Young Central Europeans: strongly European but still Central
Methodology

The outcomes and findings of this report are based on public opinion poll surveys carried out in December 2019 on a representative sample of the population aged 18 – 34 years in four countries in Central Europe: Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. The surveys were conducted on a sample of 500 respondents (per country) using online panel data collection. In all countries, the profiles of the respondents were representative of the country by gender, age, size of settlement and region. For the purpose of graphical data-visualisation in this report, the results were rounded to full numbers. The data collection was conducted by IPSOS.

The quotes used within the report belong to anonymous respondents. The questionnaire included several open questions, the exact wording is indicated in footnotes. The responses in closed questions with a scale were generalised. For example, in a question with options definitely yes / rather yes / neither yes nor no / rather no / definitely no, were merged to yes / neither / no.

Glossary

Central Europe: this report uses the term in reference to all countries covered by this research - Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia.

V4 (Visegrad Four): Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia.

Younger generation: respondents aged 18-24 years

Young professionals: respondents aged 25-34 years
Developments and changes in the region - and the entire world - within the last decade suggest that the next years might not draw the easiest path for Central Europeans. The prospect of economic crisis, Brexit, unpredictability of transatlantic cooperation, and an ongoing information war waged by Russia have been, and will continue to be, a strong influence on public opinion across the region. Moreover, the assurance of strong transatlantic bonds based on common values is fading while many domestic political actors use nationalistic rhetoric to further drive apart any sense of commonness.

The next decades and the future of the region will, as always, depend to a great extent on the key driving force – young people. What effects do current developments have on young Central Europeans and what does it mean for the future of Central Europe? This research sheds more light on these questions. Using targeted online polling among more than 2,000 young people, it provides deeper insight into young people’s perceptions of the world, the European Union (EU), the United States (US) and Russia.
Young people in Central Europe

Key Findings

1) Incline to position their country somewhere in between the East and West. While the West is most commonly associated with wealth and economic benefits, the East is perceived more in terms of a geographical area, such as Russia, Eastern Europe or Ukraine.

2) are positive about the EU. While 7 in 10 would choose to stay in the EU in case of a referendum on leaving, those who would stay mentioned mostly its economic benefits and freedom of movement as an argument to remain.

3) perceive the EU more positively than the US or Russia, both in terms of having their values aligned with the EU, as well as when evaluating the EU’s behaviour in the world.

4) see the US primarily as a rich, strong and powerful world player. While more young Central Europeans do not perceive the US as a threat to their country, the most common reason is that they do not believe their countries are interesting enough for the US.

5) see Russia rather as a negative force than a force for good in the world. They tend to perceive it as a threat mostly because of the Kremlin’s attempts to influence other countries and its expansionist policies to increase its power.

Country highlights

Young Czechs aged 25 – 34 are the most sceptical of the EU: Czechs also associate the EU the most with the narrative of a supposed “Brussels dictate”.

Young Hungarians identify the least with others’ values from the region; also, they do not see the West or the East as represented by a specific country.

Young Poles remain the most pro-US and the most anti-Russian country in the V4.

Young Slovaks remain the most pro-Russian and the least pro-US oriented country in the V4.
How about “in-between”?  

Several years of polling have shown increasing numbers of Central Europeans’ leaning towards the preference of an “in-between” positioning, and the younger generation is not differing from this trend. This, however, should not be observed in negative terms due to several factors.

First, the changing landscape of power distribution in the world might be causing the disappearance from people’s minds of the original “East vs. West” dichotomy. With the Cold War’s bipolar world having vanished 30 years ago, today influence is distributed among many continents and actors shaping current developments.

Decreasing perception of the world in terms of “East” and “West” could also be explained by high percentages of young people choosing “do not know” as a response.

Second, the West might be becoming too abstract. With the United Kingdom leaving the EU, criticism and the lack of unity among NATO members, and decreasing US engagement in Central Europe might all contribute to the lack of tangible images of what the “West” represents today. As the results show, the majority of young Central Europeans associate the West with Western European countries rather than the US, which indicates that “West” is often seen simply in geographical terms – as countries lying to the West of the V4.

