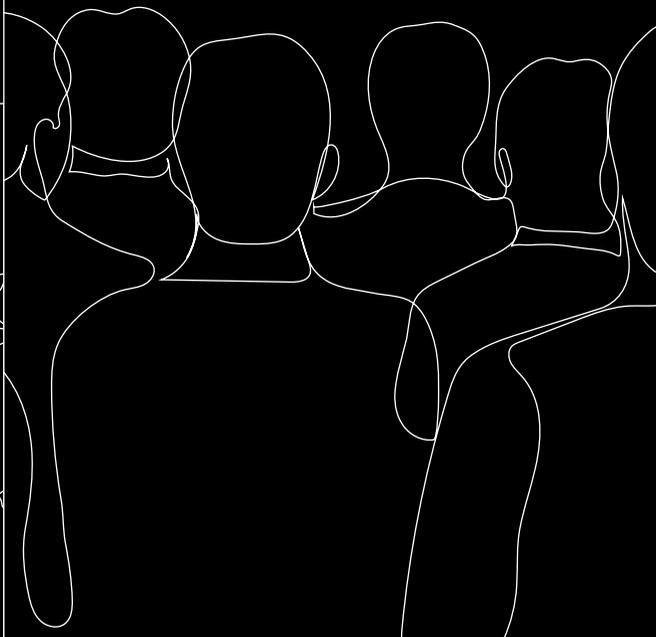




GLOBSEC

IDEAS SHAPING THE WORLD



GLOBSEC Trends

2022

**CEE amid
the war
in Ukraine**



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“GLOBSEC Trends show us what people think, highlight the differences between countries, and provide the context of how the data evolve over time. But most importantly, they raise awareness and help us defend our democratic information space.”

Ivan Korčok,
Minister of Foreign and European Affairs
of the Slovak Republic

Countries surveyed



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“The 2022 GLOBSEC Trends report offers a timely and interesting snapshot of Central and Eastern Europeans’ perceptions on key issues pertaining to foreign, defence and security policy. As such, it is a useful reference for scholars and policy-makers alike.”

Benedetta Berti-Alberti, Head, Policy Planning, Office of the Secretary General, NATO

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For full credits and methodology please see page 90.

Executive summary

The invasion of Ukraine, including its unsettling brutality, has served as a reminder to Europe that peace is a rather fragile affair. The developments have been particularly disconcerting for Central and Eastern European countries that previously experienced both Russian occupation and aggression. The conflict, however, has also strengthened solidarity in the region and elicited a sense of relief that the countries are no longer “stuck” between different spheres of influence. The polling data for this report, which was collected amid Russia’s ongoing atrocities in Ukraine, measured robust and rising support for the West and the Western model of governance. CEE societies broadly identify Russia as the aggressor and a threat to the security of both the region and the world.

While a majority in the region are able to distinguish between right and wrong, there are some alarming gaps. This is particularly true in countries that have seen pervasive (pro-)Kremlin propaganda go unchallenged for years. The distorted view of certain segments of populations towards events in Ukraine, combined with potential economic hardship ahead, could leave these vulnerable groups as potential targets for populist and autocratic leaders. Cynical political figures, in this vein, may seek to exploit fear and frustration for their own political benefit.

As the matters in Europe are becoming rather “black and white”, so is this report. While there are nuances and differences across countries, these are our key findings.

Key findings

Central and Eastern Europeans >



> feel part of the West

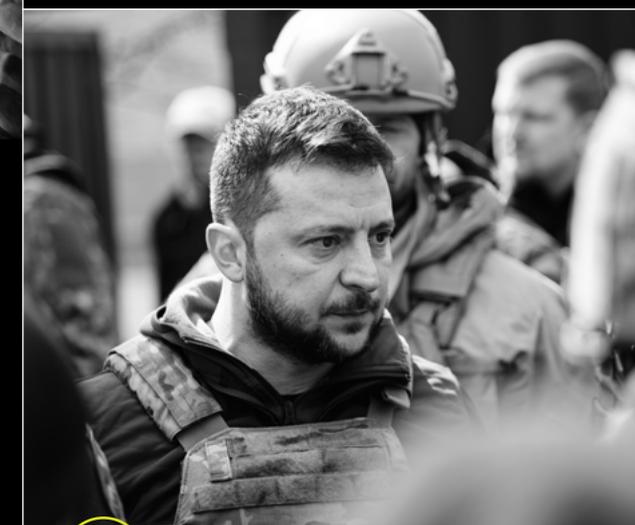
EU and NATO backing has increased slightly over the past year - 4 in 5 CEE respondents now want to be part of Western structures and perceive them as guarantors of security and territorial integrity.

> see the US as more important

The perception that the US is a strategic partner has soared by 10 percentage points since 2021 - Washington is now viewed as a key ally in NATO by 3/4 of respondents in the CEE region.

> consider Russia to be the aggressor

Russia is now considered a threat to national security by a majority in the region – underscoring a major shift from prior reports. The favourability ratings of Vladimir Putin similarly have declined to record lows.



> approve of president Volodymyr Zelensky

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, perceived favourably by 2/3 of the region’s population, is four times more popular than Vladimir Putin.



> lack awareness of China

Most CEE societies demonstrate minimal awareness concerning possible threats coming from China. In five countries, a fifth of the population could not indicate whether the Chinese regime could be a source of inspiration for their country or not.

> disagree over Ukraine's integration

CEE countries are split over whether Ukraine should become part of the EU and/or NATO or remain neutral.

> prefer economic over military response

While there is broad support for sanctions and efforts to decrease the region's energy dependence on Russia, a majority also oppose sending NATO troops to Ukraine.

> are more satisfied with democracy

Satisfaction with how democracy works, slightly increased everywhere except Romania. Openness to autocratic leaders, however, remains strong.

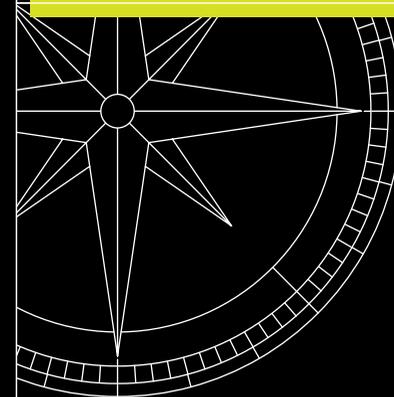
> believe conspiracy theories

Key conspiracy theories that undermine trust in democratic governance still resonate, finding support from around 30-50% of CEE respondents.

Country highlights

Bulgaria

Least pro-Western country in the region



Bulgaria exhibits the least Euro-Atlantic orientation among surveyed countries. It is the only country where support for leaving the Alliance has increased over the past year (38% now wish to exit NATO).

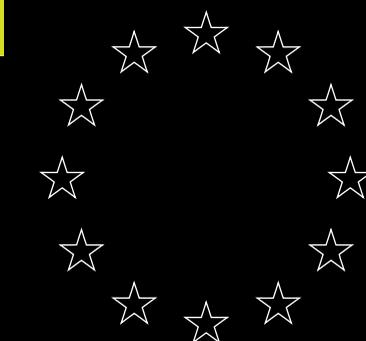
Despite the invasion of Ukraine, 57% of Bulgarians still do not consider Russia to be a security threat to the country and 30% consider Russia to be the most important strategic partner.

Emmanuel Macron stands out as the only world leader viewed favourably, at nearly 60% approval, by a majority of Bulgarians.

Bulgarians also remain vulnerable to conspiracy theories – 54% of respondents, on average, believed three conspiracy narratives concerning democracy.

Czechia

Support for staying in the EU in Czechia has increased by 13 percentage points over the past year and now stands at 80%.



From Eurosceptics to Eurofans

Czechs also remain enthusiastic about their relations with Germany - 74% perceive Berlin as a strategic partner, while Czechia is the only country in the region where Olaf Scholz is viewed favourably by a majority.

Awareness of Chinese influence is strong in Czechia. 50% of Czechs perceive China as a security threat, the highest number in the region.

68% of respondents are satisfied with how democracy works in their country, a 21-percentage point increase since 2020. Czechia is further one of three surveyed countries where a majority (58%) trusts the media.

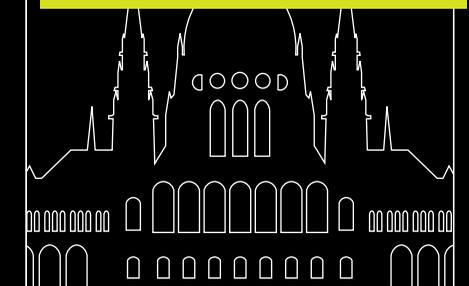
Hungary

Respondents in Hungary are the least supportive of Ukraine's efforts to join the EU and NATO from the region. Only 23% back Ukraine joining either or both organisations while 63% would prefer that Ukraine becomes a neutral country.

Russia is perceived as a security threat by 45% in Hungary. Perceptions that Russia is a strategic partner, meanwhile, were unaffected by the war - around 35% identify Russia as a strategic partner, the same figure as in 2021.

1/5 of respondents sees China as a strategic partner of Hungary and perceive Xi Jinping positively. Yet 48% of Hungarians had never heard of him or were unsure how to respond to the question.

Minor changes in attitudes



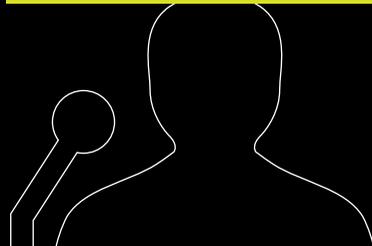
Satisfaction with democracy, since 2020, has increased by 9 percentage points to reach 54%. This comes despite the decline in the quality of the country's democracy according to numerous international indexes.

Country highlights

Estonia

Estonia boasts one of the highest levels of satisfaction with democracy in the region, reaching two thirds of the population. This is also reflected in relatively high levels of trust towards the country's armed forces (76%), president (72%) and media (52%).

Satisfied with democracy



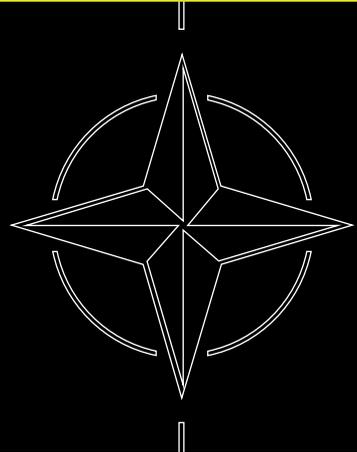
Despite strong awareness of Russia's threats, only 24% perceive China as a security threat to their country, with 22% unsure.

This ambivalence came through on a range of topics: 25% do not know if liberal democracy threatens their values and identity, 15% do not know if their country geopolitically belongs to the East or West and 11% declined to say whether the country should stay or leave the EU.

On the other hand, they were more unequivocal regarding Ukraine's future – 56% would welcome Ukraine in the EU and/or NATO.

Latvia

Trust in NATO



NATO enjoys widespread trust in Latvia. Support for membership increased from 72% to 79% over the past year and 79% also believe that NATO membership reduces the risk that a foreign nation will attack them.

Negative perceptions of Xi Jinping increased from 19% a year ago to 31% today. But 38% were unsure whether Taiwan should be considered an independent country, part of China or a disputed territory.

Satisfaction with how democracy works has increased by 22 percentage points since 2020 to 58% today and is the second highest in the region. Preferences for an autocratic leader, meanwhile, declined from 54% to 35%.

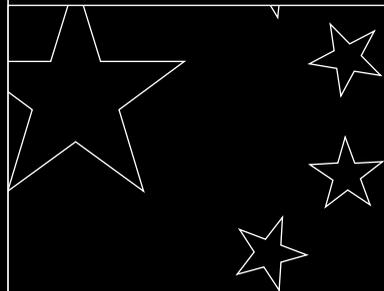
Latvia ranks as one of only three countries in the region where more people trust the media than distrust it.

Lithuania

Lithuanians are clear on the geopolitical orientation of their country - 57% would prefer their country to align with the West and 88% support EU and NATO membership. These figures put them among the top in the region.

Awareness concerning Russian aggression is also robust in the country – 83% consider Russia to be a threat to their security and 89% perceive Vladimir Putin unfavourably.

The public also holds rather sceptical views towards China. 43% believe that China poses a security threat to their country and 46% consider Taiwan to be independent. Many are still undecided, however, concerning whether China poses a threat to the security of their country (22%) or their values and identity (28%).

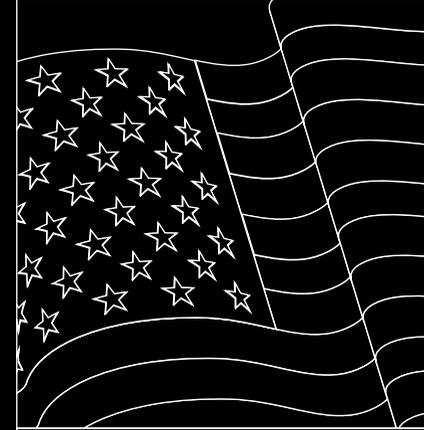


Strong position on China

Lithuania also marked the highest increase in support for democracy as a system of government over the past year – from 70% to 79%.

Poland

Polish respondents measured up as the most ardent supporters of NATO membership in the region, with 95% keen towards staying.



More of the US, less of Germany

The US also cemented its status as the most important strategic partner for Poles - 73% see Washington this way, a 19 percentage points increase since 2021. Meanwhile, the relative importance of Germany in the eyes of the public plummeted from 48% in 2021 to 27% in 2022.

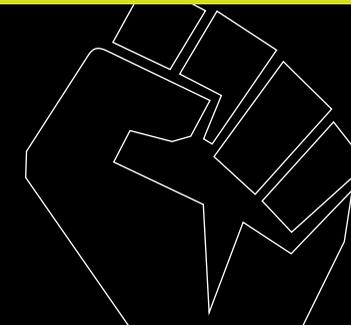
Poles also indicate the greatest willingness in the region to support Ukraine, with 88% backing further sanctions against Russia even at the price of higher cost of products.

Distrust towards the standard media in Poland ranks among the highest in the region, with only 34% of Poles declaring trust in them.

Romania

Romania is the only country in the region where backing for a Western geopolitical orientation decreased - from 43% to 27% over the past year. 12% were unsure how the country should be geopolitically positioned.

Moving to the East



An alarming 22% of respondents believe that Russia had the right to invade Ukraine and 26% think that the West was responsible for the war by provoking Russia.

Romania is also the only surveyed country where satisfaction with democracy decreased (from 30% to 23%). Openness to an authoritarian leader, at 60%, also remains highest in the region.

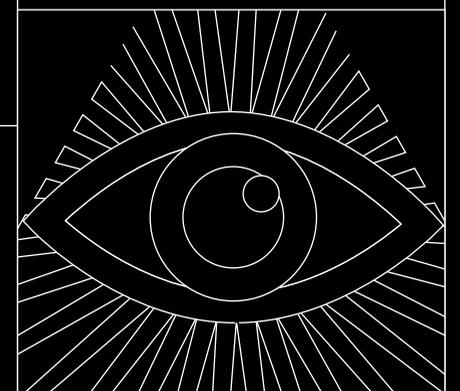
As far as security threats are concerned, Romanians give the benefit of the doubt to Beijing, with 73% not recognising China as a security threat to their country. This represents a 37-percentage point increase compared to 2020 - 51% "did not know" or were undecided at that time.

Slovakia

Slovak support for NATO saw a modest 9% percentage point uptick to 72%. While more than 70% espouse backing for both NATO and the EU, 51% still believe that geopolitically their country belongs "somewhere in-between" the East and the West.

Although Russia is perceived as a threat by 62% of respondents, 37% still see the country as one of the most important strategic partners of Slovakia.

Slovakia remains among the most vulnerable countries to conspiracy theories in the region, with 54% subscribing to various conspiracy theories.



Vulnerable and threatened

The Slovak public continues to see threats all around them. An average of 48% of respondents consider the US, Western societies, liberal democracy and/or migrants to be threats to their security and/or values and identity.

How to proceed now?

① Do not allow support for Ukraine to fade away

While a majority of respondents now espouse broad support for Ukraine, it is paramount that societies not forget the lessons learned and revert to prior beliefs. It is important, therefore, that intensive communication efforts about the war, including its causes and consequences, continue until the conflict reaches a final resolution.

② Address social policy concerns

Soaring inflation across Europe must be addressed to sustain support for sanctions. Social policies should complement sanctions and efforts to build resilience towards foreign malign influence, including cynical efforts aimed at exploiting Europe's energy dependence.

③ Keep up strong and united EU

The rising support of the CEE region for EU membership is a response, to some extent, to the bloc's unity and action vis-à-vis Russian aggression. The EU should use its renewed status as a normative power to pursue a more principled, tougher stance towards democratic backsliding, both inside and outside of its borders, alongside assertive strategic communication.

④ Leverage popularity of NATO

NATO should leverage its improved image in the region to engage in more intensive communication with citizens of CEE member states, especially those who professed lower pro-NATO sentiment in the past. The presence of NATO soldiers on the ground and military cooperation could both revive discussions concerning security and the value of NATO in promoting peace and prosperity. Peer-to-peer stories can particularly humanise the Alliance and underline the value of membership.

⑤ Step up fight against Russian propaganda

Most EU states, amid the conflict, have adopted measures to combat Russian information operations. But the effectiveness of these actions must be constantly re-evaluated and the measures adjusted accordingly in a context where buy-in to the Kremlin's narratives is rampant throughout significant subsets of the population. There is a further need to experiment with novel more systematic and offensive measures. These steps should include additional EU-wide actions and support of independent journalism in the CEE region and Russia.

⑥ Promote more accurate image of Russia

In countries with traditionally stronger pro-Russian sentiment, the current shift in perceptions regarding Russia should be utilised to rid certain segments of the population of their romantic and nostalgic feelings towards Russia, the beliefs that had previously benefitted Russian narratives in public discussions. Russia's actions and internal issues should be depicted in a more accurate manner.

⑦ Do not lose CEE, Germany

German leadership needs to take a more decisive and assertive stance through both its rhetoric and actions to resume its role as one of the EU's leaders. This approach would also enhance the recognition and favourability of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz who is still rather unknown in the region.

⑧ Learn from your mistakes

Having permitted the Russian malign influence to flourish without appropriate counter measures for years, Europe must now do better with China. Intensive strategic communication, the delineation of red lines on critical infrastructure, and open communication on Chinese influence in the region and human rights violations in China are all integral.

⑨ Use strategic communication as the first line of defence

Malign domestic and foreign actors are filling the void left by communication shortcomings of both national public institutions and international organisations such as the EU and NATO. The effective strategic communication of public institutions will require an increase in both personal and technical capabilities as a first step. Success will also be contingent on societies becoming better informed and resilient.

⑩ Keep investing in critical thinking

Despite public opinion shifts, the acceptance of disinformation and conspiracy theories remains high. Invest into critical thinking and digital skills across all age groups and, as well as into debunking and pre-bunking activities throughout society. For that to happen, in many countries, education needs to undergo reform.

East -West

Re-evaluation of strategic partners in progress

44%
in CEE want to
be part of the
West.



The notion that Central and Eastern Europe stands as a “bridge” between East and West has long been a prevailing identity trope in the region. The war in Ukraine, however, has compelled societies to re-evaluate their strategic partners and even their general geopolitical orientation. In all analysed countries, apart from Romania, there is a discernible shift in opinion away from the preference of being “somewhere-in-between” to a rather more unequivocal backing of a Western geopolitical orientation. CEE countries, amid the war in Ukraine, have also become leading voices in calling for both EU and NATO action.

There has recently been considerable discussion about the geopolitical and civilisational positioning of your country. Would you like your country to be part of the West, part of the East, or somewhere in between?

The support for the West in Czechia has increased by 23%.

