Survey Results

University Students from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovakia

December, 2016 and April, 2017

mesa10

progress, determination, influence
CEAS
Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies

The surveys were undertaken at seven universities located in five countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovakia).

- In December 2016 (fall semester), 1753 students were polled.
- In April 2017 (spring semester), 1644 students were polled.

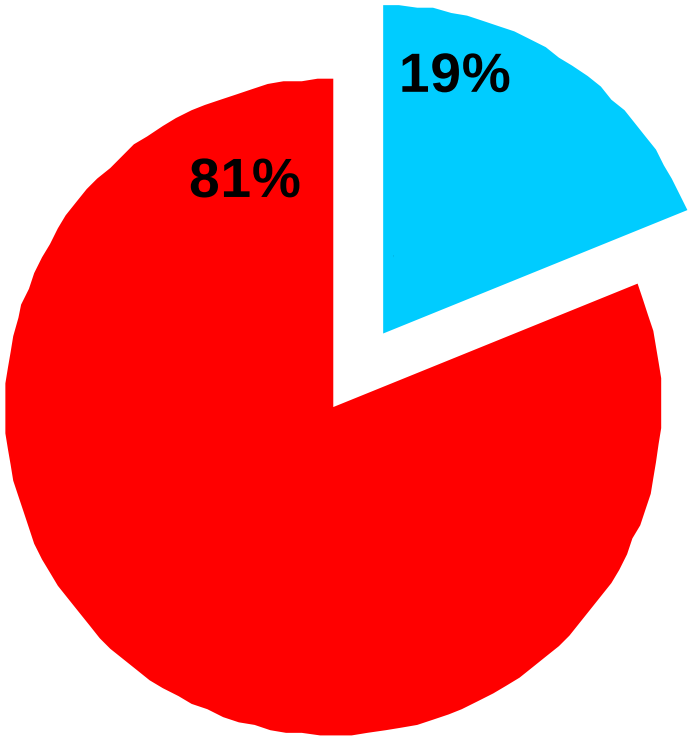
Most of the questions were repeated in both surveys. Slight modifications in April 2017 reflected the recent developments in world politics or addressed new issues.

Both surveys are part of a University Students Debates' project aimed at promoting universal values and principles through independent and critical thinking. The project is implemented jointly by MESA10 (Slovakia) and CEAS (Serbia).

Debates among seven university teams took place on December 8, 2016 and April 26, 2017.

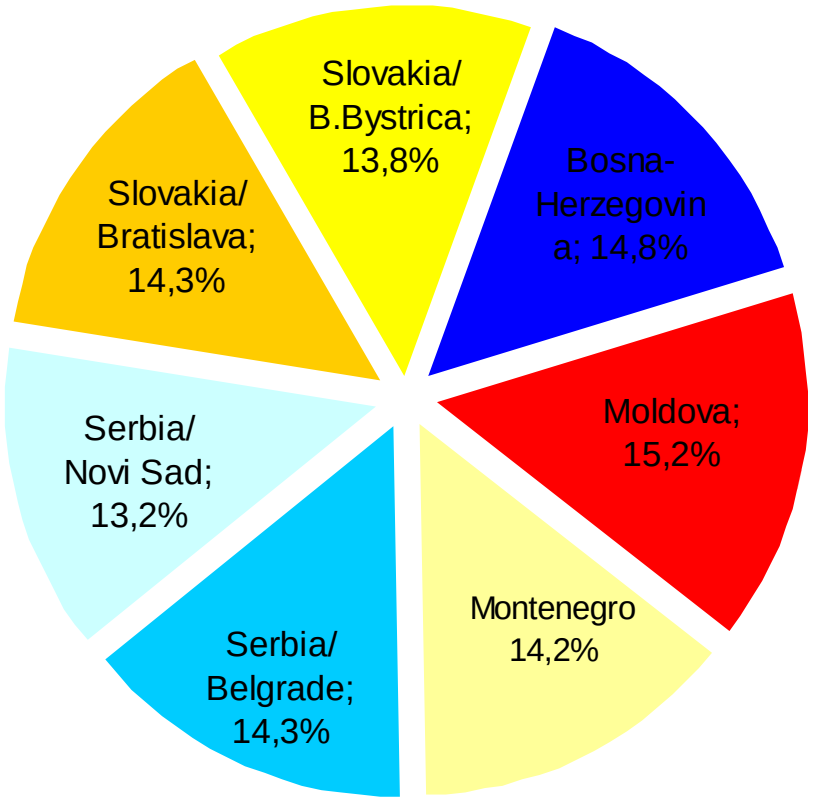
Students´debate – December 2016 (fall semester)

Sample structure



Did you attend/watch the students´ debate on December 7, 2016?

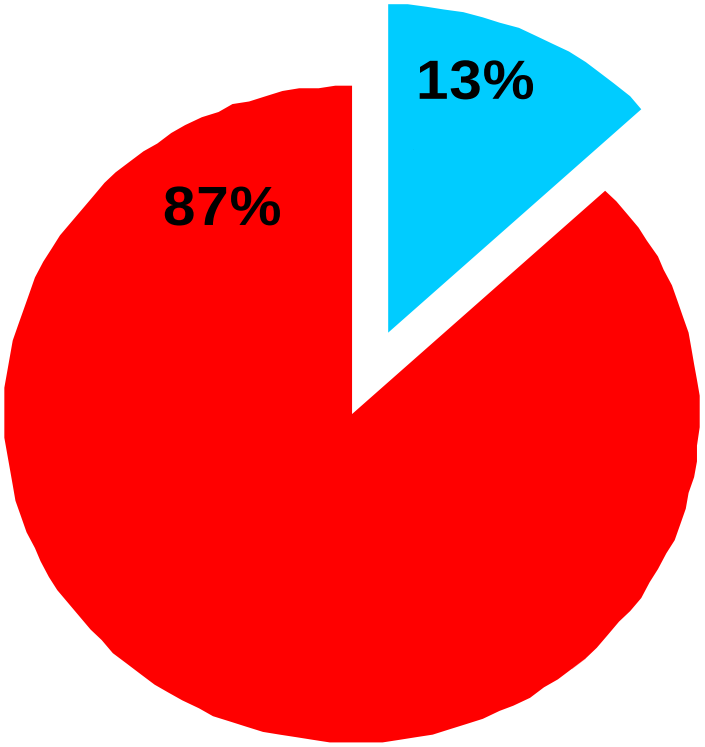
You are a student of a university in:



Total number of students participating in the survey= 1 753

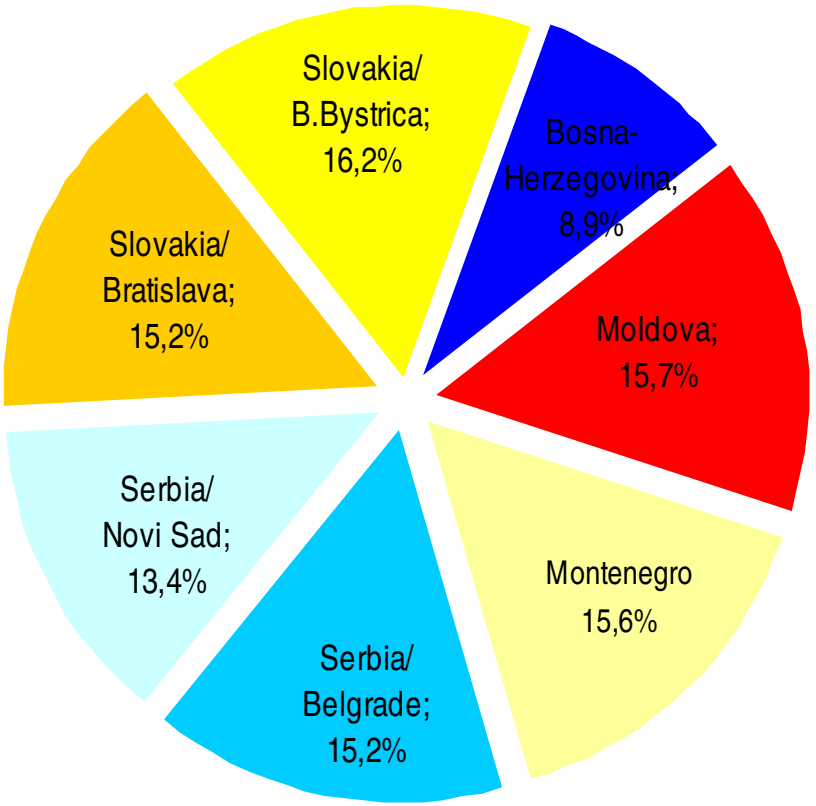
Students´debate – April 2017 (spring semester):

Sample structure



Did you attend/watch the students´ debate on April 26, 2017?

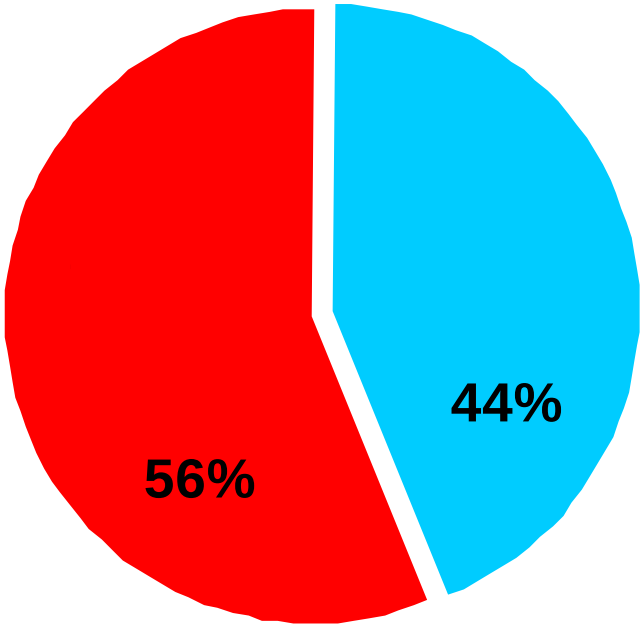
You are a student of a university in:

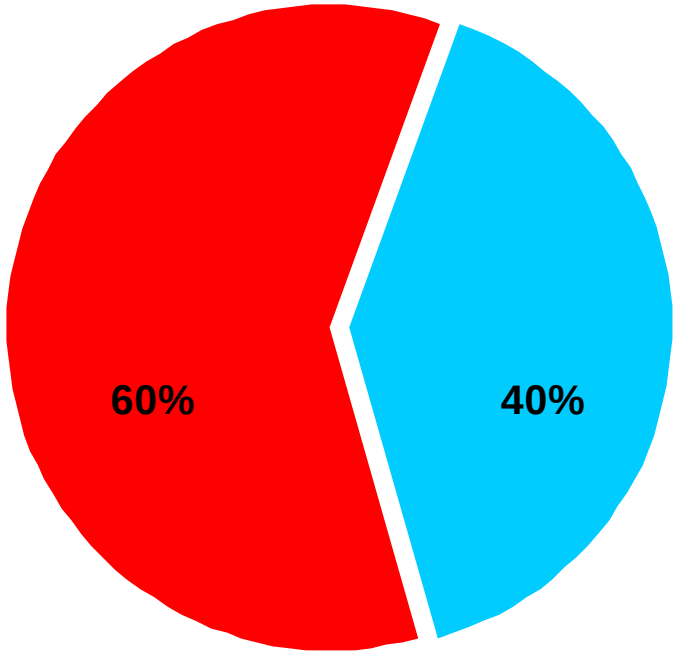


Total number of students participating in the survey= 1 644

Students´debate – December 2016 (fall semester):

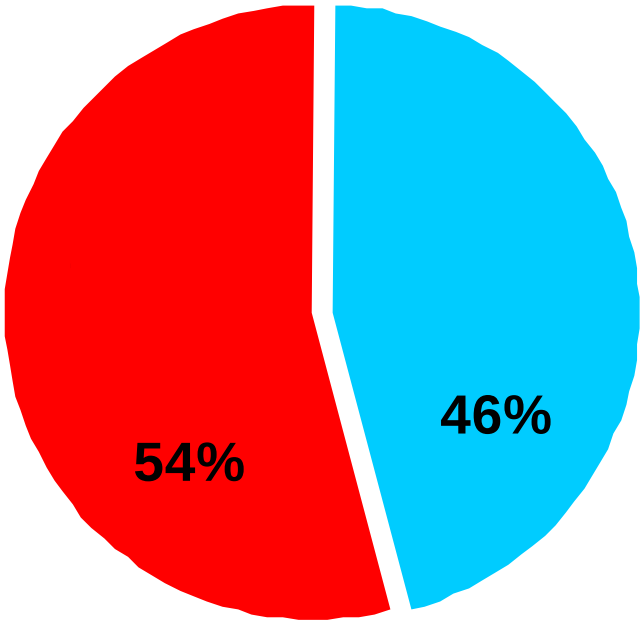
Sample structure

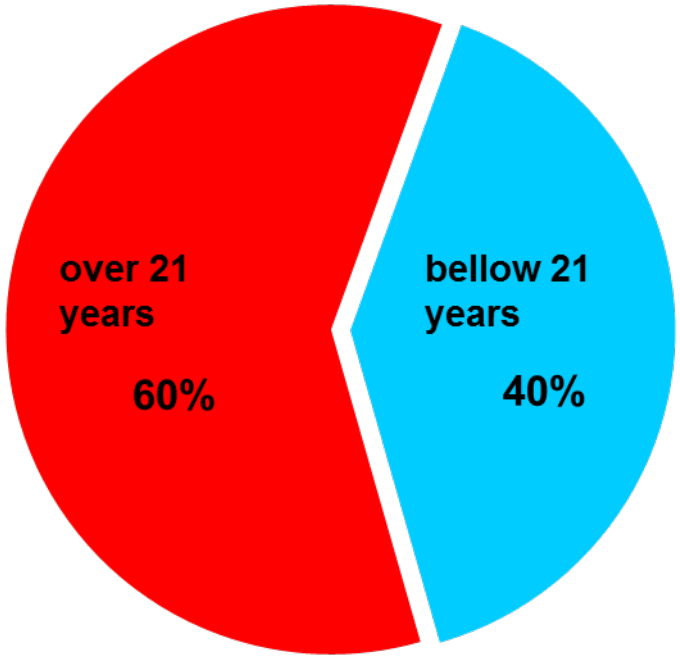




Students´debate – April 2017 (spring semester):

Sample structure





Content:

1. Preference for liberal democracy and the West (Q18,19,20, 21,22)
2. EU: for majority an ultimate goal (Q6,7,13)
3. NATO and security (Q10-12, 14)
4. Populism and extremism are threats to democracy (Q8, Q7-december)
5. Students and the public life (Q23-25)

Content:

1. Preference for liberal democracy and the West
2. EU – for majority an ultimate goal
3. NATO and security
4. Populism and extremism are threats to democracy
5. Students and the public life

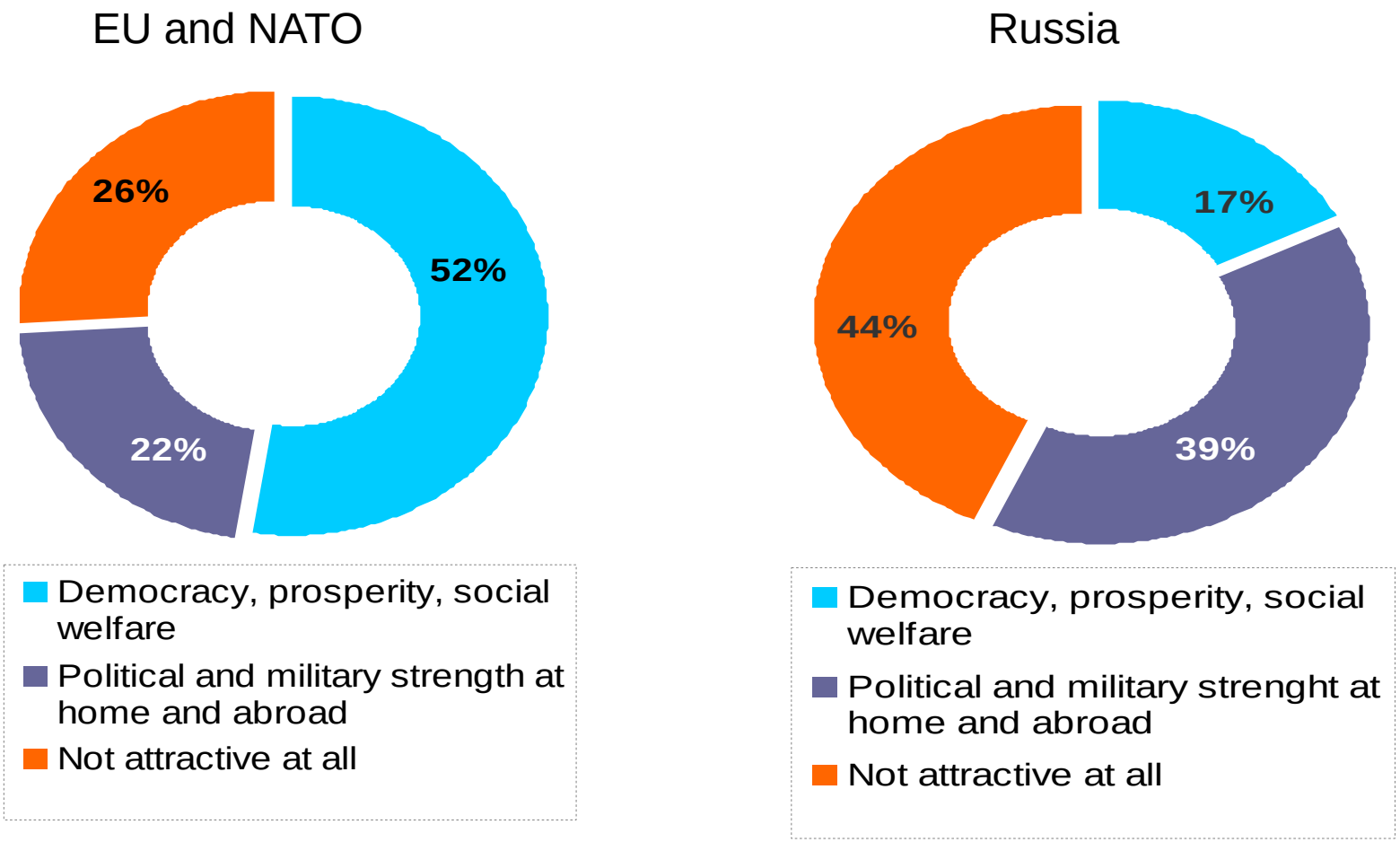
Students expressed clear choices in favor of liberal democracy and the West

Students gave clear preference to democracy, prosperity and social welfare as these are represented by the EU and NATO countries – 52% said these are the values which make these countries attractive to them (Graph 1).

As for Russia, only 17% said the same. The most frequent response with regard to Russia was: the country is not attractive at all (44%), followed by political and military strength (39%).

