precondition for normalization of relations. Interestingly enough, the percentage of those who do not see the apology as a precondition for normalization, is relatively high, at 30 percent. In terms of issues with Serbia, absolute majority, 92 percent believe that the issue of missing persons should be part of the final agreement between Kosovo and Serbia. In terms of resolving the issue of the missing persons, majority of the respondents, 46 percent, believe it is a joint responsibility of Kosovo and Serbia. This result is very important to note as it shows that the youth in Kosovo is not hostile to cooperation between the two countries on issues of common interest. But more importantly, this result is an indicator of the recognition among the youth that both countries have missing persons from the war and their cooperation is essential to resolve their fate.

However this is not an indication of the perception among youth in general about Serbia. 67 percent of those surveyed said that they would not believe in an apology issued by the Serbian government for the war crimes committed in Kosovo. This means, they would not see such an apology as sincere, or that it was truly meant by the Serbian government. 17 percent said it would depend on the leader who issued the apology, which means that if it were to come from leaders that were part of the former regime of Milosevic in the 1990s, such as the current President of Serbia Vucic, it would not make a difference to them. However, when they are asked if Kosovo government should apologize for the Serbian civilian victims of the Kosovo war, only 5 percent answered with a yes, while 23 percent said yes but only after Serbia apologies first.

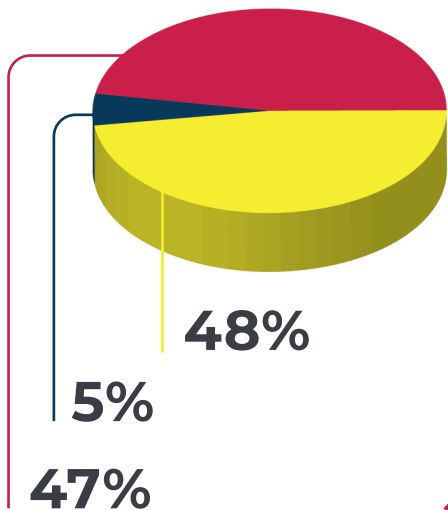
This is rather pessimistic or skeptical take on the potential apology from Serbia, is also informed by occasional news coming from Serbia, whereby Albanians are referred in derogatory and racist slurs by members of the Serbian government, such as the case with Minister of Defense of Serbia Aleksandar Vulin. Or more

importantly, news such as the one from November of 2020, when human remains that are believed to be the bodies of Albanians killed during the war in Kosovo were found inside Serbia. This would also explain, why 86 percent of the participants of the survey believe that there are still massive graves of Albanians in Serbia.

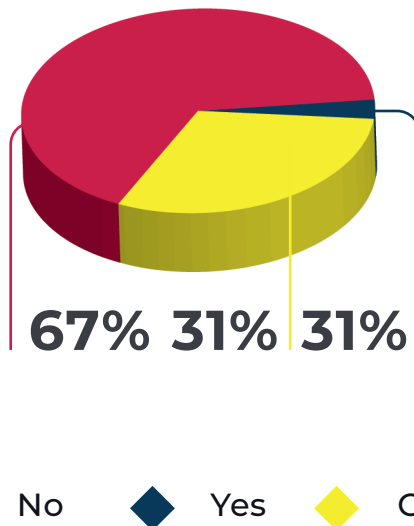
¹ Nevena Bogdanovic and Alan Crosby. (2019, May 3). Serbian Defense Minister Sparks Controversy By Using Pejorative For Albanians. Radio Free Europe. Available at:
<https://www.rferl.org/a/serbian-defense-minister-sparks-controversy-by-using-pejorative-for-albanians/29919664.html>

² Reuters. (2020, December 4). Serbia unearths mass grave from Kosovo war. Available at:
<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-warcrimes-serbia-kosovo/serbia-unearths-mass-grave-from-kosovo-war-idUKKBN28E20E>