West

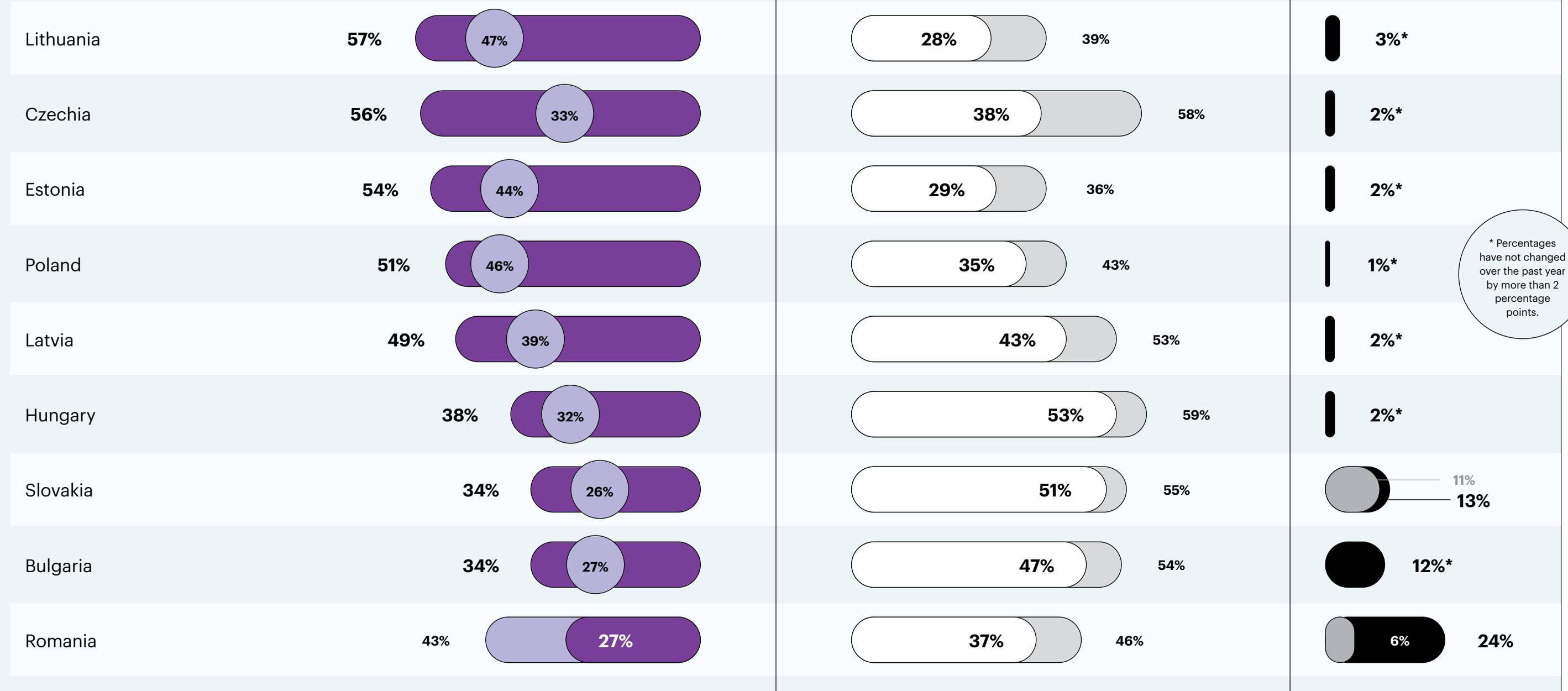
2022 2021

Somewhere in between

2022 2021

East

2022 2021



* Percentages have not changed over the past year by more than 2 percentage points.



Outliers

Romania is a clear regional outlier – almost 1/4 of respondents favour an Eastern geopolitical orientation - almost the same percentage as the preference for the Western one. Meanwhile, 12% in Romania “do not know” where they stand on Romania’s preferred geopolitical and civilisation position. Similar levels of indecisiveness are apparent among Estonians (15%) and Lithuanians and Poles (12%).

In 4 of 9 countries a majority wants to be part of the West.

We are the West now

44% of Central and Eastern Europeans express support for their countries adopting a Western geopolitical orientation. The seven percentage points increase across the region measured over the past year marks the largest since our polling began on this question in 2016. In 5 of 9 countries now, more respondents prefer a Western geopolitical orientation than the “in-between” “Central-Western” approach of needing to define one’s own path.¹

Against the backdrop of war in Ukraine, 15% of Estonians and 12% of Lithuanians, Poles and Romanians are unsure where they stand on the geopolitical and civilisation orientations of their countries.

European Union

Continued robust support across the region

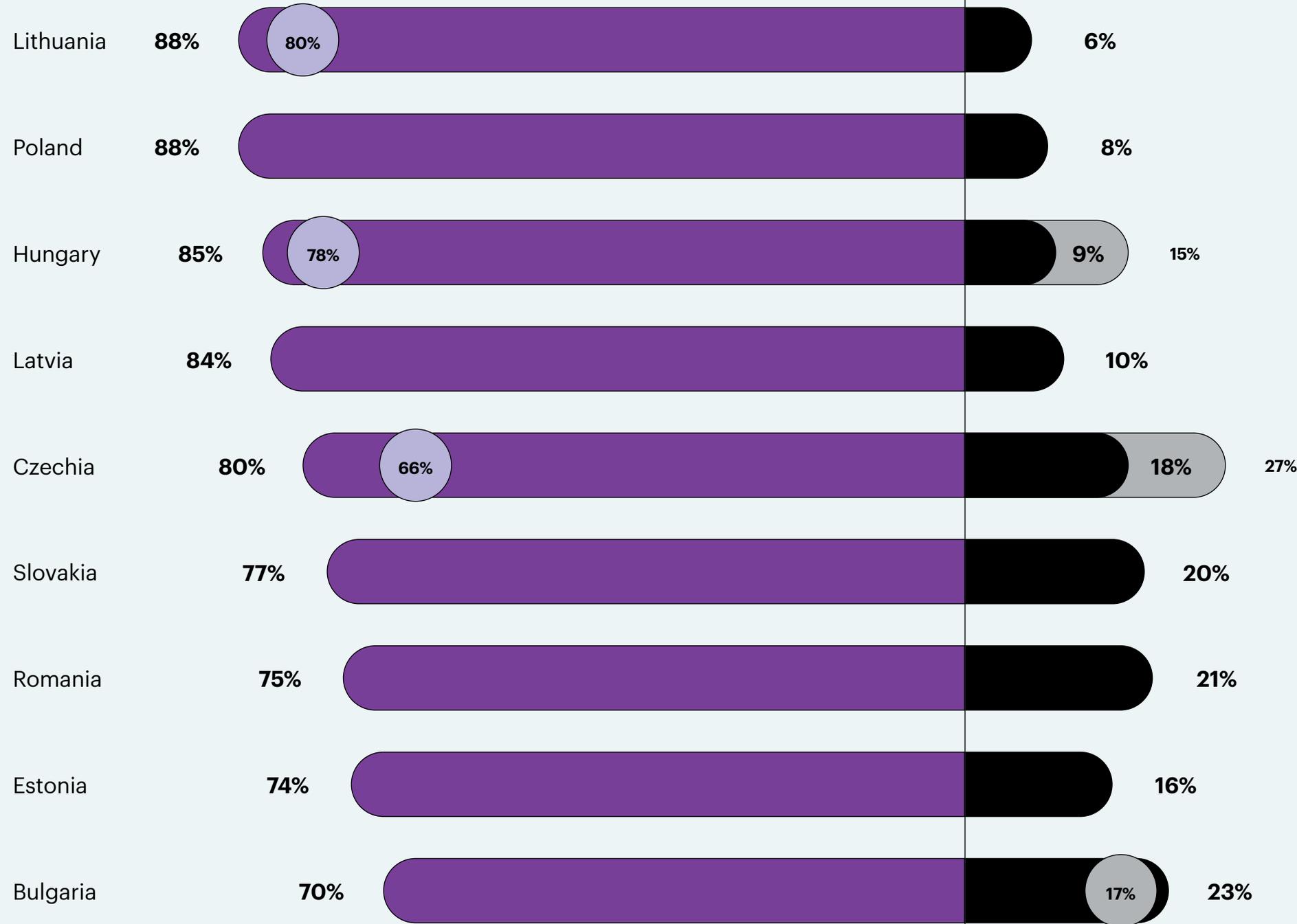
The EU garners continued robust support across the Central and Eastern European region. On average, 80% of respondents would vote to stay in the EU, underscoring the fact that EU membership has become rather entrenched in the region. This fervent backing is undergirded by a renewed united front against the backdrop of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The EU has stood up to the aggressor - unanimously adopting sanctions and other measures to weaken the Russian economy and hinder propaganda efforts.

80%
in CEE would
vote to stay
in the EU.

Imagine, that the following weekend, there will be a referendum in your country on its membership in the EU. How would you vote – for your country to stay in the EU or leave the EU?

Stay 2022 Stay 2021 Leave 2022 Leave 2021

The graph only visualises changes in countries that experienced shifts over 5% in public opinion.



Stay or leave?

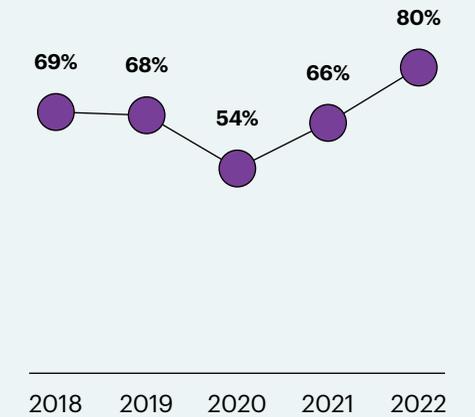
Support for EU membership has reached historical highs in the region. The backing for staying in the EU has increased, since 2021, by 14 percentage points in Czechia, 8 percentage points in Lithuania and 7 percentage points in Hungary.

The increased support for staying in the EU in the past year can be viewed as a reaction to two crises of the past couple years – COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine - when the EU membership proved to be rather advantageous.

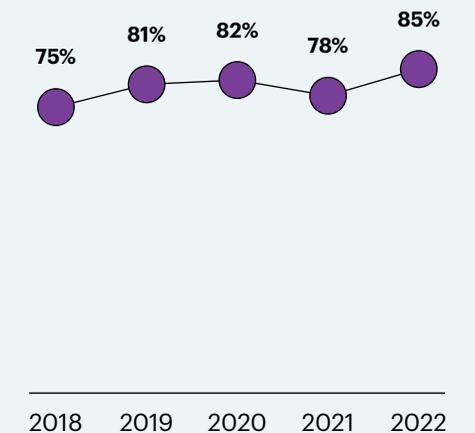
Czechs, though conventionally more Eurosceptic, have expressed record support for EU membership. This development is perhaps also connected to the new, strongly pro-European government at the helm and the upcoming second Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Czechia's shift leaves Bulgaria as the now most Eurosceptic country. Hungary, for its part, also saw higher support for EU membership following a decline the prior year and despite Orbán's continued propagation of narratives against the EU.²

Shifts in support for EU membership over the years

Czechia

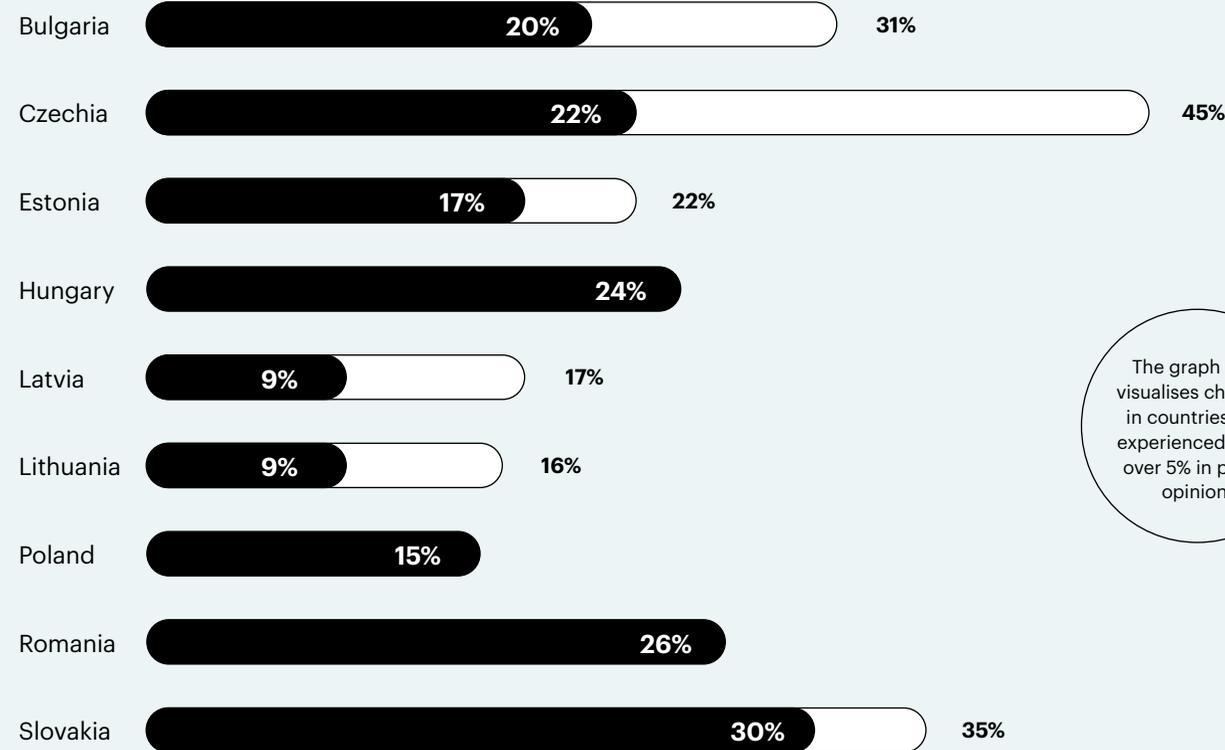


Hungary



Those who consider the European Union to be a threat to their identity and values:

2022 2020



The graph only visualises changes in countries that experienced shifts over 5% in public opinion.



“[The EU] has been trying to help us, but we fail to appreciate this.”

(landscape architect, 42 years, Romania)

Response collected during the focus group discussions in March 2021 in Romania to the following prompt: “What is the first you imagine when we say the EU?”

EU less of a threat

Alongside increasing support for EU membership, there has been a corresponding drop across CEE in the number of people labelling the EU as a threat to their identity and values - from 26% in 2020 to 19% in 2022. The most pronounced decline of 23 percentage points occurred in Czechia, which dovetails with growing Czech support for the EU more generally.

We see you, Madam President

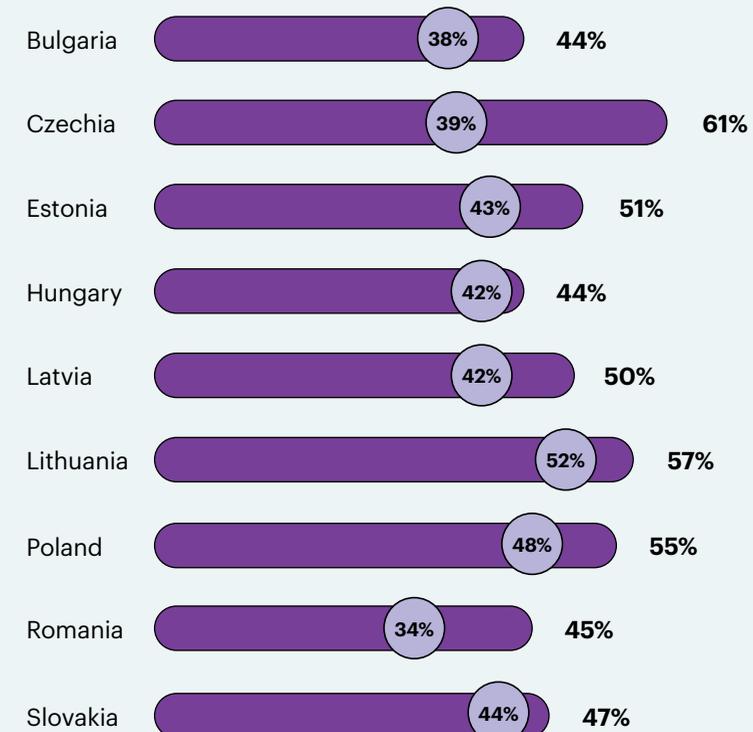
While Ursula von der Leyen remains one of the least known leaders across researched countries (surpassed only by Chinese President Xi Jinping and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz), her name recognition has improved over the past year by a notable 13 percentage points. It appears that her leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, push for an ambitious recovery plan, and recent unifying role in responding to Russia has made her both more recognisable and popular.

The greater awareness of the Commission President, that said, has translated into a rise in both positive and negative opinions of her. The average increase in favourable attitudes, however, outpace negative perceptions by two to one. Positive sentiment towards von der Leyen increased in all surveyed countries (by 8 percentage points compared to 2021), with the most pronounced upward movement observed in Czechia.



Those who perceive Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission, positively:

2022 2021



22%, on average, do not know what to think of or had never heard of Ursula von der Leyen, a drop from the 35% figure the year prior.

NATO

Growing support for NATO across the region

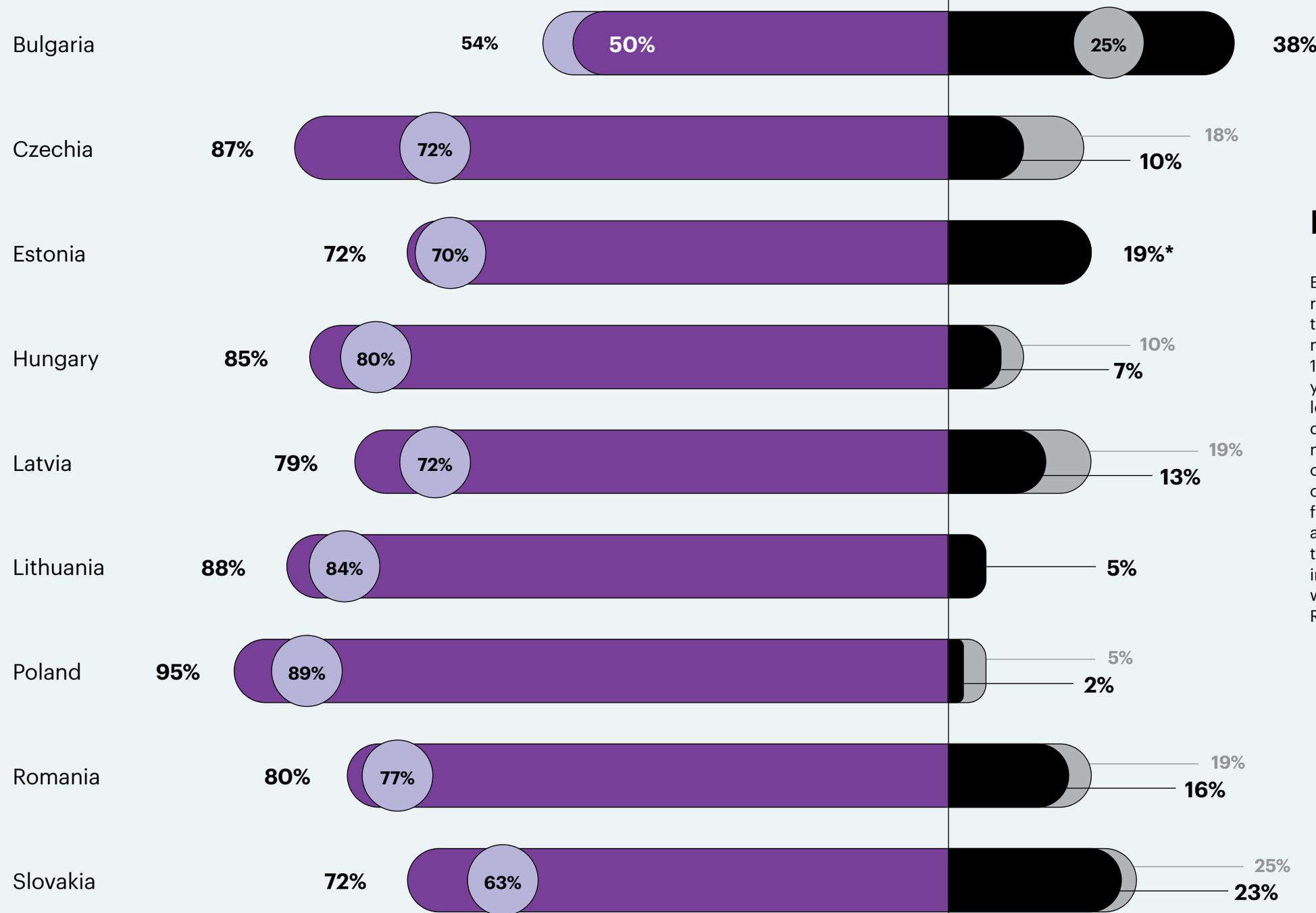
Regional support for NATO membership is now at 79%.

NATO membership and the security guarantees it provides have never been as relevant as they are now and the growing support for NATO across all countries confirms that CEE societies understand these implications of regional and global developments. NATO membership backing now averages 79%, with all countries, apart from Bulgaria, also sharing the awareness of being under a threat due to Russian aggression and looking up to NATO as guarantor of their security and territorial integrity.

Imagine, that the following weekend, there will be a referendum in your country on its membership in the NATO. How would you vote – for your country to stay in the NATO or leave the NATO?

Stay 2022 Stay 2021 Leave 2022 Leave 2021

* Percentages have not changed over the past year by more than 2 percentage points.



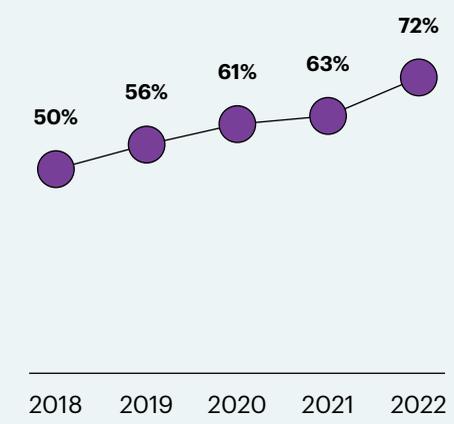
Deviation

Bulgaria appears to be a regional outlier on NATO with the opposition to Alliance membership increasing by 13 percentage points over a year. This decline in support leaves the population evenly divided between backers of membership and those either opposed to it or holding no opinion on the subject. The finding goes against the grain and realpolitik situation - even traditionally neutral countries including Sweden and Finland want to join NATO following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Positive trend in Slovakia

Slovak support for NATO has experienced a steady rise since 2018. Further improvements over the past year are likely linked to the current conflict in Ukraine. The multi-year change in trajectory, however, is also probably associated with the change in government that occurred in 2020. The more open leadership style of the Minister of Defence and the armed forces consistently communicating the importance of NATO for Slovakia have also been paramount. However, with one quarter of respondents still wanting to leave NATO amid intense information operations promoting these views, the battle for hearts and minds, to this end, is not over.