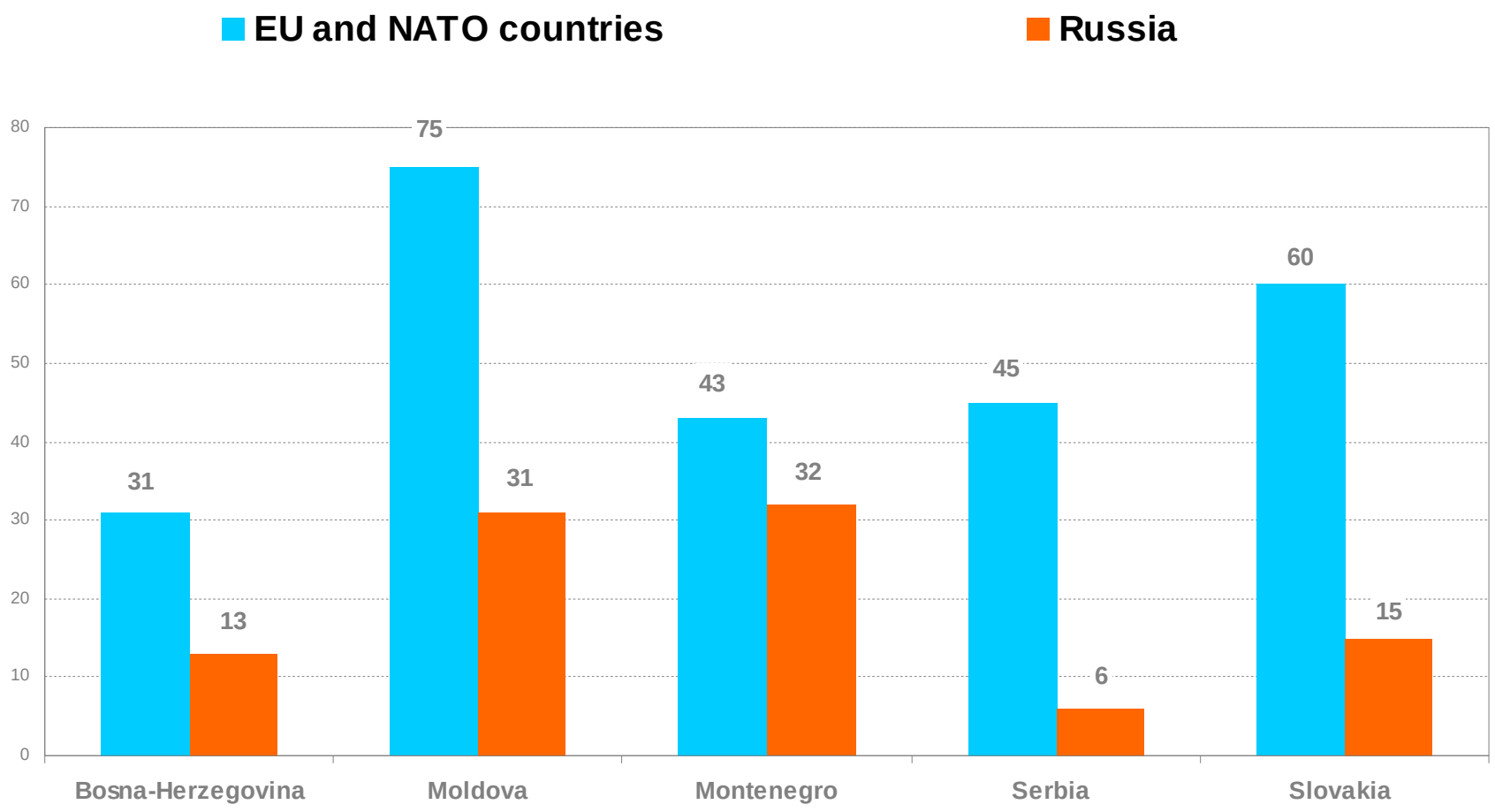
About a quarter of respondents does not see any attractiveness of the EU and NATO countries, similar percentage (22%) value their military and political strength.

Graph 1: EU and NATO countries/Russia are attractive to you because of their ... (April 2017)



Source: SIV/2017

Graph 2: EU and NATO countries/Russia are attractive to you because of democracy, prosperity, social welfare (April 2017):



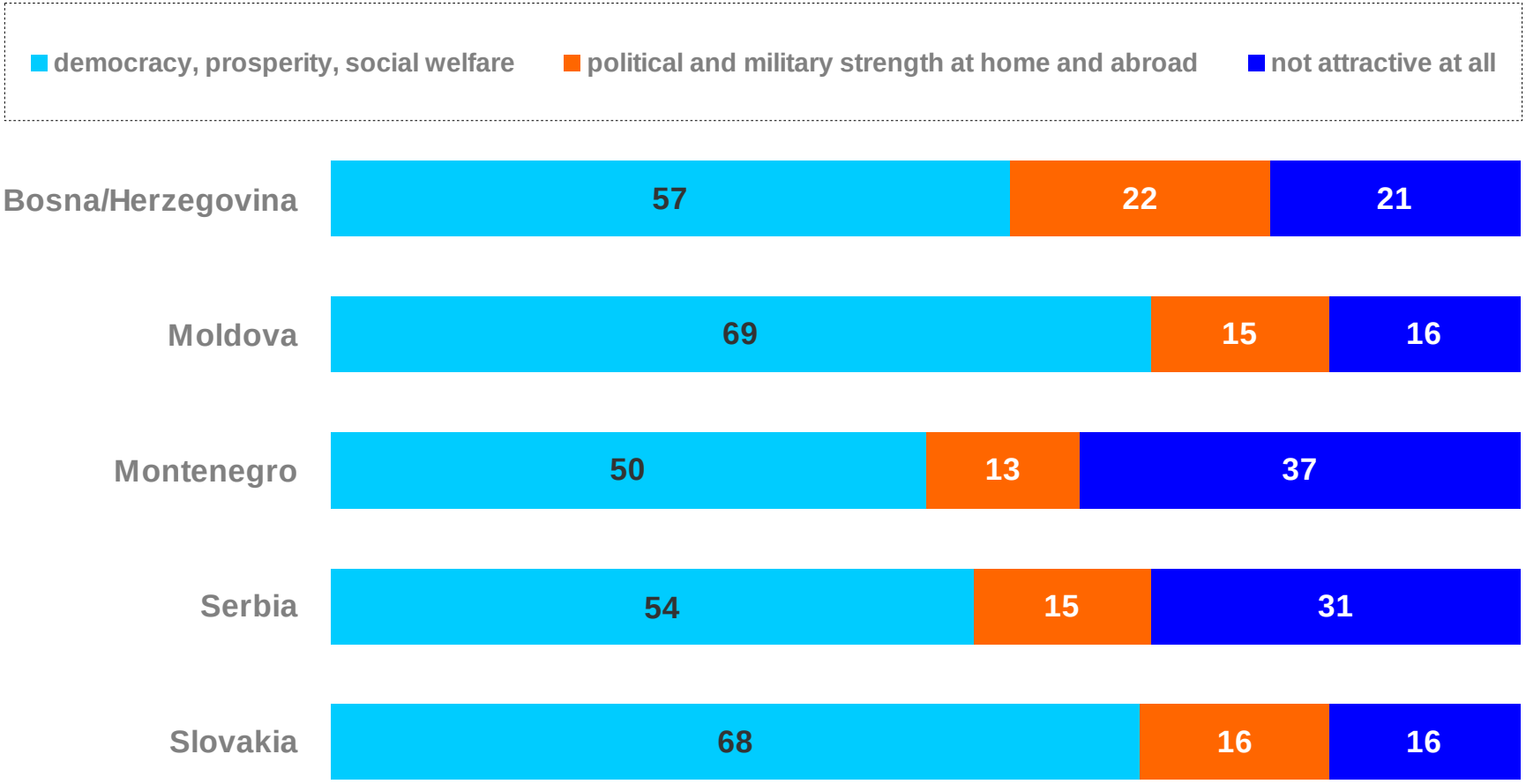
Source: SIV/2017

Students from five countries differ in their perception of the EU/NATO countries and Russia

There are differences among the students across five countries. The pro-West front-runners are students from Moldova, followed by the Slovaks. Students from Serbia and Montenegro are less enthusiastic and the most distant position to the EU and NATO countries is presented by students from Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, when we take into account also the trends between December 2016 and April 2017, BIH is the country where we see a significant drop in almost all questions related to EU (e.g. attractiveness of democracy, prosperity and social welfare attributed to EU and NATO countries it is decline from 57% to 31%) (cf. Graphs 3 and 4).

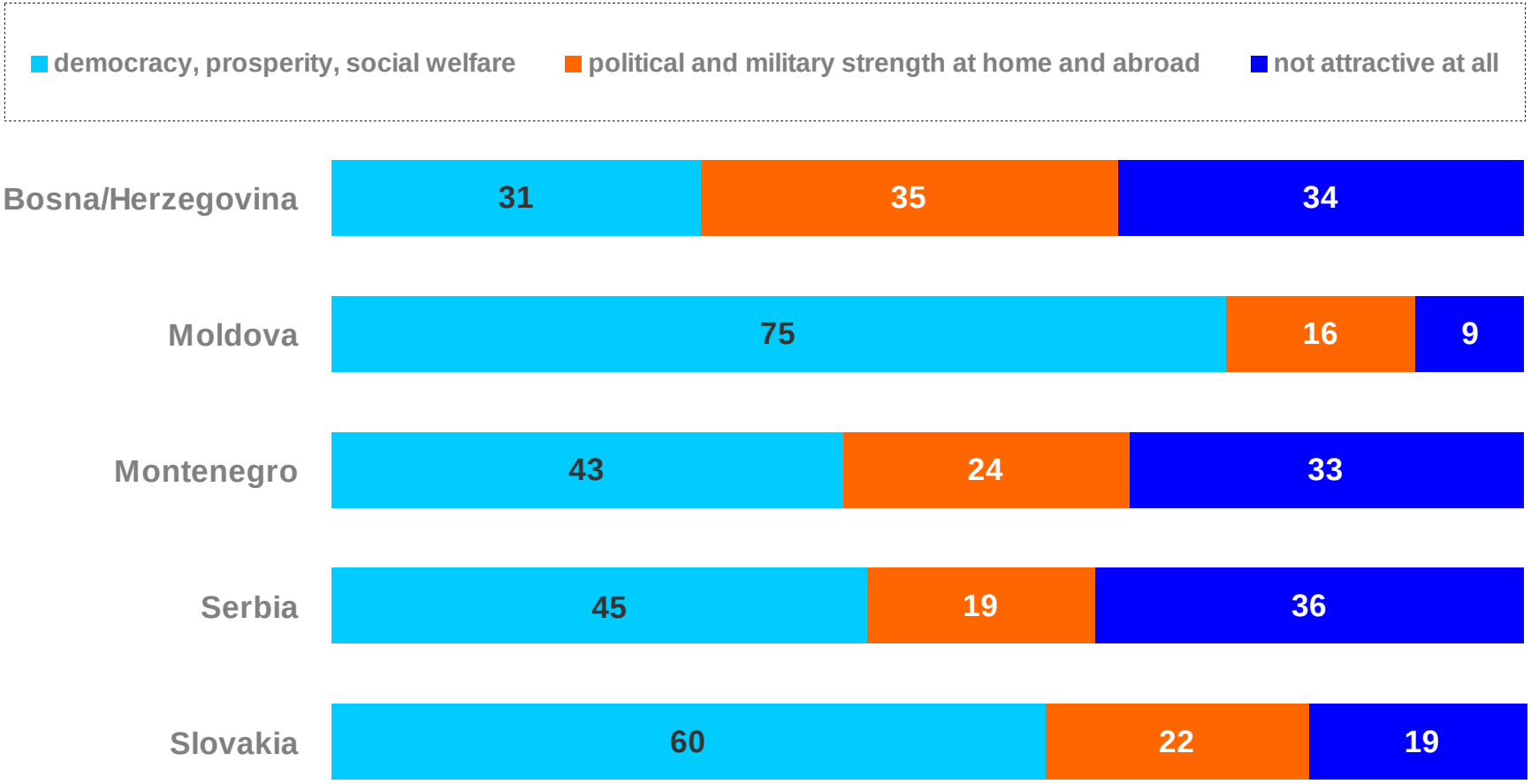
This might indicate high heterogeneity of the students´ community, as well as weak embedeness of the pro-integration attitudes which might be in the background of high volatility and uncertainty.

Graph 3: EU and NATO countries are attractive to you because of their: (responses in %) December 2016



Source: SXII/2016

Graph 4: EU and NATO countries are attractive to you because of their: (responses in %) April 2017



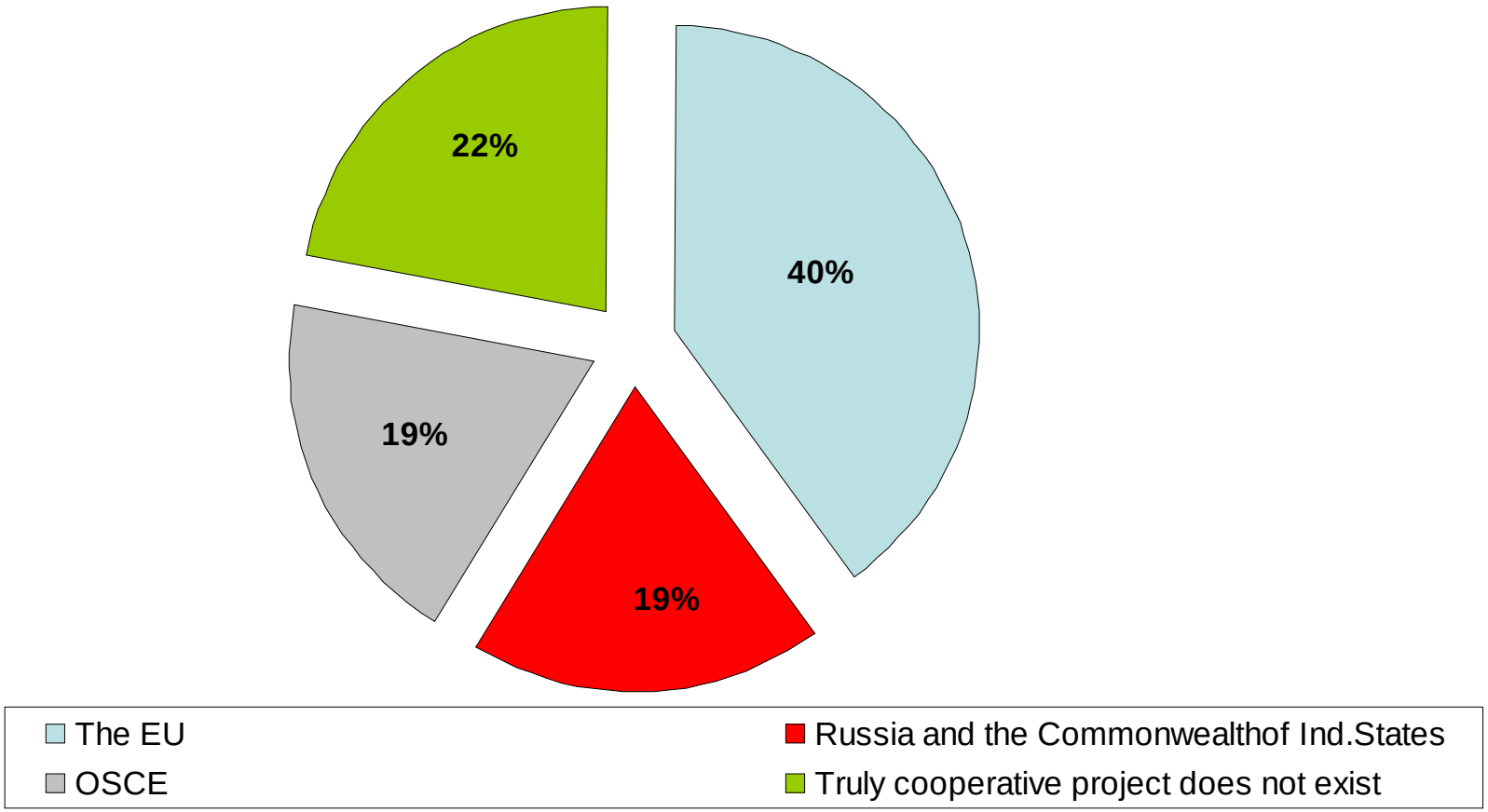
Source: SIV/2017

EU represents the most prosperous and efficient European cooperation project

According to 40% of students, the EU represents the most prosperous and efficient cooperation project on the European continent. Other options were selected by significant less respondents, namely: 19% said Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States represent such project; the same percentage „voted“ for OSCE.

However, more than one fifth said that there is none truly cooperative project in Europe. This opinion has to be taken seriously. Highest percentage of such skeptical views were in Serbia -29%.

Graph 5: The most prosperous and efficient European cooperation project is today represented by (all five countries, responses in %, April 2017)



Source: SIV/2017

EU countries are „pull factor“ for job and study

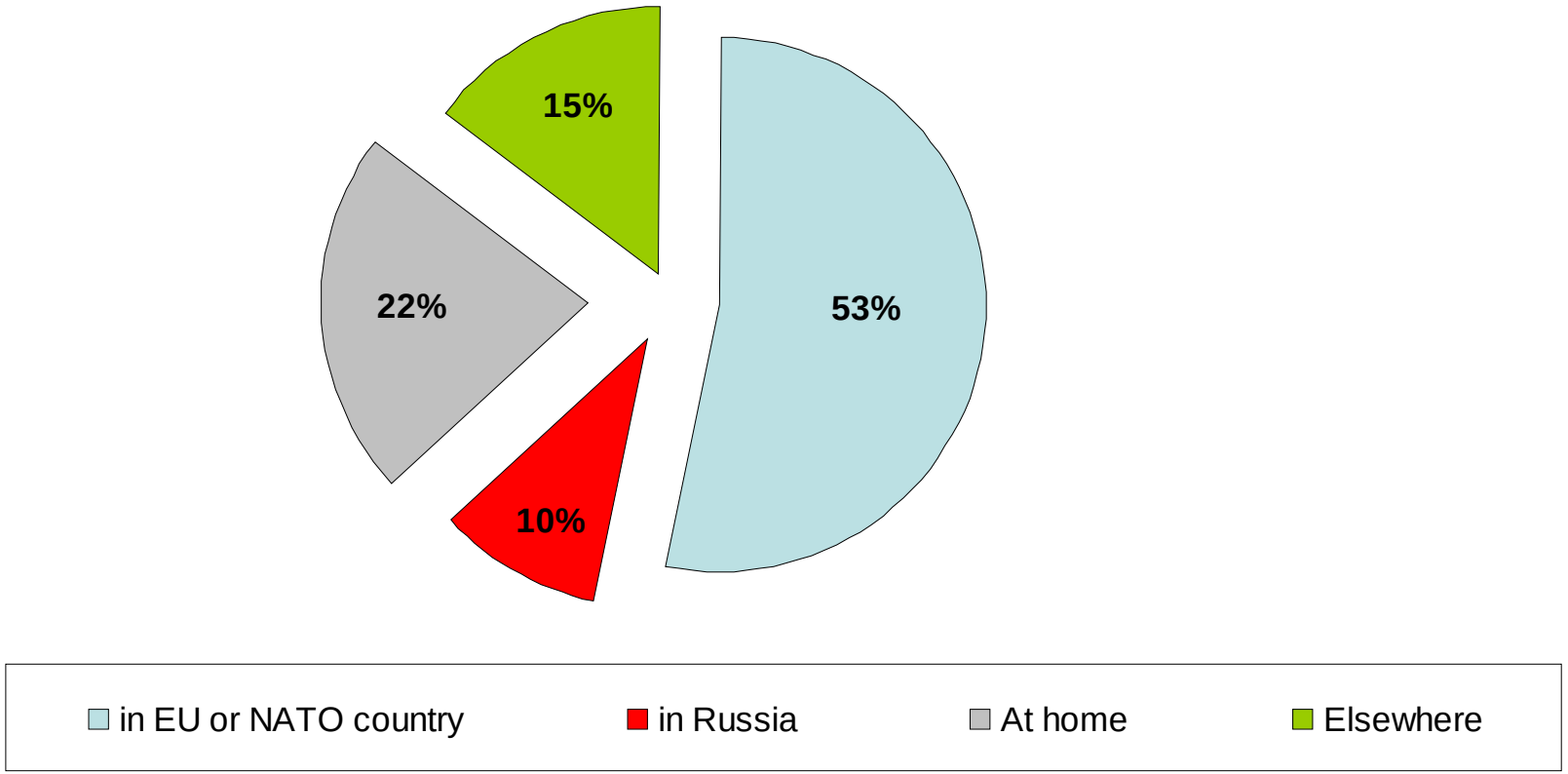
The survey focused also on personal choices and strategies of the students when it comes to where to study or work.

All in all, a clear majority - 53% would choose EU to complete their studies if they would have a scholarship or could pay for their education; other possibilities are less attractive - at home – 22%; elsewhere 15%, and Russia 10%.

It clearly indicates that even those who have some admiration or respect for Russia because of its strength, in their personal life they see other options as better (Graphs 6-7).

The same pattern could be seen with regard to future job after graduation, although in this question the gap between the options „in the EU“ and „at home“ is smaller- what's expected and reasonable. Moreover, it protects these countries against massive brain-drain of young qualified people.