Third, the data prove that the image of the richer and more developed West is still strongly present among many young Central Europeans, so the hesitancy towards choosing the West might be a result of giving up on the idea that Central European countries will ever reach the level of Western European countries.

Related to that, as Central Europe has achieved a certain level in its standard of living, young people might have moved higher on Maslow’s “hierarchy of needs”. Theoretically, the West should be our aspiration, but we can observe a growing number of its defects. Unfortunately, it seems that neither a bit better “Western” nor a worse “Eastern” path is right for us.

On the contrary, the “East” is mostly seen simply in terms of countries lying to the East of Central Europe, and is largely associated with negative elements – backwardness, poverty and worse standard of living.

There has recently been much discussion in our society about the geopolitical and civilisational positioning of [your country]. Would you like your country to be:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Part of the West</th>
<th>Somewhere in-between</th>
<th>Part of the East</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czechia</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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1 The rest of the percentages is represented by those who responded “do not know” to the question. That corresponds to 16% of Czechs, 10% of Slovaks, 20% of Poles and 12% of Hungarians.

2 An example of an article explaining the concept can be found here: https://www.thoughtco.com/maslows-hierarchy-of-needs-4582571

3 Example of a study on millennials: https://www2.deloitte.com/global/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/millennialsurvey.html
What do you imagine under the West?

The strongest association with the West is related to wealth—around a quarter of all respondents imagine rich or more economically developed countries under this term. This association was most common in Hungary, where it was mentioned in almost 50% of all responses. Associations regarding economic benefits were generally much more common than value-based perceptions in all the V4 countries. Despite the fact that the US was mentioned most often, common references to Germany, Western Europe or France combined indicate that the understanding of the West is strongly related to Western Europe among young Central Europeans.

Geographically, we are obviously somewhere between the East and West, but ideologically, we should follow the Western societies. (respondent from Hungary)

Formerly, it meant wealth and cultural development, now I imagine a decline of European values and problem with refugees. (respondent from Poland)

Economically developed countries

United States

Germany

West as a cardinal direction

Better living standards

Western Europe

Most common associations with the West:

West as a cardinal direction 31%
Economically developed countries 13%
United States 8%
Germany 7%
Better living standards 7%
Western Europe 5%

If you imagine a specific country under the “West”, which one(s)?

Czechia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Poland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Slovakia

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>8%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

If you imagine a specific country under the term “West”, 47% of Czech respondents imagine Germany, 40% imagine the US, 23% France and 19% UK. In Poland, 67% imagine Germany, 11% US, 19% France and 5% UK. In Slovakia, 45% imagine Germany, 39% US, 18% France and 8% UK.
What do you imagine under the East?

Specifying a country as one’s first association with the East is common among approximately one half of the respondents across the region. In Slovakia and Czechia, one third of all responses included the mention of Russia.

The East paints a completely different picture in the minds of young Hungarians, who primarily imagine Eastern Europe under the term in general. Also, 21% of young Hungarians mentioned non-developed or backward countries as an association with the East. Russia is the most common association among young Czechs, Poles and Slovaks.

While the most common associations with the West are mostly understood in terms of economic benefits and a better quality of life, negative associations dominate in relation to the East. Images of backwardness, poverty or lower standards of living were common across the region.

Most common associations with the East:

- **Russia** (25%)
- Less developed countries (12%)
- Poverty & lower standard of living (9%)
- Eastern European countries (6%)
- Countries to the East of us (6%)
- East as cardinal direction (5%)

If you imagine a specific country under the East, which one(s)?

- **Czechia**
  - Russia: 74%
  - Ukraine: 13%
  - China: 17%

- **Poland**
  - Russia: 65%
  - Ukraine: 22%
  - China: 3%

- **Slovakia**
  - Russia: 71%
  - Ukraine: 14%
  - China: 9%

On average, in Czechia, Poland and Slovakia, 78% of male respondents mention Russia when asked about a country representing the East. The same applies to only 60% of female respondents.

The East as a country

While Russia is still in the minds of a majority when asking what country represents the “East”, larger Ukrainian minority might have shaped the perceptions of Poles. A stronger Chinese influence in Czechia, which is also reflected in a continuous and vivid public discussion, is visible in the responses of young Czechs.