Support for NATO membership over the past 5 years



Slovak support for NATO has increased by 22 percentage points since 2018.

Only 28% in CEE support NATO countries sending own troops to Ukraine.



Confidence in NATO lower than support for membership

While CEE societies espouse robust support for NATO membership, they are generally more sceptical that this membership will deter attacks from foreign adversaries. Bulgaria and Latvia were the only two surveyed countries where responses on the questions of NATO membership and confidence on the security matter mirrored one another. It appears, consequently, that even some backers of NATO membership doubt the veracity of the commitments of member states to come and protect them if their country were invaded.

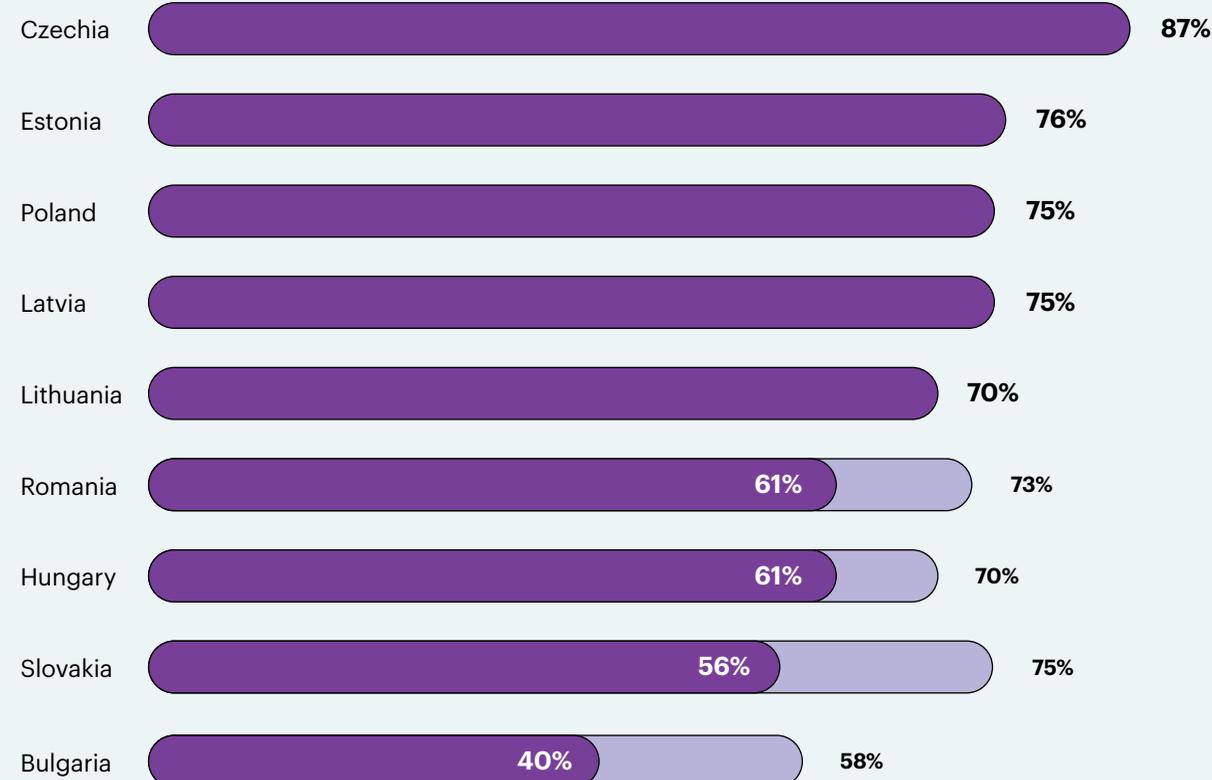
Respondents agreeing that "My country's membership in NATO makes it less likely that a foreign nation will attack us."



Trust in armed forces³

2022 2021

The graph only visualises changes in countries that experienced shifts over 5% in public opinion.



Trust in own armed forces

In 8 of 9 countries, a majority trust the armed forces of their own country, whereas in 5 of 9, the trust exceeds 70%. A lack of confidence in the armed forces is particularly striking in Bulgaria at 40% (a 18 percentage point decline from 2021). While the decrease in trust in 4 of 9 countries is a striking finding at times of war it may be explained by scepticism towards the combat readiness of troops and the capacity of the militaries to defend their respective countries.



"NATO is protection, along with our soldiers contributing... I believe that if anything would happen, NATO, all its member states, will really come together and help."

(housewife, 23 years, Czechia)

Response collected during the focus group discussions in March 2021 in Czechia to the following prompt: "What is the first you imagine when we say NATO?"

With 67%, armed forces are the most trusted institution in CEE.

Strategic partners & leaders

CEE countries rely on the US for protection



65% of CEE respondents perceive Russia as a threat to their country's security.

The invasion of Ukraine also impacted Central and Eastern European perceptions regarding the most important strategic partners for their countries. These attitudes have likely been influenced by a confluence of factors, but the war dynamic and insecurity, have spotlighted the fact that CEE countries rely on the US for protection against possible aggression and economic downturn.

Strategic partners

Return of the US, decline of Germany

The escalation of the armed conflict in Europe, following decades of relative peace especially for small countries in the CEE region, has revived the need for the US as a strong security guarantor and the most important strategic partner. This intensified sentiment was possible to observe in 7 of 9 surveyed countries. A re-orientation towards the US may be linked to the corresponding perceived lack of action on the part of Germany. Only 47% now classify Berlin among their countries' most important strategic partners, while the figure had previously stood at 54%. In 6 of 9 countries, the perceptions of Germany as a strategic partner declined, while in Czechia, Bulgaria and Hungary the position of Germany was reconfirmed with the increase in support.

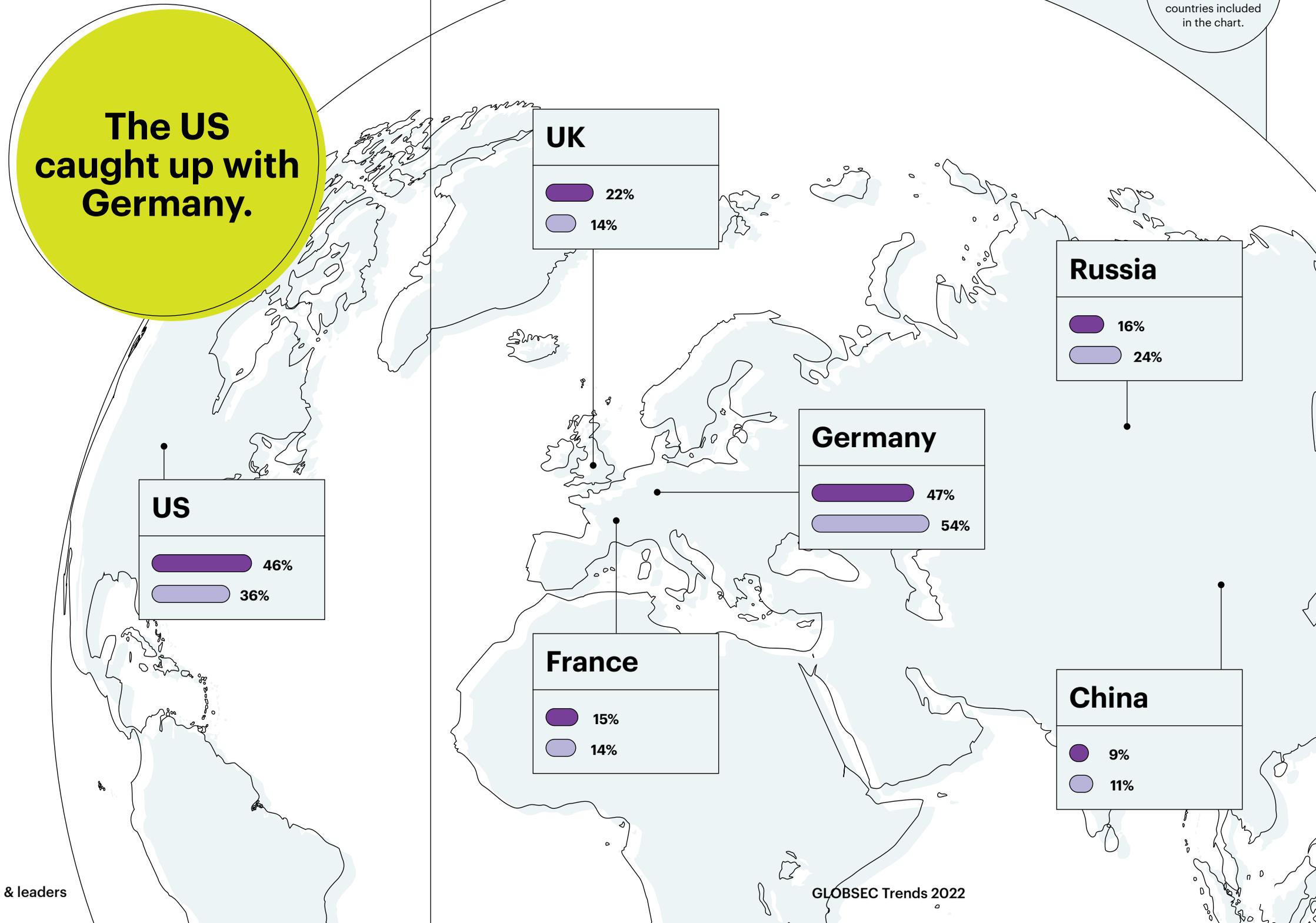
The indecisiveness of Germany towards the Kremlin in the immediate aftermath of the invasion and the lack of strong leadership resonated among CEE respondents, as also demonstrated in perceptions of Olaf Scholz (see page 42). In a result, the US now matches Germany in perceptions of strategic importance.

The US caught up with Germany.

Average responses to: **Which of the following countries are the most important strategic partners of your country today? Pick maximum two.**

2022 2021

Respondents could choose from a randomised selection of 6 countries included in the chart.



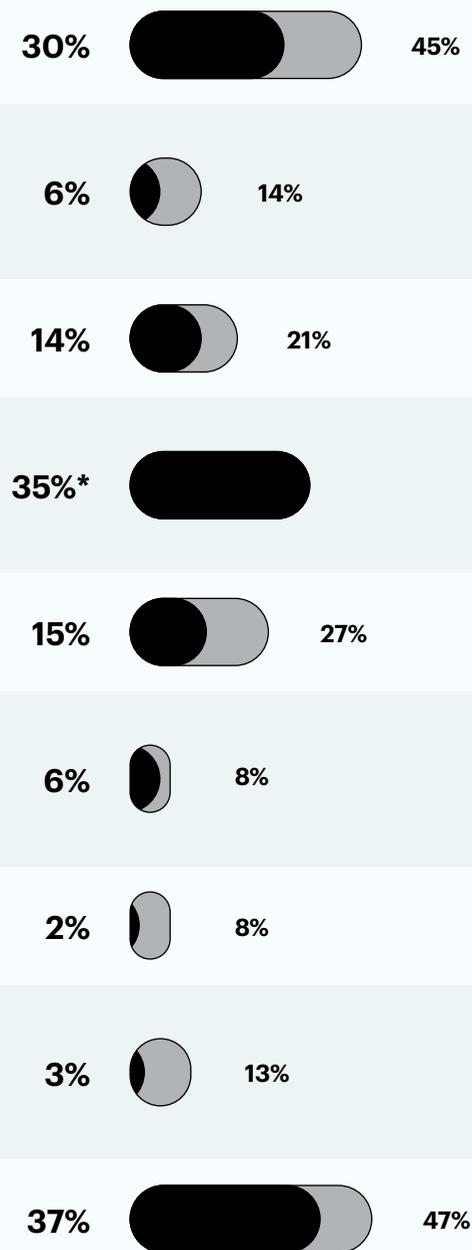
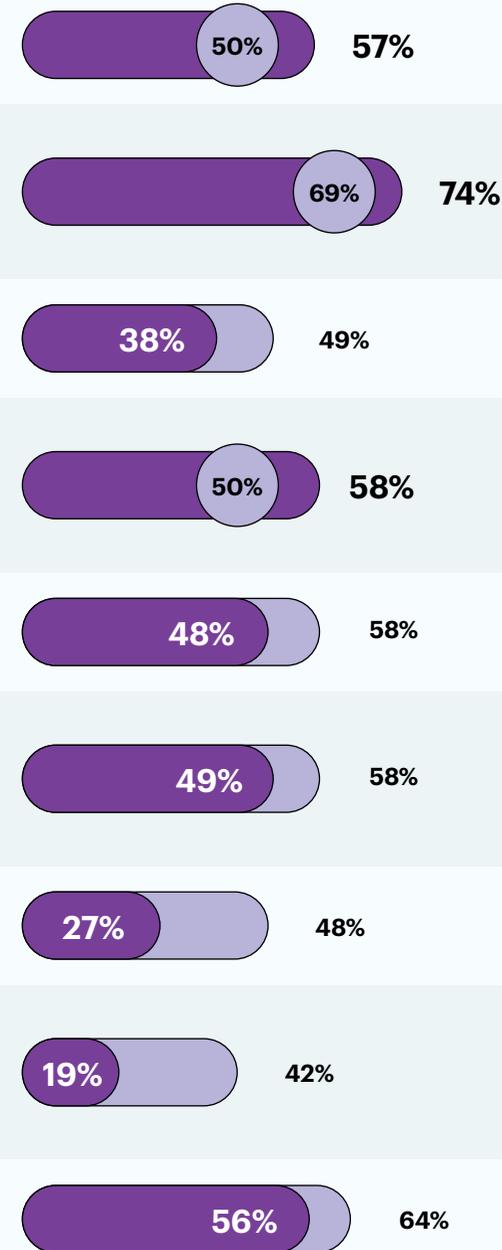
Perceptions of the US, Germany and Russia as strategic partners⁴

2022 2021

The US

Germany

Russia



* Percentages have not changed over the past year by more than 2 percentage points.

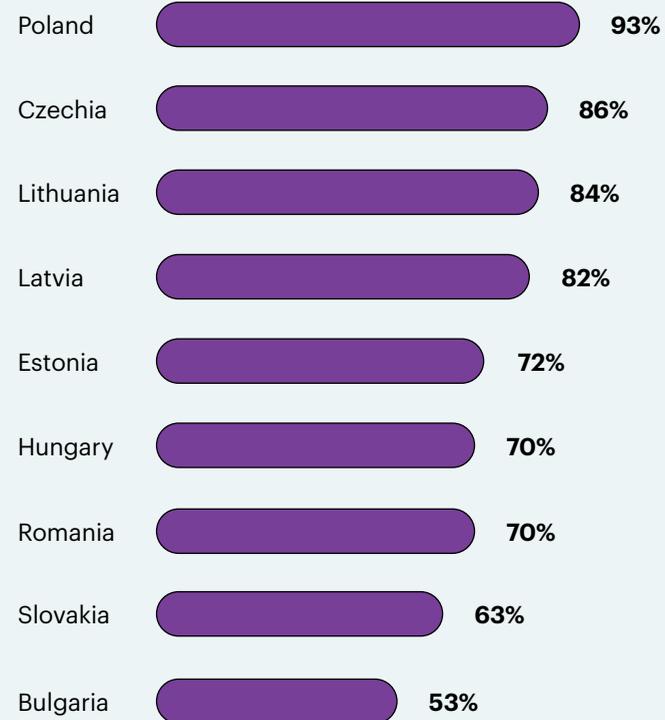
The war cannot erase it all

In 8 of 9 countries the Russian invasion of Ukraine has led to a decrease in perceptions that Russia represents the most important strategic partner. The many years of extensive propaganda campaigns, influence operations and cultural ties, however, have proven especially difficult to completely erase in some countries including Estonia and Latvia (with their relatively significant Russian minority populations) and Bulgaria and Slovakia. Hungary's refusal to support Ukraine and the takeover of the Kremlin war propaganda by leading political figures can be linked to the widespread perception that Russia is an important strategic partner.⁵

1/3 in Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovakia see Russia as a strategic partner.

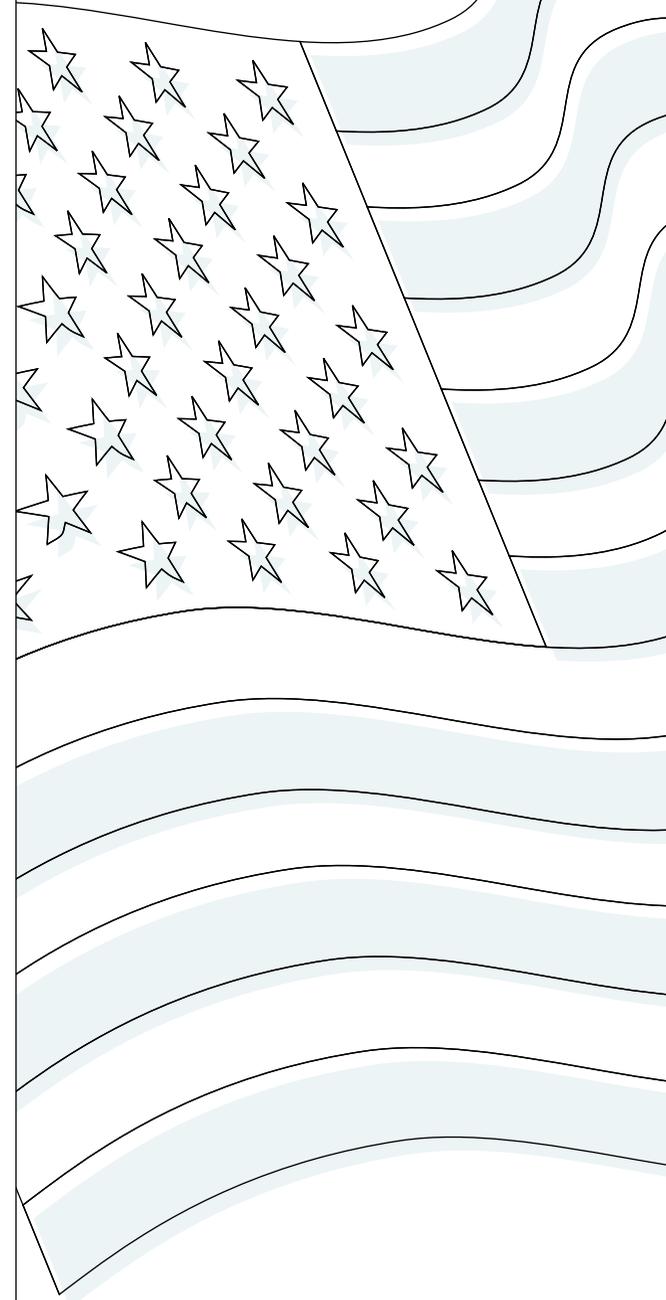


Those who agree that the US is their ally and traditional partner within NATO.



US still an ally

An average of 75% of respondents across all surveyed countries identify the US as an ally and traditional partner within NATO. This pattern is less apparent, however, in Bulgaria and Slovakia (53% and 63% respectively) than in other countries. The lack of belief in the US as an ally could be connected to the image of the US as an “aggressor”, a position voiced by respondents in polling conducted in 2020.⁶ The mixed result in Slovakia could further be the product of an intensive smear campaign and mobilisation efforts by opposition parties during the adoption of the Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA) between the US and Slovakia at the beginning of 2022.⁷



In 7/9 countries the perception of the US being a strategic partner increased, while it stayed the same in Hungary and declined in Bulgaria.



“On papers, we’re partners and we’ll stay that way because we’re important pawns. The problem is that pawns are always sacrificed first.”

(acquisition analyst, 34 years, Romania)

Response collected during the focus group discussions in March 2021 in Czechia to the following prompt: “What is the first you imagine when we say the US?”

Threat perception

The unprovoked invasion and atrocities conducted by Russian soldiers against Ukrainian civilians also impacted threat perceptions in the region. For many Central and Eastern Europeans who in the past years harboured doubts about their countries' friends and foes, the war in Ukraine, to this end, has represented a genuine and unsettling wakeup call.

Those who believe Russia, China or the US present a security threat to their country.

2022 2020

The graph only shows data for 2020 in countries where shifts in perceptions were greater than 5%.