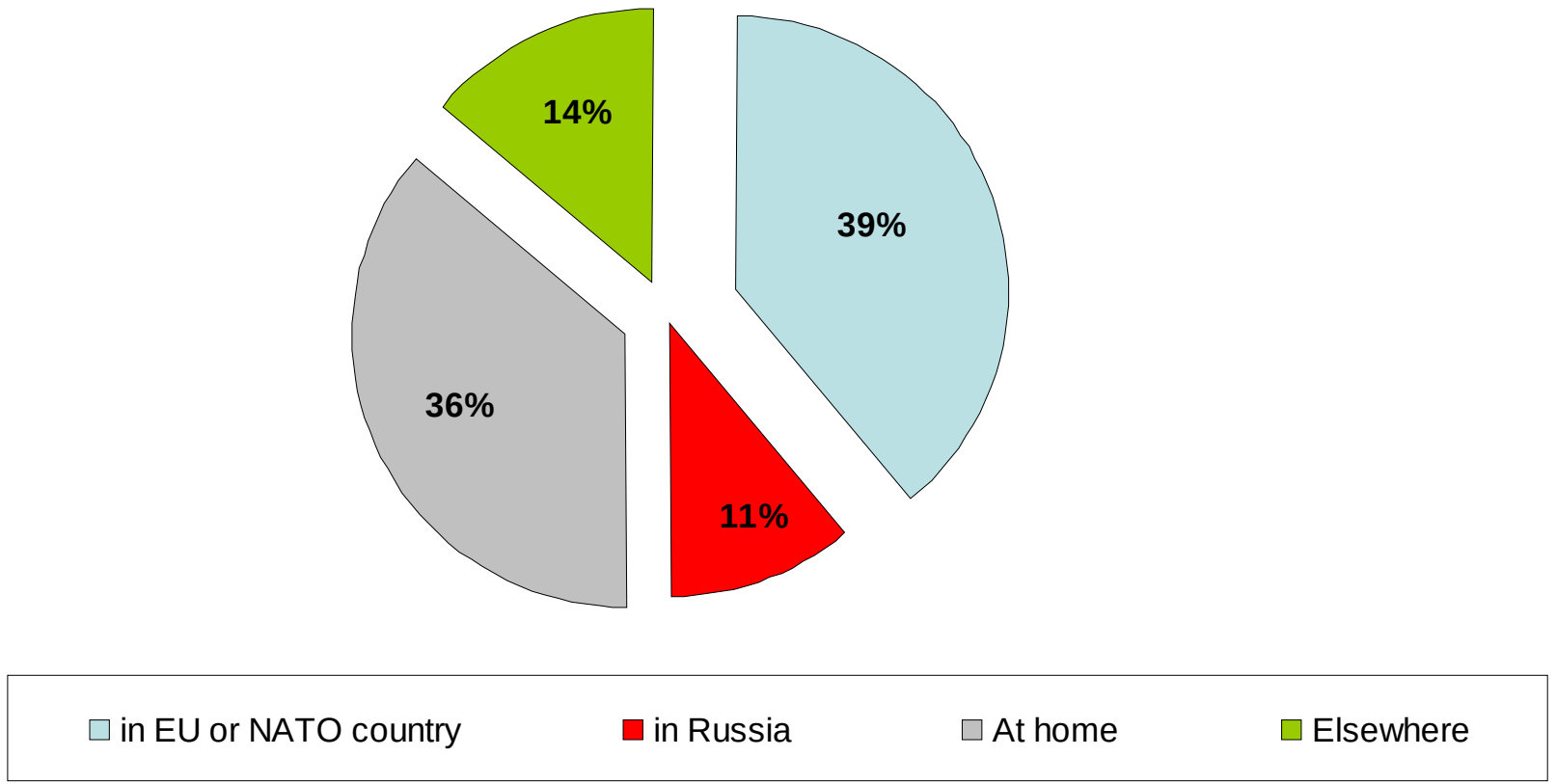
Graph 6: If you had a scholarship or could pay for your education, where would you complete your studies? (all five countries, responses in %, April 2017)



Source: SXII/2016

Graph 7: Where would you like to get a job after graduation?

(all five countries, responses in, April 2017 %)

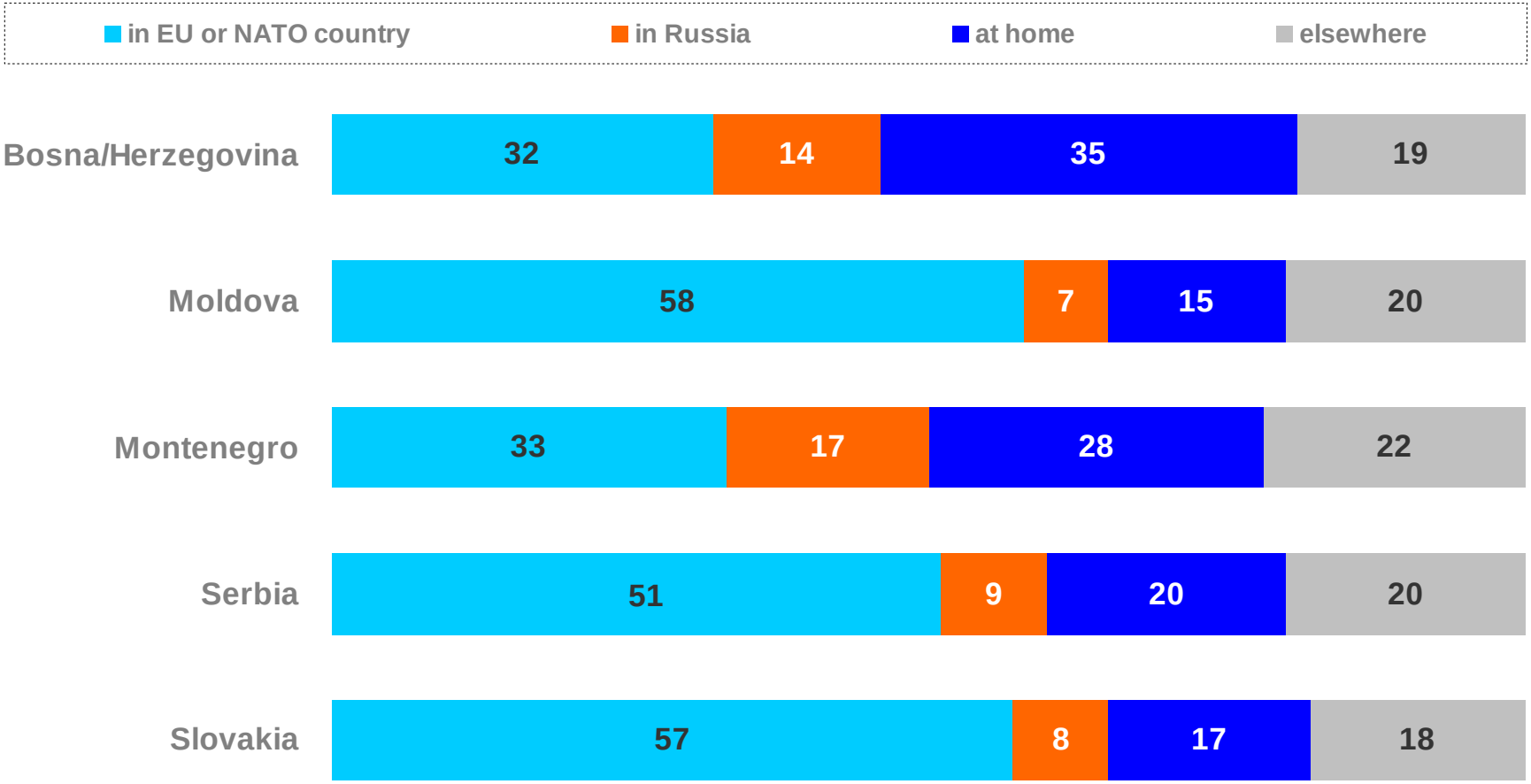


Source: SIV/2017

EU countries are „pull factor“ for job and study

The strongest drive for studying or working in the EU can be found among the students in Moldova and Slovakia, but also in two Western Balkan countries (Montenegro and Serbia) - it is the most attractive option; less students would decide in favour of the EU countries only in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where staying at home is the most frequent response (Graph 8).

Graph 8: If you had a scholarship or could pay for your education, where would you complete your studies? (responses in %, April 2017)



Source: SXII/2016

Content:

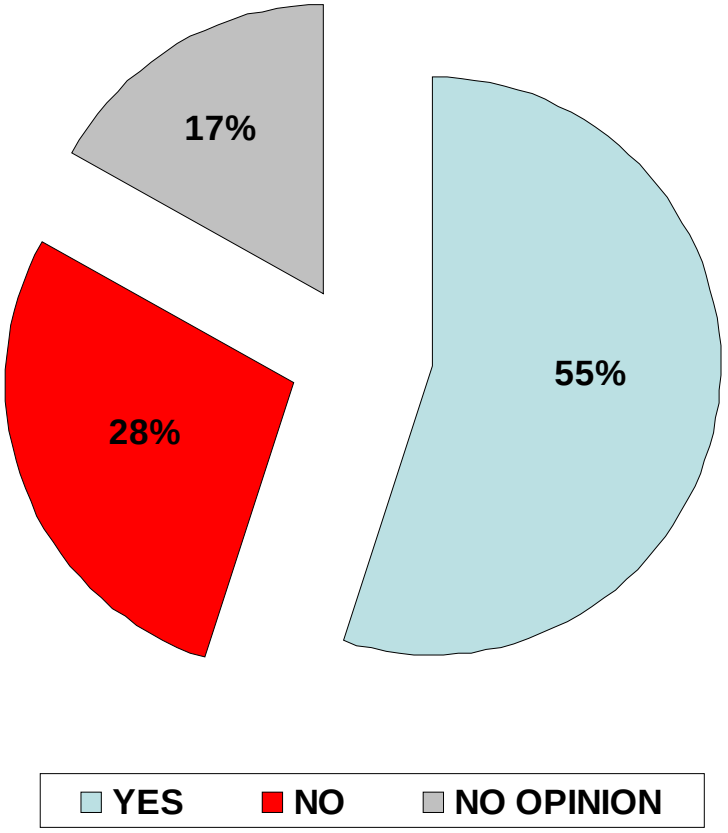
1. Students expressed clear preference for liberal democracy and the West
2. EU – for majority an ultimate goal
3. NATO and security
4. Populism and extremism are threats to democracy
5. Students and the public life

EU membership is highly valued

Out of five countries included in the project only Slovakia is an EU member state. The other four countries are recently at different stage of integration process. Nevertheless, EU membership is an attractive objective - most of the students would like to sustain or to achieve it. Clear majority – 55% expressed this view (58% in December 2016).

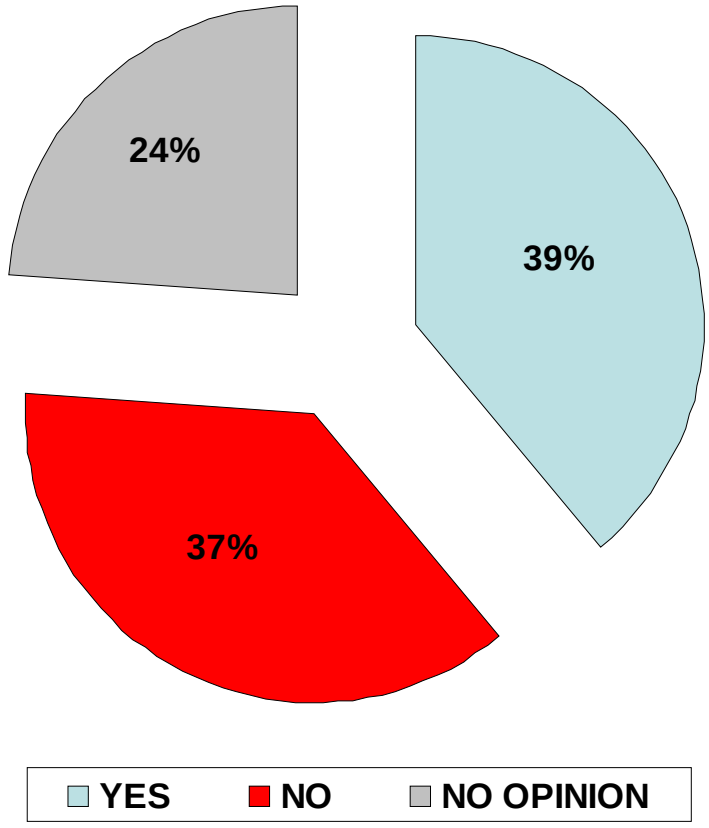
However, students expressed more skeptical views in answering the question if they believe the Western Balkan countries will ever join the EU – 37% of respondents (in both surveys) responded negatively whereas 39% gave positive response. 24% had no opinion (graphs 9 and 10).

Graph 9: Do you want your country to remain or to become a member of the European Union? (all five countries, responses in %)



Source: SIV/2017

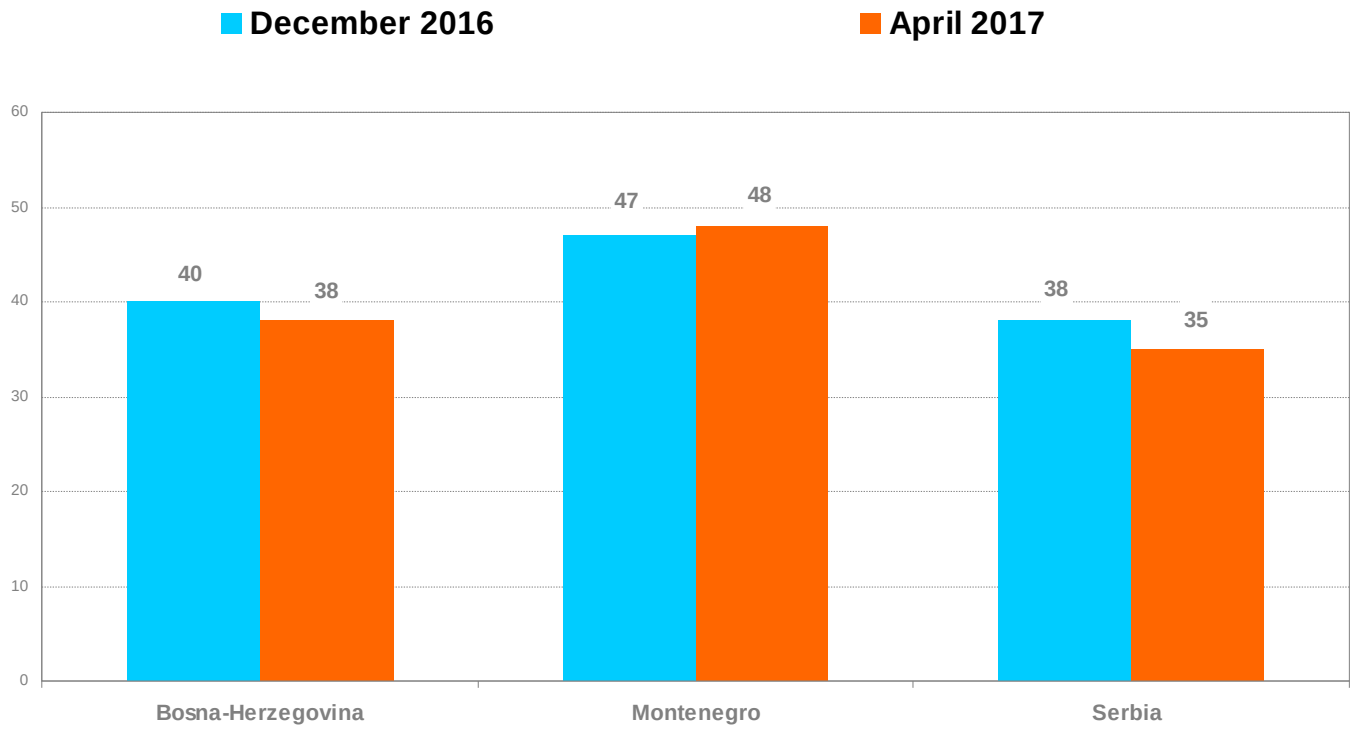
Graph 10: Do you believe that most of the states of the Western Balkans and the EU's East will ever join the EU? (all five countries, responses in %)



Source: SIV/2017

Q6a. Do you believe that most of the states of the Western Balkans and the EU's East will ever join the EU?

(only YES responses, in %)

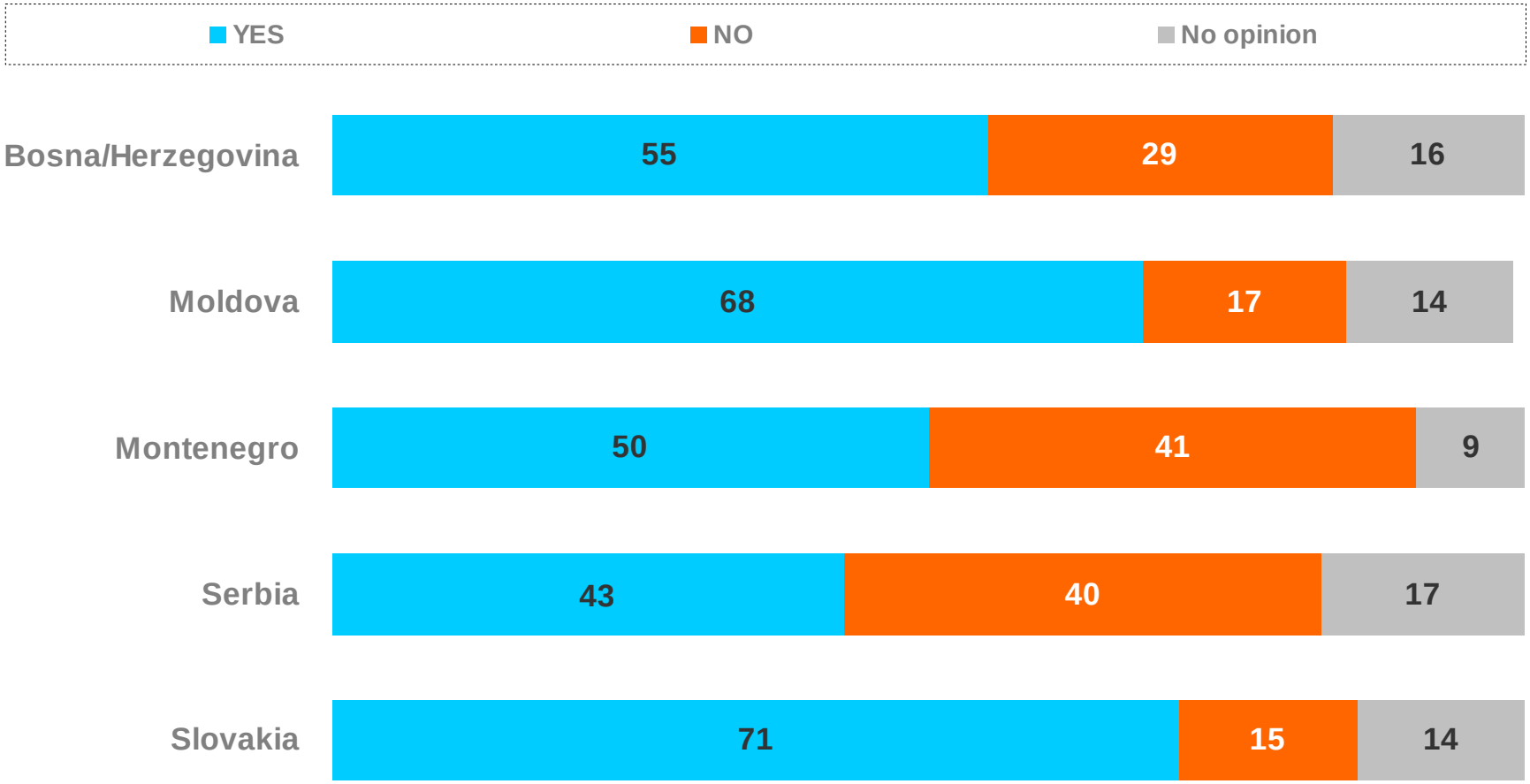


Source: SIV/2017

Differences in EU membership´s desirability

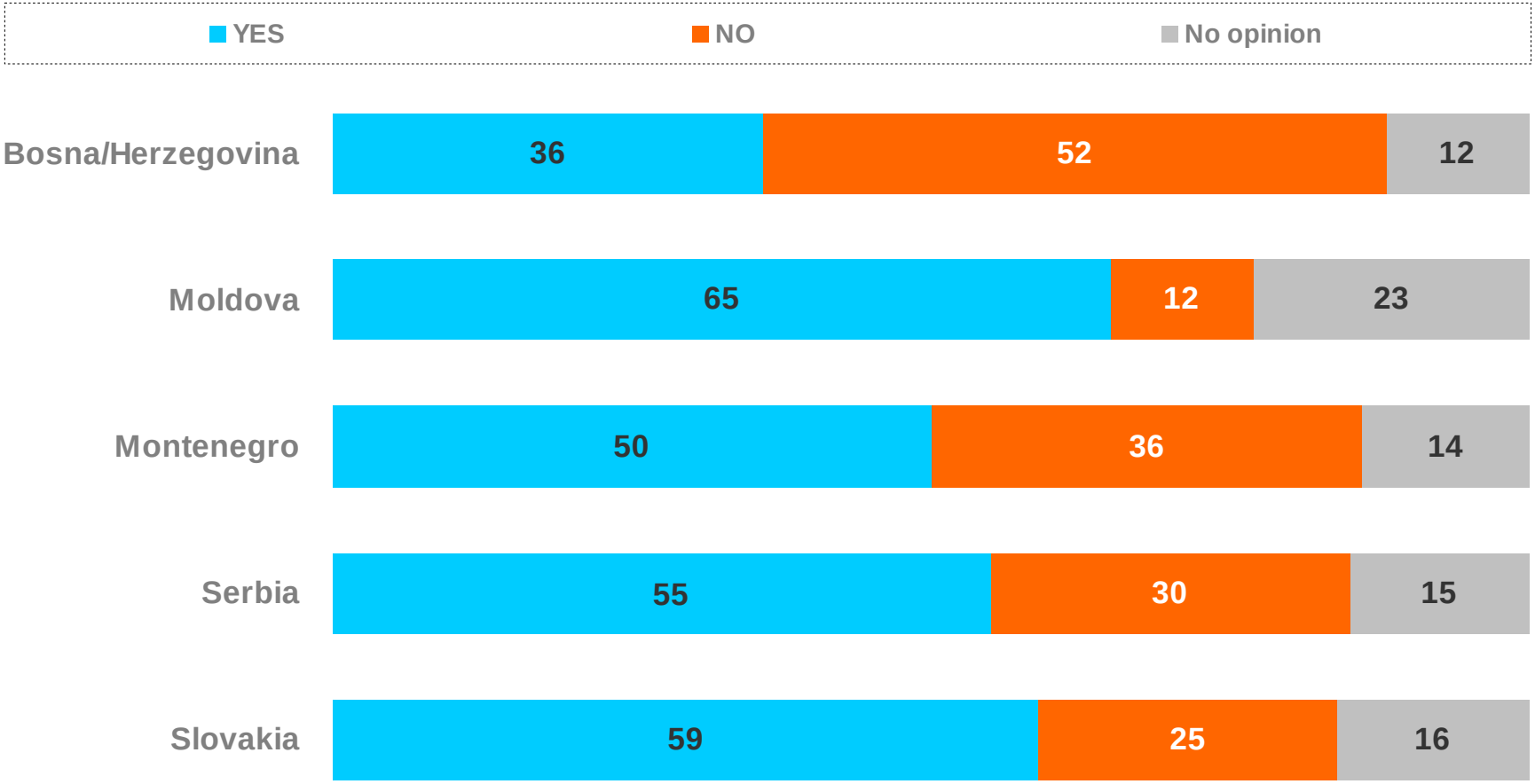
There are variations across the countries – among the non-member states the EU membership is mostly desired in Moldova, followed by three Western Balkan countries. Comparing the two surveys, we see different dynamics in Serbia and BIH. Whereas in Serbia the portion of the pro-EU students increased (from 43% to 55%) in BIH it declined (from 55% to 36%). Based on just two surveys, it is difficult to speculate about the reasons for the BIH drop – as stated earlier, the fluctuations could be caused by a rather shallow pro-EU attitudes, but also by a frustration stemming from the too far perspective of the EU membership. However, this cautious attitude towards the EU membership does not have any effect on relatively positive perception role of the EU, Germany and transatlantic cooperation among the students from BIH.