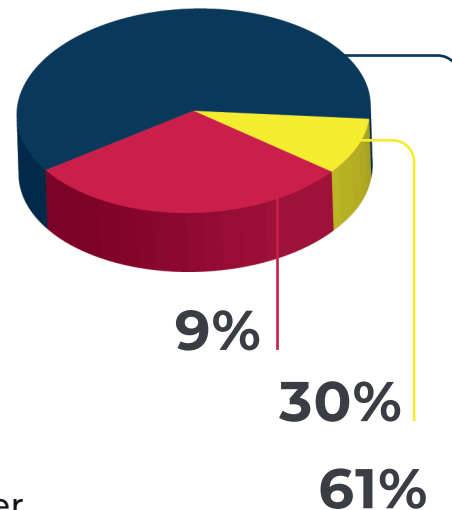
SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT OF KOSOVO APOLOGIZE FOR THE SERB CIVILIAN VICTIMS OF THE KOSOVO WAR



WOULD YOU BELIEVE IN AN APOLOGY FOR WAR CRIMES IF ISSUED BY SERBIAN GOVERNMENT

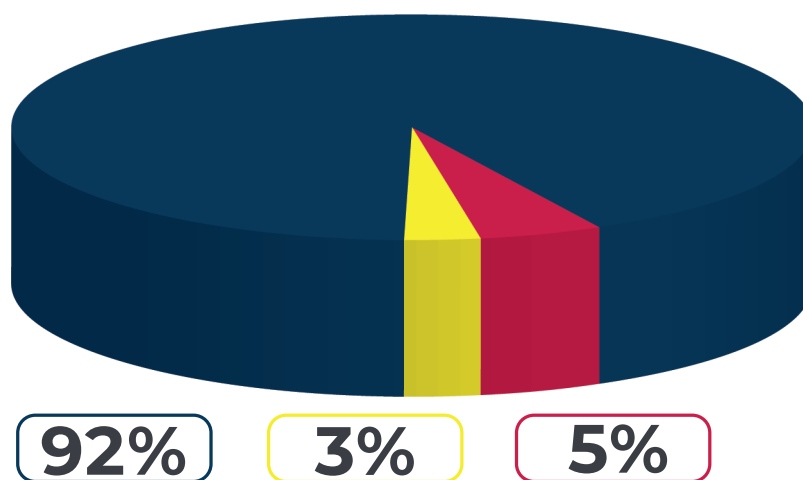


SERBIA'S APOLOGY FOR WAR CRIMES IN KOSOVO SHOULD BE A CONDITION FOR THE NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS



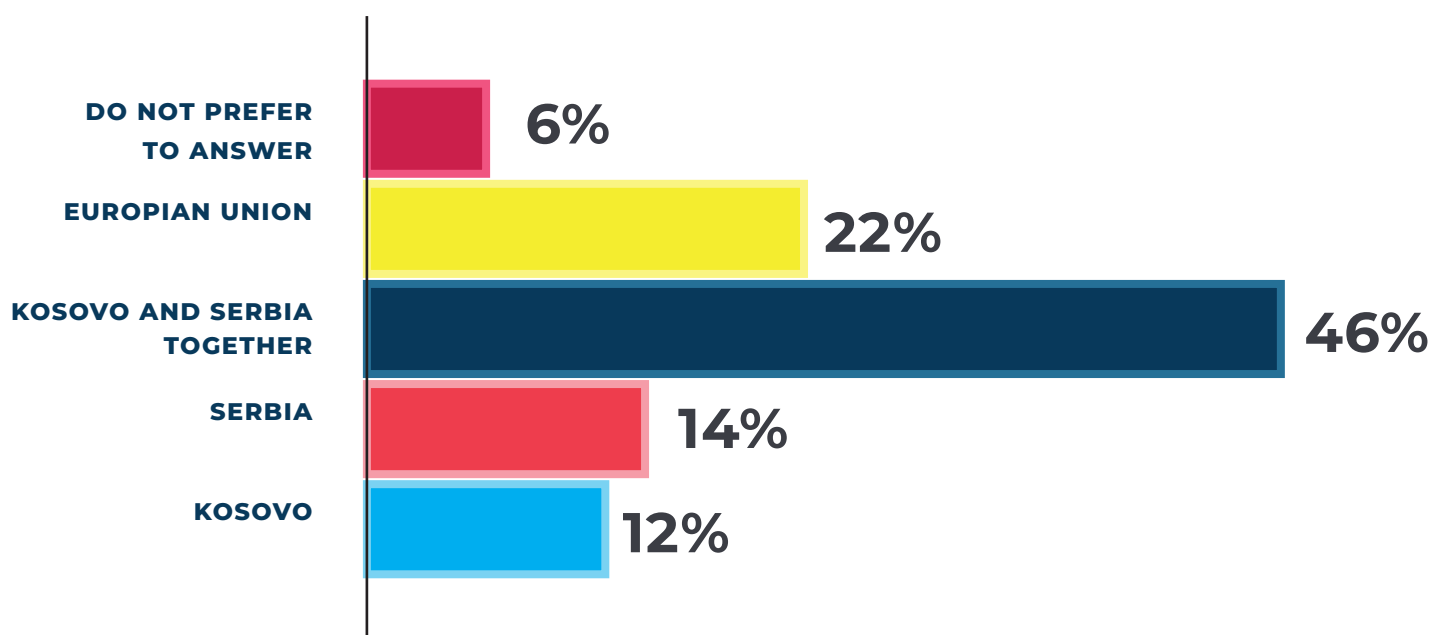
◆ No ◆ Yes ◆ Other

DO YOU BELIEVE THAT THE ISSUE OF MISSING PERSONS SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE AGREEMENT BETWEEN KOSOVO AND SERBIA?

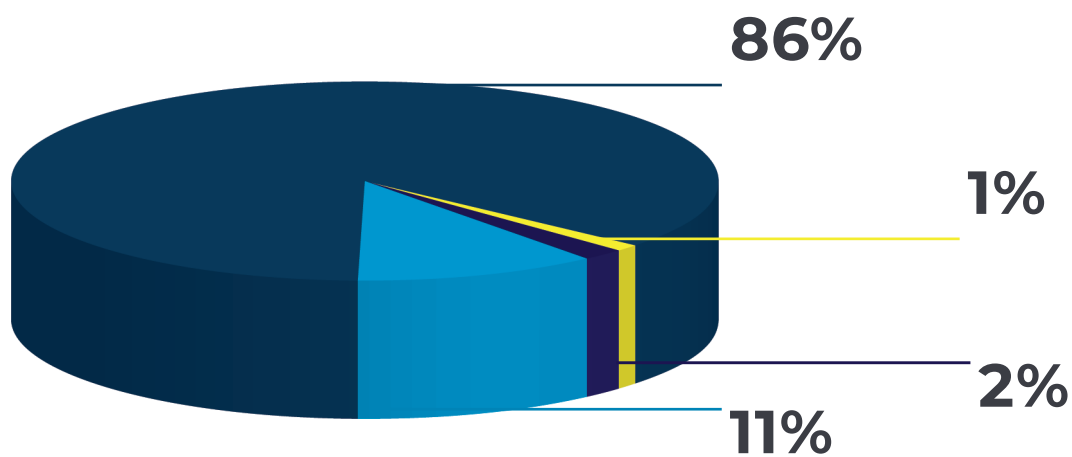


◆ Yes ◆ Do not prefer to answer ◆ No

WHO SHOULD SOLVE THE ISSUE OF MISSING PERSONS?



DO YOU THINK THERE ARE STILL MASS GRAVES OF ALBANIANS IN SERBIA?