Russia



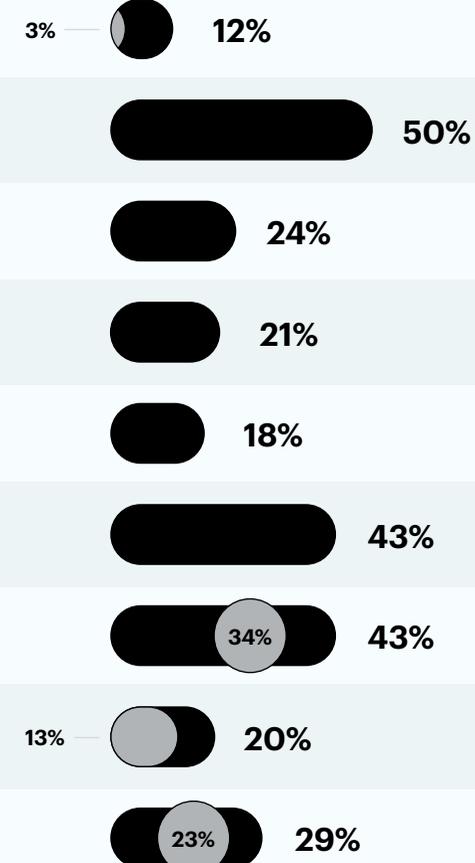
Knowing the enemy

With the invasion of Ukraine, the perception of Russia as a threat has increased in all 6 countries in which GLOBSEC had polled the question in 2020. There are, however, notable differences between countries. While a majority of respondents think that Russia poses a significant threat to their country in 7 of 9 countries, Bulgaria stands out as a regional outlier, with 57% believing that Russia poses no threat to their country. The conflict, however, has spurred Romanians and Bulgarians to make up their minds on the matter – around 40% who held no view

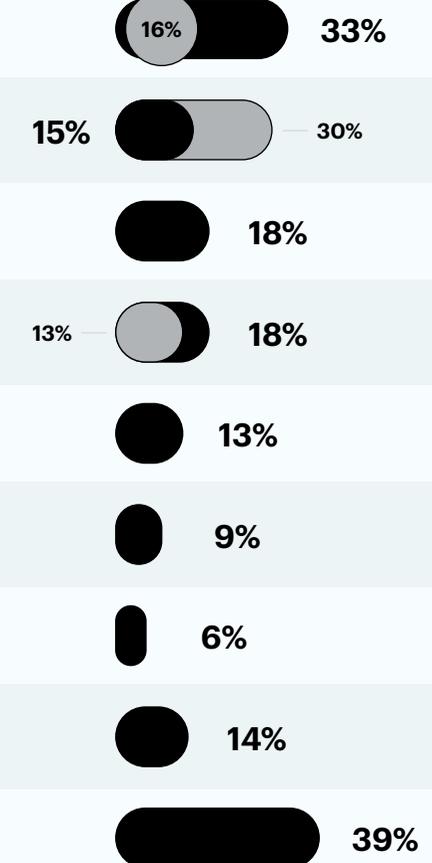
in 2020 regarding potential threats stated an opinion this time. This clarification of positions, no matter the results, indicates that the conflict might be clearing up grey zones and ambiguities.

To read more about perceptions of Vladimir Putin and Russia, please see page 59.

China



US

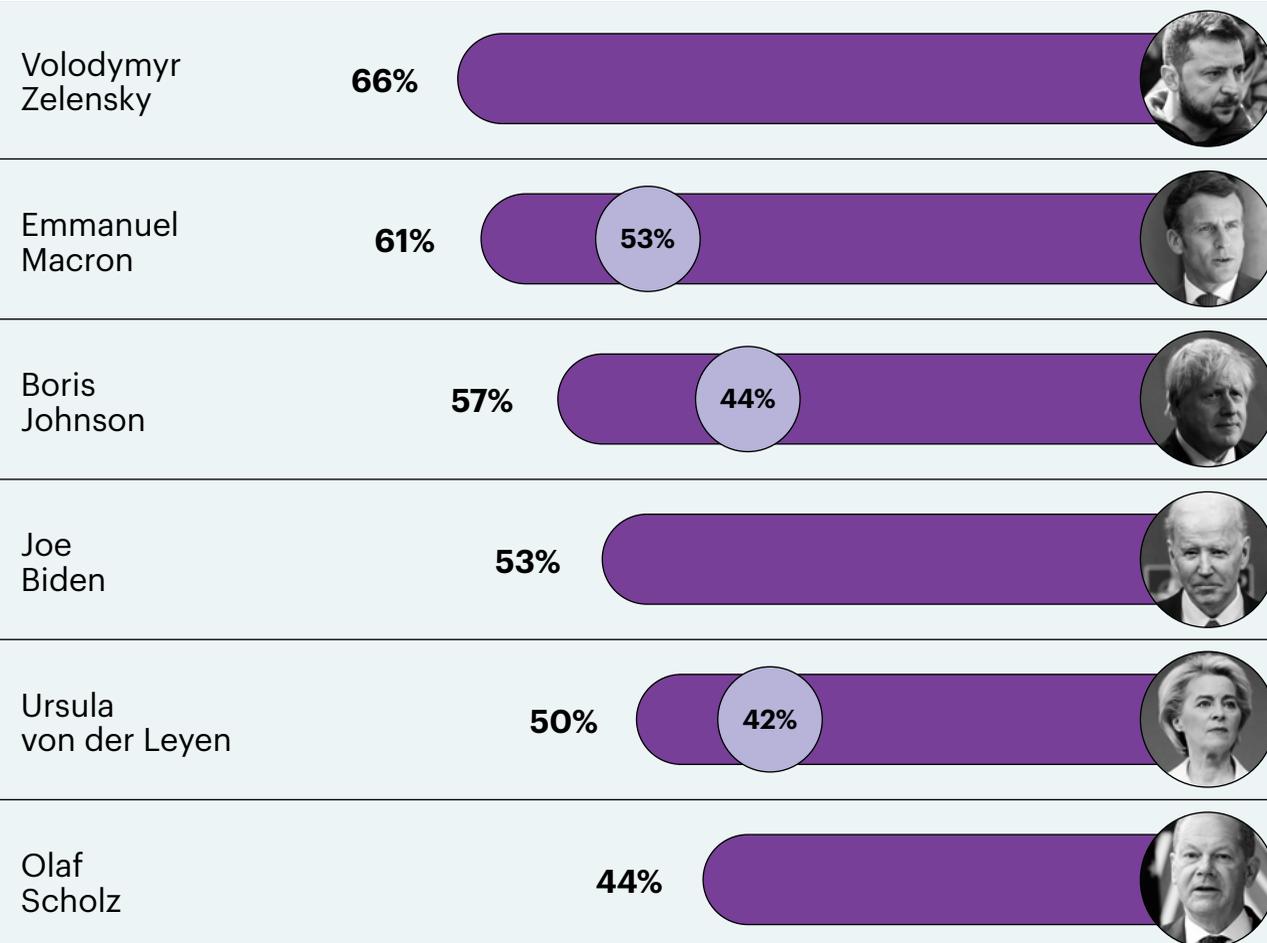


The face-off

The war in Ukraine has impacted perceptions of numerous global political leaders. Societies are now generally more likely to recognise the names of leaders and hold an opinion on them. In 2021, 24% of Central and Eastern Europeans “did not know” or had “never heard of” Joe Biden and 35% the same regarding Ursula von der Leyen. These leaders are now recognised, respectively, by an additional 14 and 13 percentage points.

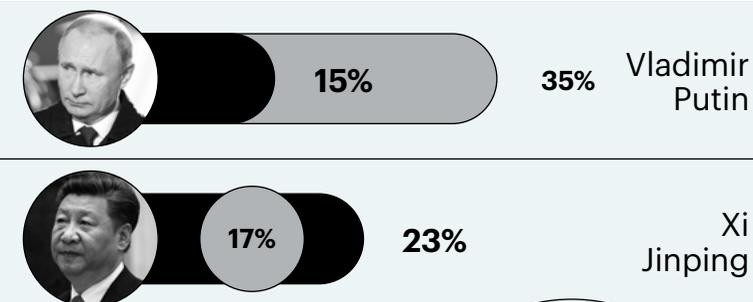
Regional average of those who viewed a particular world leader positively.

2022 2021



With 44% holding favourable views of the new German Chancellor, Olaf Scholz lags the popularity of his predecessor, Angela Merkel, by 17 percentage points among Central and Eastern Europeans. A further 31% “do not know” or have “never heard of him”.

2022 2021



A notable 35% of CEE respondents have still never heard of Xi Jinping.

Vladimir Putin

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky now garners more than four times greater popularity than his opponent Vladimir Putin. A majority of Central and Eastern Europeans hold negative views towards Putin following the invasion of Ukraine.

Volodymyr Zelensky

In 7 of 9 countries, a majority perceives Volodymyr Zelensky positively. The impact of the Kremlin’s war propaganda, disinformation narratives and smear campaign, however, are taking their toll in numerous countries including Bulgaria, Slovakia and Hungary⁸. A total of 50%, 42% and 40% in these three countries, respectively, view Zelensky negatively.

Joe Biden

Substantial coverage provided to the war has contributed to greater awareness concerning Joe Biden and the policies of his administration. Only 10% of respondents hold no opinion regarding Biden, 14 percentage points less than in 2021. While Joe Biden managed to maintain his favourability rating of 53% in surveyed countries, more respondents (36%) also perceive him negatively compared to 2021. There has been a measurable rise in negative perceptions towards the US president in 7 of 9 countries and the regional average has increased by 10 percentage points.

China

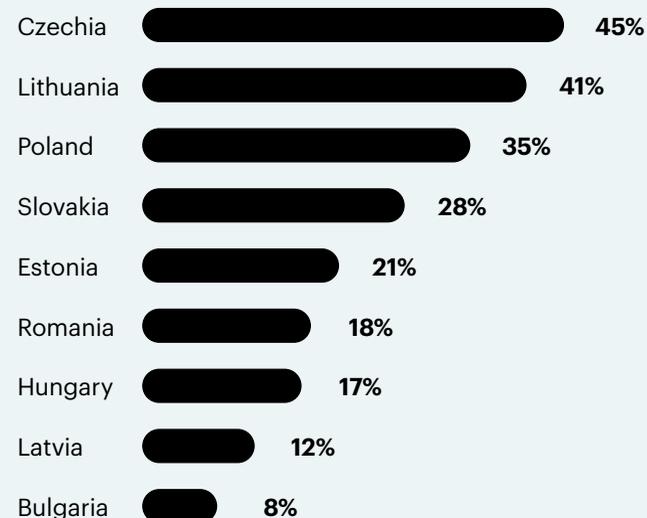
With the world's attention now turned towards the Russian invasion of Ukraine, China has found itself temporarily side-lined from public discussions in Central and Eastern Europe. As the pandemic gradually cedes its position in the spotlight, China's relations with the region are no longer seen through the prism of mask diplomacy and vaccines - bilateral issues rather have been placed centre stage. A few examples, among numerous others, include Lithuania's diplomatic row with Beijing following the opening of Taiwan's de facto embassy in Vilnius⁹, Hungary's internal disagreement on the construction of a Chinese Fudan University campus in Budapest¹⁰ and the Estonian, Lithuanian and Slovak diplomatic boycott of the 2022 Olympic games¹¹. Against this backdrop, the public can be expected to develop more specific opinions (positive or negative) regarding Beijing.

China's regime still attractive for many

The continued appeal of the Chinese regime is apparent across the region, an alarming pattern that points to the persistent susceptibility of the region to authoritarian modes of government. According to GLOBSEC's prior research, CEE citizens often associate the CCP regime with effective governance and laud its economic performance and record on developing infrastructure.¹² Many also approve of the "cleanliness" and "orderliness" found in China, a sentiment perhaps carried over from the CEE region's communist past. These considerations, however, paper over the costs of such "order".

Attitudes towards the communist era could also explain public opinion in the two evident outliers (Poland and Czechia). These two countries both simultaneously share a pronounced distaste towards the Chinese regime and the most fervent enthusiasm regarding the transition to multiparty systems and market economies in the CEE region¹³.

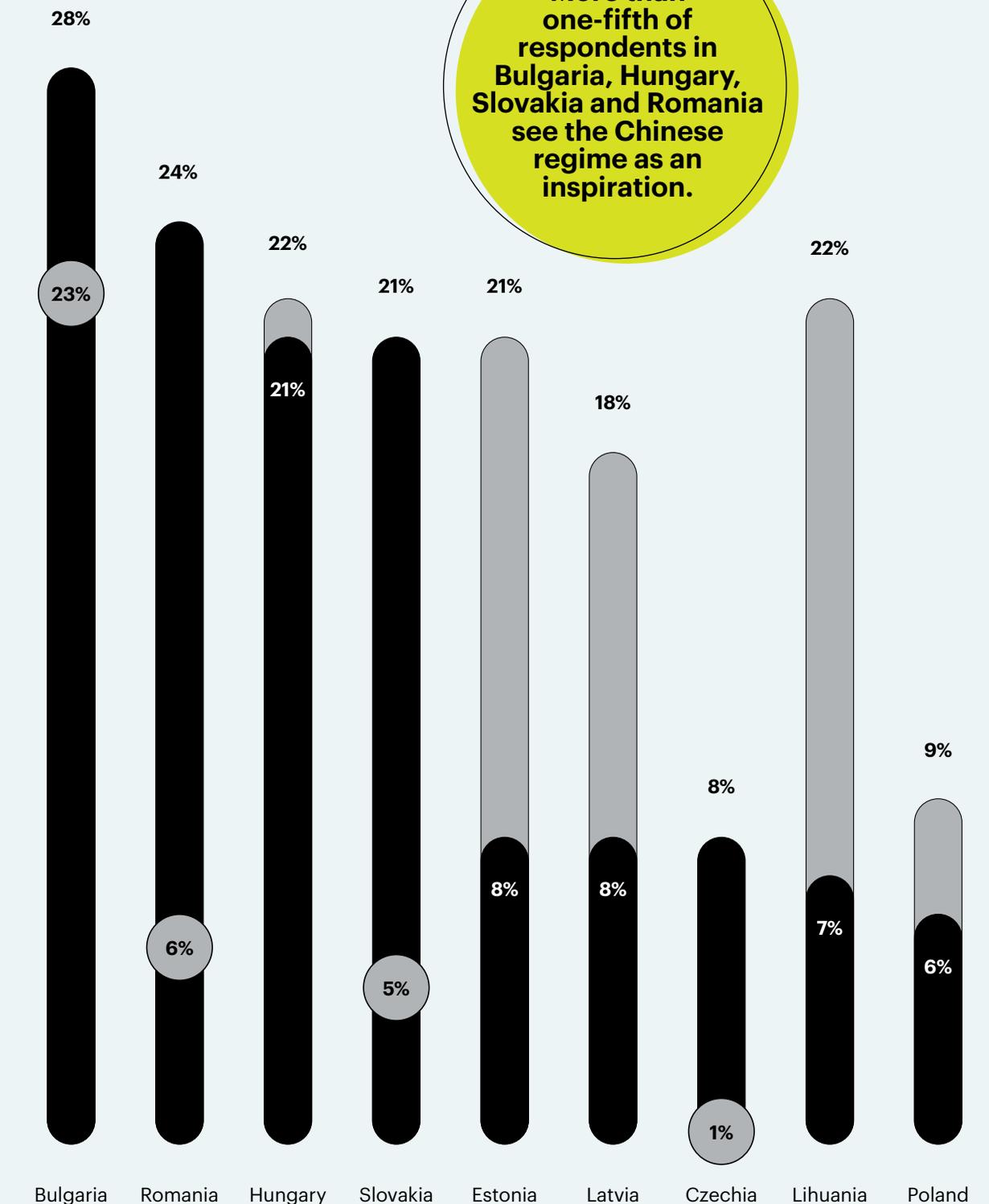
Those agreeing that the Chinese government threatens their identity and values.



Chinese regime could be an inspiration for my country

Agree Do not know

More than one-fifth of respondents in Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania see the Chinese regime as an inspiration.



Dragon does not sleep

The perception of China as a strategic partner remained about the same as the prior year in most of the analysed countries. Only 9% of respondents in the CEE region perceive China as the most important strategic partner with Hungary representing an outlier – with 21% perceiving China as important.¹⁴

”

“[China] is by far the most dangerous country in the world. Not only in military terms, but primarily via its economy, it can accomplish more than other countries via employment of armed forces. China is slowly taking over and controlling the world’s economy.”

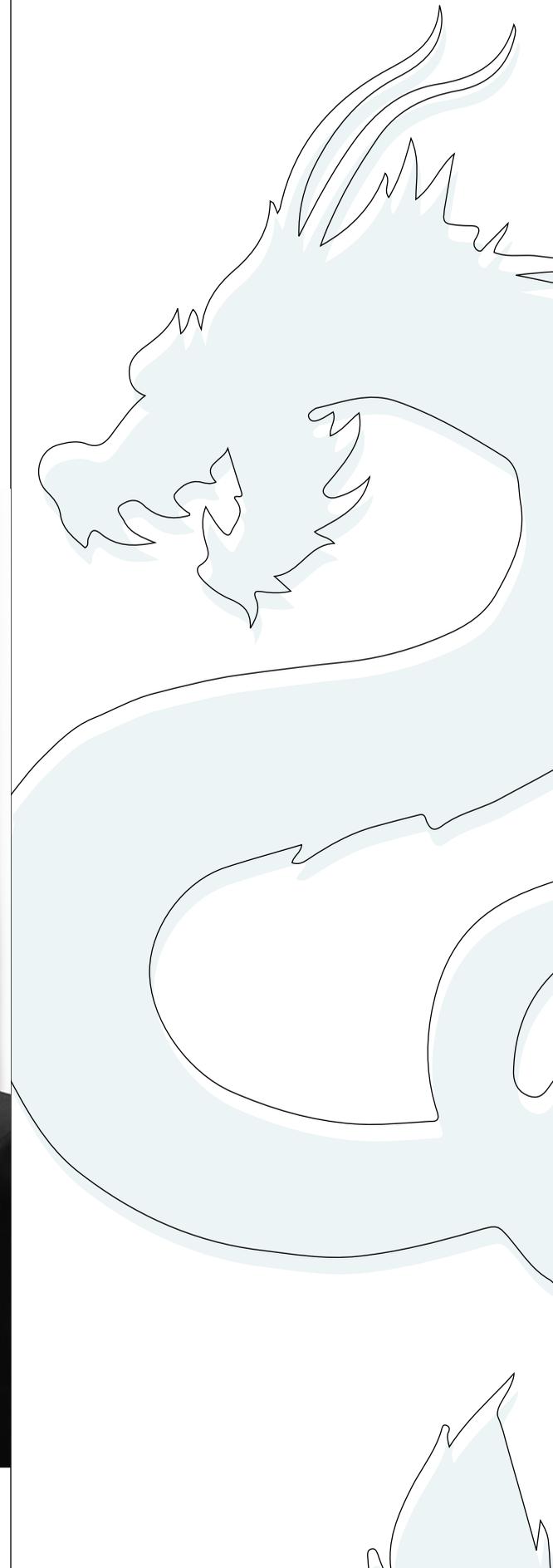
(repairman, 55, Czechia)

Response collected during the focus group discussions in March 2021 in Czechia to the following prompt: “What is the first you imagine when we say the China?”

Two different perspectives towards autocratic actors

In 6 of 9 countries, the foreign malign influence of China still goes largely unnoticed, with a majority not viewing Beijing as a security threat. This lack of awareness towards Chinese influence operations in the region was spotlighted by the Vulnerability Index¹⁵ and continues to represent a significant security vulnerability. The problem could grow if the resilience building activities of EU and NATO member countries become solely preoccupied with the Kremlin’s malign influence operations and expansionist policies.

Also, despite increased efforts by the Baltic states to raise awareness about the foreign malign influence of China¹⁶, 22% of respondents in Estonia and Lithuania do not know whether China poses a threat to their country.



61% of CEE respondents do not perceive China as a security threat to their country.

In 4/6 countries, fewer people identified China as a threat in 2022 than in 2020.



”

“[China is] an ideal partner! There are things we export to China, not to mention what we import. Almost everything is bought from China. We can partner in many things because they have technology and know-how from all over the world.”

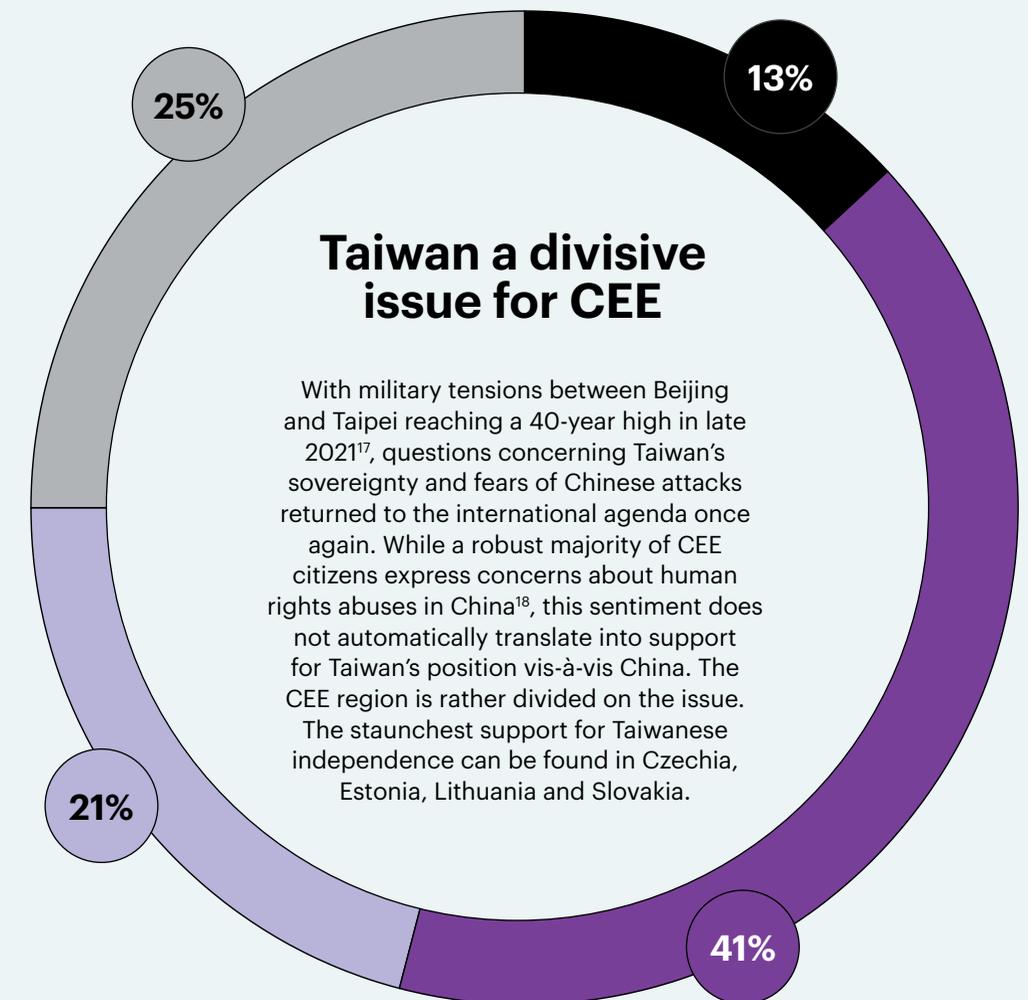
(security guard, 58 years, Bulgaria)

Response collected during the focus group discussions in March 2021 in Bulgaria to the following prompt: “Is China rather a partner for your country or not?”