Graph 11: Do you want your country to remain or to become a member of the European Union? (responses in %) December 2016



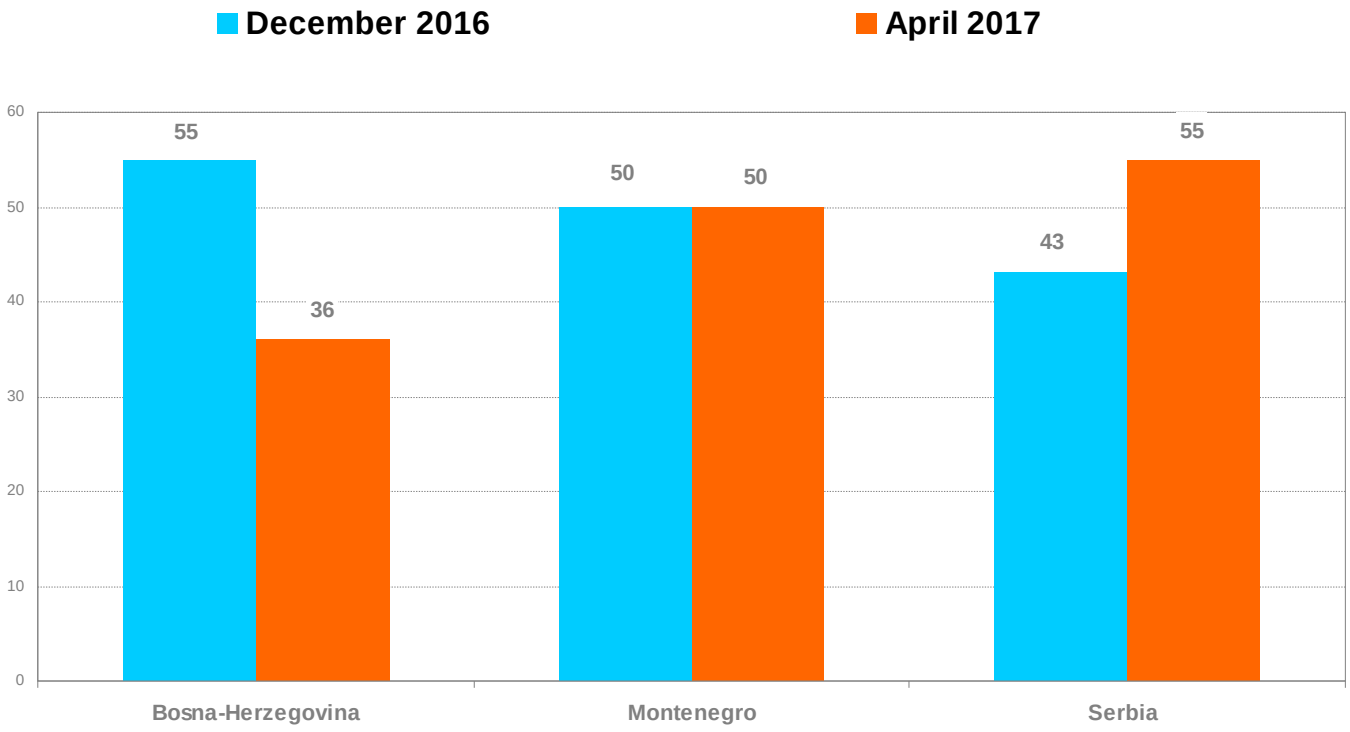
Source: SXII/2016

Graph 12: Do you want your country to remain or to become a member of the European Union? (responses in %) April 2017



Source: SIV/2017

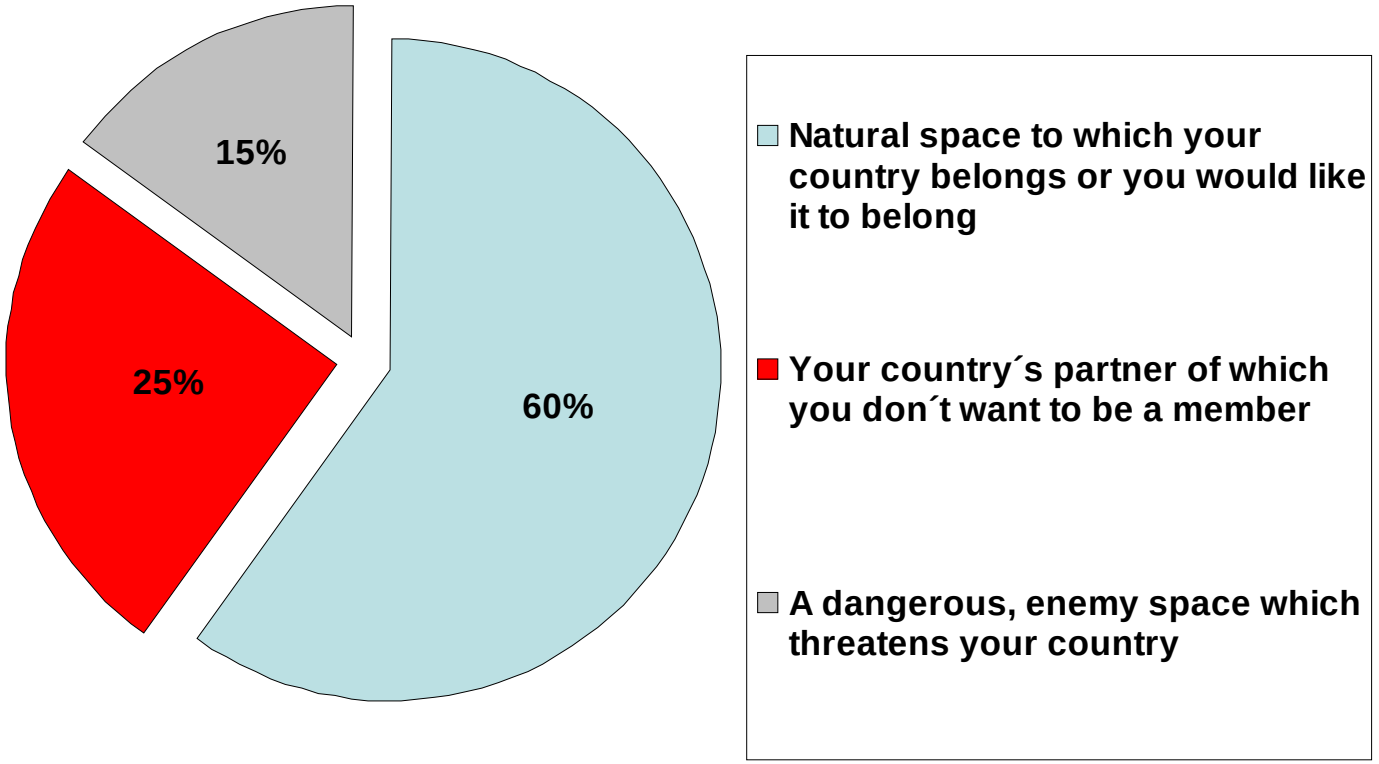
Q5a. Do you want your country to become a member of the European Union? (only YES responses, in %)



Source: SIV/2017

Graph 13: In your opinion, the European Union is:

(all five countries, responses in %)



Source: SIV/2017

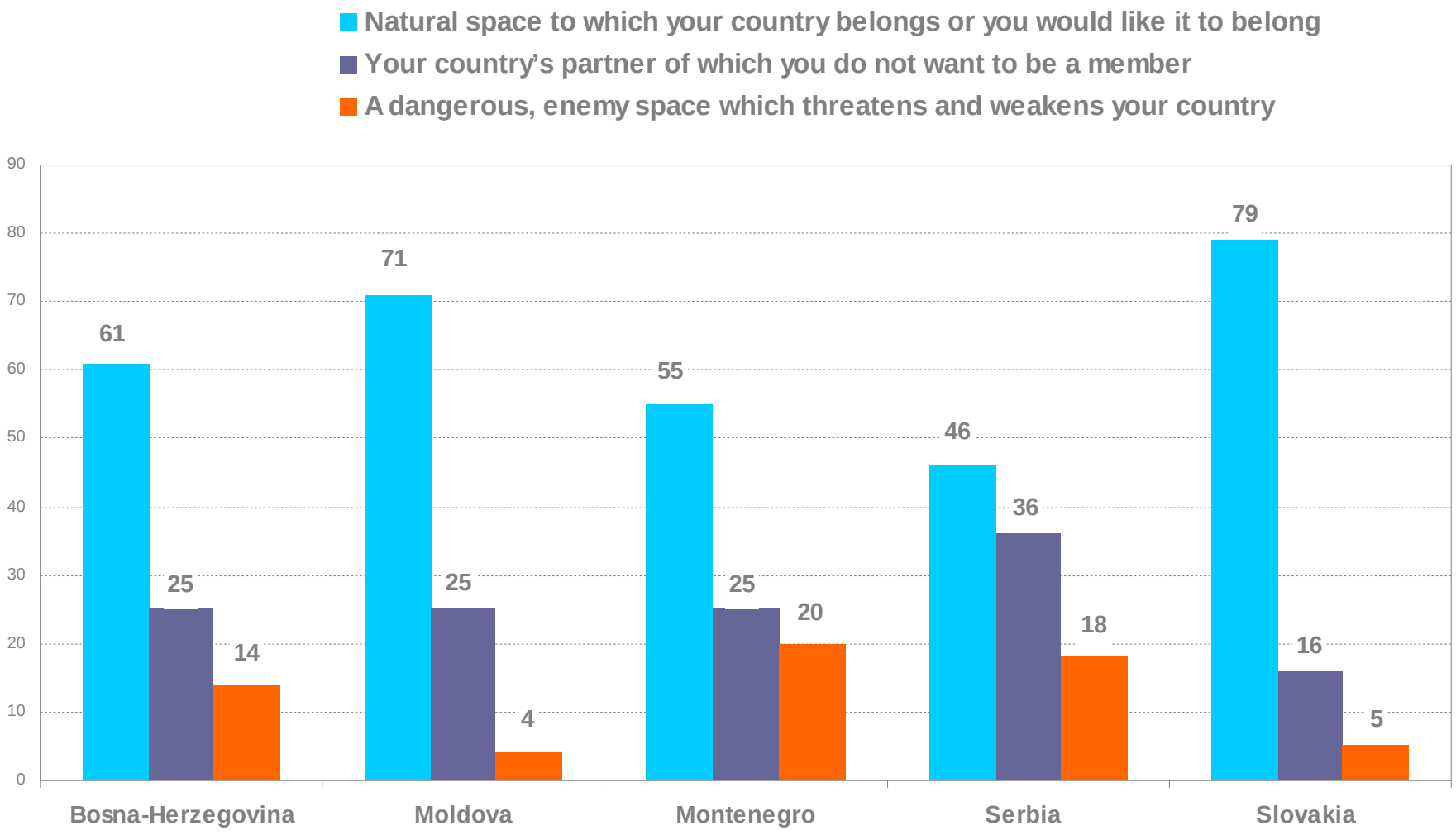
„EU is our natural space“

Respondents were choosing one of the characteristics of the EU – is it natural space we belong or want to belong to; is it a partner, but membership is not desired; and thirdly, is the EU an enemy space: majority of students (60%) decided for the first option, only 15% see EU as dangerous space.

Students from five countries differ in their views, however, the perception of the EU as an „enemy“ is marginal everywhere (graph 14).

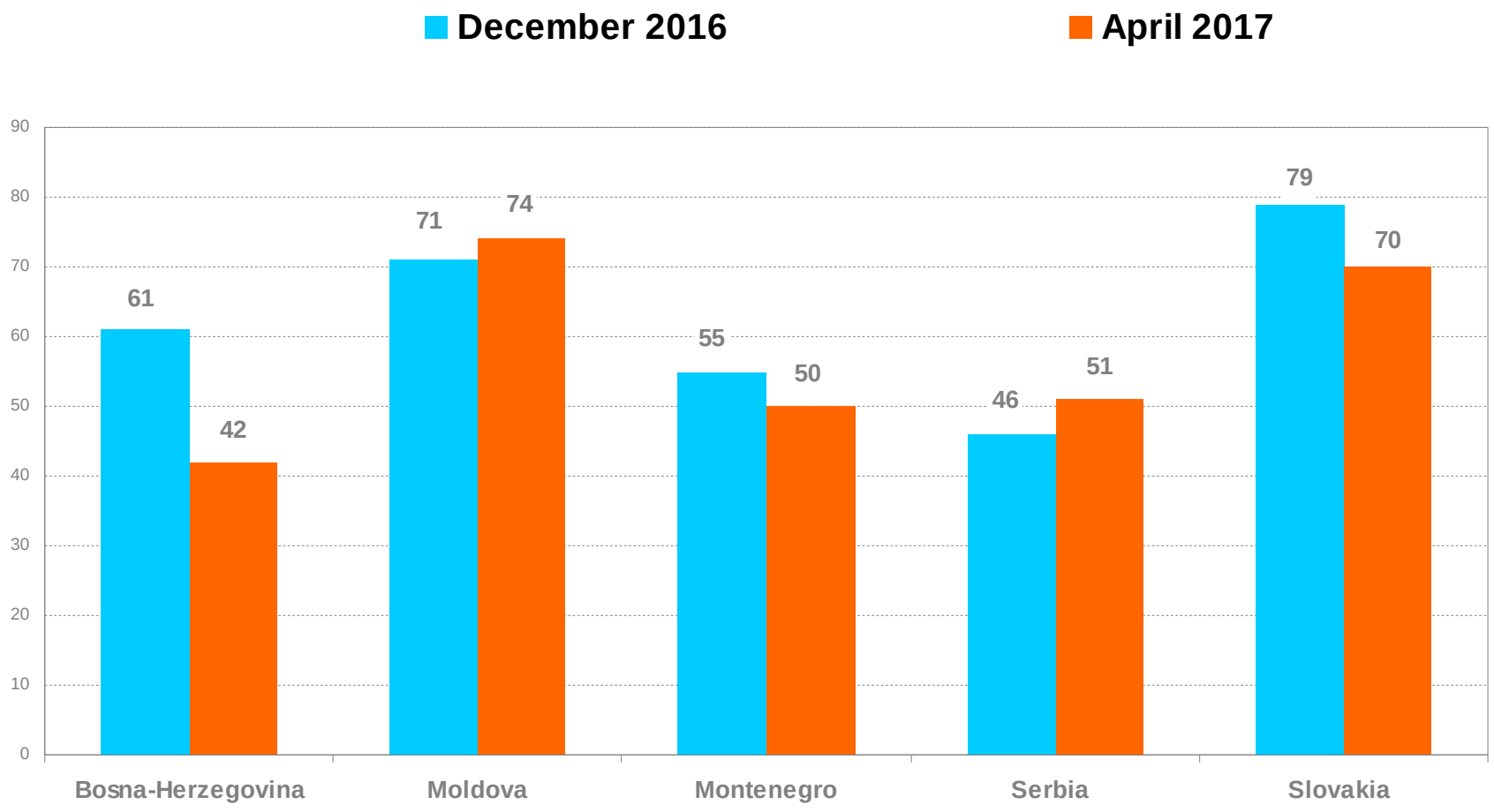
As for the time comparison (graph 15), most of the students´ groups are in principle stable, the only outlier are students from BIH.

Graph 14: In your opinion, the European Union is (December 2016):



Source: SXII/2016

Graph 15: In your opinion, the European Union is (only responses: It is natural space to which your country belongs or you would like it to belong – comparison fall and spring semester survey)



Source: SXII/2016 and SIV/2017

„EU plays a positive role in the political and economic development of our country“

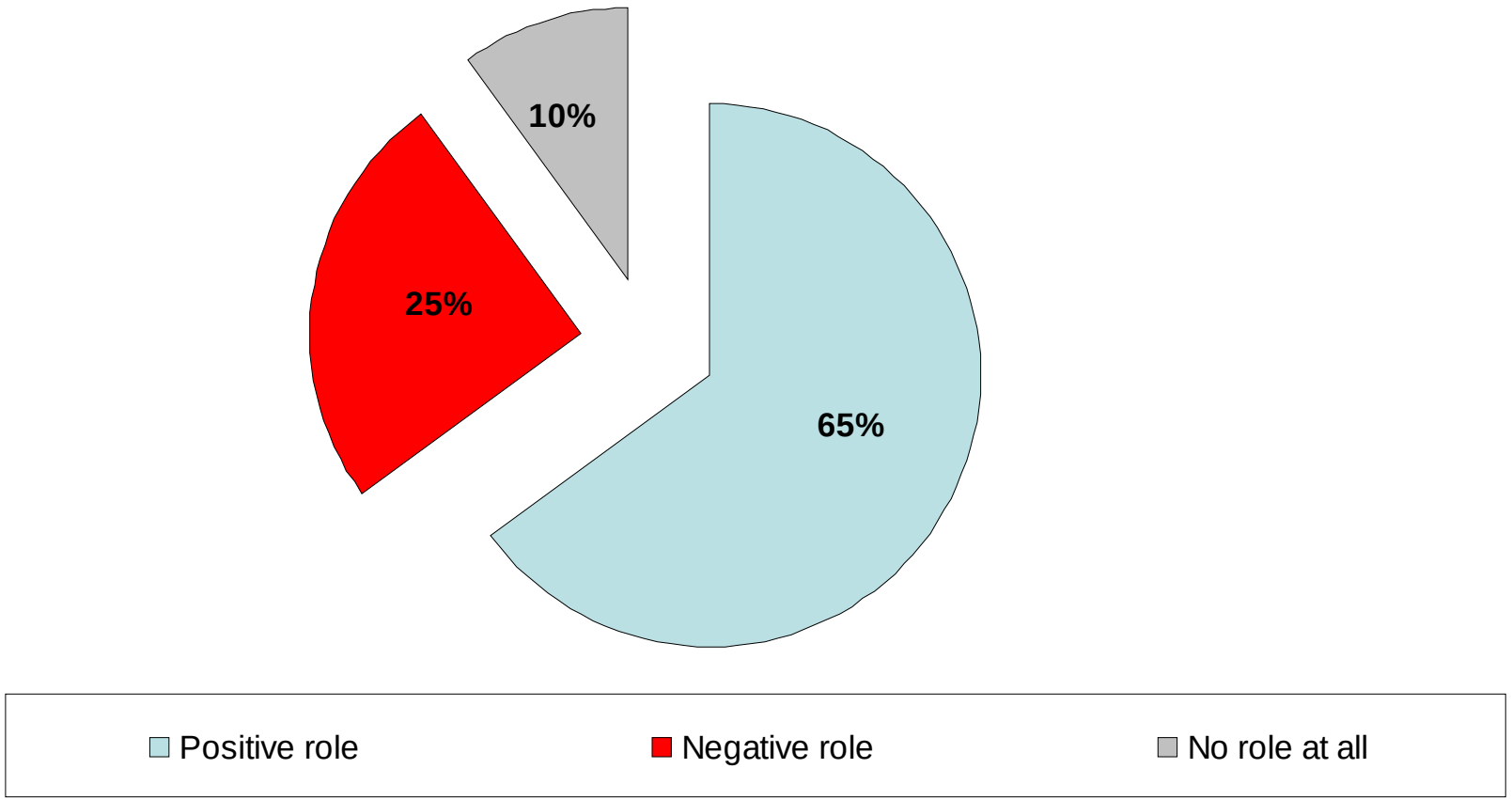
Respondents evaluated the role of three countries (USA, Russia, Germany) and international entities (EU, NATO) on their country's development. All in all, the EU´s role is seen as the most positive, with one exception – students in Bosnia and Herzegovina (graphs 16,17).