◆ Yes ◆ Perhaps ◆ Do not know ◆ No ◆ Do not prefer to answer

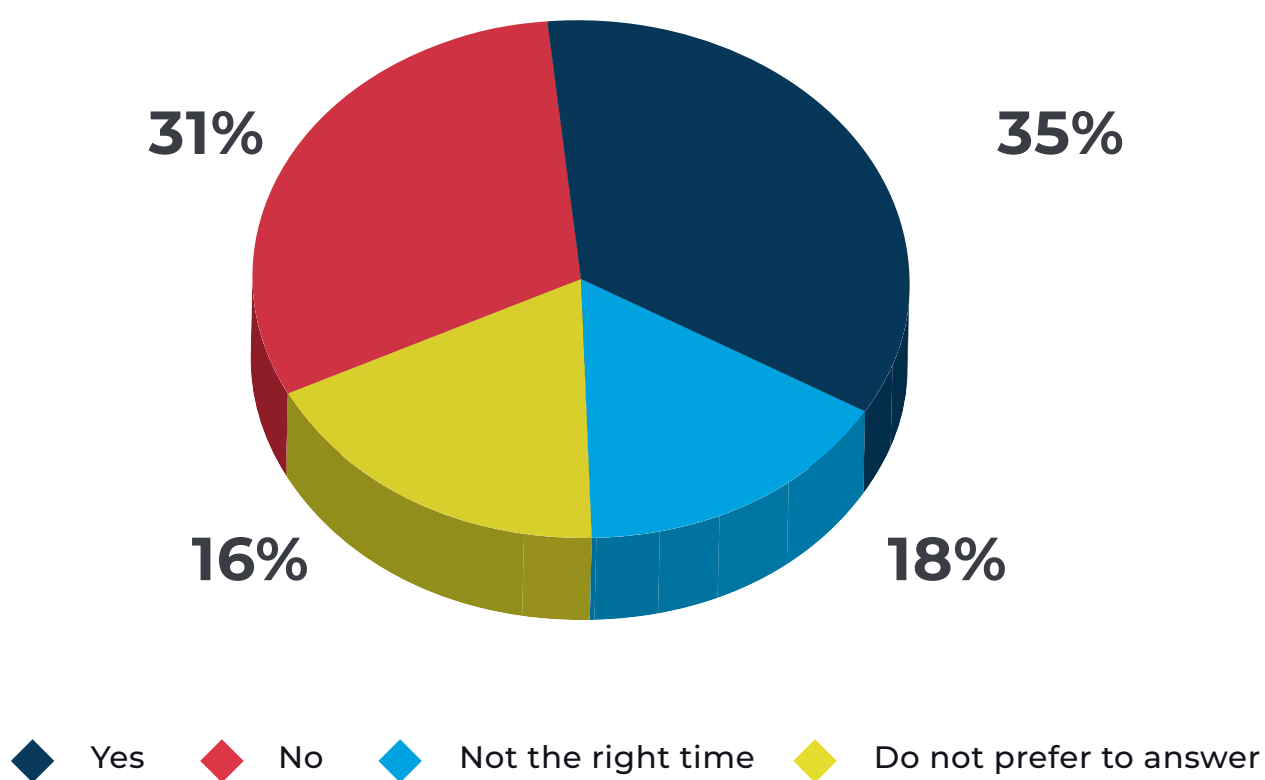
DEALING WITH THE PAST AND PEACE WITH SERBIA

Most of the participants of the survey, 35 percent agree that integration of the Kosovar Serbs in political, social and economic life should be supported, compared to those that were against (31 percent). This is an important result, especially with respect to the debates concerning the establishment in Kosovo of an Association of the Serb Municipalities, which was negotiated between Kosovo and Serbia in the EU facilitated dialogue. However, the underlining assumption of Kosovo's priorities is that peace with Serbia is of vital significance. However, the actual perceptions of the citizens of the relevance of peace with Serbia, suggest otherwise. When asked if peace with Serbia is important, 34 percent responded with a yes compared to 52 percent that said no. This seems to imply that for young people in Kosovo, relations with Serbia are not a number one concern. Additionally, it suggests that the actual impact of the continued dispute between Kosovo and Serbia does not seem to trickle down into everyday life of the young people in Kosovo. Similarly, majority of the participants of the survey, 67 percent prioritized justice for the victims of the Kosovo war, compared to 1 percent that opted for reconciliation between Kosovo and Serbia. This seems to suggest that without the fulfillment of justice for the victims of the Kosovo war, any achievement in the framework of the dialogue for normalization of relations, including recognition from Serbia, would not be seen as a meaningful step towards reconciliation.