84% of Hungarian respondents do not imagine any specific country under the term “East”.

The percentages correspond to the sample of respondents who responded “East” or “in-between” to the question on the page no. 7.

The question was open with a possibility to write more than one country. The table refers to the percentages of the sample of those who answered yes to the question: Do you imagine any specific country under the term “East”? Hungary is not included in the data set, as only 14% of respondents said yes to imagining a specific country under the East, i.e. the sample was too small to draw conclusions.
No EU-exit for Central Europeans

The support of EU membership among young Central Europeans remains strong. On average, 70% of them would vote to stay in the EU in case of a referendum. The strong and clear support for membership is also proven by the fact that only 9% would not take part in such a referendum. In case of any attempts to follow the example of the United Kingdom, young Central Europeans would not hesitate to vote “stay”.

On average, younger Central Europeans are keener to stay in the EU than their older fellow citizens. Poles are an outlier though. The highest numbers of leave-supporters were identified among Czechs aged 25-34 years (25%), and 21% of Slovaks of the same age group.

7 in 10 young Central Europeans would vote to stay in case of a referendum on EU membership.

Those who would vote to stay in case of a referendum on EU membership

- Younger generation 18-24
- Young professionals 25-34

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Younger generation 18-24</th>
<th>Young professionals 25-34</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Czechia</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our future has to be in the EU. As a small state in the middle of the EU, we cannot play a solo game.

(respondent from Czechia)

10 The percentages refer to the sample of two age groups of respondents who would vote to stay when asked: “Imagine, that the following weekend, there will be a referendum in [your country] on its membership in the EU. How would you vote in such referendum?”

Those who would vote “To leave”:
- 21% of Czechs, 9% of Hungarians, 12% of Poles, 19% of Slovaks.

Those who responded “Would not take part in the referendum”:
- 19% of Czechs, 5% of Hungarians, 8% of Poles, 10% of Slovaks.

Those who responded “Do not know”:
- 5% of Czechs, 5% of Hungarians, 6% of Poles, 3% of Slovaks.
More insight into the perception of the EU is provided by respondents about why they would stay in the EU and what values they associate with the EU. General "benefits" of EU membership resonated among all four countries. Most young people in the V4 believe that staying in the EU is worth it because it has more advantages than disadvantages and because they see it as beneficial either for their society or country. This notion was further supported by those who voiced appreciation for economic benefits, EU grants and financial support specifically. Two issues remain questionable in this regard – first, whether general “benefits” were regarded only in economic and financial terms or they are also linked to “higher” values such as freedom and democracy; and second, whether such values were enough to prevail since Central European countries are not pure beneficiaries of EU funds.

With 38%, the most mentioned reason to leave among the young Central Europeans who would vote to leave the EU was “the Brussels dictate” followed by a narrative that “the EU does not bring my country any benefits” (13%). Both of these narratives are most widespread among young Czechs. Of those who would vote to leave, 58% in Czechia and 34% in Hungary would do so due to the so-called EU dictate and limitations of the national sovereignty of their country. Building on the fears of the loss of sovereignty in the region, which was under the control of other world powers for the majority of the 20th century, these narratives are commonly used among populists seeking to find the “other” to blame for a lack of progress and growth. 10% of young Poles who would vote to leave the EU would do so because of the perception that the EU does not treat their country equally to others. 11% of Hungarians would vote to leave because they just “feel it that way”.

Core EU values matter for young Central Europeans. In 3 of 4 countries, the most common associations with the EU among young people were its core values of solidarity, cohesion and cooperation. When analysing all the responses, around 60% of responses included abstract values such as solidarity, freedom, safety, democracy, etc. At the same time, the EU is also strongly associated with economic benefits. 60% of all responses also included mentions of economic benefits, development and prosperity. Only around a fifth of all values listed included negative associations such as “Brussels dictates”, inequality and bureaucracy.

The support of the EU and the membership is also reflected in the belief that the values of Central European countries are in line with the values of the EU. Hungary stays an outlier, which confirms a trend of Hungarians standing out in terms of different perceptions of geopolitics and orientation of their country. However, this should not be seen as a rejection of the EU among Hungarians but rather as a declaration of an attempt to maintain a strong Hungarian national identity. A similar tendency of not identifying with the values of others was demonstrated toward the United States or Russia.