On the other hand, leading positive evaluators are students from Moldova and Slovakia - 78%, resp. 72% of them see a positive role of the EU, even slightly higher than the results in December 2017.

With regard to Serbian students we could observe a positive trend – in December 2016, 49% students gave a positive evaluation, whereas in April 2017 65% did so.

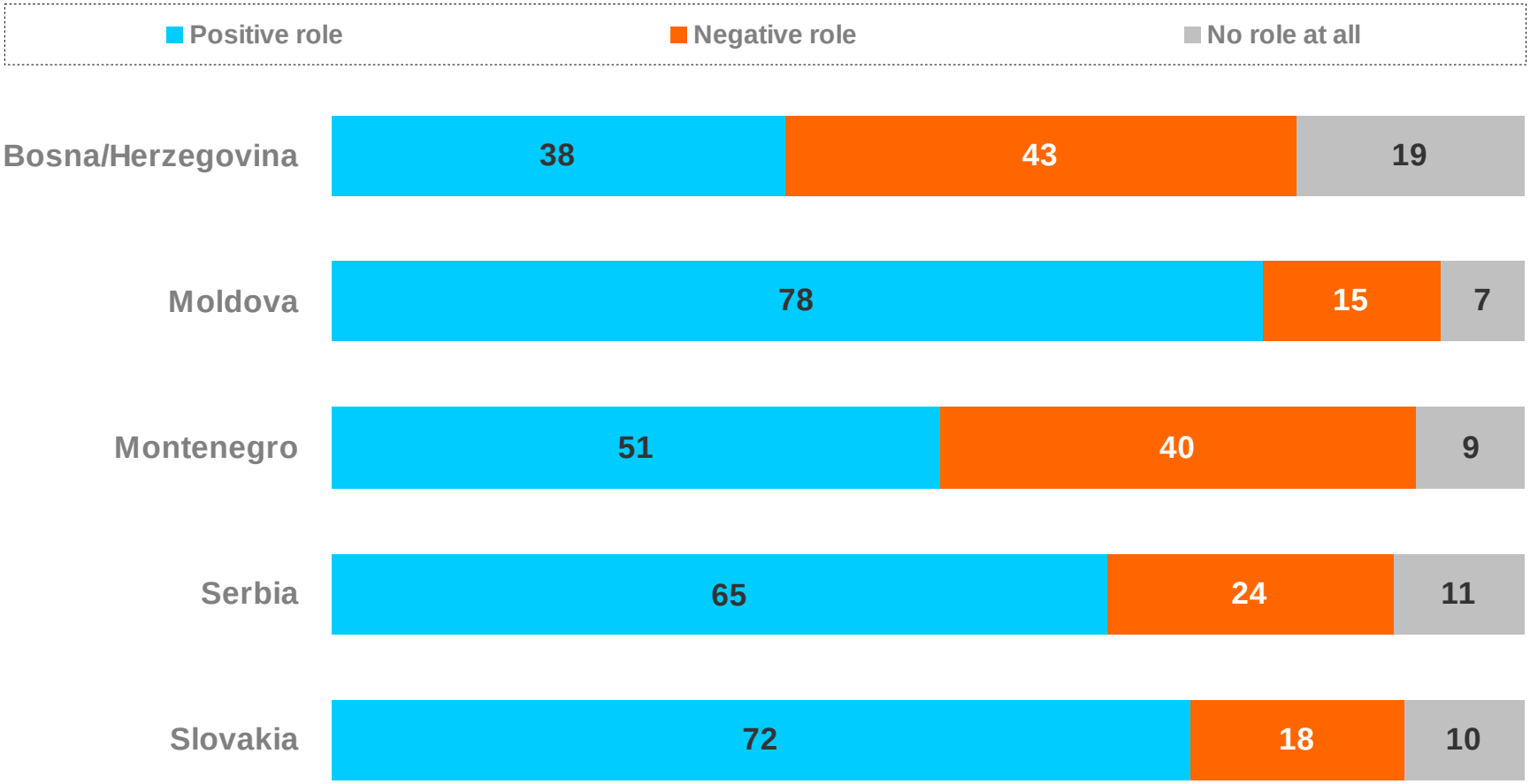
As for Germany, a leading EU country, positive evaluation clearly prevails over negative in four countries but not in BIH (Graph 18), what might reflect the overall decline of pro-EU stances.

Graph 16: In the political and economic development of your country, the EU plays: (all five countries, responses in %)



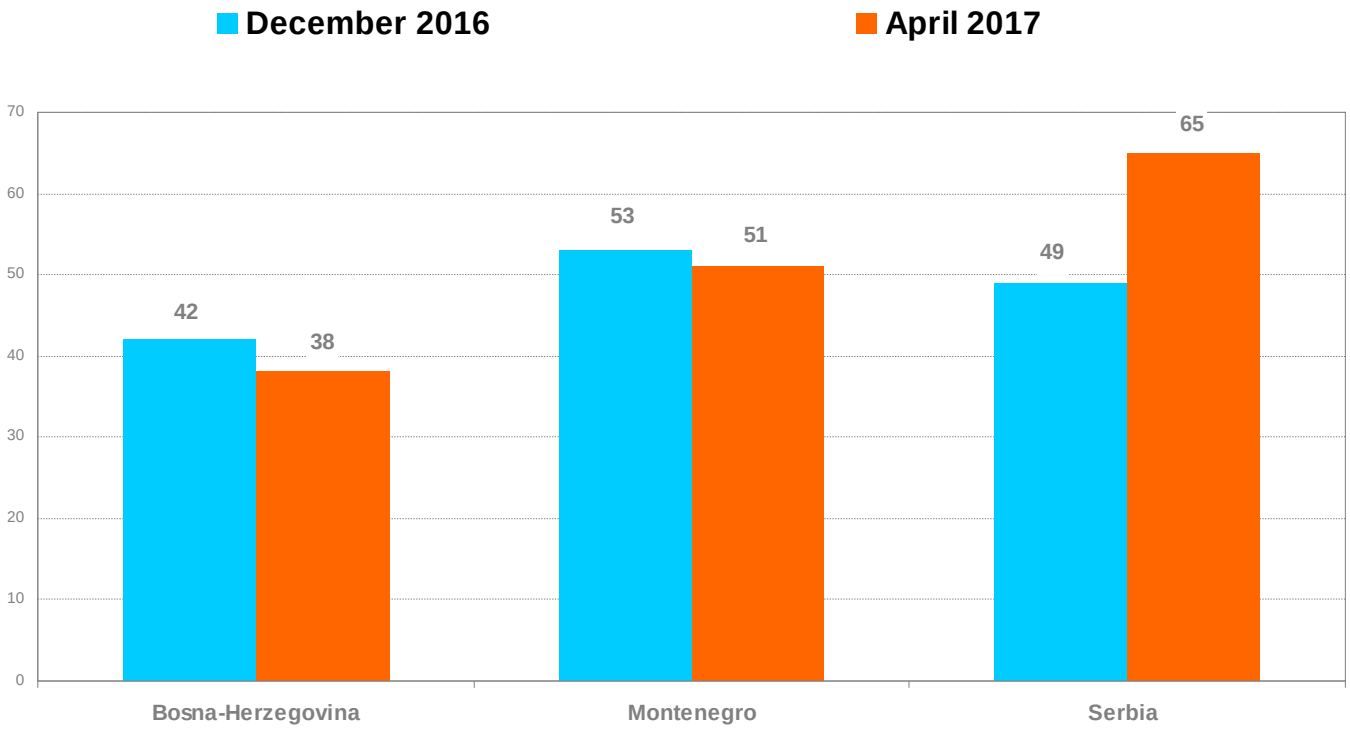
Source: SIV/2017

Graph 17: In the political and economic development of your country, the EU plays (responses in %)



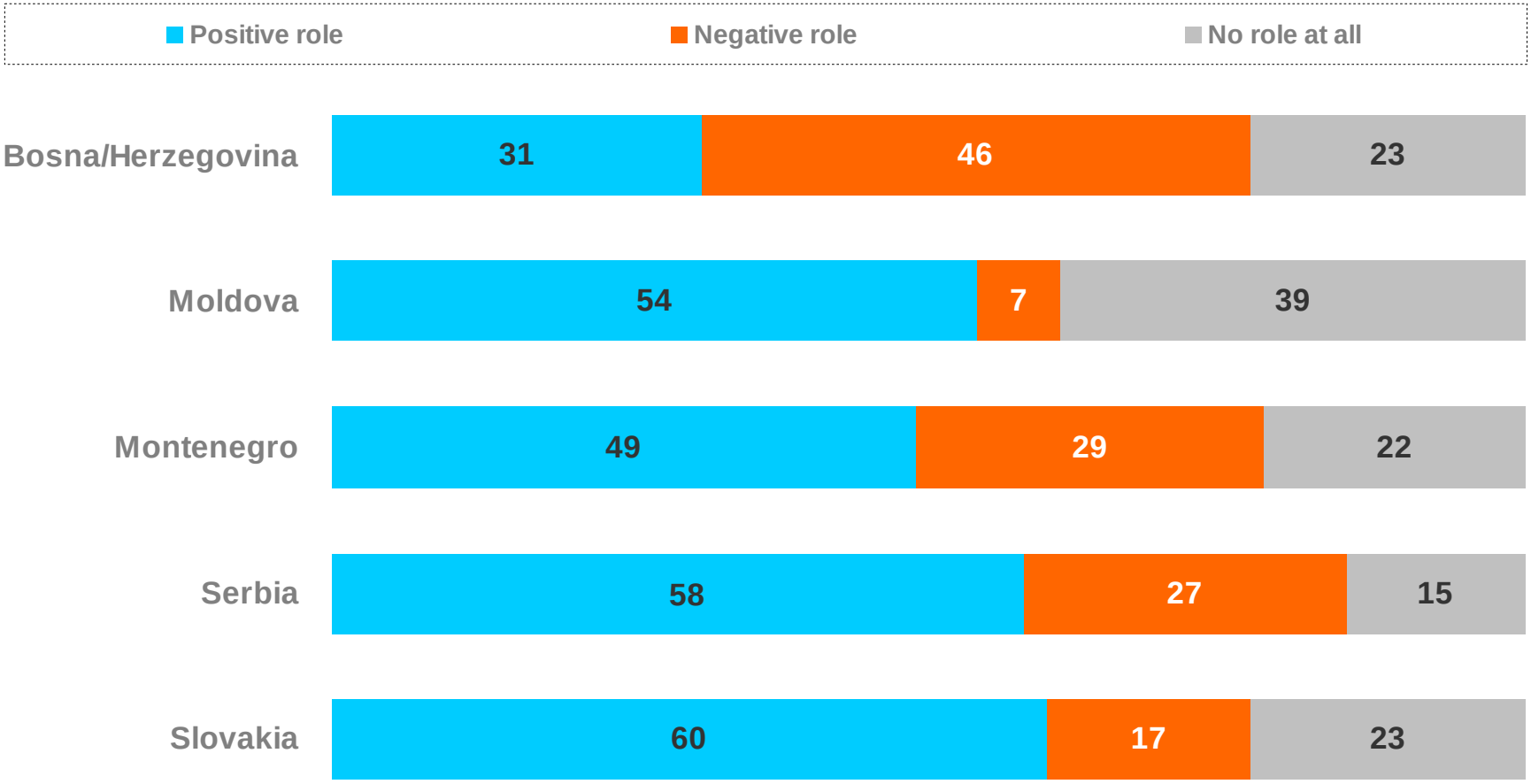
Source: SIV/2017

Q13. In political and economic development of your country EU plays... (only POSITIVE ROLE responses, in %)



Source: SIV/2017

Graph 18: In the political and economic development of your country, Germany plays: (responses in %)



Source: SIV/2017

Content:

1. Students expressed clear preference for liberal democracy and the West
2. EU – for majority an ultimate goal
3. NATO and security
4. Populism and extremism are threats to democracy
5. Students and the public life

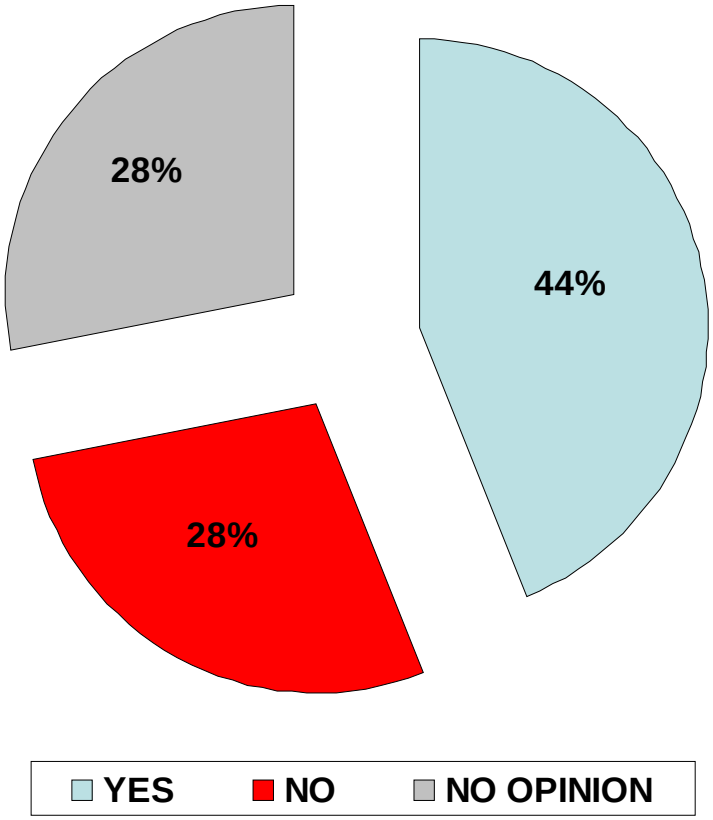
NATO means security

In spite of some reservations against NATO (graph bellow, Serbia), the overall picture is positive and encouraging – 44% of respondents said „Security provided and prosperity protected by NATO is useful“; 28% shared the opposite view (Graph 19). However, it is less than in December 2016, when it was 36%.

Similarly to other questions, we see differences among the groups of students – on the positive pole, Slovakia (58% of affirmative responses), on the negative pole, Serbia – with just 29% (Graph 20). As for Serbia, when comparing with December 2016 survey, we see not an increase of positive responses, but at least a decline of negative ones (from 42% to 30% in April 2017), whereas the portion of „no opinions“ increased.

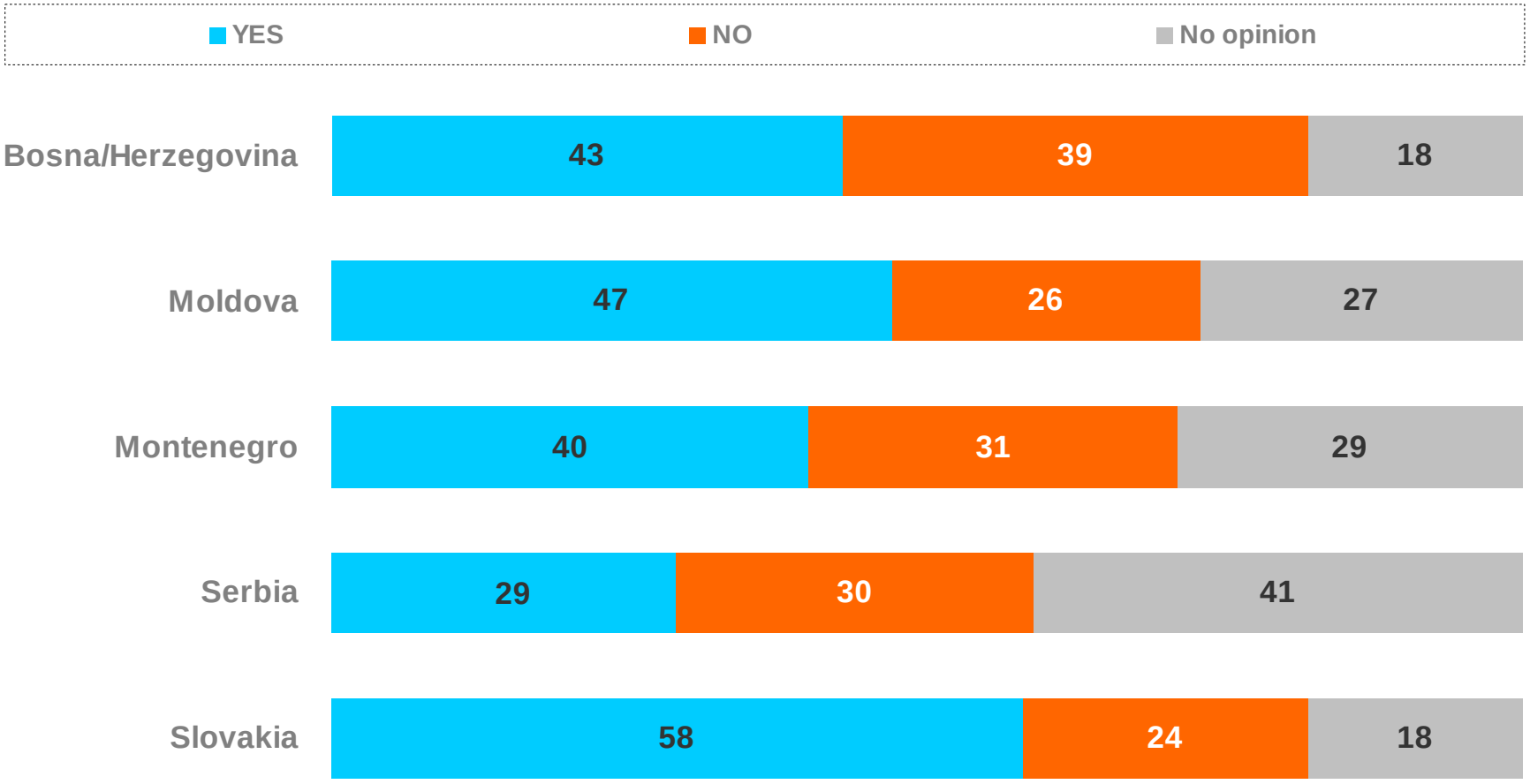
Graph 19: Security provided and prosperity protected by NATO is useful:

(all five countries, responses in %)



Source: SIV/2017

Graph 20: Security provided and prosperity protected by NATO is useful: (responses in %)



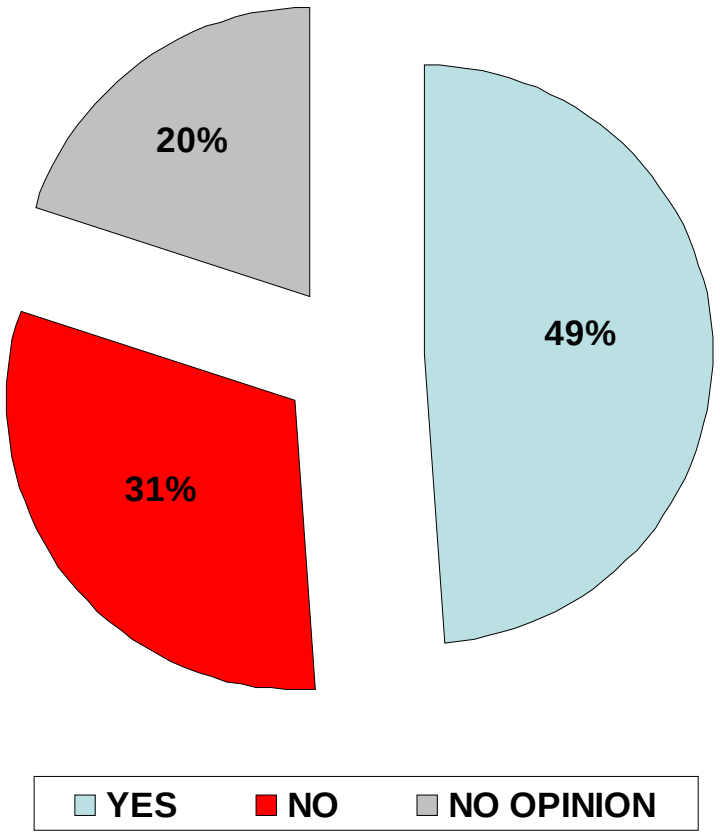
Source: SIV/2017

Transatlantic cooperation has a solid base in common values

Almost half of the respondents said that the EU and the USA share enough values to cooperate in the future (Graph 21). It is slightly more than in December 2016 (44%).

