

Dec 20 2011

Anti-EU trend turning around in Croatia – while neighbours grow increasingly sceptical of the European Union

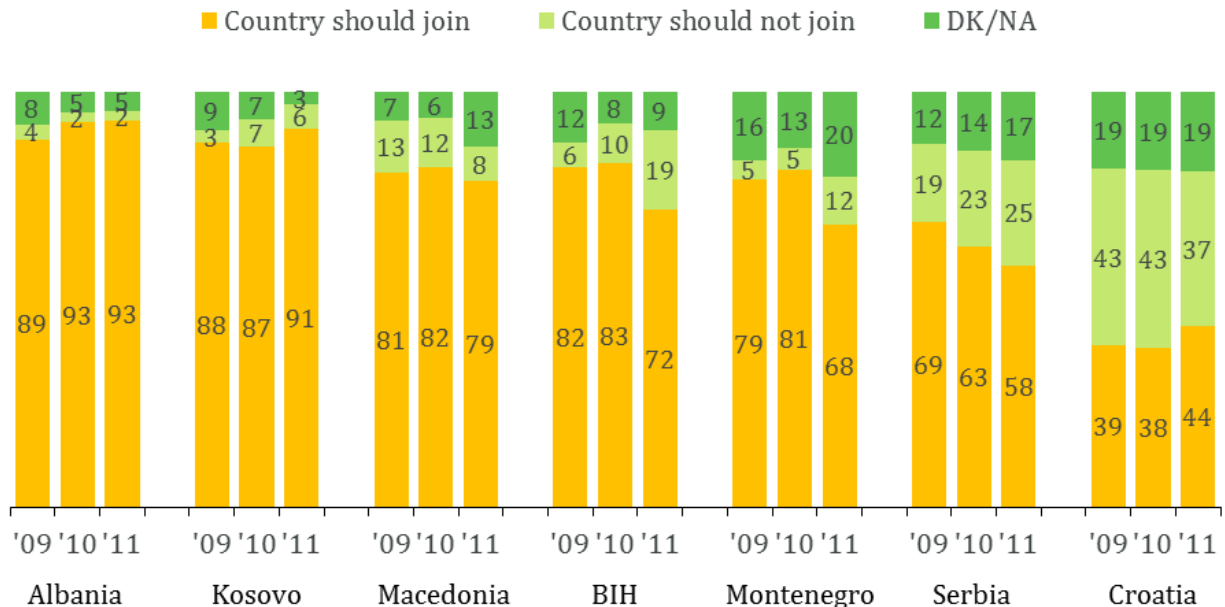
LSE Ideas

By Jan Sonnenschein

While the European Union is being rocked by the crisis of the euro, it seems to be losing its status of the ‘promised land’ in some Western Balkan countries. From mid-2010 to mid-2011, support for joining the EU eroded significantly in Montenegro, Bosnia, and Serbia. While in 2010 73% of Montenegrins and 69% of Bosnians thought their country’s membership of the European Union would be a good thing, a year later these shares had dropped by fifteen and thirteen percentage points, respectively (to 58% and 56%). Meanwhile in Serbia, the share of those believing that joining the EU would be a good thing for the country dropped from 44% in 2010 to 36% in 2011 (down 8 percentage points) – thereby reaching the lowest support for EU membership ever measured in Serbia since the Gallup Balkan Monitor started surveying the region in 2006; back in 2006 a clear majority of Serbs (61%) believed that joining the EU would be positive. In contrast, Croatia and Albania have seen a small increase in the number of respondents believing that their country’s EU membership would be beneficial (from 25% to 30% in the case of the former and from 81% to 87% in the case of the latter).

Yet, in an EU referendum most countries would vote ‘yes’ - Croatia remains divided

If there was a referendum on Sunday on whether [country] should join the European Union, what would you vote?