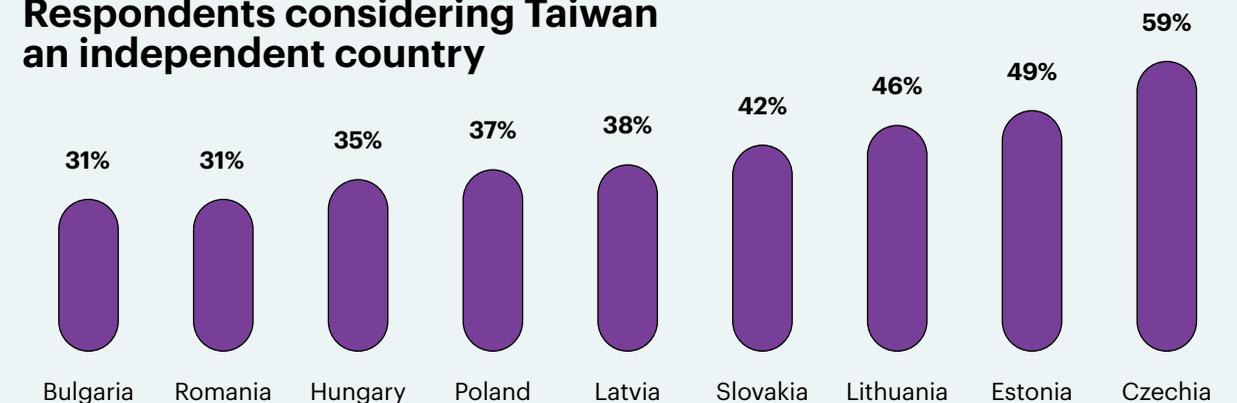
Only 8% of Latvians perceive the Chinese regime as a source of inspiration for their country compared to 17% in 2021.

Do you consider Taiwan to be

Part of China
 Independent country
 Disputed country
 Do not know



Respondents considering Taiwan an independent country



Geopolitics overview

79% of Central and Eastern Europeans support NATO membership.

“The 2022 report shows strong support for NATO and a clear reaffirmation of the centrality of the transatlantic bond to European security and defence.”

Benedetta Berti-Alberti, Head, Policy Planning, Office of the Secretary General, NATO

The US as a strategic partner

Those who consider the US one of the two key strategic partners for their country

Romania **75%** Poland **73%** Lithuania **61%**
 Estonia **55%** Latvia **44%** Czechia **41%**
 Slovakia **29%** Bulgaria **21%**
 Hungary **13%**

Russia as a threat

Do you think Russia presents a security threat to your country?*

	☑ Yes	No
Poland	90%	8%
Czechia	84%	15%
Lithuania	83%	11%
Estonia	68%	24%
Latvia	64%	30%
Slovakia	62%	36%
Romania	58%	37%
Hungary	45%	48%
Bulgaria	33%	57%

*remaining percentages account to those who refused to or did not know how to respond

Stay or leave NATO?

Now, please, imagine, that the following weekend, there will be a referendum in your country on its membership in the NATO. How would you vote – for your country to stay in the NATO or leave the NATO?*

	☑ Stay	Leave
Poland	95%	2%
Lithuania	88%	5%
Czechia	87%	10%
Hungary	85%	7%
Romania	80%	16%
Latvia	79%	13%
Estonia	72%	19%
Slovakia	72%	23%
Bulgaria	50%	38%

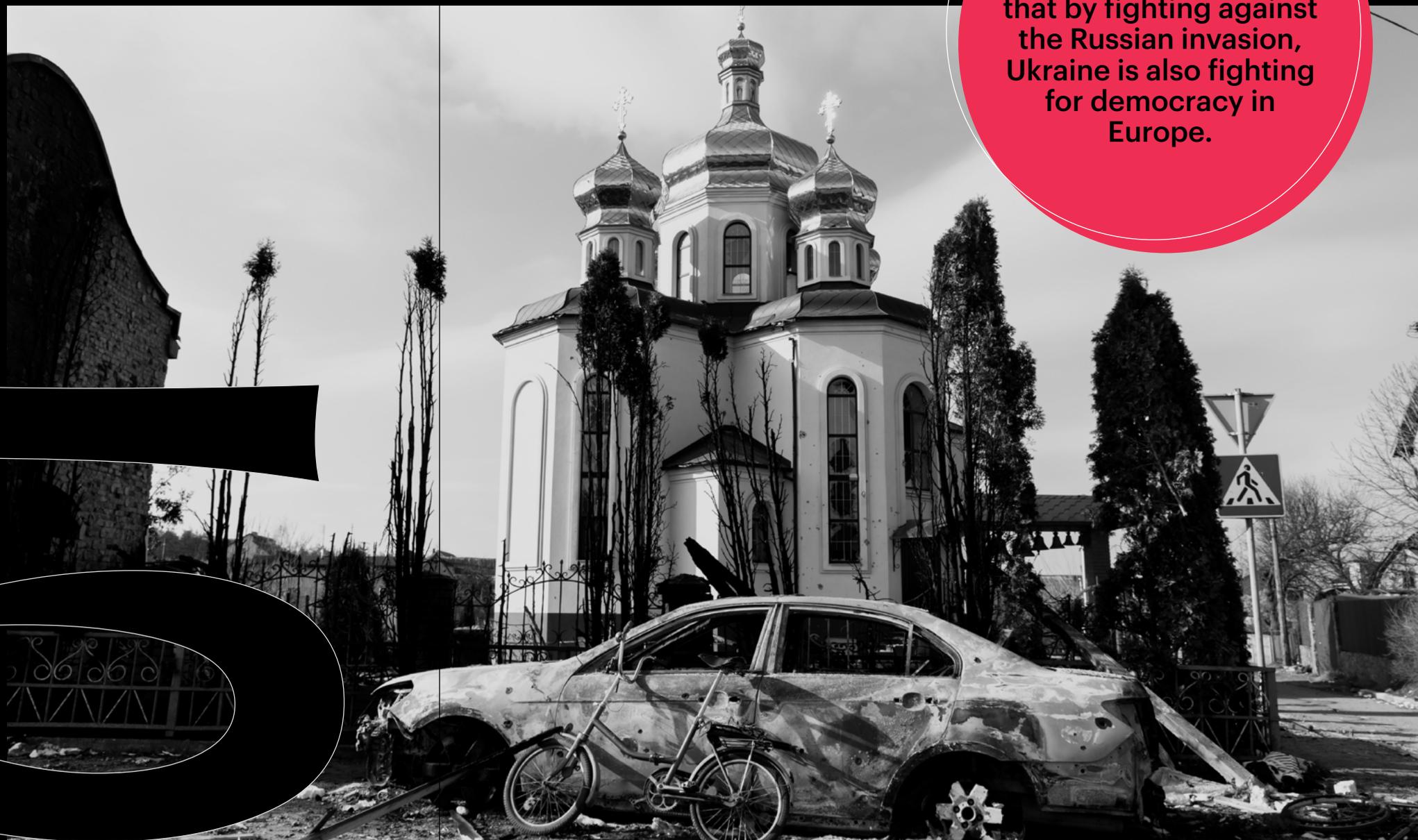
War in Ukraine

Majority of CEE is clear on who the villain is

An understanding of perceptions towards the war among Central and Eastern Europeans and their perspectives on Ukraine provides an insight into both the region's strengths and vulnerabilities. While an overwhelming majority is clear on the villain and victim in the conflict,

the persistent use of information operations in some countries has clouded the vision of certain segments of the population.

62% in CEE believe that by fighting against the Russian invasion, Ukraine is also fighting for democracy in Europe.



Who is responsible?

A majority in every country, apart from Hungary, identifies Russia as the party responsible for the conflict in Ukraine. Bulgaria and Slovakia, however, are also closely divided, with half believing disinformation about the war. The most resolute beliefs were measured in Poland, Czechia and Lithuania. Meanwhile, attitudes in Estonia and Latvia might be influenced by the fact that the two countries encompass large Russian-speaking minorities more inclined to consume Russian news sources. Uncertainty about culpability – respondents indicating that they “do not know” or refusing to answer the question - was higher in Bulgaria and Lithuania (both 12%), and Hungary and Latvia (both 16%).

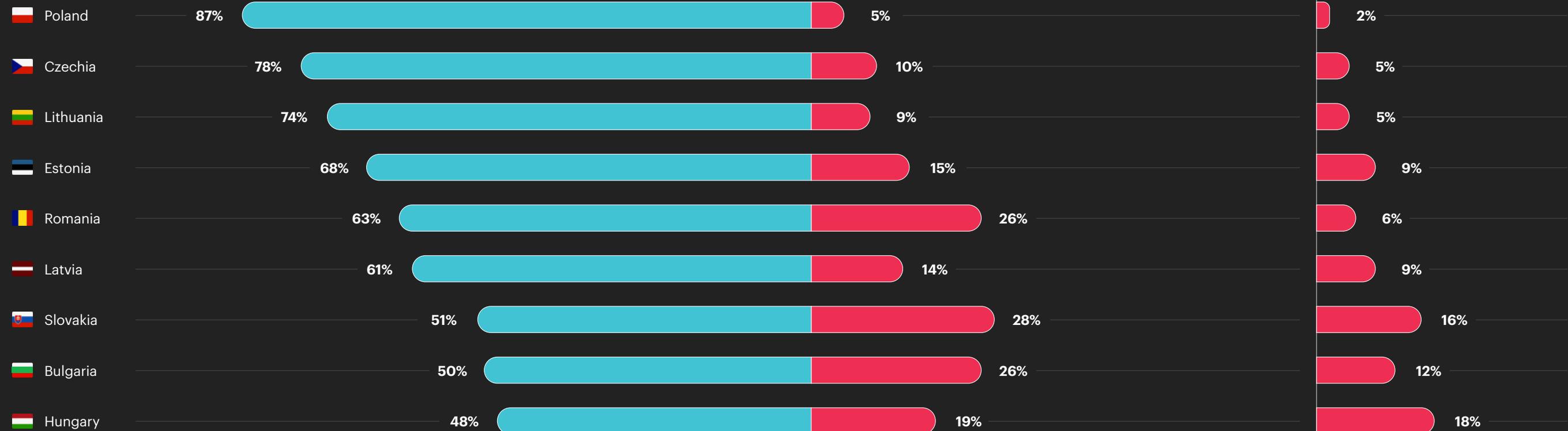


Which of these statements do you agree with the most?

Russia that invaded Ukraine

West that provoked Russia

Ukraine that oppressed Russian-speaking part of population



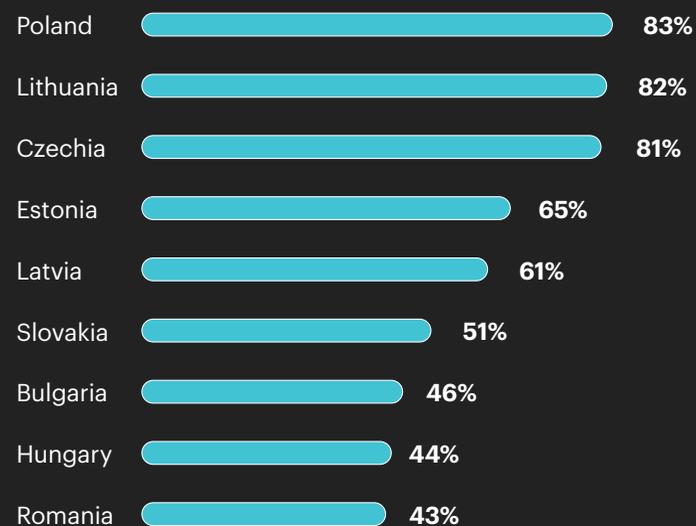
Perceptions of Ukraine



The future path of Ukraine currently remains uncertain and contingent on numerous factors. While Ukraine's citizens and leaders will play a fundamental role in determining the post-conflict course of the country, other actors will be consequential too. Kyiv's foreign policy direction – whether it includes applications for EU and/or NATO membership or the decision to remain neutral - will require robust support and backing from EU and NATO members. The helping hand extended by Central and Eastern Europe, which has itself been victim to Russian (or Soviet) aggression and occupation in the past, will particularly continue to play a key role in the process. Public opinion suggests that Ukraine will indeed be able to rely on its Western neighbours.

Fighting for us

The majority of CEE countries recognise the importance of the war fought on the region's borders. The chart below shows the percentage of those who agree that: "By fighting against the Russian invasion, Ukraine is also fighting for democracy in Europe."



Ukraine is a sovereign country

A majority considers Ukraine to be an independent and sovereign country across CEE. Bulgaria, where many believe Ukraine to be either a puppet of the West or a part of Russia, is the one exception. This general consensus underlines the fact that the Kremlin has failed to manipulate large segments of the population to believe its narrative denying Ukrainian statehood.¹⁹ The storyline that Ukraine is merely a Western puppet, nevertheless, finds resonance among 20-35% of respondents in 6 countries. This dynamic is shaped by the stronger Kremlin influence in countries like Bulgaria and Slovakia where considerable parts of the population even consider Ukraine to be part of Russia and the more pronounced resonance of anti-Western narratives in countries like Hungary and Romania.

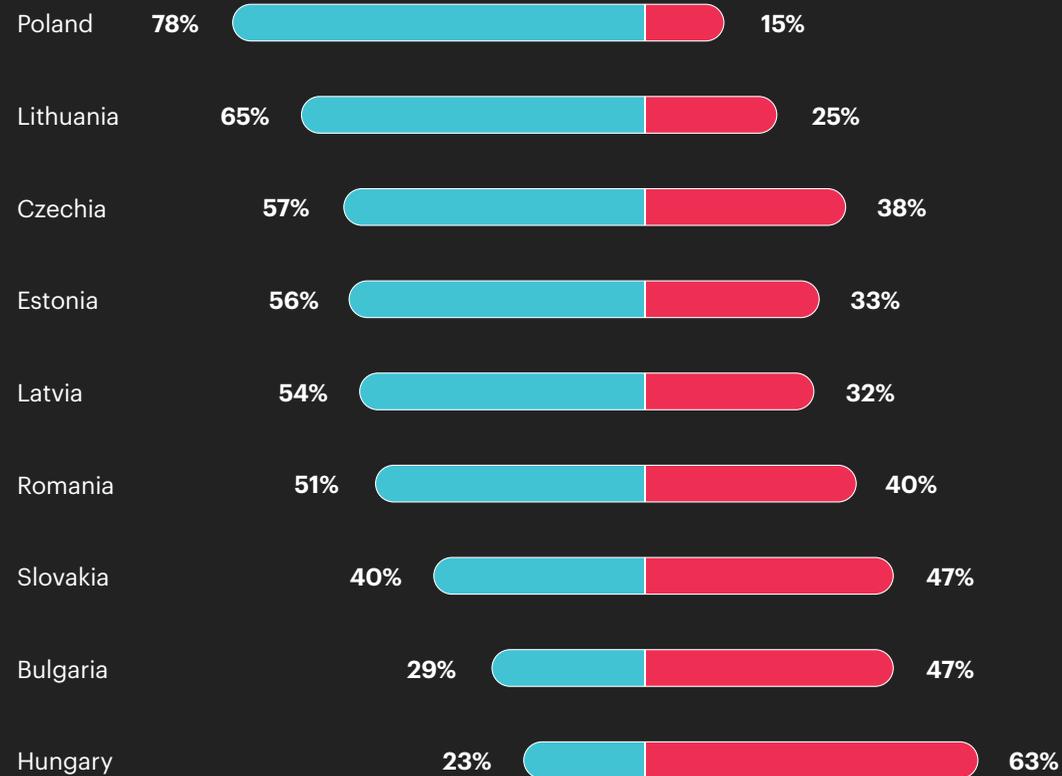
Do you consider Ukraine to be...²⁰

	An independent country	Puppet of the West	Part of Russia
Poland	87%	6%	2%
Czechia	87%	7%	5%
Lithuania	73%	13%	2%
Latvia	72%	20%	2%
Estonia	69%	24%	1%
Slovakia	61%	23%	13%
Romania	58%	25%	9%
Hungary	58%	24%	8%
Bulgaria	45%	35%	12%

Should Ukraine be/become...¹³

■ a member of the EU or NATO or both
 ■ a neutral country

The original wording of the question included five options from which respondents could only choose one answer: a) A member of the EU; b) A member of NATO; c) A member of both EU and NATO; d) A neutral country; e) In the Russian sphere of influence.



Be neutral or be with us?

When it comes to the future of Ukraine, CEE countries are less united. In 6 of 9 countries, a majority of respondents would fervently welcome Ukraine to be part of either the EU and/or NATO. In 3 countries, meanwhile, more people would prefer Ukraine to stay neutral. When it comes to membership preferences, some respondents want to see Ukraine join both the EU and NATO (average 31%), fewer prefer Ukraine to solely accede to the EU (average 14%) and fewer still NATO (5%).

A concerning 10% in Bulgaria and Slovakia believe Ukraine should be under the Russian sphere of influence. In other CEE countries, similar attitudes were voiced by only 1-5% of respondents.

10% in Bulgaria and Slovakia believe Ukraine should be under the Russian sphere of influence.

Image of Russia and Vladimir Putin

Prior to the invasion of Ukraine, Vladimir Putin was one of the most well-liked international leaders in some countries of the CEE region.²¹ The image of Putin as a protector of traditional values and the national identities of (small) countries against a decadent liberal West has resonated with many Central and Eastern Europeans, a finding confirmed by focus groups discussions conducted in 2021. Vladimir Putin and Russia have been perceived by many as “pillars of stability” in an otherwise tumultuous world.²² This favourable image was particularly evident in Bulgaria and Slovakia – narratives that foreground the cooperation and closeness of “Slavic countries” strongly resonated²³ in these two countries and have been promoted by the Kremlin and various domestic actors.²⁴

”

“Only Putin from the politicians I know. Thanks to him, there has been no war here for a long time. He refused to be vexed by various American provocations — military actions already during Obama’s [administration]. And he resisted with prudence and calmness.”

(teacher, 56 years old, Slovakia)

Responses collected during focus group discussions in March 2021 in Slovakia in response to the following prompt: “Name a person or leader who offers real solutions to today’s problems, whether in our country or beyond.”



The fall of the mighty

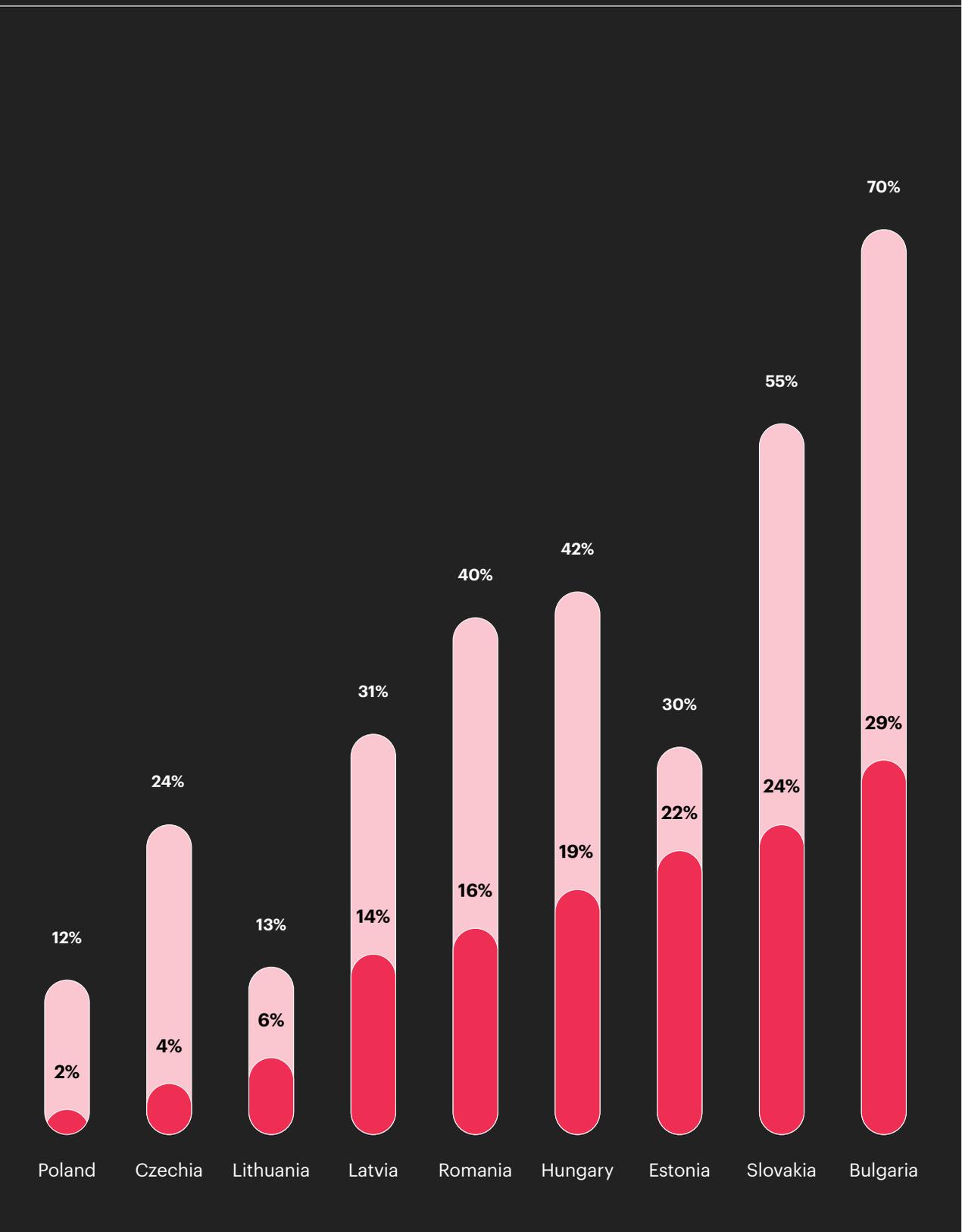
Months into the invasion of Ukraine that has been universally condemned in the West, Putin now stands out as the most negatively viewed international leader in the region. A majority, in fact, perceives the Russian president negatively in every surveyed country including Bulgaria, despite the fact that respondents in that country were disinclined towards identifying Russia as a threat to their country.