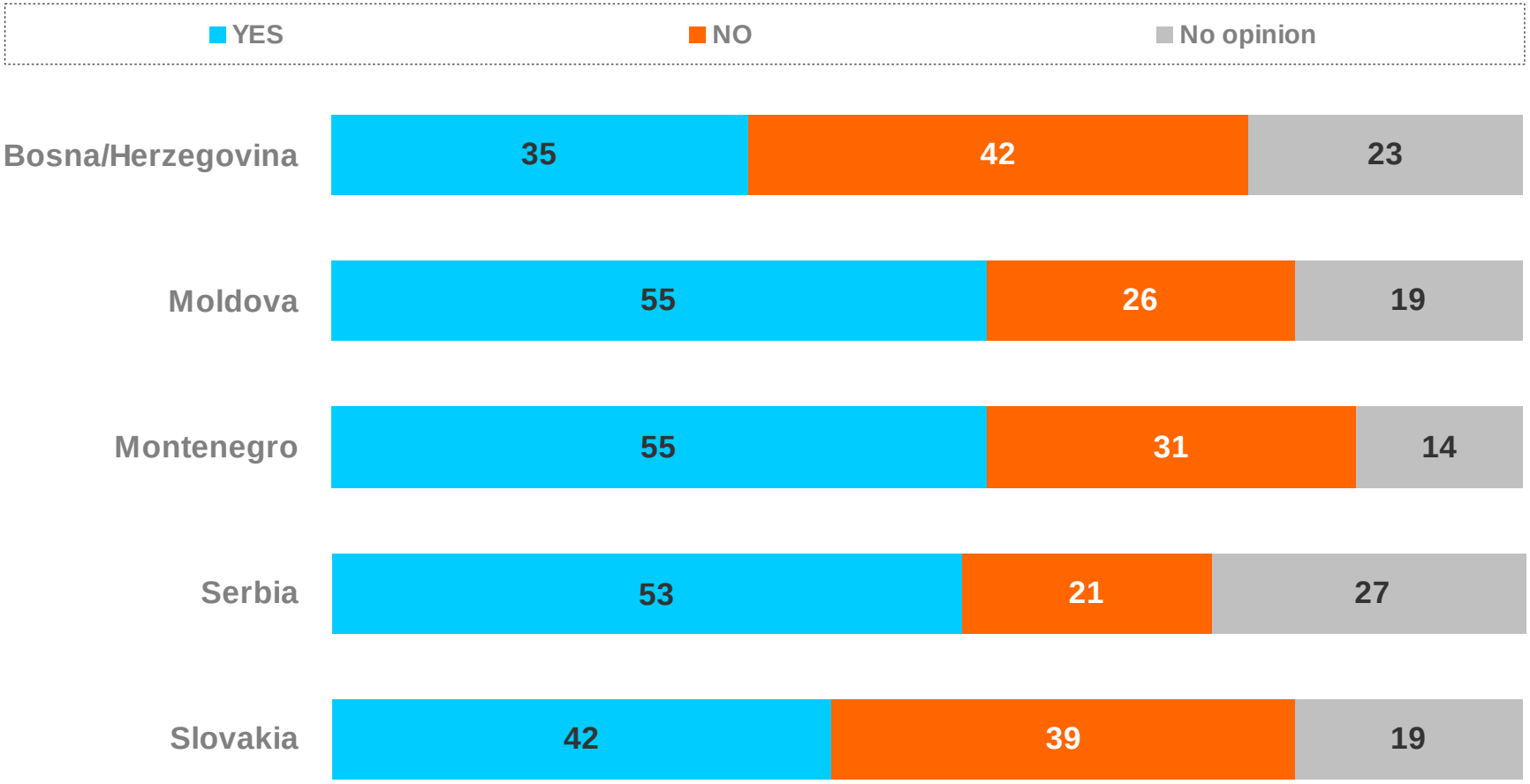
A closer look on students' groups reveals an interesting picture with regard to Serbian students – they are evidently not NATO fans, nevertheless, they are very constructive when it comes to transatlantic cooperation (Graph 22).

Graph 21: Do you think that the EU and the USA share enough common values to cooperate in the future? (all five countries, responses in %)



Source: SIV/2017

Graph 22: Do you think that the EU and the USA share enough common values to cooperate in the future? (responses in %)



Source: SIV/2017

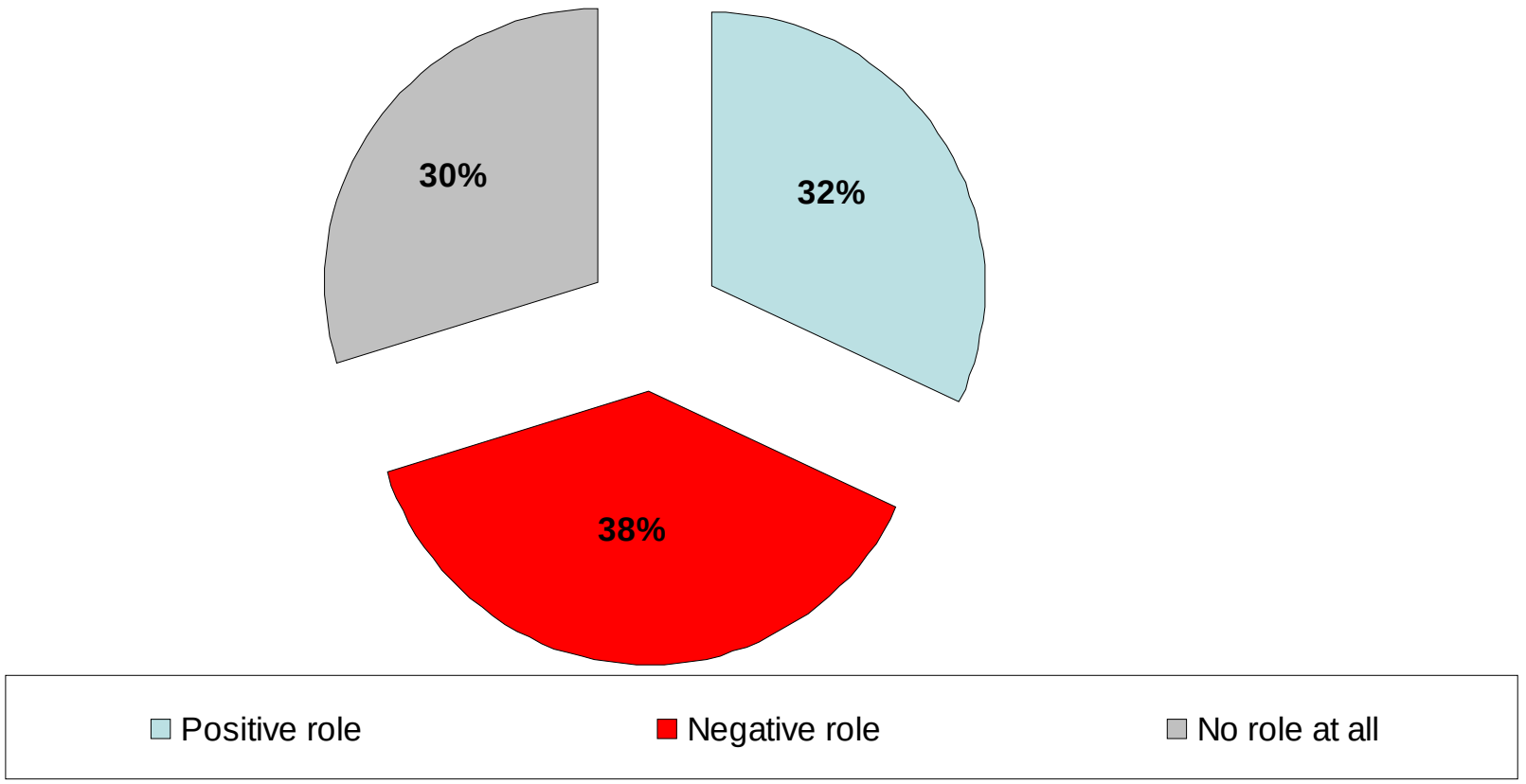
Role of NATO disputable

Responses to question „what role NATO plays in political and economic development of your country“ are divided in three almost equal shares (Graph 23). This pattern is stable across both surveys.

A more detailed picture shows the variations among the groups – among Slovak and Moldavian students the pro-NATO views prevail, whereas the countries of Western Balkans incline towards a more critical position (Graph 24).

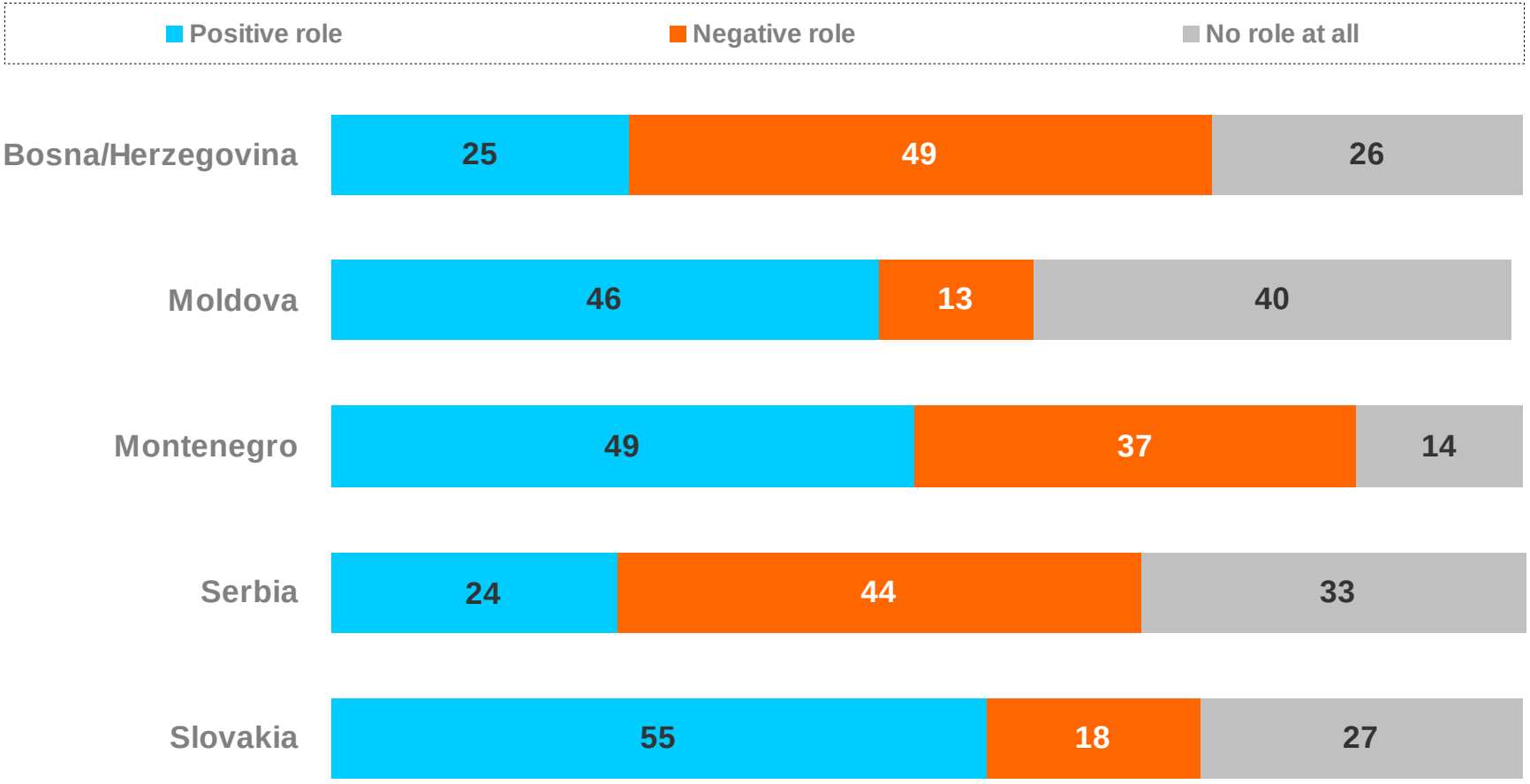
When we compare the EU and NATO perceptions (Graph 25), the EU is the „winner“. The closest results are in Montenegro, which joined NATO in May 2017, shortly after the spring survey was conducted.

Graph 23: In the political and economic development of your country, NATO plays: (all five countries, responses in %)



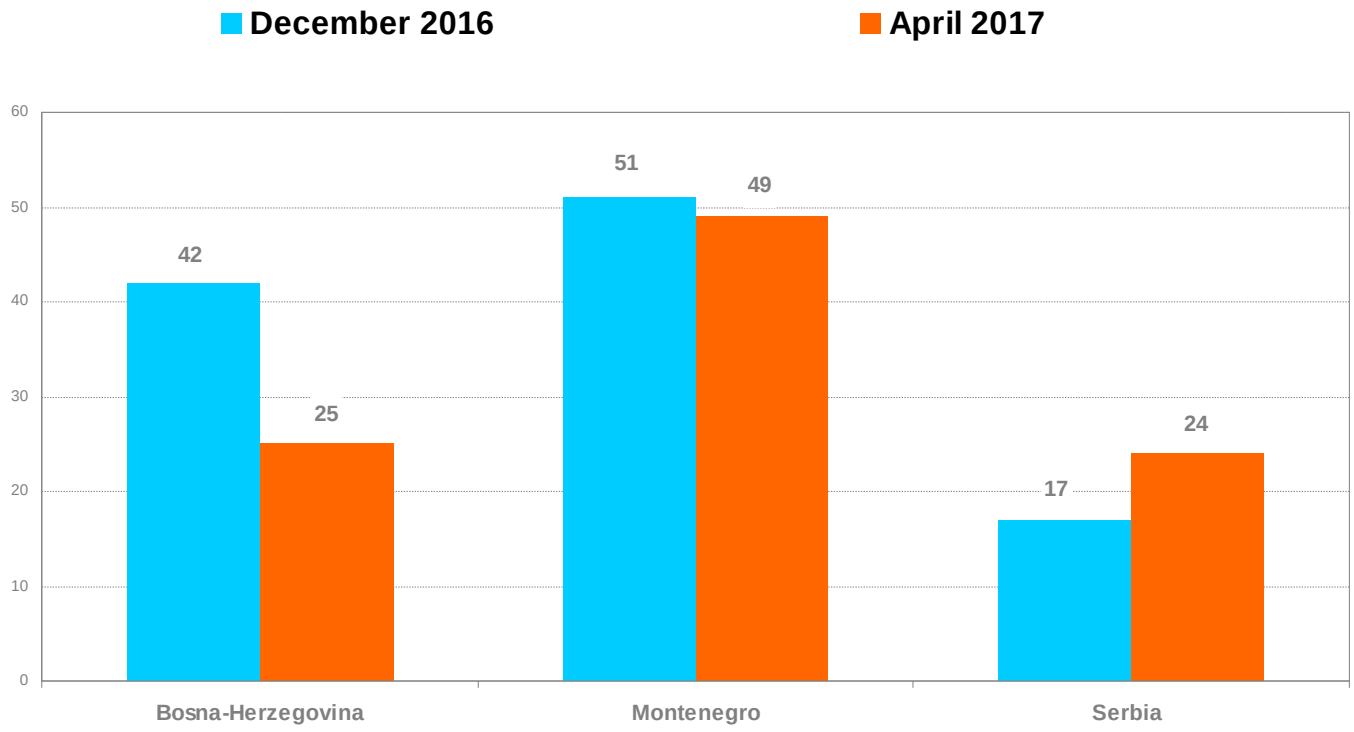
Source: SIV/2017

Graph 24: In the political and economic development of your country, NATO plays: (responses in %)



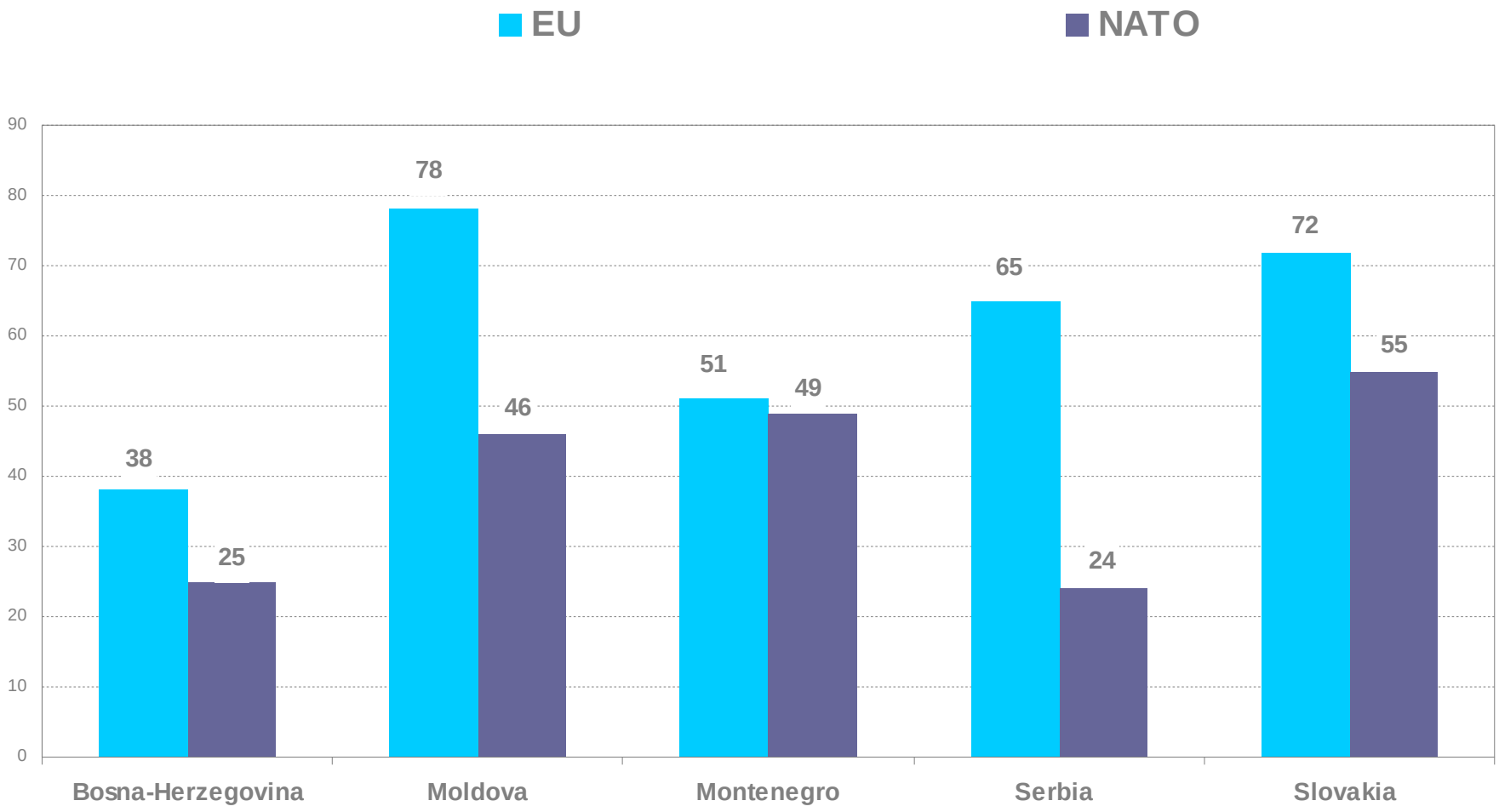
Source: SIV/2017

Q13. In political and economic development of your country NATO plays... (only POSITIVE ROLE responses, in %)



Source: SIV/2017

Graph 25: Positive role of the EU and NATO in the political and economic development of your country:



Source: SIV/2017

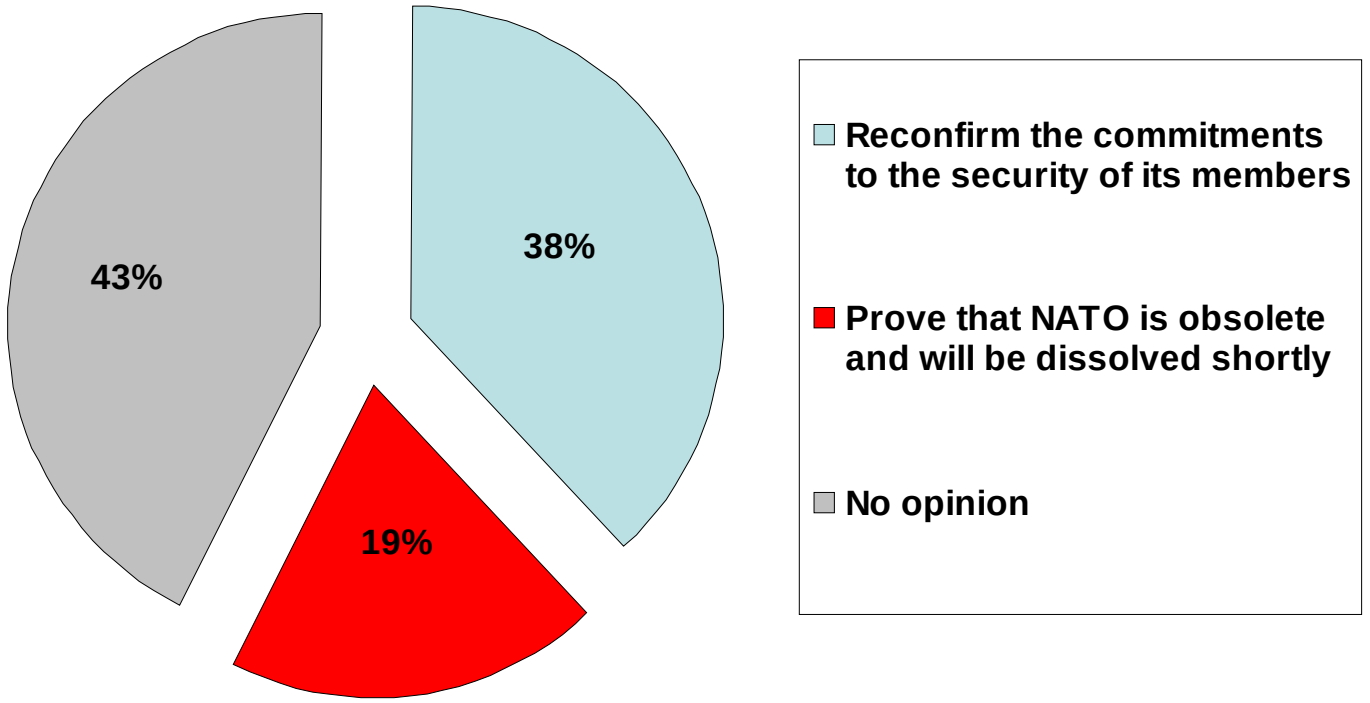
Too many uninformed responses

Students were asked to give their opinions on the upcoming NATO summit (May 2017). However, large part of them were not able to choose between two principled alternatives: „Will NATO reconfirm the commitments to the security of its members“ or „Prove that NATO is obsolete and will be dissolved shortly“ and responded with „no opinion“ (graph 26). Taking into consideration that most of the students are studying social sciences or even international relations one would expect more informed opinions.