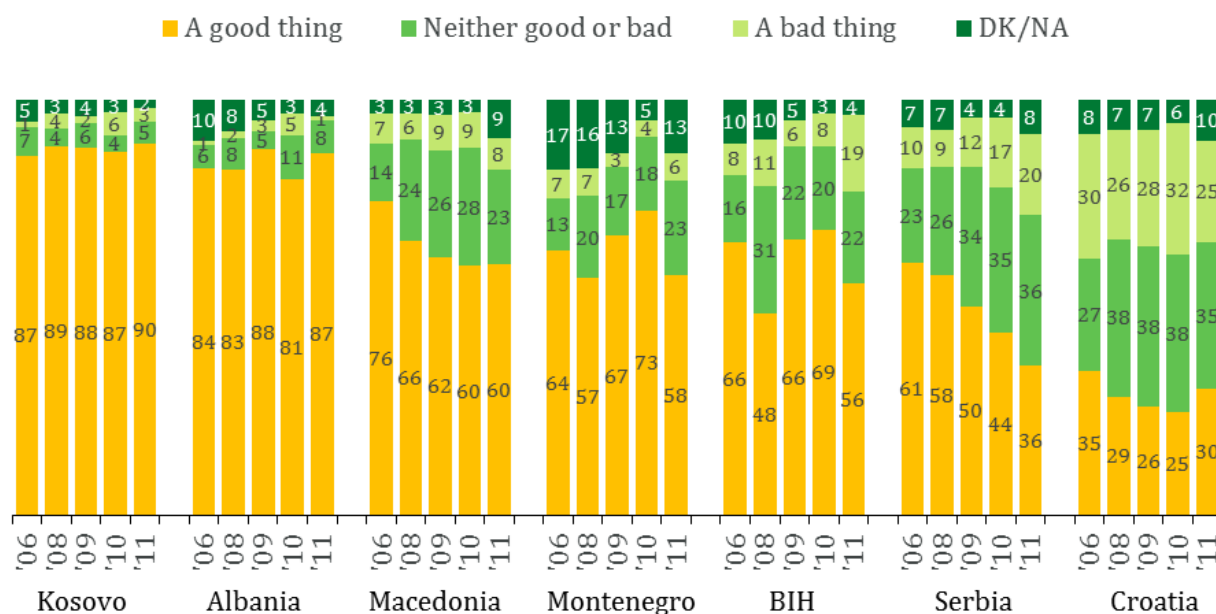
Copyright © 2011 Gallup, Inc. All rights reserved.

GALLUP

The same pattern can be seen when looking at the results of how Balkan residents would vote if there was a referendum on Sunday on their country’s accession to the EU. While the shares of respondents who would vote in favour of joining the EU plummeted, albeit from high levels in Bosnia Herzegovina (from 83% to 72%), Montenegro (from 81% to 68%) and Serbia (from 63% to 58%), an important uptick was registered in Croatia.

In a large part of the Western Balkans, the EU is losing some of its appeal

Generally speaking, do you think that [COUNTRY]' membership of the European Union would be a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good or bad?



Copyright © 2011 Gallup, Inc. All rights reserved.

GALLUP

Chances of success of a referendum in Croatia are growing, yet the “Yes” camp still falls short of an absolute majority

In mid-2010 Croatians were more likely to say that they would vote against their country's accession rather than to vote in favour (43% vs. 38%); the situation has changed significantly since June 2011, when the European Commission recommended that Croatia complete its negotiations with the EU, to pave the way for the country's accession in 2013. One month after the Commission gave its go-ahead for Croatia to become a member of the EU, the Gallup Balkan Monitor surveyed Croatians again on their opinions of joining the Union. The latest figures show that the Commission's decision has had an important impact on Croatians' willingness to become part of the EU; in July 2011 Croatians were more inclined to vote in favour of Croatia's EU accession, if there was a referendum on Sunday, than to reject it (44% vs. 37%). Those respondents who said they would not know how to vote in an EU referendum (19%) were subsequently asked if they leaned towards an approval or rejection of Croatia becoming the EU's 28th Member State. The majority (62%) once more said that they did not know how they would vote: 16% (3% of the total population) said they were leaning towards voting in favour of Croatia joining the EU and 37% said the tendency was to vote against accession. Thus, even adding up those who would vote “Yes” and those who leaned towards voting in favour, falls short of a majority (47% of the total), which would be needed for the referendum to be successful regardless of the number of voters who chose to participate.