An overwhelming **78%** of Central and Eastern Europeans perceive Vladimir Putin negatively.

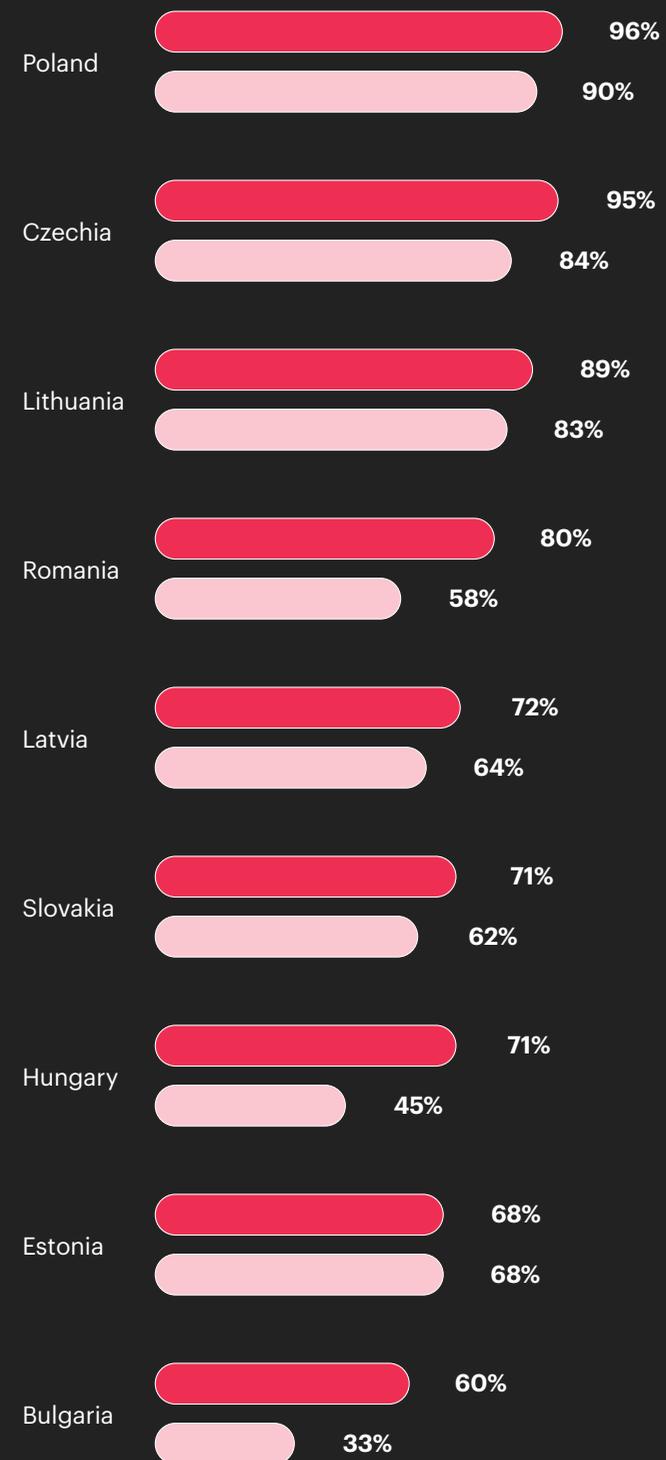
Share of those who view Vladimir Putin positively:

2022 2021



Country vs. leader

■ Those who perceive Vladimir Putin negatively
■ Those who perceive Russia as a threat

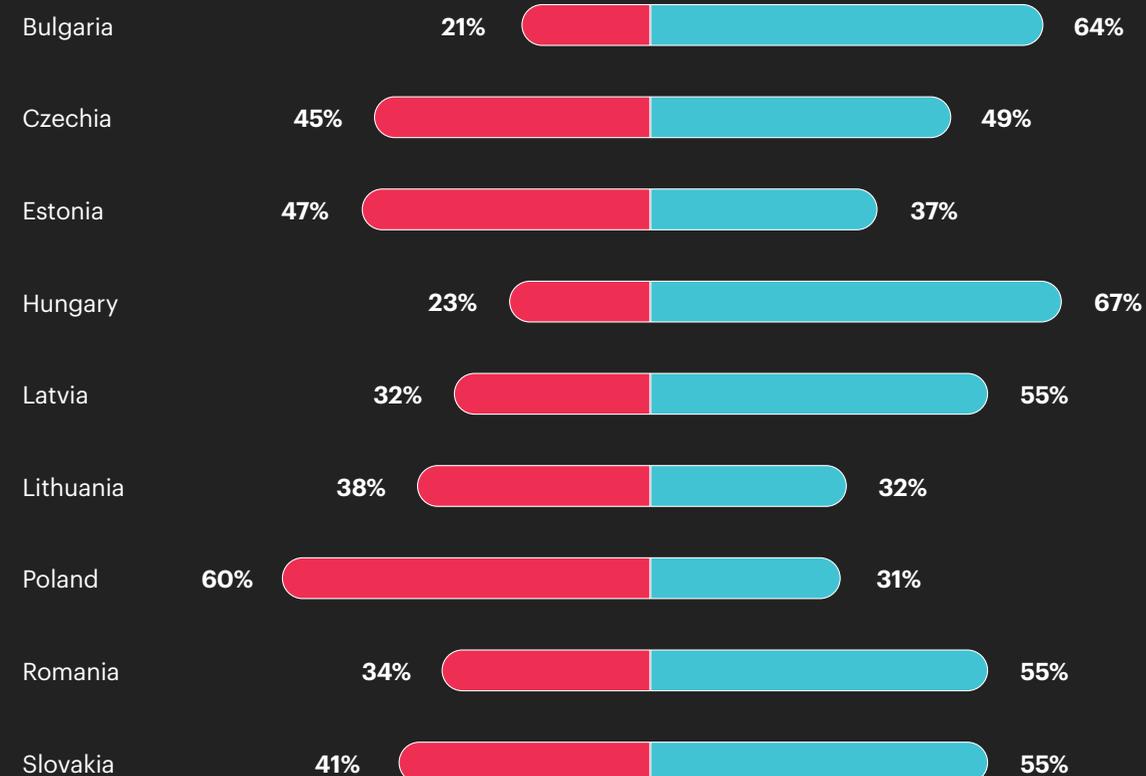


81% in the CEE region think that Russia had no right to invade Ukraine.

In all surveyed countries, majorities hold unfavourable views of Vladimir Putin. And in 7 of 9 countries, most believe that Russia poses a threat to their countries. The CEE respondents also broadly identify the Russian government as a threat to their identity and values (in addition to being a threat to their security) – majorities share this view in Poland, Lithuania, Czechia, Estonia and Slovakia.

Russia will not stop in Ukraine, it will invade other European countries as well.

■ Agree
■ Disagree



Cautious optimism

Respondents tended to be slightly sceptical that Russia's territorial expansionist policies would extend beyond Ukraine – majorities in 5 of 9 countries see invasions of other European countries unlikely. These views are perhaps shaped by fears of further conflict with Moscow and the deterrence effect of NATO membership. Poles, undergirded by their own historical experiences related to Russian ambitions, are regional outliers on the matter.

International response

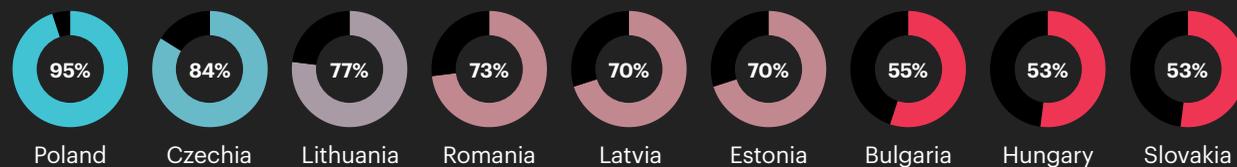
The CEE countries are among the staunchest backers of Ukraine's efforts to drive out the Russian invasion through both diplomatic and military support.²⁵ Estonia, Poland, Lithuania and Slovakia lead the rankings on military assistance (adjusted for GDP),²⁶ while the region expelled dozens of Russian diplomats and carried out numerous measures to curb the influence of Russian war propaganda²⁷. All Ukraine's neighbours have also welcomed hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian refugees fleeing Russian aggression.

Ready to transition away

As of March 2022, populations in all nine surveyed countries (70% on average) agreed that their country "should decrease their energy dependency on Russia". Polish support for resource diversification stood at 95%, while support for this transition is more modest in Hungary and Slovakia with 53% of respondents in the two countries backing lowering their energy dependence on Russia.

70% across the CEE region believe their countries should reduce their energy dependence on Russia.

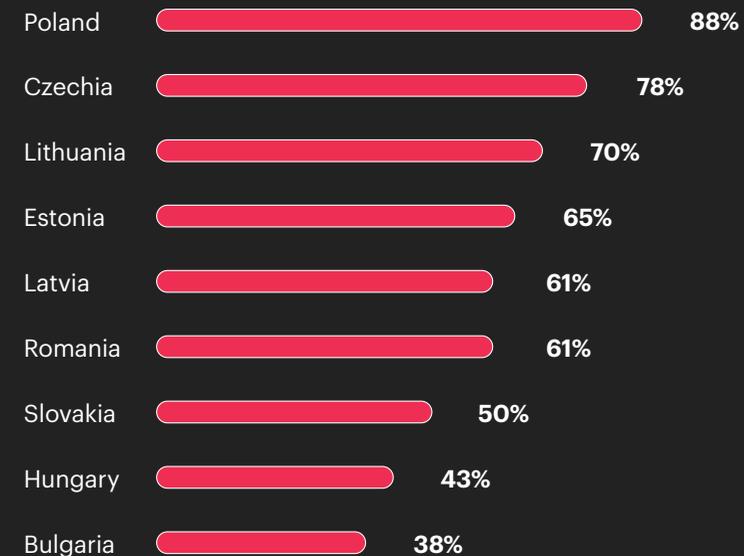
Respondents agreeing with the statement: Our country should decrease energy dependence on Russia.



Overwhelming support for sanctions

Most CEE countries have been front and centre in advocating for sanctions against Russia, and the citizens have been aligned with their leaders in this respect. A majority in 7 of 9 countries express their support for the strongest possible sanctions even for the price of economic hardship. Bulgaria and Hungary, as with other topics, are regional outliers. Public opinion in Bulgaria on this question is perhaps influenced by concerns about the relatively lower living standards that will magnify the effects of any sanctions on significant segments of the population. While only 32% of Central and Eastern Europeans currently indicate opposition, at present, to sanctions, if these voices are ignored, it could lead to greater social polarisation and democratic backsliding in the region. The public pulse should further be constantly re-evaluated given that attitudes could change dramatically as the situation evolves.²⁸

Those who agree with the statement: **EU countries should impose the strongest possible sanctions on Russia to stop it from waging further conflict even if it means the price of fuel or other products increase in my country.**



Majorities in 7/9 countries are willing to sanction Russia even if it means they must endure increased economic hardship.

No appetite for taking up the fight

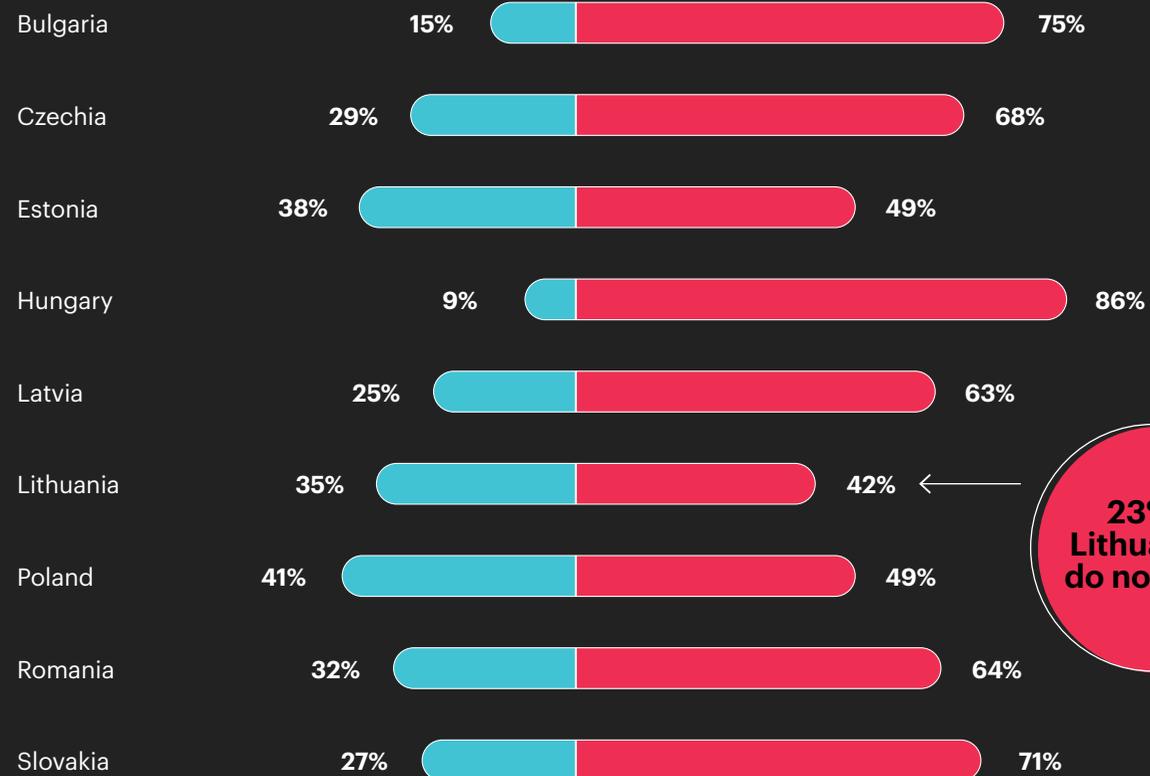
Though CEE societies are supportive of their governments partaking in economic sanctions, a majority of 63%, on average, opposes NATO troops engaging in combat against Russia in Ukraine. It is important, however, to underline some nuances within this consensus and distinguish between two groups of countries.

Opposition to the deployment of NATO forces in Ukraine is particularly ardent in Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Romania, Czechia and Latvia. Hungary's strident opposition, the highest recorded among all countries, dovetails with the pre-election

campaign message of Viktor Orbán. The Hungarian prime minister fervently rejected the idea that Hungary should even send military aid to Ukraine, instead declaring that this type of assistance would equate to participation in the war and further "warned" citizens against voting for the opposition that threatened to drag Hungary into it²⁹.

NATO countries should send own troops to Ukraine to help them fight against Russian invasion.

Agree Disagree



23% of Lithuanians do not know



70% in CEE would ban webpages and actors spreading Kremlin war propaganda from social media.

Crackdown on war propaganda

With the takedowns of (pro-)Kremlin outlets and profiles, including EU-wide bans targeting RT and Sputnik, a debate on their future has been sparked across the region. The polling data reveals that citizens support these measures. Hungary, most notably, ranks first here – a seeming anomaly could possibly be explained by the different meaning placed on the term disinformation by some Hungarians – by certain groups, disinformation might rather be perceived as any content not in accordance with official government information³⁰.

Those who agree with the statement that webpages and actors spreading disinformation about the war in Ukraine should be banned from social media.



War in Ukraine overview

Support for sanctions

EU countries should impose strongest possible sanction on Russia to stop it from waging further conflict, even if it means the prices of fuel or other products will increase in my country.



70% across the CEE region believe their countries should reduce their energy dependence on Russia.

68%

in CEE consider Ukraine to be an independent country free to make its own decisions.

"As usual, GLOBSEC provides the informed observer with a guide to the present crisis to our East. Based on more than armchair speculation, GLOBSEC contributes to our on-the-ground understanding of this great test to the order we've known since the end of the Cold War. A welcome report from the wise analysts at GLOBSEC."

Cameron Munter, Senior Fellow, CEVRO Institute, Prague

Should Ukraine be/become...*

*remaining percentages account to those who refused to or did not know how to respond

	a member of the EU	a member of NATO	a member of the EU and NATO	a neutral country	in the Russian sphere of influence
Bulgaria	14%	1%	13%	47%	11%
Czechia	20%	7%	30%	38%	1%
Estonia	11%	4%	41%	33%	2%
Hungary	10%	3%	10%	63%	4%
Latvia	11%	3%	40%	32%	1%
Lithuania	19%	6%	40%	25%	2%
Poland	14%	7%	58%	15%	1%
Romania	13%	11%	27%	40%	5%
Slovakia	14%	5%	21%	47%	10%

Democracy

Increased satisfaction with democracy across the region



As the democratic world reunites against autocratic aggression, a wave of hope for a renewed trust in democracy might also be occurring in the transatlantic space. Comparing one's own situation and comfort of living in a peaceful and free society to the situation in Ukraine – a European country where such life is now perceived a luxury, can translate into some parts of societies being more grateful for the peaceful

and free systems they live in. The data, nonetheless, shows that the benchmark has not drastically shifted for Central Europeans. While satisfaction with the system of governance is higher, overall support for democracy has not changed much since March 2021. The conflict's economic repercussions will affect many in the CEE region, with particularly detrimental impacts on impoverished communities. These vulnerable groups also tend to be more prone to manipulation efforts. Democracies harbouring distrustful and polarised societies, therefore, must ready themselves for difficult fights ahead.

The satisfaction with how democracy works has risen in the whole region by 11% on average.

Satisfaction with the governance system

Whereas the 2020 polling revealed that a majority in no country, apart from Austria, expressed satisfaction with democracy, the satisfaction now boasts majority support in 5 of 9 countries. Satisfaction with democracy has grown, on average, by 11% across the entire region. Differences between countries, however, are notable. While satisfaction increased in 7 of 9 countries, it declined in Romania and remained static in Slovakia. These findings suggest that the occurrence of a war next door alone does not necessarily bolster support for democracy and the governance systems of these countries more broadly.