Young Central Europeans who believe that the values of their country are in line with the values of the EU.

On average, 54% believe that the EU promotes peace in the world.

EU’s action in the world seen more positively

On average, more than a half of young Central Europeans think that the EU promotes peace in the world. This is 40% and 26% more than about Russia and the United States, respectively.

The positive perception of the EU continues with the view of its policies and its influence in the world in terms of political, economic, social or environmental issues. On average, 51% of young Central Europeans perceive it positively. The EU influence in the world is also viewed much more positively than the individual influence of the alleged engines and leaders of the EU, France (35%) and Germany (43%). However, young people’s positive view of a country is not automatically passed on its leader. Please see chapter about political leaders on page no. 29.

Also, almost one fifth of young Slovaks and Czechs did not know which values to associate with the EU. For Hungary and Poland, it was only around 4% of respondents.
Image of the US differs

The perception of the US in the eyes of young Central Europeans differs from country to country. As is the case for the whole population⁹, Slovak youth perceives the US in the least positive light among the V4. A negative portrayal of the US as an aggressor or manipulator is often used in public debate, particularly by outlets and actors spreading conspiracies. On the other hand, young Poles follow the pro-Atlanticist trend typical for their country and expressed the most positive attitudes towards the US. On average, from two to three times more young Poles see the US positively than Slovaks. Czechs and Hungarians are both usually at the same level with around a quarter of their young population having positive attitudes and assessments of the US, thus lying somewhere in between Slovaks and Poles.

Young Central Europeans overall see the US as a rich, strong and powerful country and world player representing freedom. The power, however, is mostly not associated with peace promotion or its current president. Youth in the V4 are reluctant to agree with the image of the US as a promoter of peace, while almost a half of the respondents view the current president negatively. The attitudes towards Donald Trump among young Central Europeans are comparable to those of Russian president Vladimir Putin - around a fifth of respondents view both presidents in a positive light and around a quarter in neutral terms. However, large differences can be observed between Slovaks and Poles – only 9% of Slovaks perceive Donald Trump positively in comparison to 28% for Vladimir Putin, while 33% of Poles views Trump in a positive way in comparison to 9% for Putin.

On the other hand, general perceptions of the US as a whole, freed of any connection with its behaviour on the international scene or leadership, stays positive.

How do you personally perceive the US in general?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Positively/Agree</th>
<th>Negatively/Disagree</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Czechia</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>32%</td>
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</table>

How do you personally perceive Donald Trump?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Positively/Agree</th>
<th>Negatively/Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Czechia</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>63%</td>
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</table>

The question of values is a case worth analysing further. While absolute majorities in Slovakia, Czechia and Poland, and a relative majority in Hungary, believe that the values of their countries are in line with EU values, such identification with the US is not so straightforward. The data not only show that the value-based connection is the weakest in Hungary and Slovakia, but young Slovaks and Hungarians also have a slightly stronger attachment to Russia in terms of values than to the US.

This tendency can also be observed by specific associations. Only around a third of all US values mentioned by young Slovaks and Hungarians represented abstract positive terms such as freedom, democracy, diversity or cooperation. In Poland, these were mentioned in around two-thirds of all values listed.

More common associations with US values are based on power-based and materialistic terms. In the eyes of young Central Europeans, the US more commonly represents a world power, strong economy, technological development, capitalism or trade. Negative associations are mostly linked to the image of a liar or greedy player, especially among Slovaks, war and conflicts, and superiority and arrogance.

The tendency of low identification with other countries’ values among young Hungarians (a trend already observed for the whole population in GLOBSEC Trends 2019) is also demonstrated in the question of values representation. 43% of Hungarians said “nothing” when asked what values they associate with the US. Same tendency was observed for Russia.

* The exact wording of the question was: “To what extent do you believe that the values of [your country] are in line with the values of the United States of America (USA)?”

Those who responded “Neither yes nor no”: 30% of Poles, 35% of Czechs, 34% of Hungarians, 33% of Slovaks.