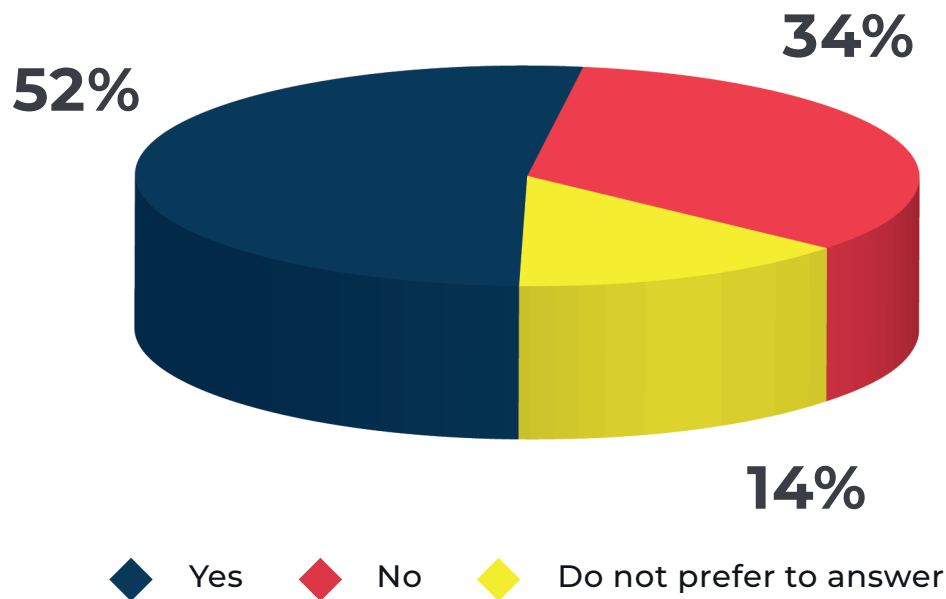
The readiness of the Kosovo society to start a process of restorative justice is an important factor to consider. Ripe conditions are essential for the process of dealing with the past to start. An important portion of the participants of this survey, 33 percent of them, seem to believe that it is not yet the time to start a process of reconciliation between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo. 23 percent believe the process should start, while 35 percent are against. However, majority of them, 54 percent, believe that Kosovo needs a process of dealing with the past in order to establish the truth about what happened during the war. This data shows that the youth in Kosovo make an important distinction between reconciliation and setting the truth and facts about the war. It seems that for young people in Kosovo reconciliation and establishing the truth should not be a parallel process, but separate, with the former proceeding the latter.

Furthermore, absolute majority of the young people, 93 percent, prefer that the truth is established by an independent commission comprised of experts. It suggests that for young people in Kosovo, a truth about the Kosovo war established by independent experts would be acceptable. When asked who you would trust in establishing a truth about the Kosovo war, most of the participants 35 percent chose the option ‘Local independent experts’ followed by civil society with 26 percent. Only 4 percent of the participants would trust the EU to do this, while an even lower confidence was displayed on the potential undertaking with respect to the government (1 percent), Kosovo Assembly (3 percent) and the Office of the President (2 percent). This finding suggests an increasing confidence among the Kosovar youth on local potential and capacities. This is a significant finding that implies an emerging local agency in Kosovo that is ready for greater ownership and responsibility. Furthermore, this data shows that the assumptions that ‘internationals’ or even the EU in Kosovo are seen as the most capable and independent actors is misleading.