The distribution was different among those who participated in the students´ debate – out of this group „only“ 29% had no opinion and 48% chose the first alternative.

Graph 26: NATO´s upcoming summit at the end of May 2017 will:

(all five countries, responses in %)



Source: SIV/2017

Content:

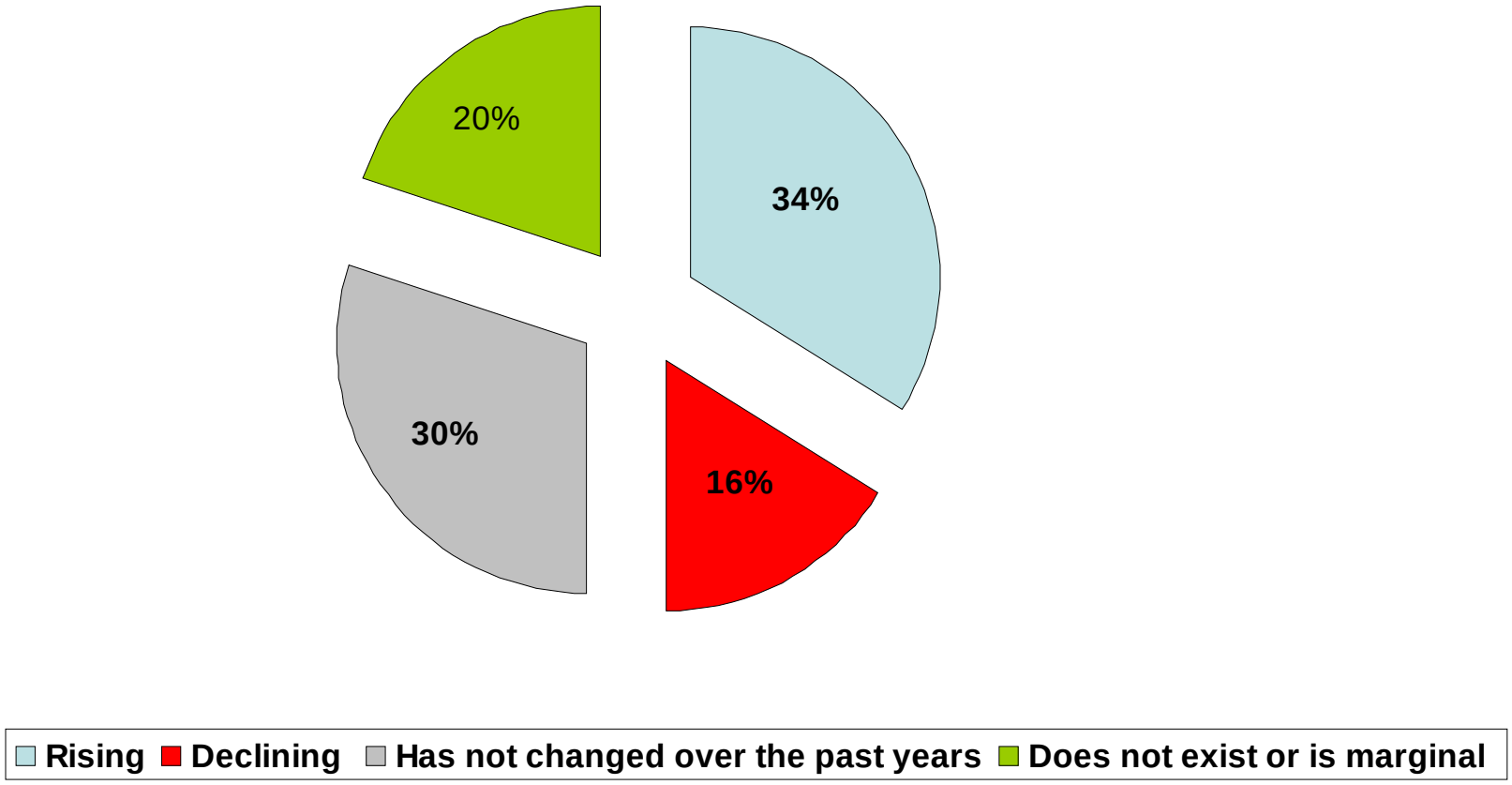
1. Students expressed clear preference for liberal democracy and the West
2. EU – for majority an ultimate goal
3. NATO and security
4. Populism and extremism are threats to democracy
5. Students and the public life

Students are aware of threats to democracy

Almost two thirds of students see extremism as rising or staying about the same, only 20% said it does not exist and 16% saw it on decline (Graph 27). Rising extremism is a phenomenon in Slovakia (clear majority - 57% of Slovak respondents said) (Graph 28). This is probably related to popularity of extreme right party People's Party – Our Slovakia.

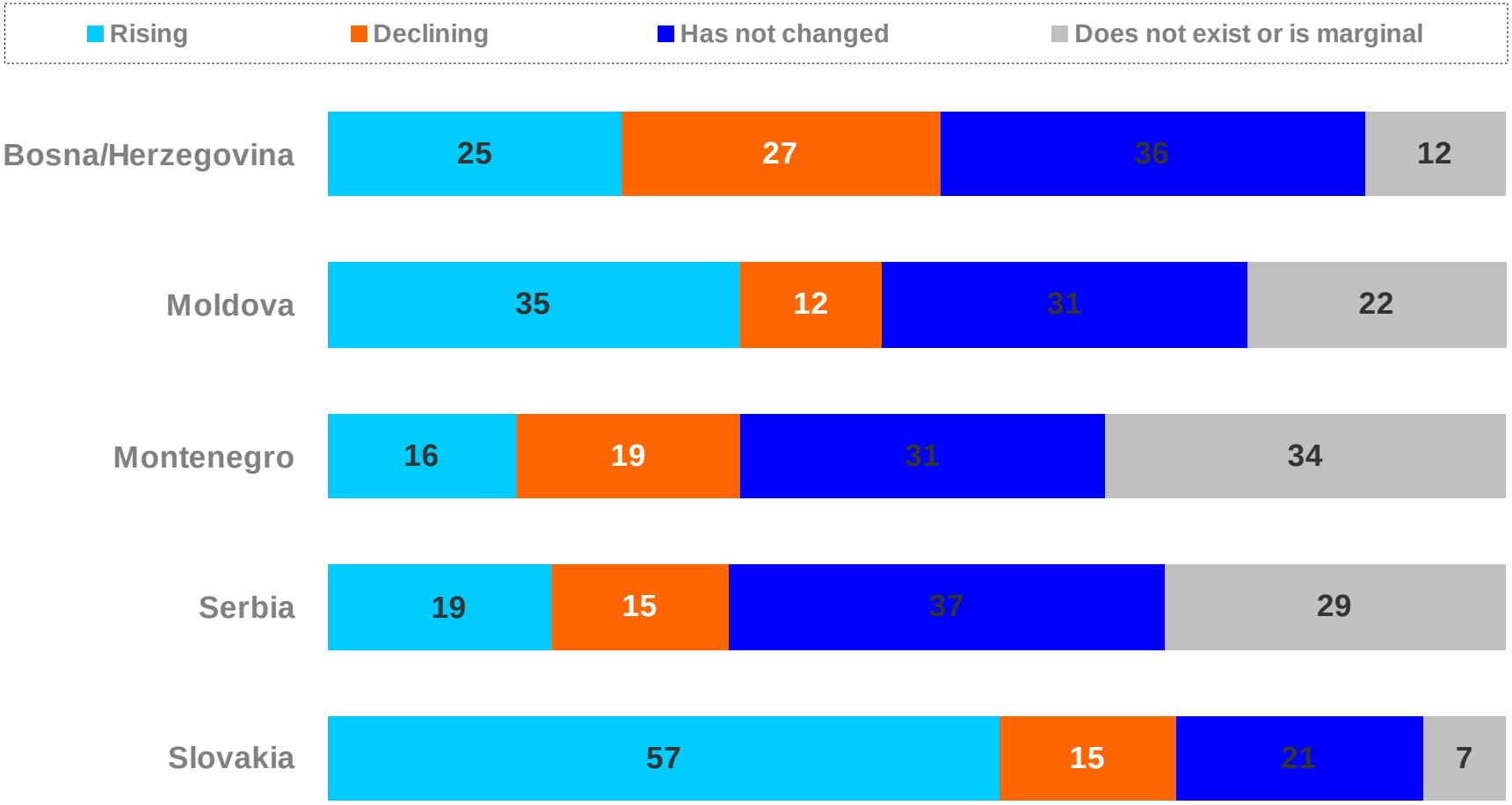
In December 2017 survey, the students were asked if they believe that the rise of extreme, euro-sceptic, and populist parties and political leaders across the EU as a threat to EU cooperation and integration - all in all, roughly 60% responded agreeably.

Graph 27: In your opinion extremism in your country is: (all five countries, responses in %)



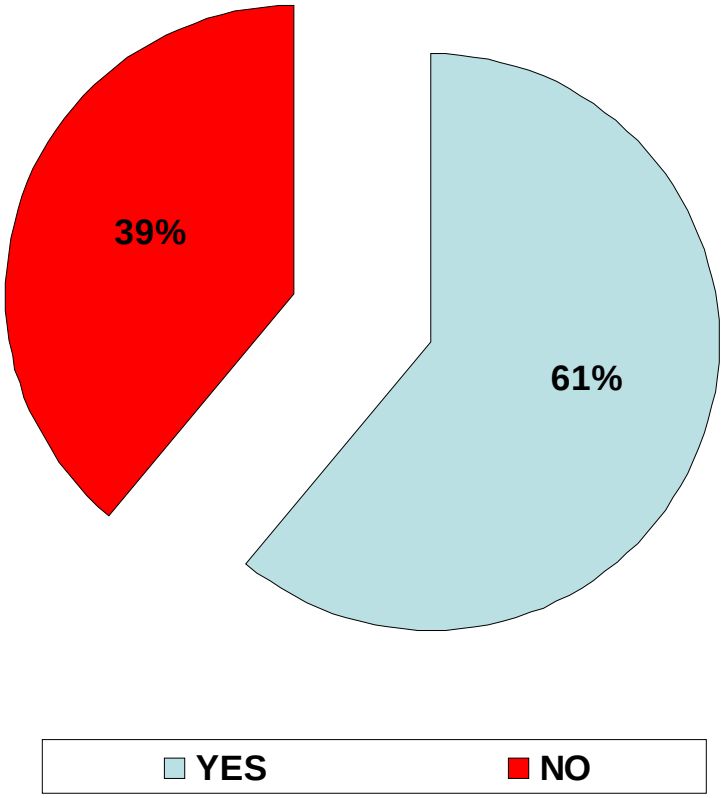
Source: SIV/2017

Graph 28: In your opinion, extremism in your country is: (responses in %)



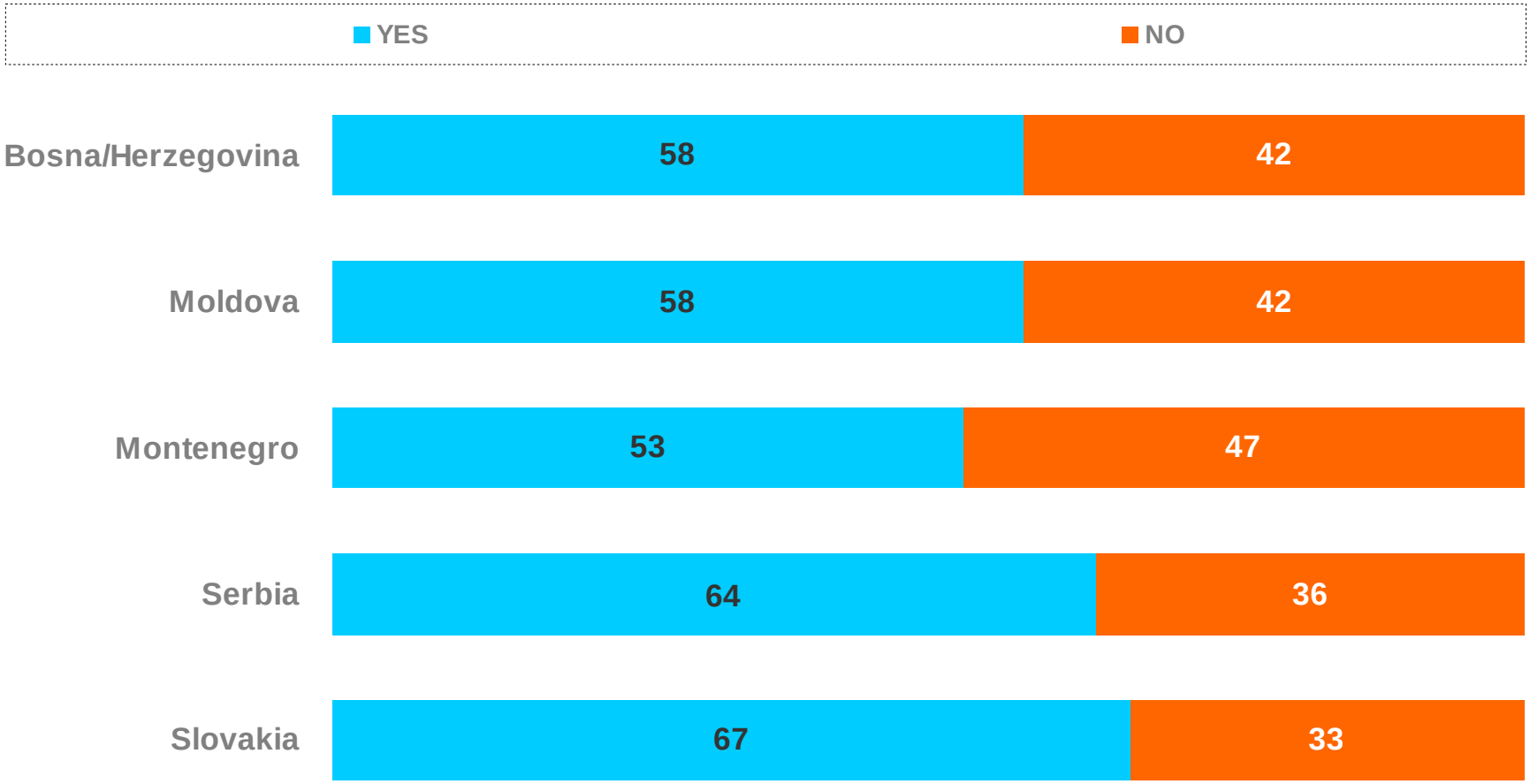
Source: SIV/2017

Graph 29: We see the rise of extreme, euro-sceptic, and populist parties and political leaders across the EU. Do you believe that this is a direct threat to EU cooperation and integration? (all five countries, responses in %)
only in December



Source: SXII/2016

Graph 30: We see the rise of extreme, euro-sceptic, and populist parties and political leaders across the EU. Do you believe that this is a direct threat to EU cooperation and integration? (responses in %) only in December



Source: SXII/2016

Content:

1. Students expressed clear preference for liberal democracy and the West
2. EU – for majority an ultimate goal
3. NATO and security
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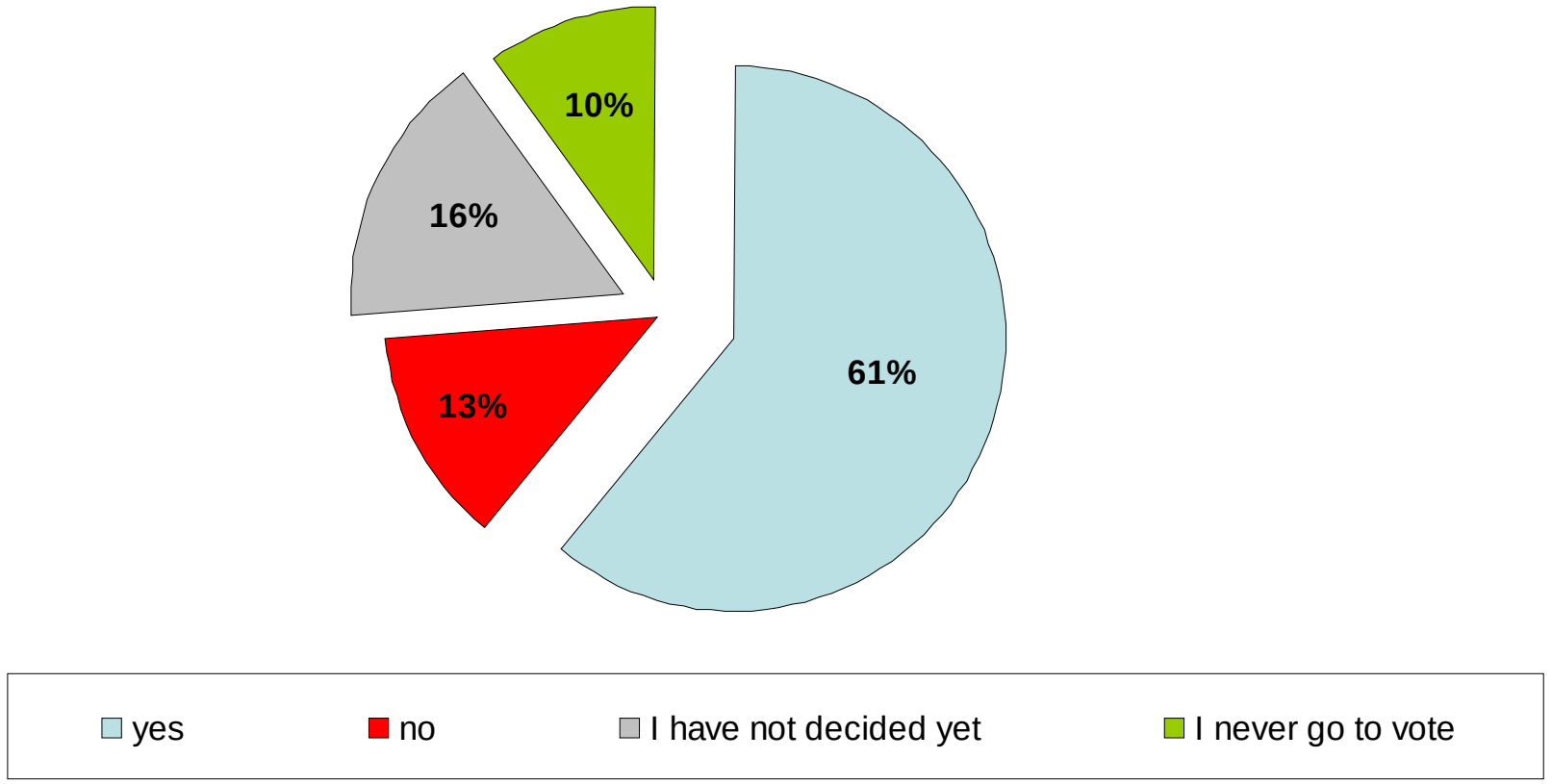
5. Students and the public life

The students tend to be active citizens

On average, 61% of students would vote and 26% would run for a office (graphs 31 and 33). The levels they would run are almost evenly distributed between local, regional, national and transnational (Graph 35).