Those who responded “Not in line”: 20% of Poles, 23% of Czechs, 31% of Hungarians, 35% of Slovaks.


14  The question was open with a possibility to list 3 values maximum.

Those who believe that the values of their country are in line with the values of the US

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CZ</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HU</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SK</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The US is perceived as a rich and powerful country representing freedom, but its actions on the international scene and its current president are not seen in a positive light.

What values do you personally associate with the United States?

- Freedom
- Influen
d
- Power economy
- Strong will
- Power economy
- Freedom
- Diversity
- American dream
- Opportunities
- Power economy
- Freedom
- Diversity
- American dream
- Opportunities
No common perception of Russia

Similar to the US, the perceptions of Russia are different in each country. The attitudes towards the “bear” are generally more negative than positive though. In general, only around a fifth of young Central Europeans have some positive perceptions of Russia – more when talking about values or overall perceptions of the country than its international behaviour or leadership.

In general, stronger negative stances are expressed by young Poles and Czechs, while Slovaks, and to a lesser extent Hungarians, lean towards more positive or neutral assessments when thinking about the country.

This is visible in the questions assessing the behaviour of Russia on the world stage, which demonstrate that Russia is seen as a rather negative force than a force for good in the world. Positive connotations are mostly present in terms of historical or cultural ties, not in the assessment of its actions internationally.

How do you personally perceive Russia in general?

Russia is perceived as a strong country and world player with authoritarian tendencies and lower standards of living.

How do you personally perceive Vladimir Putin?

Russia promotes peace in the world.
Those who believe that the values of their country are in line with the values of Russia

Young Czechs, Slovaks, and Poles associated Russia the most with authoritarian or totalitarian regimes, and with strength and size. More than 10% in each country view Russia as a world power, big or strong country. Among Poles, war and aggression were often-repeated associations with Russia, which underlines Poles’ negative sentiments and distrust towards Russia.

However, relative majorities in all countries view Russia as a country neutrally. Around 35 - 40% of young Central Europeans lean towards neutral evaluation.

When it comes to identification with values, young people in Czechia, Poland, and Slovakia generally do not think their values are in line with those of Russia. Hungary is an outlier - 32% believe their values are in line with Russia. Despite the overall more positive approach towards Russia in Slovakia, the degree of identification with the values of Russia is comparable to less pro-Russian societies in Czechia and Poland.

The question of values representing given countries helps us with a clearer overview of young people’s understanding of that same country. As was the case for the US, Hungarians are outliers. Not only their perception of Russia is clearly different than the rest of V4, almost 50% could not name a single value they would associate with the country, as was the case for the US. What is more, the most often repeated “values” were natural gas and strong economy, which demonstrates that the politics of Hungarian government might have succeeded in portraying Russia as the country’s economic partner rather than a regime with a lack of democracy and lower standards of living.

Unsurprisingly, as our data have been showing for years, Poles are the strongest opponents of Russia. 62% of young Poles perceive it as a threat to their country and an absolute majority perceives the country, its conduct and leader negatively.

To the contrary, in Slovakia, around 30% of young people have positive associations to the overall picture of the country, i.e. when not assessing Kremlin’s actions in the world. In addition, almost 30% of young Slovaks see the long-lasting leader Vladimir Putin positively as well, which is quite paradoxical as the revival of Russian aggressive behaviour strengthened during his rule. Slovaks also have a historical tendency to sympathize with strong leaders though; a poll conducted in 2018 also confirmed 25% of the population would prefer a strong leader.15

However, relative majorities in all countries view Russia as a country neutrally. Around 35 - 40% of young Central Europeans lean towards neutral evaluation.

Young Czechs, Slovaks and Poles associated Russia the most with authoritarian or totalitarian regimes, and with strength and size. More than 10% in each country view Russia as a world power, big or strong country. Among Poles, war and aggression were often-repeated associations with Russia, which underlines Poles’ negative sentiments and distrust towards Russia.
Young Central Europeans’ perceptions of who poses a threat to their national security, whether the US or Russia, follow the patterns observed in previous chapters and differ from country to country. However, it seems that young Central Europeans have a clearer understanding of who is a friend and who is a foe to their country.