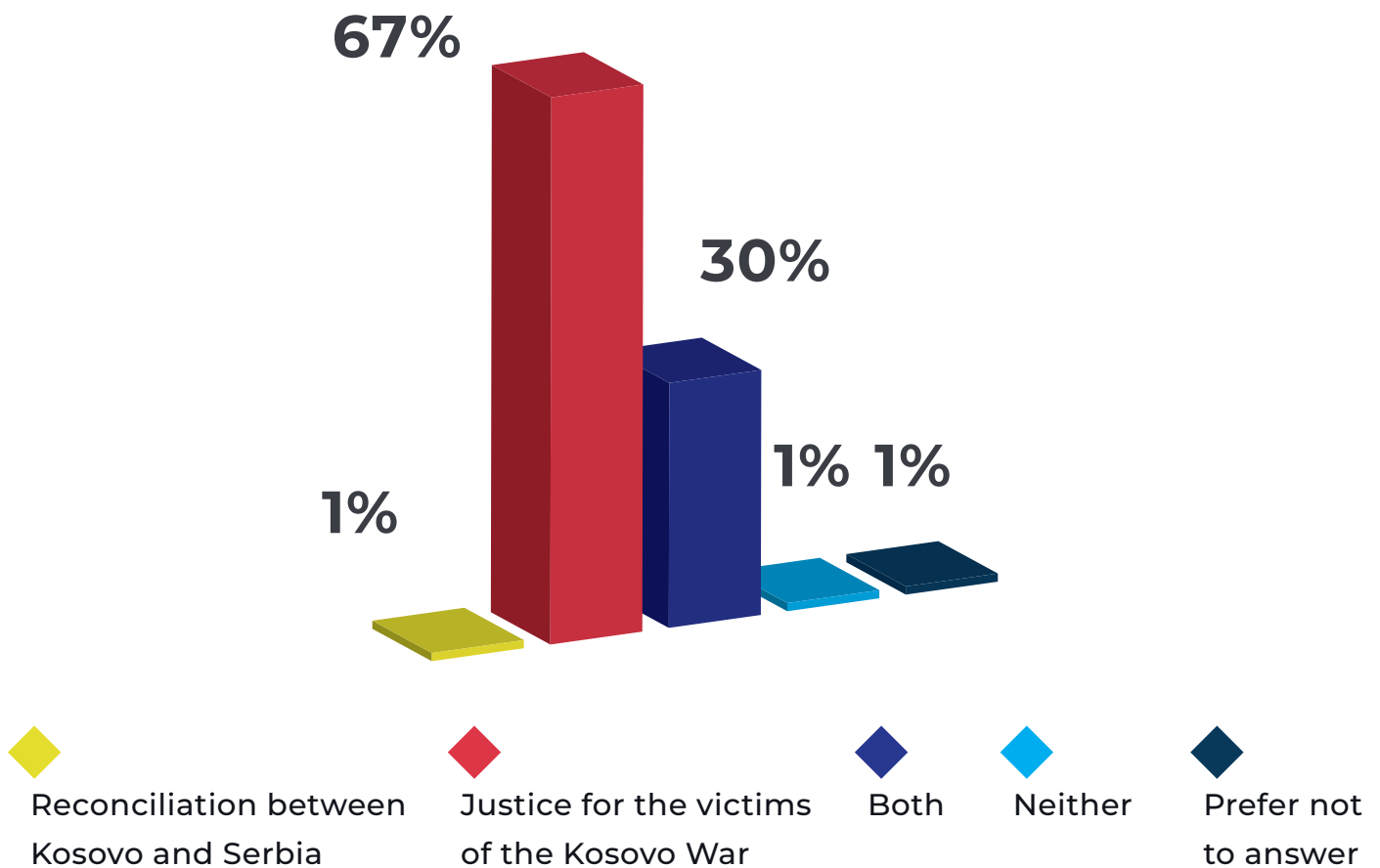
SHOULD WE SUPPORT THE INTEGRATION OF KOSOVO SERB CITIZENS IN POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC LIFE?



IS PEACE WITH SERBIA IMPORTANT?

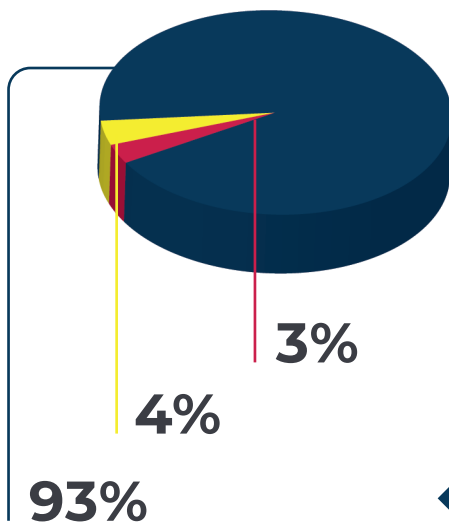


WHICH DO YOU THINK IS MOST IMPORTANT?