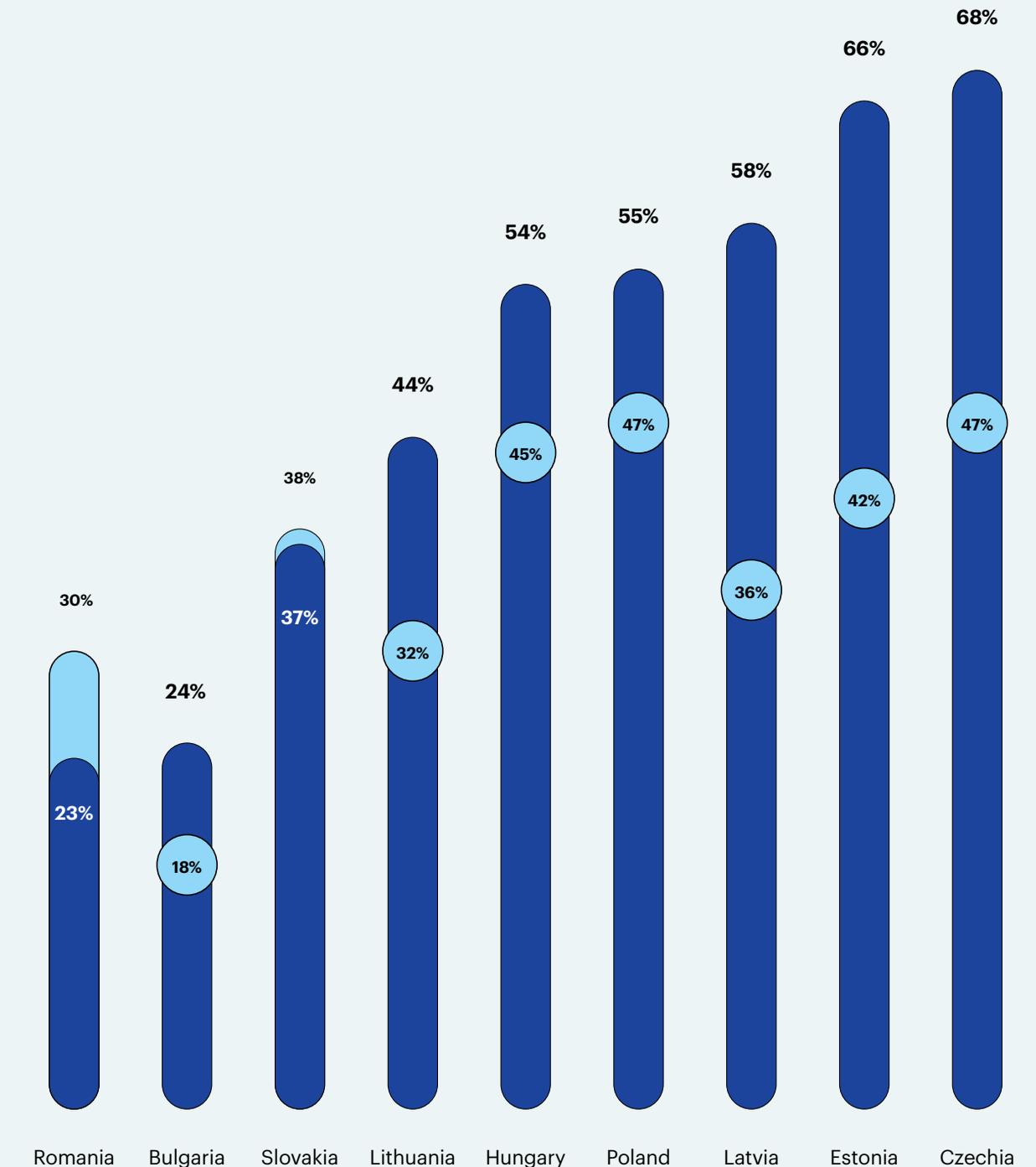


The greatest upward shift concerning satisfaction with democracy was measured in Czechia, Estonia and Latvia. These countries, together with Lithuania and Hungary, have also seen a considerable increase in respondents believing their needs are well taken into account by their political systems.

On average, 48% are satisfied with how democracy works in their country.

Those who responded very or rather satisfied to: **If you take all circumstances into account, to what extent are you overall satisfied with how democracy works in your country?**

2022 2020



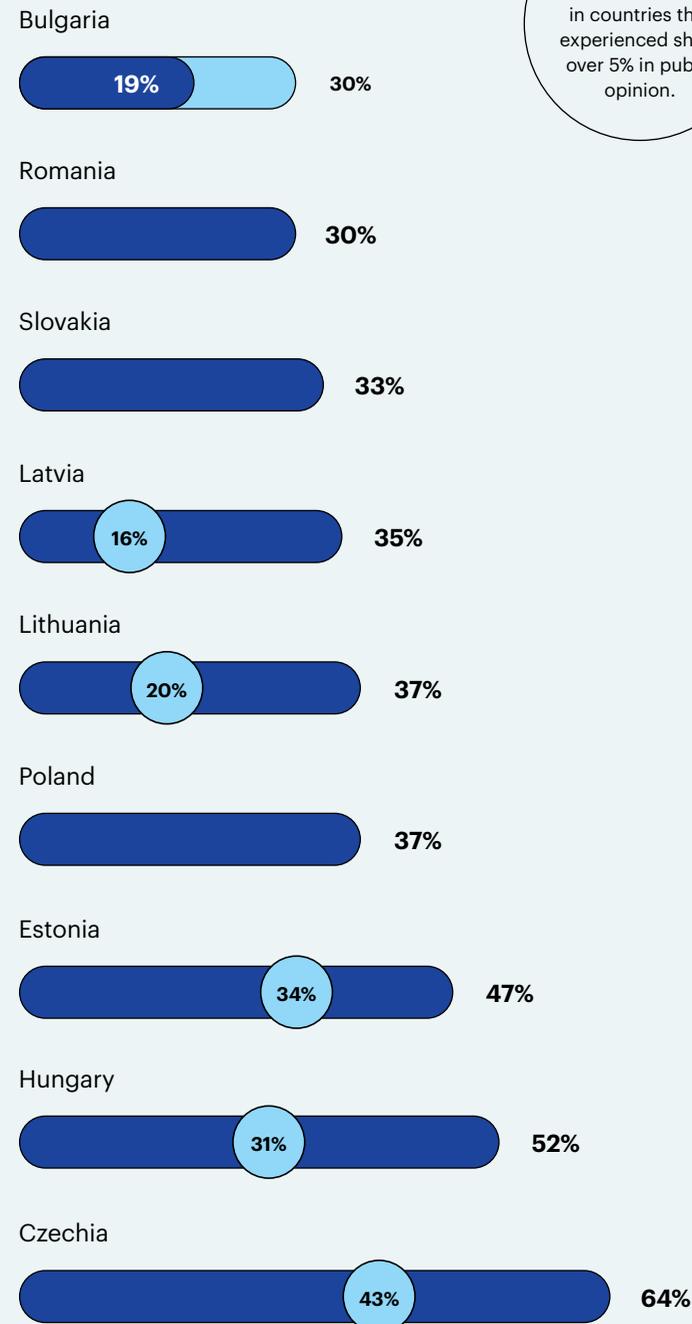
Case of Hungary and Poland

A somewhat paradoxical situation is apparent in Hungary and Poland. Despite international indexes (such as Freedom House and the Economist Intelligence Unit) indicating declines in the quality of democracy in both countries³¹, satisfaction with democracy has increased. Compared to 2020, more Hungarians also feel like their needs are taken into account by the system. While 31% agreed that this was the case in 2020, 52% of respondents felt the same way in 2022. This dynamic underscores the insight that satisfaction with democracy does not necessarily equate to the quality of democracy, but rather might depend on a range of factors including content with one's own socio-economic situation.

Satisfaction with how democracy works has increased by 9 percentage points in Hungary and Poland since 2020.

Respondents agreeing that:
The needs of people like me are well taken into account by the political system in my country.

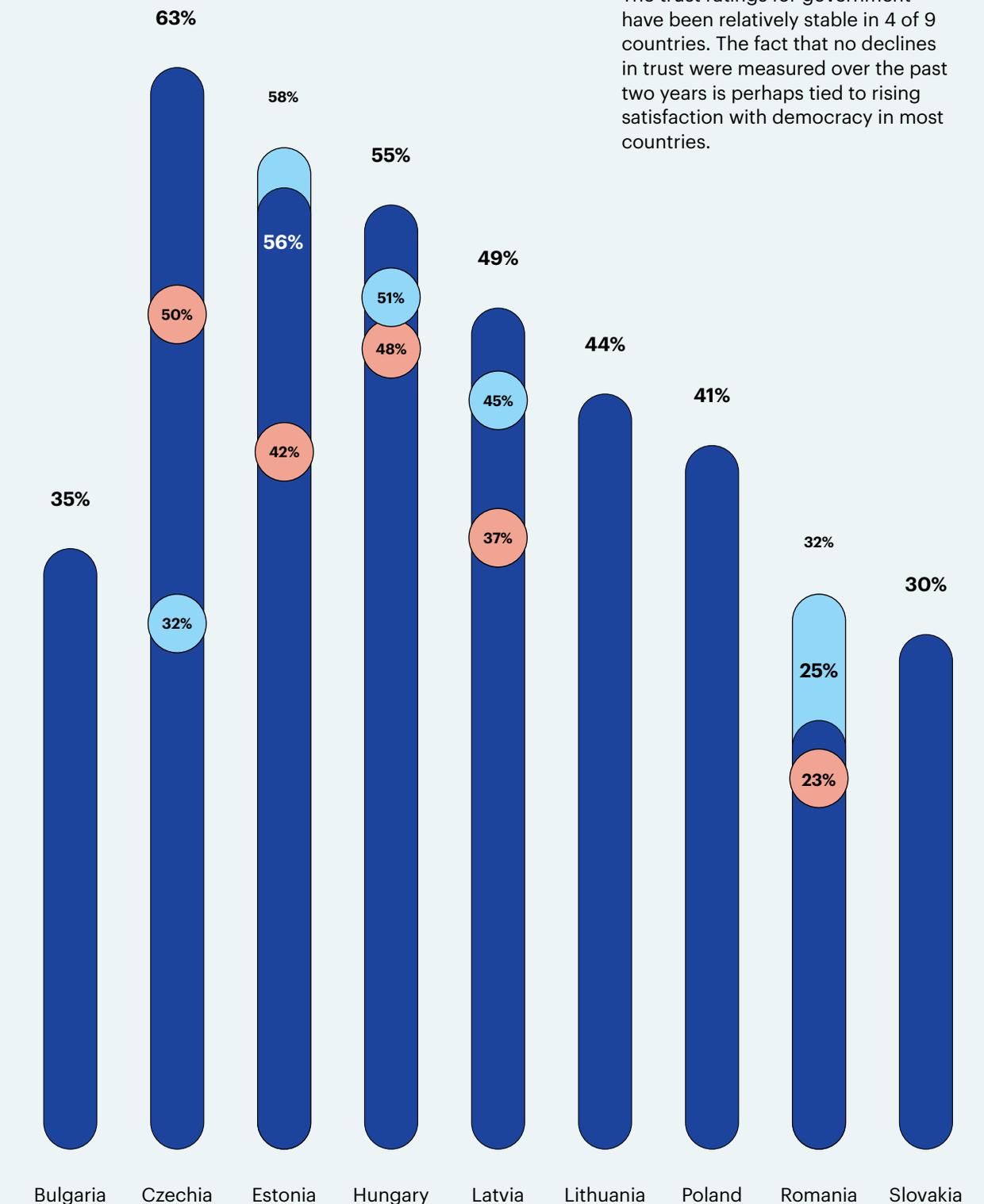
2022 2020



The graph only visualises changes in countries that experienced shifts over 5% in public opinion.

Trust in national governments

2022 2021 2020



The trust ratings for government have been relatively stable in 4 of 9 countries. The fact that no declines in trust were measured over the past two years is perhaps tied to rising satisfaction with democracy in most countries.

The graph only visualises changes in countries that experienced shifts over 5% in public opinion.

Trust or not?

Institutional trust is another indicator of citizen satisfaction with the system they live in. The findings reveal generally similar levels of trust in government and parliament in all countries (though parliament is less trusted by 4% on average). The trust ratings for the respective presidents, on the other hand, stand apart from the results for the governments in Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia. In most of these countries, the presidents also enjoyed a significant increase in trust compared to the 2021 poll.

Trust in the president in Romania declined from 44% in 2021 to 29% in 2022.

Countries where the levels of trust in the president differ from the levels of trust in the government and parliament

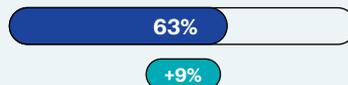
2022 2021 difference



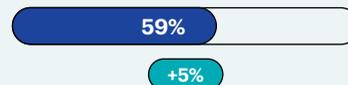
Estonia
Alar Karis



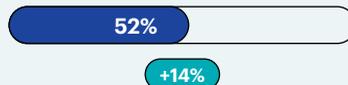
Lithuania
Gitanas Nausėda



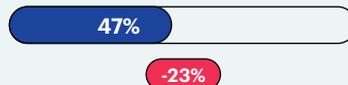
Bulgaria
Rumen Radev



Poland
Andrzej Duda



Slovakia
Zuzana Čaputová

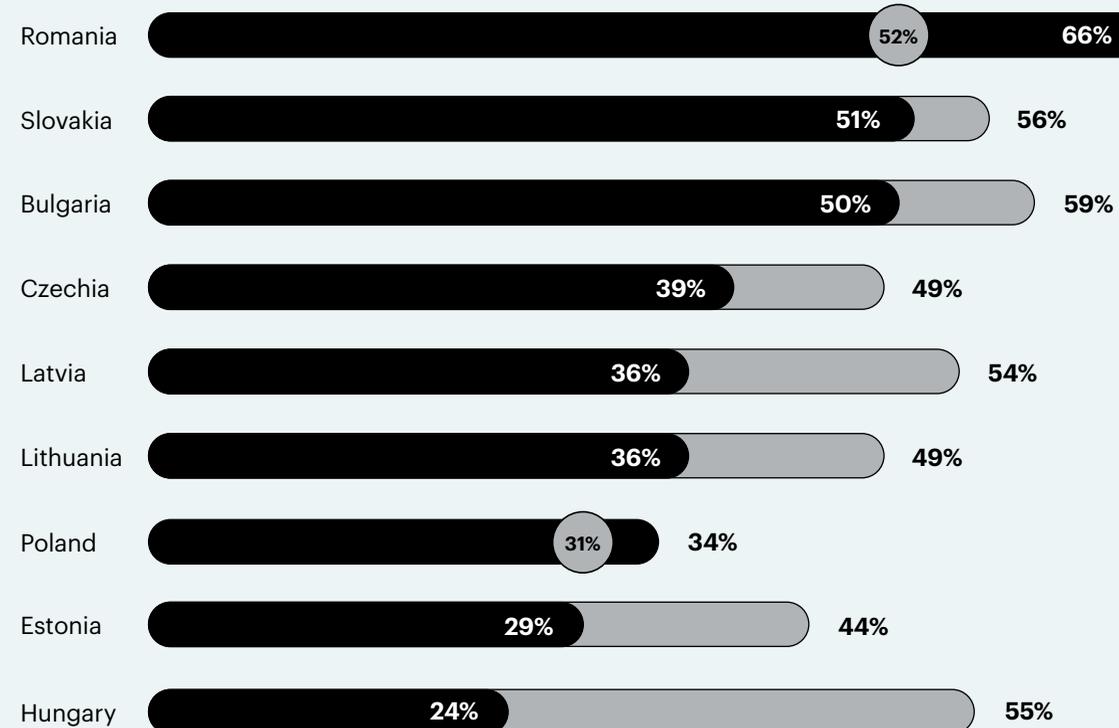


Czechia
Miloš Zeman



Those agreeing that: **Who holds the power in the government does not matter, nothing will change.**

2022 2020



Feeling of powerlessness

Another factor contributing to the dissatisfaction with democracy can be the overall feeling of powerlessness towards the system or other entities in each country. Stronger prevalence of such sentiments correlates with, as already identified by the polling in 2020, higher tendency to believe in conspiracy theories and disinformation. The feeling of despair is most apparent in Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia – countries where the highest percentages of respondents also believed in surveyed conspiracy theories.

The findings indicate that the powerlessness has slightly declined in the

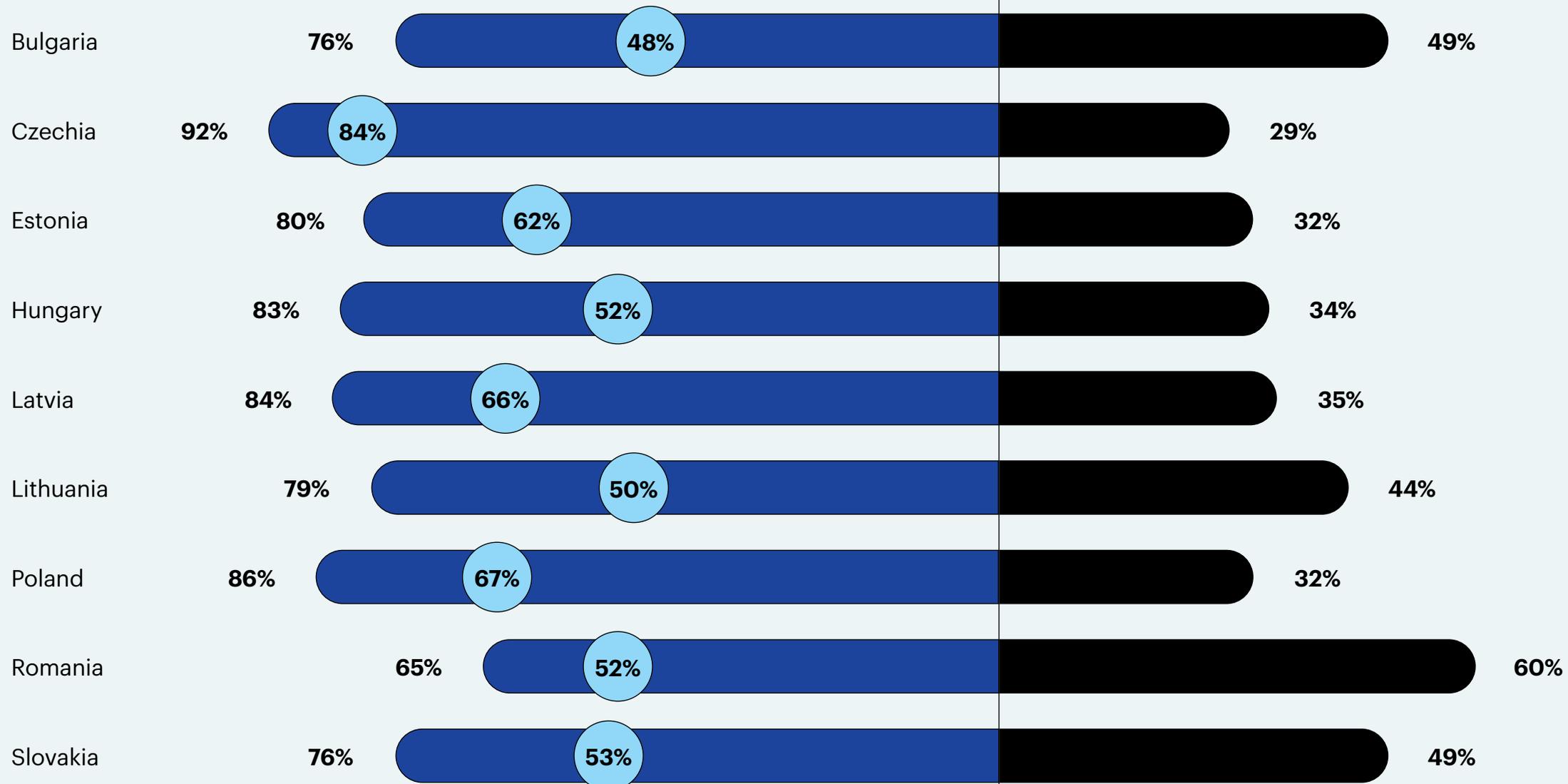
region since 2020 as measured by the level of agreement with two statements: “Who holds the power in the government does not matter, nothing will change” and “Our country has always been oppressed, we were never able to control our path”. While majorities in 5 of 9 countries felt that the power holders were irrelevant in 2020, this figure now stands at only 3 of 9. Hungary saw the largest declines among those agreeing with both pessimistic statements, which may be connected to the fact that the data was collected just before parliamentary elections - the period during which the population should generally feel more empowered to influence the direction of the country.

Support for democracy

Extent of approval for democracy and autocracy

■ **DEMOCRACY** as a system based on equality, human rights and freedoms, rule of law is good for our country.
 ■ **LIBERAL DEMOCRACY** as a system based on equality, human rights and freedoms, rule of law is good for our country.

■ **HAVING A STRONG LEADER** who does not need to bother with any parliament and elections is good for my country.



Support for democracy as the best governance system is shared by an overwhelming majority across the CEE region. However, contrary to the overall rise in satisfaction with the governance system in most countries, there has been little change, since 2021³², in attitudes towards democracy being the best system of governance for their respective countries. Lithuania is the only exception on this question.

“Our Christian values are under threat! They’re trying to accustom us with the idea of gays, lesbians, sexual education in schools. [They are] teaching our children to be gay. That’s a clear departure they’re pushing from our Orthodox faith.”
 (accountant, 42 years, Romania)

Response collected during the focus group discussions in March 2021 in Romania to the following prompt: “Do you believe anyone or anything threatens your values? If yes, who/what and which values are these?”

The shift in attitudes regarding feelings about democracy, perhaps surprisingly, also does not align with changes in attitudes towards autocracy. Even where support for democracy has risen since 2021, it does not necessarily equate to a drop in openness towards strong leaders. A correlation was only observed in Slovakia, where the drop in support for democracy and increased openness for a strong leader was recorded, underscoring a concerning trend towards greater support for autocracy in the country (25% in 2020, 38% in 2021, and now at 49% in 2022).