Russia is perceived as a threat twice as much as the US by young Central European respondents. The same question shows that, on average, 50% of young Central Europeans do not perceive the US as a threat while 29% believe that Russia does not pose a threat to their country. One fifth of young Central Europeans are undecided towards both countries and think that neither the US nor Russia poses a threat to their country.

While there are large differences in threat recognition within the V4, young Slovaks clearly stand out. Confirming the image of the most pro-Russian country in the region, 41% do not think that Russia poses a threat to their country. Only 15% of young Poles think similarly. The effect of disinformation campaigns against the US and a supposed common pan-Slavic heritage led by Russia is reflected in Slovaks’ attitudes. More young Slovaks perceive the US as a threat than Russia, contrary to other V4 countries.

The question asked: “Do you think that Russia poses a threat to [your country]?” was closed with options of 1. Definitely yes, 2. Rather yes, 3. Neither yes nor no, 4. Rather not, 5. Definitely not, 6. Cannot say/ Do not know. While on average 21% of young Central Europeans responded as “neither yes, nor no”, the rest of the percentages is represented by those who responded “do not know” to the question. That corresponds to 8% of Czechs, 7% of Slovaks, 4% of Poles and 7% of Hungarians.

The question asked: “Do you think that the US poses a threat to [your country]?” was closed with options of 1. Definitely yes, 2. Rather yes, 3. Neither yes nor no, 4. Rather not, 5. Definitely not, 6. Cannot say/ Do not know. While on average 22% of young Central Europeans responded as “neither yes, nor no”, the rest of the percentages is represented by those who responded “do not know” to the question. That corresponds to 8% of Czechs, 6% of Slovaks, 4% of Poles and 6% of Hungarians.
The most common reason for Central Europeans seeing Russia as a threat are the Kremlin's attempts to influence other countries and its expansionist policies to increase its power. Such perceptions were held by 27% of young Poles who see Russia as a threat. On the contrary, young Hungarians are the least concerned about Russia's expansionist policies, with only 16% mentioning it.

The second most voiced reason in the V4 for perceiving Russia as a threat was a belief that Russia is looking for wars and stirs conflicts. Young Poles, as the most cautious of Russia in the region, also mentioned bad historical experiences and deteriorated diplomatic relations.

Young Czechs also mentioned Russia’s 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia and ongoing disinformation operations. Russia has been conducting in Central Europe. While young Slovaks voiced their concerns the most in connection with the conflict in the Eastern Ukraine, their neighbour, young Hungarians were worried the most within the V4 about the Kremlin’s ability to shut off the flow of gas.

One fifth of young Central Europeans who think that Russia does not pose a threat to their country think that it is because there is no reason for conflict. This view is held by 31% and 27% of young Czechs and Slovaks who do not consider Russia as a threat accordingly. 23% of young Hungarians who do not see Russia threatening say that it is due to good bilateral relations. One of the reasons might be linked to Russian economic involvement in the country – Russian companies have built the latest underground line in Budapest and Russia’s state-owned Rosatom is building Paks nuclear power plant in Hungary. A supposed pan-Slavic connection and heritage with Russia stands out in Slovakia. 17% of those who do not perceive Russia as a threat mentioned that it is due to the pan-Slavic brotherhood.

On average, 18% of those who think Russia is not a threat say that it is because their country is not interesting for Russia.
Reasons why the US is a threat

On average, 17% of young Central Europeans who perceive the US as a threat explain that it is due to its aggressive interventionist policies and wars. 29% of young Slovaks who view the US as threatening think accordingly and thus represent regional outliers. The second most commonly stated reason in the V4 is the huge arsenal of weapons the US has at its disposal (9% of those who see the US as a threat). The third most stated reason is the current president of the United States, Donald Trump, who is quite unpopular in the region (only 19% of all respondents perceive him positively), especially among young Slovaks (63% of all respondents in Slovakia perceive him negatively).

On average, 15% of those who perceive the US as a threat are not able to state why.

Reasons why the US is not a threat

On average, 25% of young Central Europeans think that the US does not pose a threat to their country because their country is not interesting enough for the United States. This was the most voiced reason by 37% of young Slovaks and 29% of young Hungarians who do not see the US as a threat to their country.