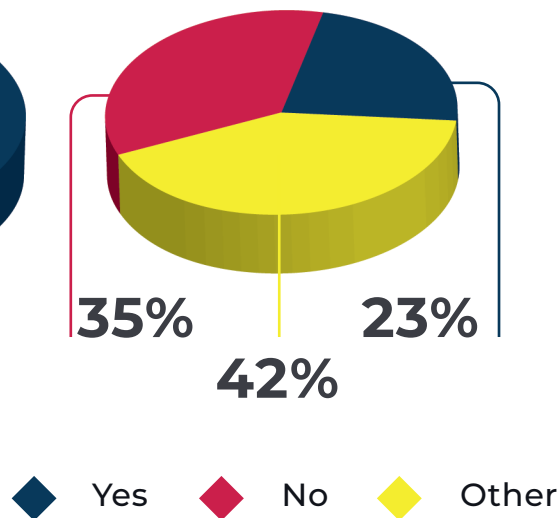


DEALING WITH THE PAST

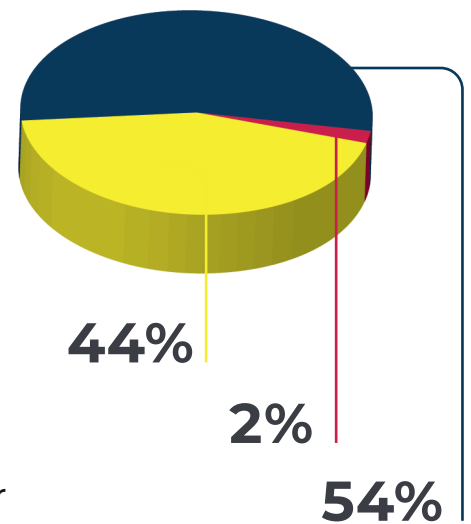
DO YOU THINK THAT THE DOCUMENTATION OF THE TRUTH ABOUT THE KOSOVO WAR CAN BE ESTABLISHED BY AN INDIPPENDENT COMMISSION OF EXPERTS?



DO WE NEED TO ESTABLISH A PROCESS OF RECONCILIATION BETWEEN ALBANIANS AND SERBS IN KOSOVO?