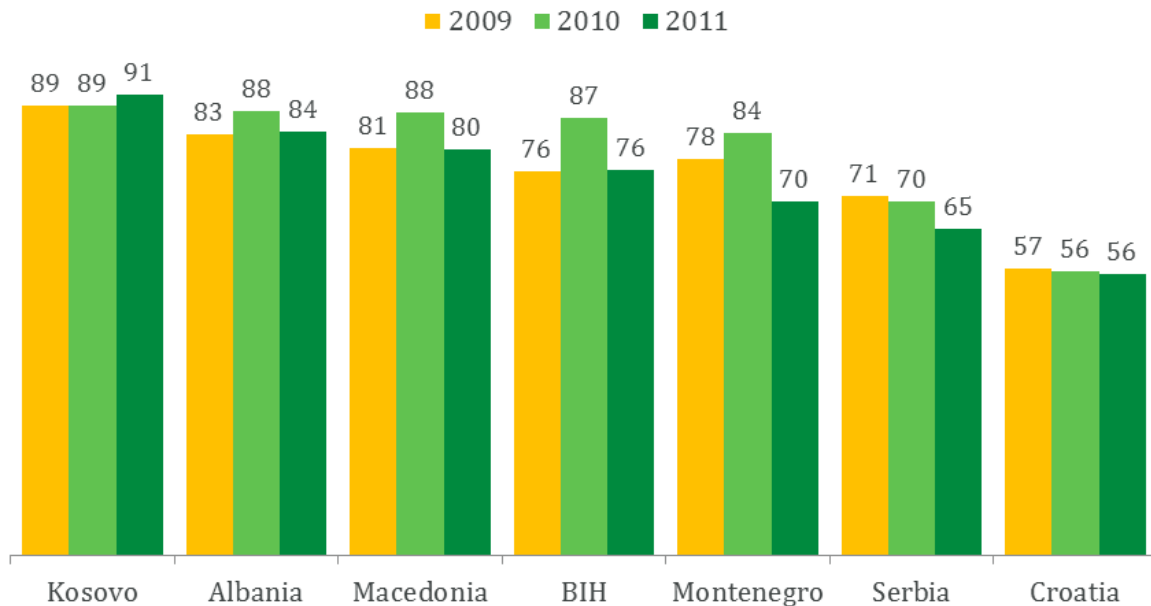
Despite the fact that Gallup finds no majority in Croatia in favour of joining the EU, the survey may fill the “Yes” camp with courage, in that those who would vote in favour of Croatia joining the EU were considerably more likely to say that they would certainly or probably cast a vote in such a referendum (96% vs. 68% of those who would vote against EU membership). This higher likelihood of EU supporters turning out at the ballot box clearly raises the chances of the referendum to succeed: of those saying they would certainly or probably vote, 55% stated that they would vote ‘yes’.

The end of the Promised Land?

Gallup's surveys clearly show that respondents in those Balkan countries where EU support dropped substantially over the past year were losing faith that EU accession would bring more economic development to their country. The biggest drops in hopes for more economic development were registered in Montenegro (down 14 percentage points to 70%) and Bosnia Herzegovina (down 11 percentage points to 76%). In Serbia the decline was less severe (minus 5 percentage points to 65%).

In many countries citizens lose hopes that EU accession will be advantageous for their economies

What do you think the EU accession would bring to [COUNTRY]? More economic development.
Only "Yes" shown



Copyright © 2011 Gallup, Inc. All rights reserved.

GALLUP

The impact of Mladic's arrest on Serbia's EU support

Apart from the declining expectations among Serbs concerning the EU's positive impact on their country's economy, the arrest of war crime suspect Ratko Mladic in May 2011 is another key explanation for the drop in EU support in Serbia. Although Serbs were more likely to believe that Mladic's arrest will be good for Serbia's EU integration rather than the opposite (41% vs. 33%), they do not necessarily approve of it. Fewer than 3 in 10 (29%) respondents said it serves justice that Mladic was arrested; only 23% of Serbs believed that Mladic is guilty of most crimes that he is accused of and about half (49%) thought that Mladic is a good Serb. Since the EU had insisted on the arrest the most prominent war criminals at large as one of the conditions of Serbia's membership, it should not come as a surprise that EU support has fallen considerably among Serbs, given Mladic's popularity among the general population.

Gallup's survey clearly reveals that Mladic's supporters or sympathisers were considerably less likely to say that Serbia's EU membership would be a good thing. For example, those who disagreed with the statement that Mladic's arrest is good for the future of Serbia were twice as likely to say that Serbia's EU membership would be a bad thing, rather than to state the opposite (40% vs. 19%).

The Gallup Balkan Monitor survey continually monitors the views of Western Balkans residents: from their living standards, happiness and attitudes towards the EU, to their employment opportunities, feelings about living abroad and the performance of their governments. The Balkan Monitor is the one-stop-shop for anyone requiring strategic insights into the Western Balkan region.

To find out more about the Balkan Monitor, please visit www.balkan-monitor.eu or contact us at balkanmonitor@gallup-europe.be.

This entry was posted in [EU](#), [Europe](#), [Kosovo](#), [Southern Europe](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).