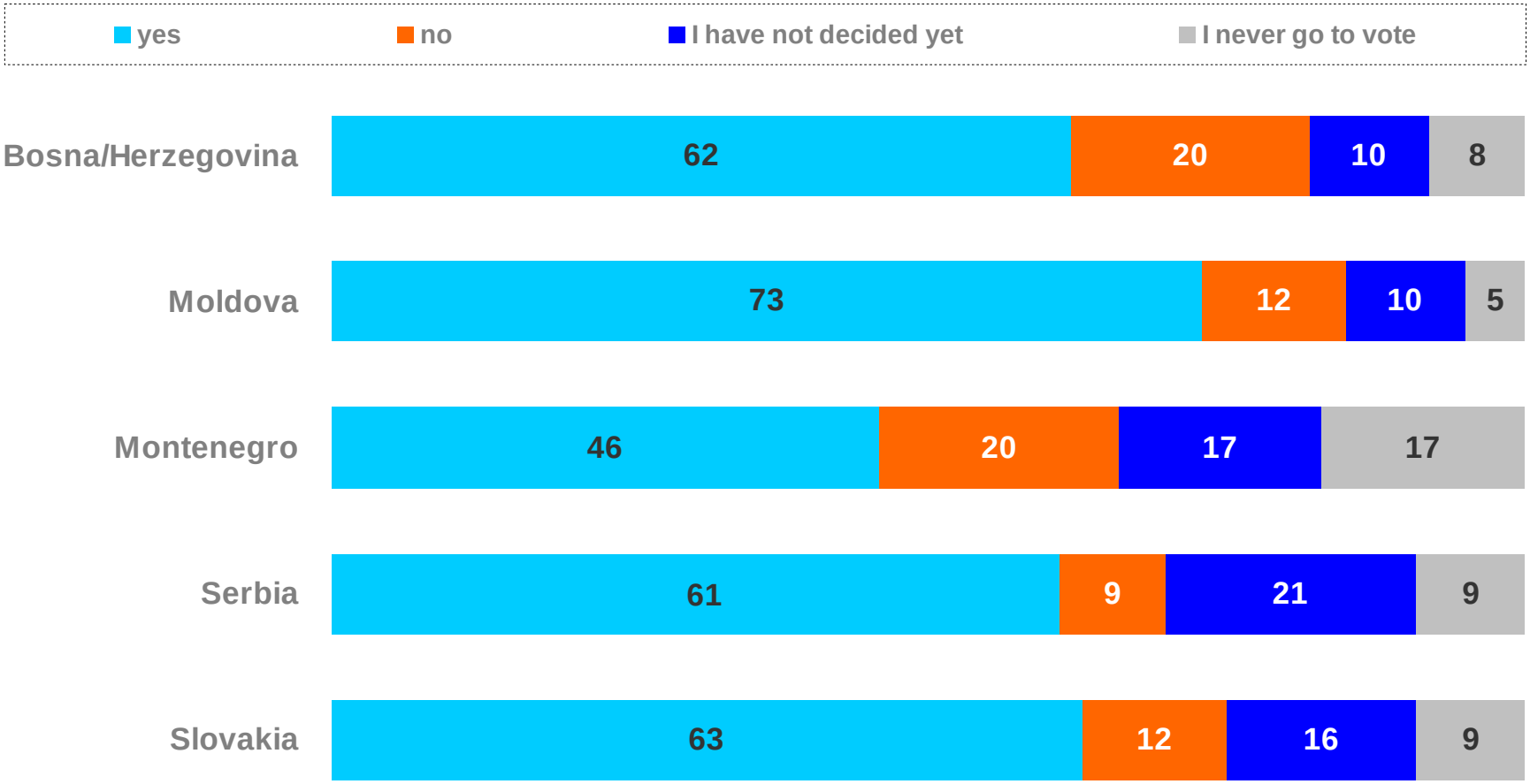
This is a very optimistic picture of participation potential for the future of all five countries.

Graph 31: In the next parliamentary elections in your country, are you planning to vote? (all five countries, responses in %)



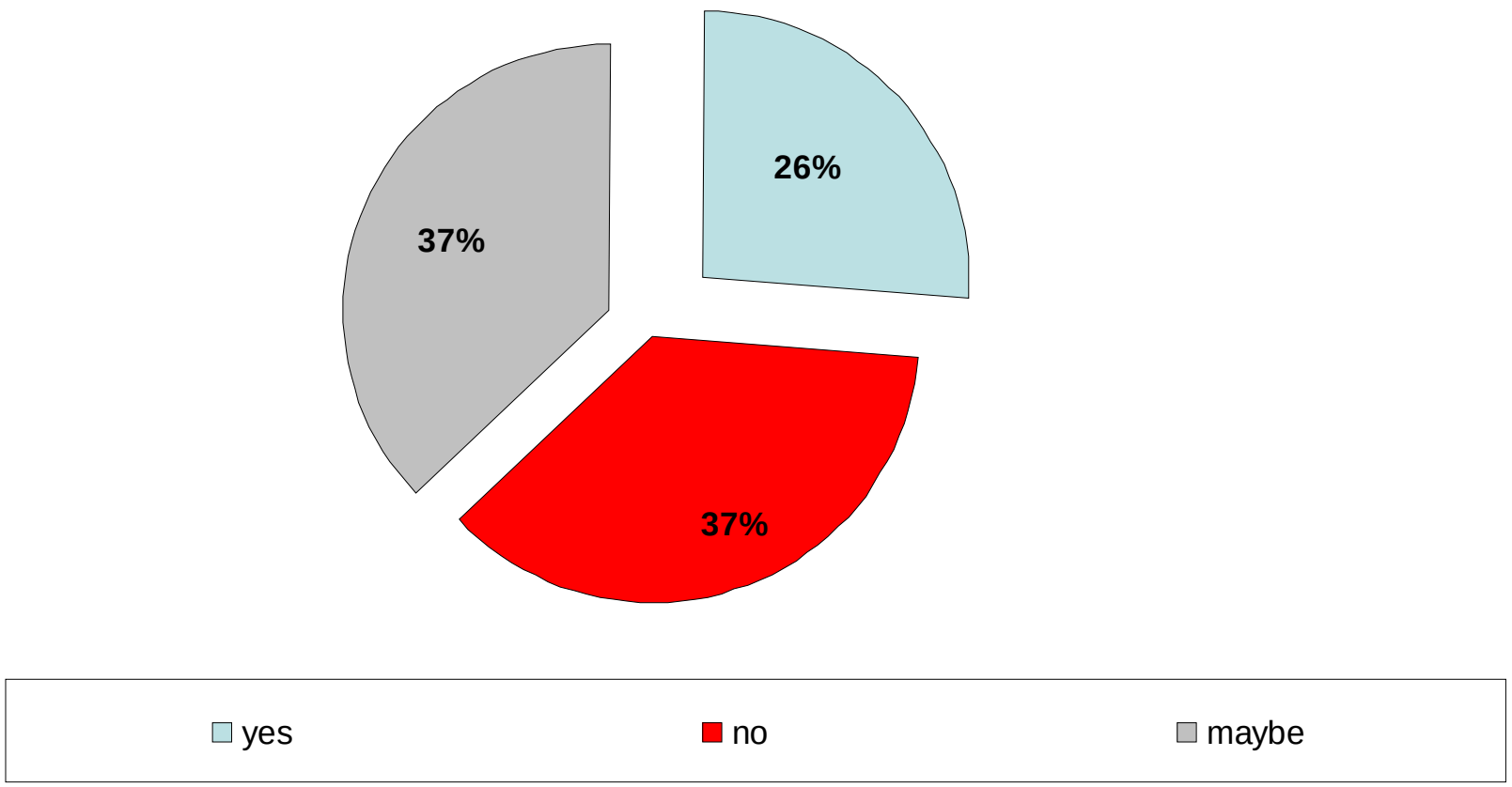
Source: SIV/2017

Graph 32: In the next parliamentary elections in your country, are you planning to vote? (all five countries, responses in %)



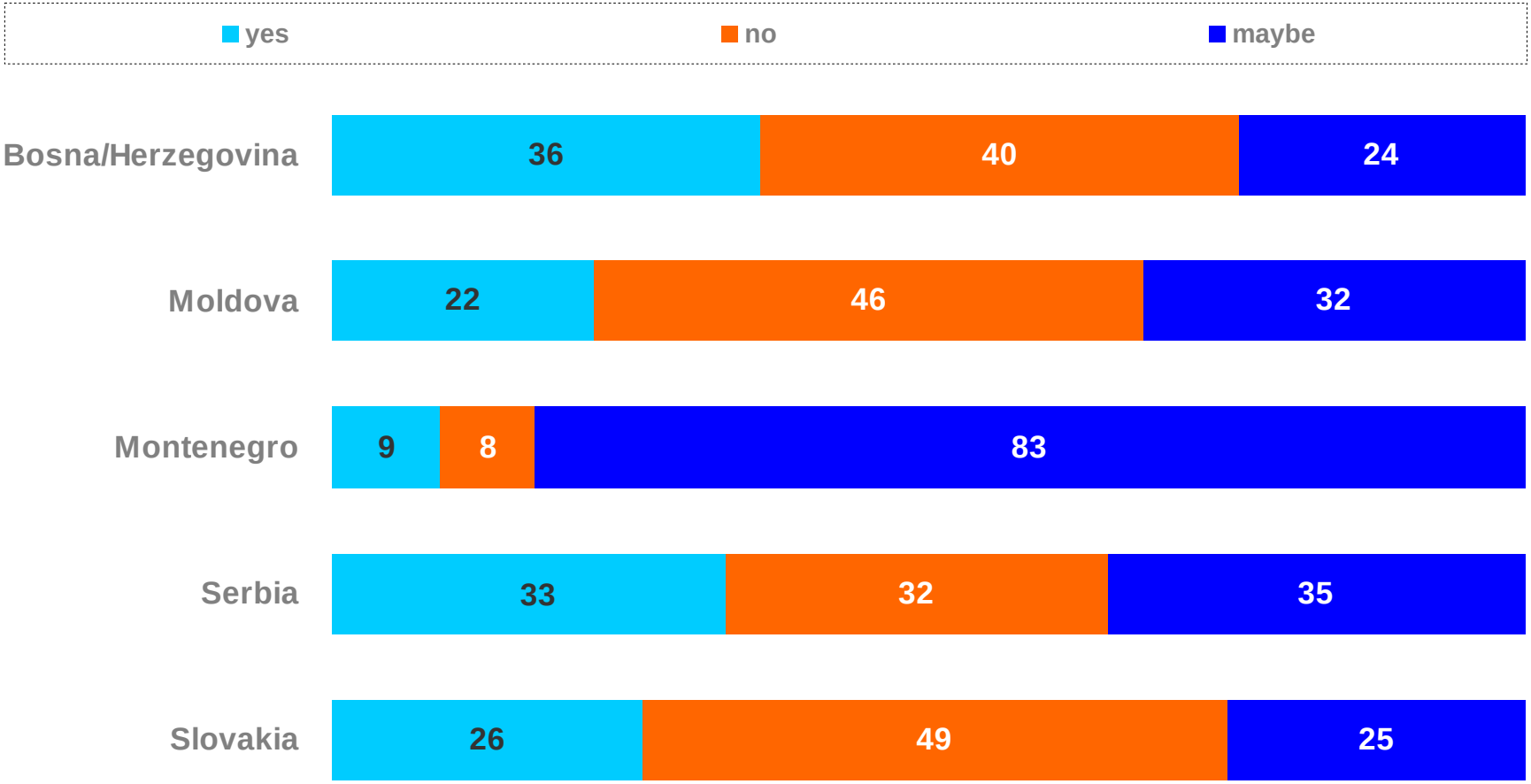
Source: IV/2017

Graph 33: In the future, would you consider running for an elected position as a candidate? (all five countries, responses in %)



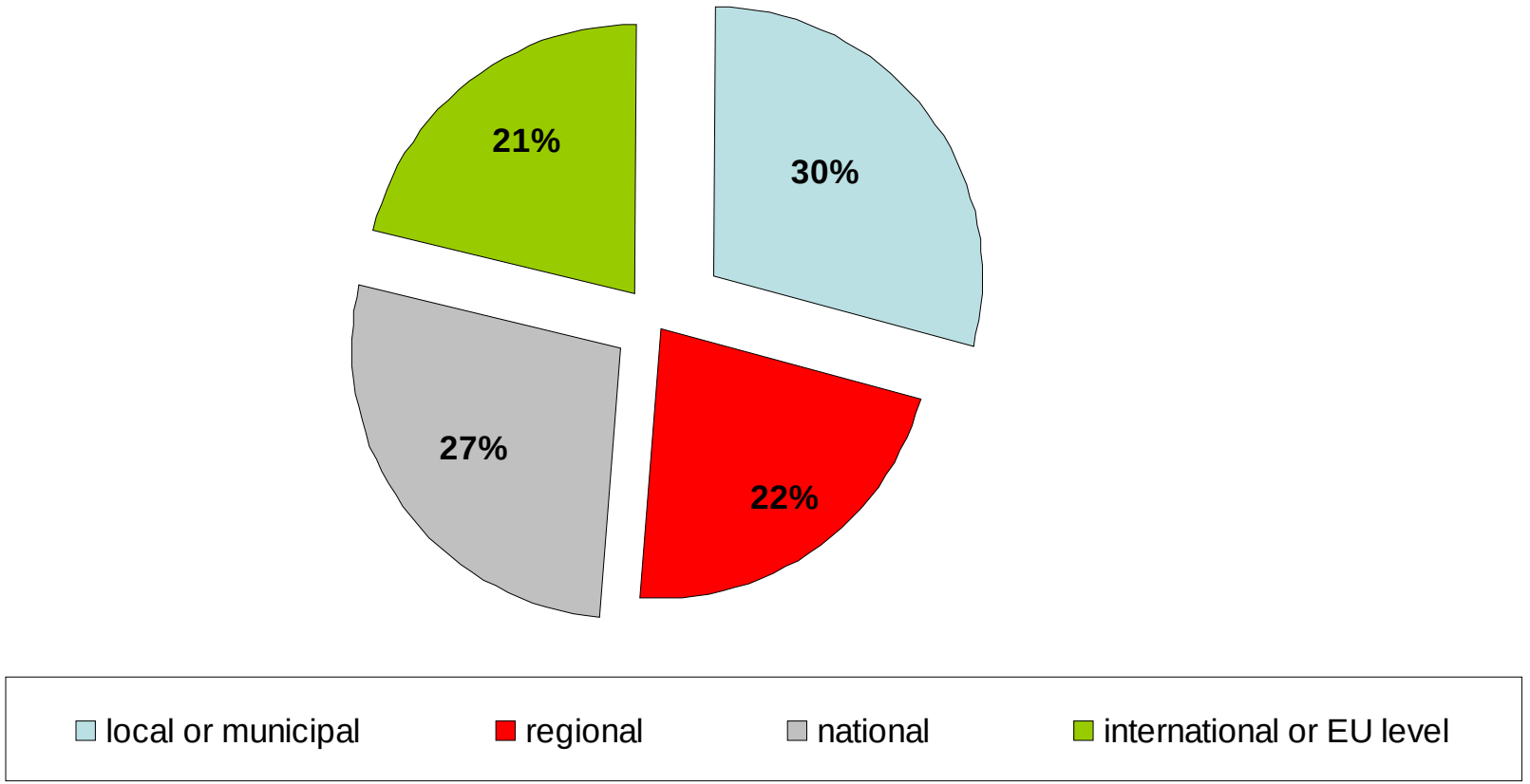
Source: SIV/2017

Graph 34: In the future, would you consider running for an elected position as a candidate? (responses in %)



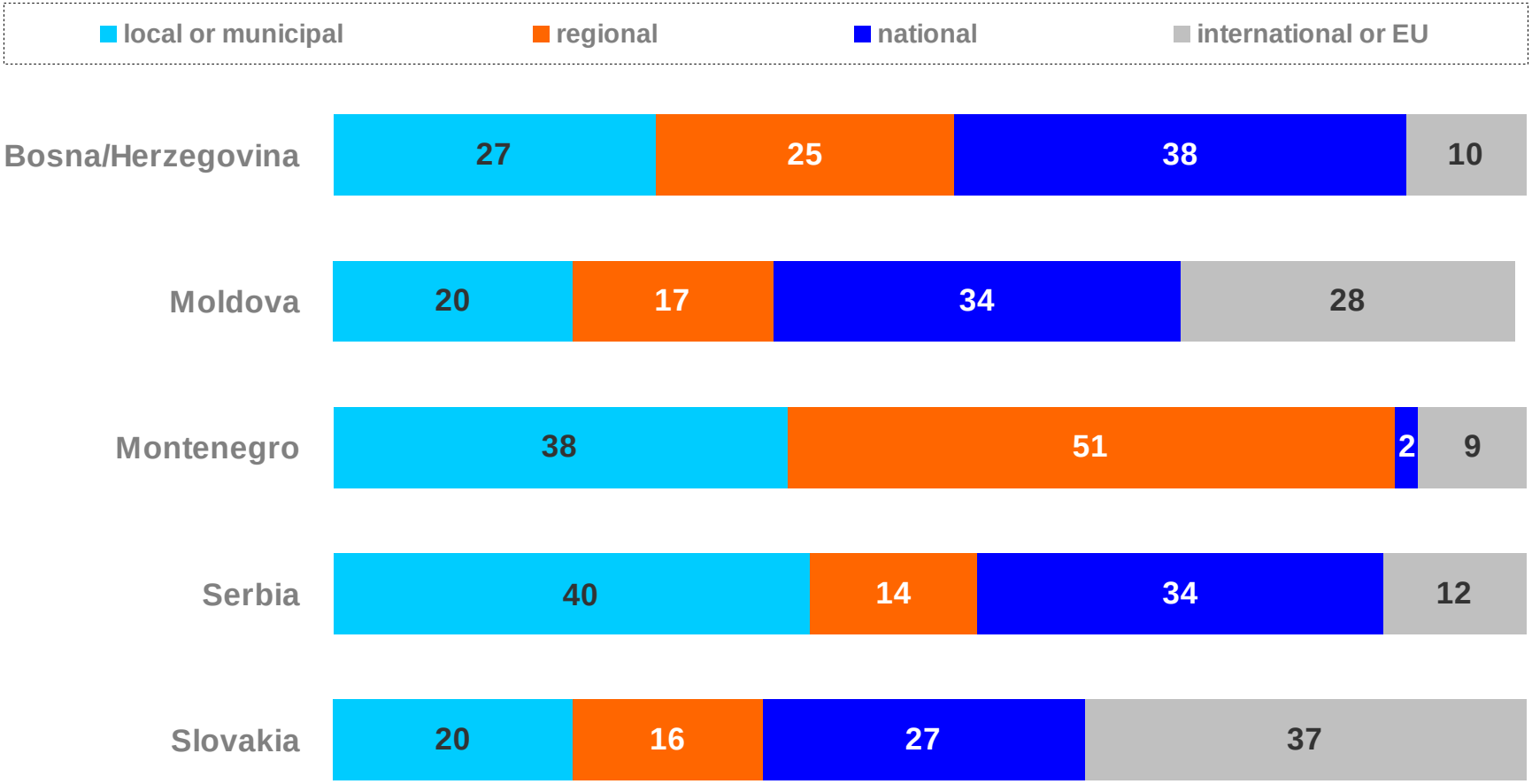
Source: SIV/2017

Graph 35: Imagine that you are a candidate in an election. At which level would you run? (all five countries, responses in %)



Source: SIV/2017

Graph 36: Imagine that you are a candidate in an election. At which level would you run? (responses in %)



Source: IV/2017