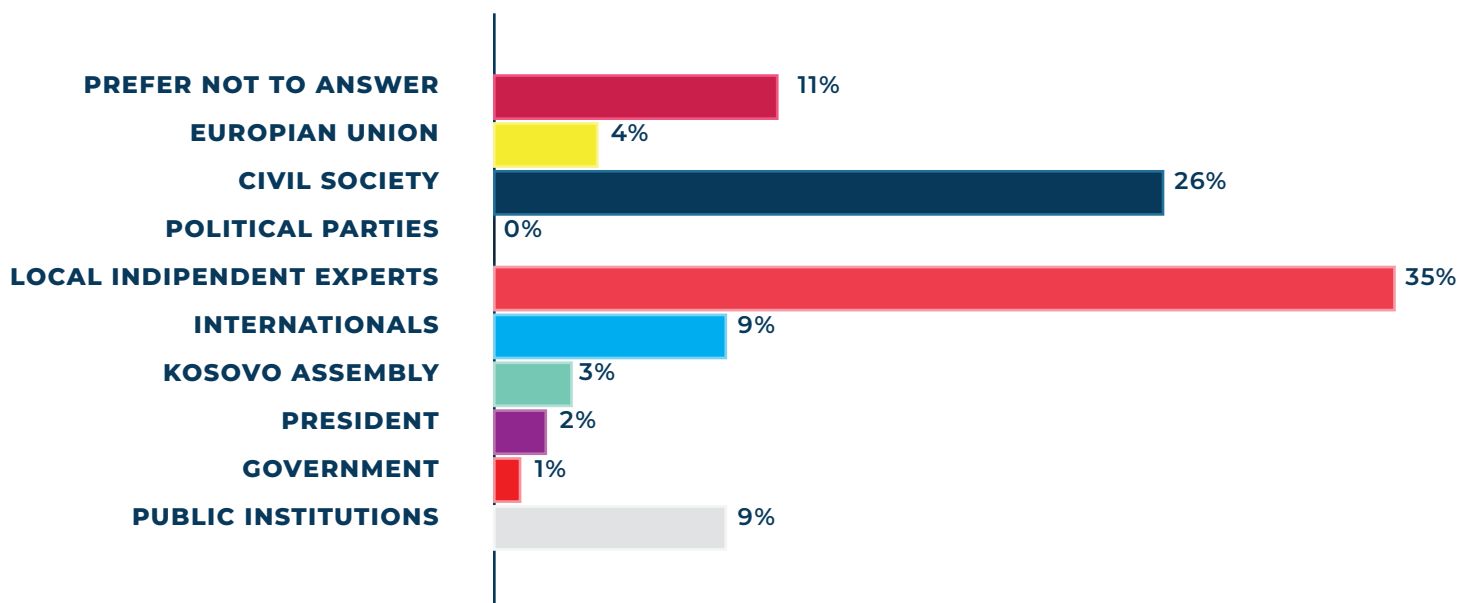


DO WE NEED A PROCESS OF DEALING WITH THE PAST TO ESTABLISH THE TRUTH ABOUT WHAT HAPPENDED DURING THE WAR?



◆ Yes ◆ No ◆ Other

WHO WOULD YOU TRUST MOST TO DOCUMENT THE TRUTH ABOUT THE KOSOVO WAR?



CONCLUDING NOTES:

Over two decades since the Kosovo war ended, and another genocide in the Balkans was prevented by the intervention of NATO and international community, the scars of the war remain fresh in the Kosovan society as a result of a growing perception among the public of the failure of the mechanisms of the transitional justice to bring before the justice the war criminals and a lack of a process of healing and dealing with its past. Revisionist efforts seeking to create a symmetry of responsibility in what was an asymmetric civil war in Kosovo, further add difficulties to reconciliation and peace between Kosovo and Serbia as well as perpetuate hostilities. The Independent International Commission on Kosovo (IICK), which was established in 1999, in the aftermath of the Kosovo War, by the government of Sweden, in their final report state that: “The revocation of Kosovo’s autonomy in 1989 was followed by a Belgrade policy aimed at changing the ethnic composition of Kosovo and creating an apartheid-like society.” Many Kosovars, and especially young people seem to feel that this has been forgotten.

This survey aims to encourage a constructive conversation in the Kosovan society about the war, dealing with the past and relations with Serbia, and include in this conversation young people of Kosovo, some of whom that participated in this survey do not even remember the war. The results are concerning and they seem to suggest that young people lack awareness and are not educated about reconciliation, which can be detrimental to efforts of promoting peaceful relations among different ethnic groups in Kosovo.

This report suggests three important topics for the young people in Kosovo. Truth-seeking: most young people in Kosovo do not believe that international (i.e., ICTY) and local institutions have brought before justice the war criminals. Young people in Kosovo seek the truth about the past, and they want the process of establishing that truth to be done by local experts. Prosecutions and trials for war crimes committed in Kosovo have failed to establish a truth about the Kosovo war, and so far, have only resulted with further marginalization of the victims. Missing persons: most young people in Kosovo want their country to work together with Serbia to resolve the issue of missing persons, and they want the issue of missing persons to be part of the normalization agreement with

Serbia. Overwhelming majority of the young people in Kosovo believe that there are still mass graves of Kosovar-Albanians in Serbia. The persistence of this strong perception among young people, is an indicator of also how they view Serbia as a country and as a society. Reconciliation: young people in Kosovo are rather skeptical of a process of reconciliation between Kosovar Albanians and Serbs. This is linked with their highly negative perceptions of Serbia and its failures to assume responsibility about the past.

The result of this report show that it is essential to integrate the young people in Kosovo in the conversation about the future of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, as well as work with them to raise awareness about the significance of a reconciliation process of peace in Kosovo.