The second most mentioned reason was a belief that Central Europeans have good relations and partnerships with the US. On average, 15% of young Central Europeans who do not perceive the US as a threat think accordingly, with Poles standing out – one third share this view and consider the US a partner. Moreover, 29% of young Poles who do not view the US a threat even strengthened this premise by voicing a clear opinion that the US is the most important ally of Poland.

NATO membership was mentioned mostly by young Czechs and Slovaks as a reason why the US does not pose a threat to them. Young Slovaks prevail in the “do not know” answers when asked to state why they perceive Russia or the US as a threat. On average, 13% of the Slovak respondents were not able to explain their views, the most among all Central Europeans.

The top 3 reasons why the US does not pose a threat among the respondents who do not perceive the US as a threat to their country:

Czechia:
1) not an interesting country for the US (26%)
2) no reason for conflict (23%)
3) believe in similar values to ours (11%)

Hungary:
1) not an interesting country for the US (29%)
2) peace between the countries (14%)
3) good relations with the US (10%)

Poland:
1) good relations with the US (33%)
2) the US is our best allies (29%)
3) not an interesting country for the US (13%)

Slovakia:
1) not an interesting country for the US (37%)
2) no reason for conflict (34%)
3) we are a member of NATO (12%)

Data refer to the percentages of the sample of those who answered “Rather not” or “Definitely not” to the question: “Do you think that the US poses a threat to [your country]?”. Larger number of negative answers to this question in comparison to affirmative answers was the decisive element for the “why” responses to be visualised.

Reasons why the US is a threat:

1. The US is a threat, because it starts conflicts all round the world.
(respondent from Slovakia)

2. Donald Trump is unpredictable.
(respondent from Czechia)

3. The US is a world superpower. It is one of the strongest countries and poses a threat not only to Poland.
(respondent from Poland)

Reasons why the US is not a threat:

1. The US does not pose a threat to my country, because it is our ally in NATO.
(respondent from Czechia)

2. US interests lie somewhere else.
(respondent from Slovakia)

3. They are our ally; US troops are stationed in Poland.
(respondent from Poland)

4. They don’t even know where Hungary is on a map.
(respondent from Hungary)

5. NATO membership was mentioned mostly by young Czechs and Slovaks as a reason why the US does not pose a threat to them.

(respondent from Hungary)

(respondent from Poland)

(respondent from Slovakia)
Leaders of the countries relevant for this analysis are in general not seen in a positive light by the majority of young Central Europeans. On average, a positive perception of each - Donald Trump, Emmanuel Macron, Angela Merkel or Vladimir Putin – is shared by around 20% of young people in the V4. While Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump share similar degree of (un)popularity - almost 50% of young people in Central Europe view both Trump and Putin negatively - the average being most influenced by young Slovaks in the case of Trump and young Poles in the case of Putin (among both groups, 63% view the given leader negatively) - Emmanuel Macron is perceived the least negatively.

Each leader was evaluated separately with a question: “How do you personally perceive the following political figures - [name of the leader]?”, with following responses available: 1. Very positively, 2. Rather positively, 3. Neutrally, 4. Rather negatively, 5. Very negatively, 6. Cannot say/ do not know.

World leaders are perceived positively by only 1 in 5 young Central Europeans.

Donald Trump

Emmanuel Macron

Vladimir Putin

Angela Merkel

(No) respect for world leaders

The image of Emmanuel Macron is the least negative from all four leaders. On average, only a quarter of young people in Central Europe perceive him negatively, while 44% view him as a neutral figure, with no striking differences between individual countries.

Vladimir Putin is the most popular in Slovakia (28% of young Slovaks see him positively) and the least in Poland (seen positively by 9%); the findings that reflect the overall trends of Poland being more supportive of the US and Slovaks of Russia. Young Czechs also do not have strong sympathies towards the Russian leader - 57% perceive him negatively.

Angela Merkel’s negative perception is shared by 43% of Central Europeans, with the strongest opponents to be found in Czechia (49%) and Slovakia (46%). On the contrary, German Chancellor is quite popular among 27% of young people in Hungary, whereas Poles prefer a neutral stance (42%).