Support for a strong leader who does not have to bother with elections or parliament remains rather robust across the region, currently at 40%. The worrying trend is reflective of autocratisation on the rise more broadly worldwide.³³

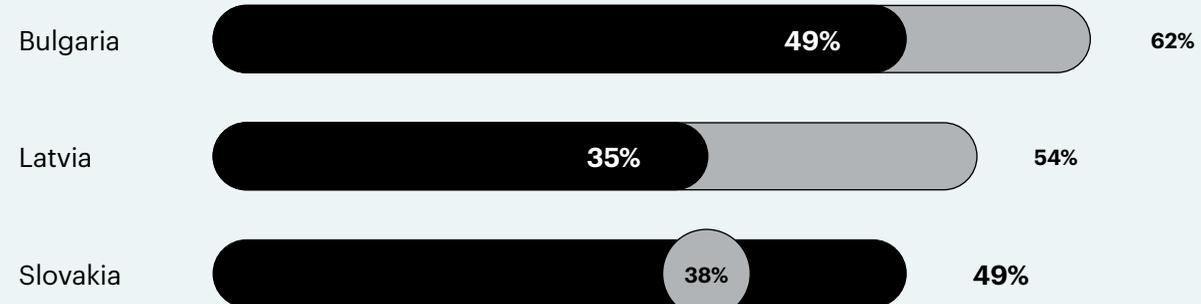
The poll, as in the prior year, also sought to measure aversion towards the word “liberal” in the region – the term often used by campaigns seeking to demonise parts of society. The trendlines reveal that support for liberal democracy followed a similar trajectory as support for democracy more generally. Where support for democracy as a system has increased, so too has backing for liberal democracy,

and vice versa. The difference between support for liberal democracy and “just” democracy with otherwise the same definition, however, remains stark - there is an average 20 percentage point gulf between the two and an increase in 6 of 9 countries over the past year. The average support for liberal democracy stands at 59% but is the strongest in Czechia and lowest in Bulgaria and Lithuania.

Only in Slovakia the support for autocratic leader has considerably increased.

Those agreeing that: **Having a strong leader who does not need to bother with any parliament and elections is good for their country.**

● 2022 ○ 2021



The graph only visualises changes in countries that experienced shifts over 5% in public opinion.



Uncertainty

Some countries recorded increased numbers of people either not knowing how to respond to the statements on democracy or refusing to respond. Overall 12% did not know or declined to respond to the statement concerning whether a strong leader would be good or not for their respective countries in Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. And 10% refrained from indicating whether democracy is good or not in the same countries.

Even greater uncertainty was expressed regarding liberal democracy. This grey zone of around 20% in Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland presents an opportunity for governments and/or civil societies to increase their communication efforts to better explain the nature of liberal democracy.

In Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, an average of 20% were unsure whether liberal democracy as a system based on equality, human rights and freedoms, and the rule of law is good for their country.

Conspiracy theories & polarising narratives

Conspiracy theories about democracy, often accompanied by manipulative or misinformative narratives demonising some parts of society or states, have been prevalent in the information space, especially in CEE, for years now. Despite the active exposure of Russian information operations across the EU and a more open and direct struggle against war-related disinformation, overall inclinations towards believing disinformation has not declined. The data, however, demonstrates some shifts.

With COVID-19 dominating the information (and thus also disinformation) space for over two years, the prevalence of narratives deriding the West and/or spreading fears about migrants, consequently, has experienced a decline. This backdrop is reflected in public opinion – societies tend to see migration, for example, as less of a threat compared to 2020. The shift of focus towards the war and Russia could further curtail the effects of disinformation, but constant vigilance and a consolidation of efforts are needed still. This is especially true considering the fact that Ukrainian refugees have become the target of various smear campaigns.

A majority in Slovakia and Bulgaria believes that democracy does not exist, because in reality, hidden elites rule the world.

Average belief in three conspiracy theories and manipulative narratives³⁵.



Conspiracy theories resonate

Bulgaria and Slovakia, once again, confirmed their status as most prone to believing in various conspiracy theories about democracy in the CEE region and having a high societal vulnerability.³⁴

There are no key discernible year to year trends for individual countries regarding their proneness to conspiracy theories - percentage shifts varied from statement to statement. The most "popular" conspiracy theory, on average, concerned the expression of doubt about the existence of democracy and instead purporting the presence of secret elites that rule the world. 45% of respondents in CEE found the allegation probable.

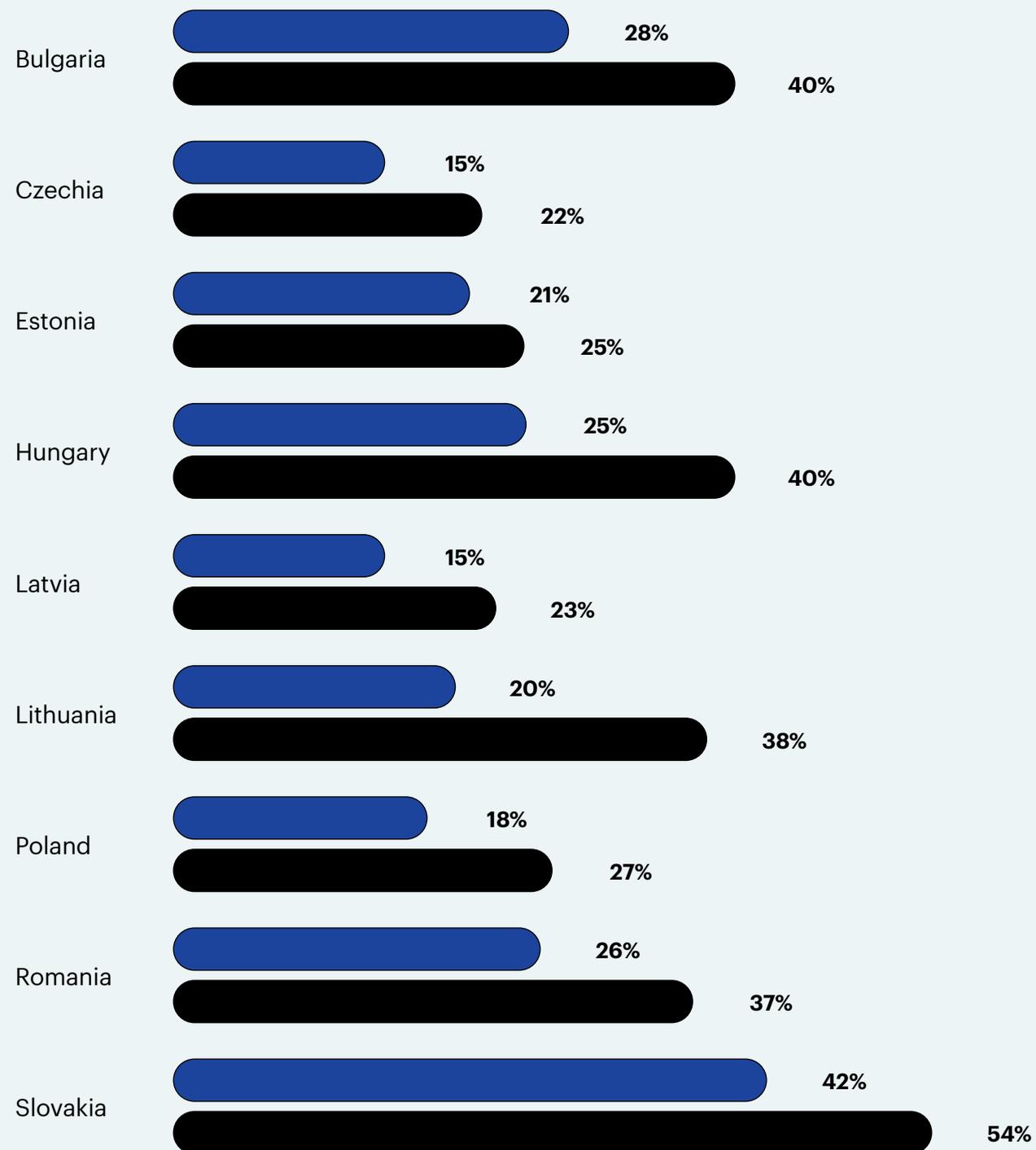
“There is no source I can trust the most.”

(unemployed, 23 years, Bulgaria)

Response collected during the focus group discussions in March 2021 in Bulgaria to the following prompt: “Which of the media you mentioned do you trust the most when it comes to the truthfulness or accuracy of information?”

Those who believe the following threaten their identity and values:

■ Western societies and their way of living
 ■ Liberal democracy



Who threatens us?

While public concern that we are under threat by certain groups of people or countries has declined since 2020, in some countries, the presence of anti-Western narratives and/or the use of migration to spread fear and hate is more visible than in others. Similar to the feeling of oppression, the notion that values and traditions are threatened by other groups is the strongest in Slovakia. These fears are weakest in Poland, Latvia, Romania and Czechia - the latter country has witnessed a significant decline in perceptions that migration is a threat - from 72% to 32%.



“Liberalism threatens the traditional family system. The state is based on the family. When families do not function normally, the state will not function normally.”

(teacher, 56 years, Slovakia)

Response collected during the focus group discussions in March 2021 in Slovakia to the following prompt: “Do you believe anyone or anything threatens your values? If yes, who/what and which values are these?”

Those who consider migrants as a threat to their values and identity:

■ 2022
 ■ 2020



More refugees, less of a threat

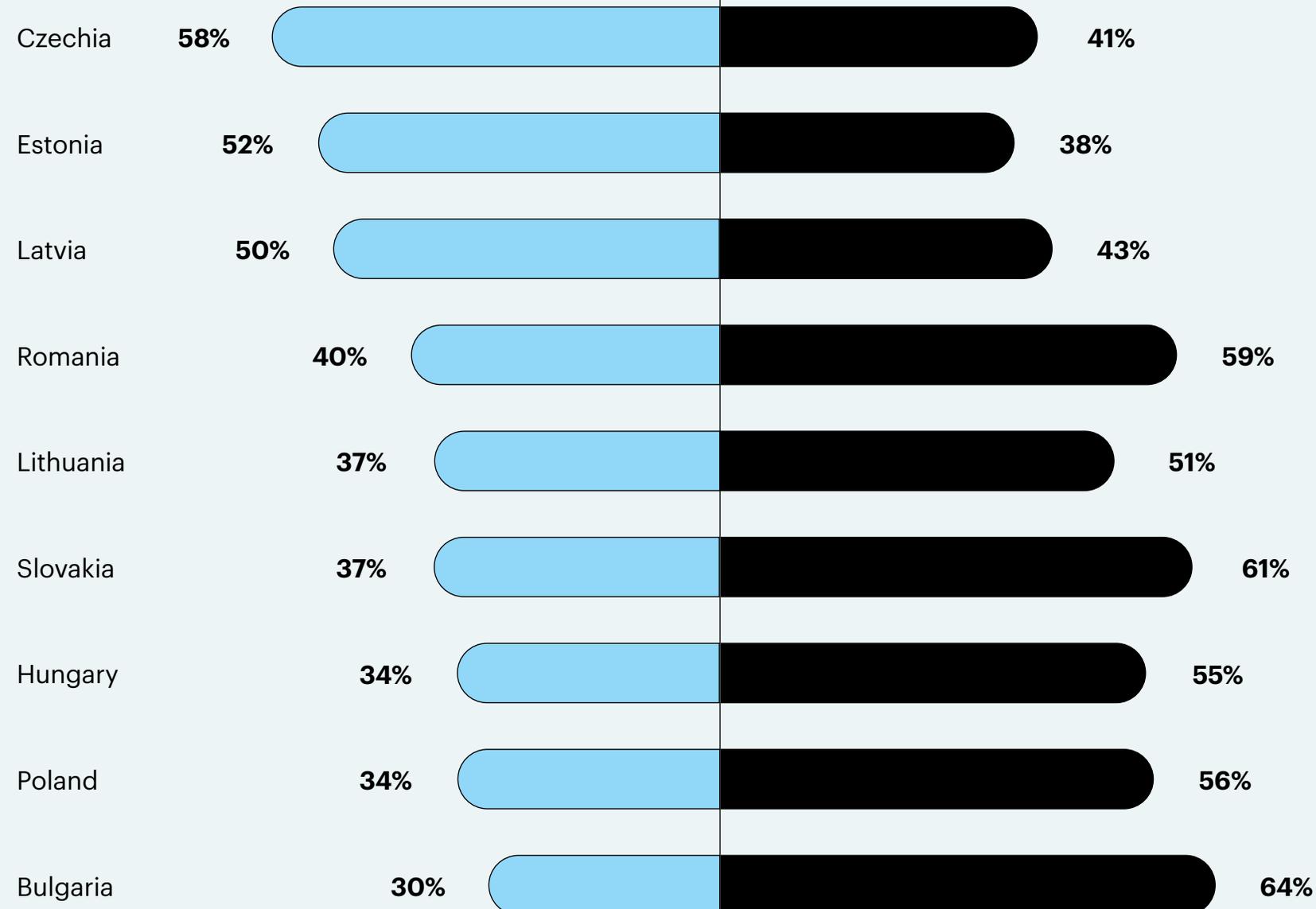
There has been a considerable decline in the perception that migrants are a threat to values and identity in all countries, including those accepting hundreds of thousands of refugees from Ukraine. This development demonstrates that fears concerning migration have never been based on actual flows of migrants but rather on the dissemination of disinformation narratives in the public space aimed at sowing doubt and apprehension. The fact that Ukraine is probably considered close in terms of “values and identity” possibly plays a role too, combined with xenophobic attitudes towards refugees coming from outside Europe, and (in)effective political communication about refugees.

Media trust

The level of media trust engenders a significant impact on the public treatment of information and manipulative content. Support for quality and independent media and trust-building efforts are, consequently, both essential and should be placed towards the top of government agendas. Unfortunately, attempts to control the media and attacks against journalists are still present in many countries,³⁶ with some even intensifying during the COVID pandemic, with Slovakia being one exhibit of this phenomenon at work.³⁷ Media trust, therefore, has failed to improve in most countries in the region and distrust rather remains rampant.

To what extent do you trust or distrust the standard opinion-shaping media in your country?

Trust Distrust



Only in 3 of 9 countries a majority trusts the media.

“Everybody distorts the truth somehow.”

(technician, 45 years, Hungary)

Response collected during the focus group discussions in March 2021 in Hungary to the following prompt: “Which of the media you mentioned do you trust the most when it comes to the truthfulness or accuracy of information?”

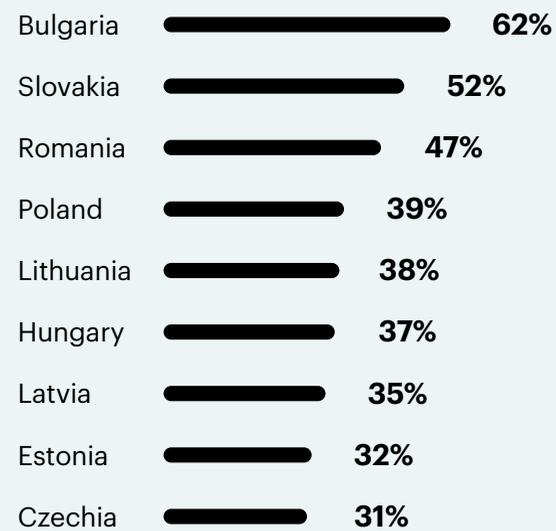
Positive examples

Czechia, Estonia and Latvia are three countries where more people trust than distrust the media. Czechia, notably, experienced a steep rise in trust, a development that may be related to the change of government in the country, whereas the former prime minister controlled several key media outlets in the country. Other than that, no dramatic shifts occurred over the past two years, with trust levels merely fluctuating within the 30-50% range in all other countries from year to year.

Democracy overview

The puppet show

Those who agree that world affairs are not decided by elected leaders but by secret groups aiming to establish a totalitarian world order.



“The reports by GLOBSEC support stakeholders by providing region-specific information that helps EU and Member States identify potential cleavages and topics that actors who engage in foreign information manipulation and interference might want to exploit and prepare for such attempts.”

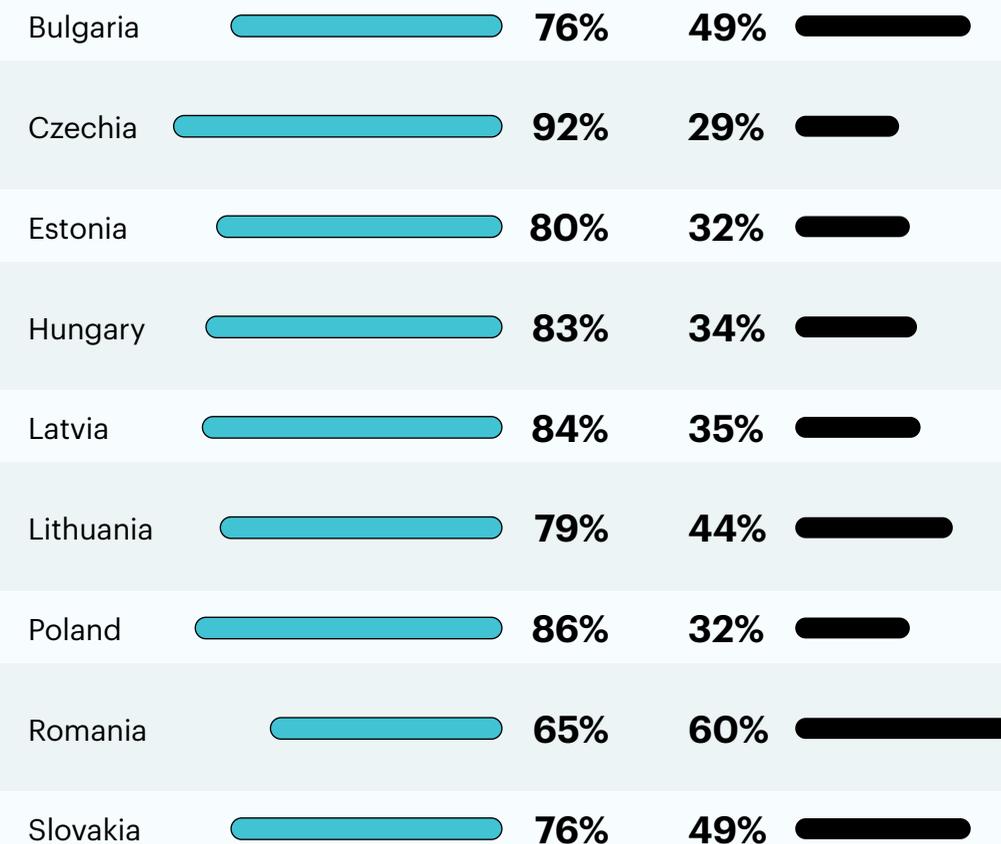
Lutz Güllner, Head of Division, Strategic Communications and Information Analysis, European External Action Service

Democracy VS autocracy

Those who agree that

Democracy as a system based on equality, human rights and freedoms, rule of law is good for our country.

Having a strong leader who does not need to bother with any parliament and elections is good for my country.



45% in CEE region think democracy does not exist, because in reality, hidden elites rule the world.

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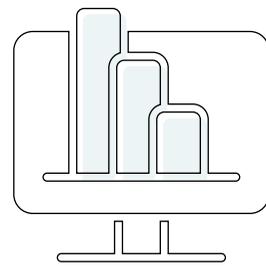
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GLOBSEC

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Methodology

The outcomes and findings of this report are based on public opinion poll surveys carried out in March 2022 on a representative sample of the population in nine countries: Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. The outcomes and findings of this report are based on public opinion poll surveys carried out in March 2022 on a representative sample of the population in nine countries: Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

The surveys were conducted on a sample of 1000 respondents per country (9,000 respondents altogether) using stratified multistage random sampling in the form of computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI). In all countries, the profiles of the respondents were representative of the country according to gender, age, education, place of residence and size of settlement. For the purposes of graphical data visualisation, the results were rounded to full numbers. To improve the readers' experience, the responses in closed questions with a scale were generalised. For example, a question with options definitely agree/ rather agree/ rather disagree /definitely disagree was merged to agree / disagree. The opinion polling was coordinated by FOCUS, s.r.o. agency.

Terminology

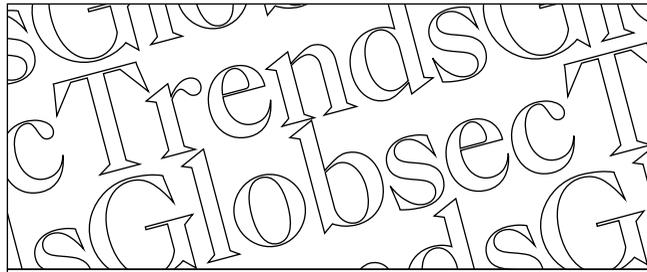
Baltics: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania
Visegrad Four / V4: Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia
CEE / Central and Eastern Europe: all surveyed countries

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- The original wording of the question included five options from which respondents could only choose one answer:
a) A member of the EU; b) A member of NATO; c) A member of both EU and NATO; d) A neutral country; e) In the Russian sphere of influence.
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- This is reflected in several recent polls including a Focus agency poll conducted in Slovakia: <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/22899145/poll-slovaks-against-disconnecting-from-russian-gas.html>
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- See public attitudes section in GLOBSEC Vulnerability Index, <https://www.vulnerabilityindex.org/>
- Democracy does not exist, because in reality, hidden elites rule the world; World affairs are not decided by elected leaders but by secret groups aiming to establish a totalitarian world order; and Liberal democracy threatens our traditional values and national identity.
- Examples can be found in GLOBSEC Vulnerability Index, <https://www.vulnerabilityindex.org/>
- <https://svet.sme.sk/c/22710926/reporteri-bez-hranic-vyzvali-na-vysetrenie-utokov-proti-novinarom-aj-na-slovensku.html>; <https://domov.sme.sk/c/22842547/fico-robot-matovic-igor-utoky-novinari.html>; <https://www.startitup.sk/matovicove-utoky-na-novinarov-sa-stupnuju-zautocil-aj-na-sefredaktora-aktualit-coraz-viac-pripomina-fica/>

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