



EXPECTATIONS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS FROM THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL IN OCTOBER 2019

IS OCTOBER 2019 THE NEW APRIL 2008?

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SUPPORTED BY:



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ABOUT ACCESSION LOG

ACCESSION Log is the new tool, designed and applied by EUROTHINK – Centre for European Strategies, to oversee and assess track record of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, EU-related policy making, implementation of the urgent reform priorities, and regular political dialogue between Macedonia and the European Union. In other words – Macedonia's accession in the EU. ACCESSION Log will also attempt to analyse key events, such as: meetings of the EU Council, meetings of the European Council and other high level meetings; various documents published by the EU in relation to its enlargement policy, as well as global developments that affect EU policies and, consequently, policies in the Republic of Macedonia. Finally, ACCESSION Log will closely follow other processes, policies, documents and events related to Macedonia's paramount priority on joining the EU and NATO.

Under individual entries, ACCESSION Log will analyse, determine benchmarks, propose policy options and advocate for particular solutions. Log entries are envisaged as brief reviews on relevant topics, based on analysis of:

- data obtained from EUROMETER or field surveys conducted by other organizations;
- data obtained from other research and analyses conducted by EUROTHINK or other organizations;
- statements obtained as part of structured interviews with relevant interlocutors, focus group discussions, and EUROTALK sessions;
- documents of the European Union, the European Commission and/or governments of EU member-states, NATO and its members, and documents of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia;
- media news and reports in the Republic of Macedonia and EU member-states.

Key points from the fall 2019 Eurometer survey

- In the wake of the European Council Summit in October 2019, at which EU member-states did not reach an agreement to start accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania, the support for EU membership in the Macedonian society remains high. However, great expectations for fast entry in the EU have been significantly deflated in the last eight months (in February 2019, 63.4% of citizens believed that North Macedonia would become EU member-state in the next 10 years, while in October the same year this share dropped to 51.6%). It is highly likely that optimism would see additional dramatic decrease.
- High, but betrayed expectations of the Macedonian public from the EU Summit (47.7% of citizens expected start of accession talks), combined with the high assessment assigned by the public about the state's preparedness to open the negotiations (6 of 10 respondents assessed that the state is either fully or partially prepared to start the negotiations), would likely lead to lower credibility of the accession process in citizens' eyes and to decreased support for the state's EU membership. Parallels made with the situation from 2008, when the Greek veto to Macedonia's bid for NATO membership caused democratic backsliding, rise of nationalism and a lost decade in political terms, are not completely unfounded. The fact that already on October 20, 2019, the political leaders agreed to hold early parliamentary elections in April 2020 is indicative of dangers for reform processes and current obligations to be blocked, for example, the already announced postponement of the population census.
- The traditionally high support for EU integration in the Macedonia society actually hides a trend of increasingly deeper divisions along ethnic and political party lines. SDSM supporters, ethnic Albanians and DUI supporters are significantly much bigger optimists and supporters of this process, unlike VMRO-DPMNE voters and ethnic Macedonians. The feeling of injustice (instigated by the European Council's failure to agree on the start of accession negotiations, thereby putting credibility of the process under question) could additionally increase these divisions and make the alternative foreign policy visions and models of development more attractive for the citizens.

Introduction, methodology and structure

This entry of the Accession Log summarizes data from the Eurometer survey research from fall 2019, by correlating its findings with those from previous survey rounds and using Eurometer survey data from 2014 to present, in order to infer conclusions about particular trends. This survey¹ was conducted in the period **27 September – 14 October 2019**, to intercept the EU General Affairs Council (GAC) and the European Council, at which the main topics of discussion included the enlargement and setting the date for start of accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania. Plans are in place for portion of survey questions to be further developed into research that will be conducted soon and will be aimed to establish how the European Council's decision affected the public opinion.

Survey results, accompanied with a brief analysis and contextualization, are presented below.

Support for EU membership among citizens in North Macedonia remains high, which is visible from 2019 survey data. Traditionally, EUROTHINK measures support for EU membership and citizens' perceptions about the European Union through series of questions that inquire about different aspects important in terms of quantity and quality of citizens' support for the EU accession process. However, the high general support hides major differences in terms of the level of support for foreign policy and developmental visions, primarily along ethnic and political party lines, but also according to other characteristics.

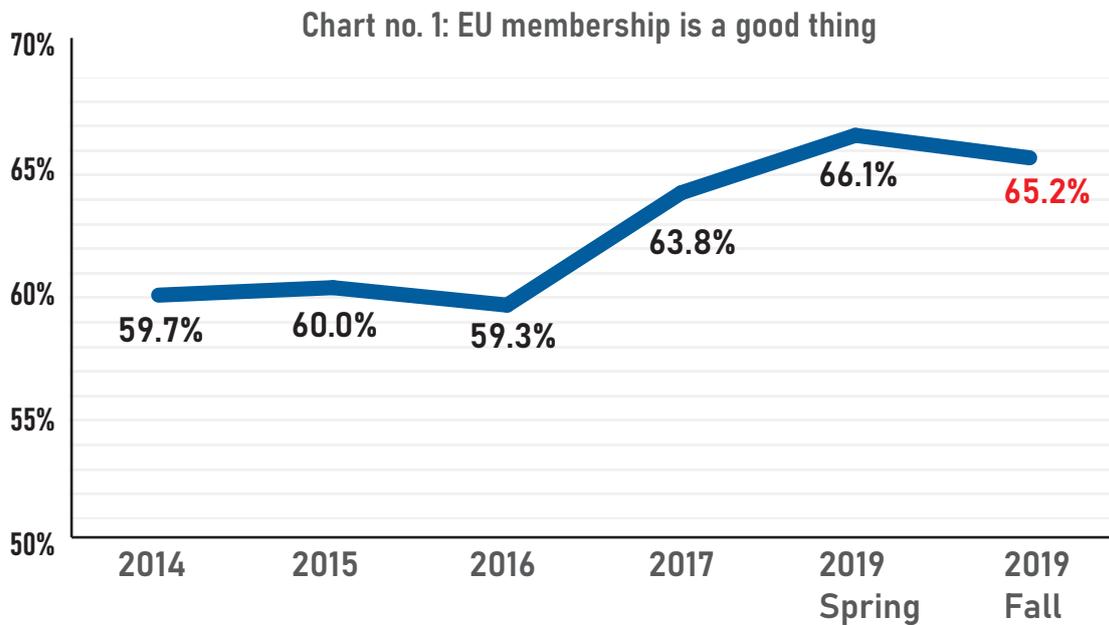
At the most basic level, the Eurometer survey conducted by EUROTHINK is used to measure support for EU membership by inquiring about respondents' agreement with the following two statements:²

1. Generally speaking, Macedonia's membership in the EU would be a good thing
2. Generally speaking, Macedonia's membership in the EU would be a useful thing.

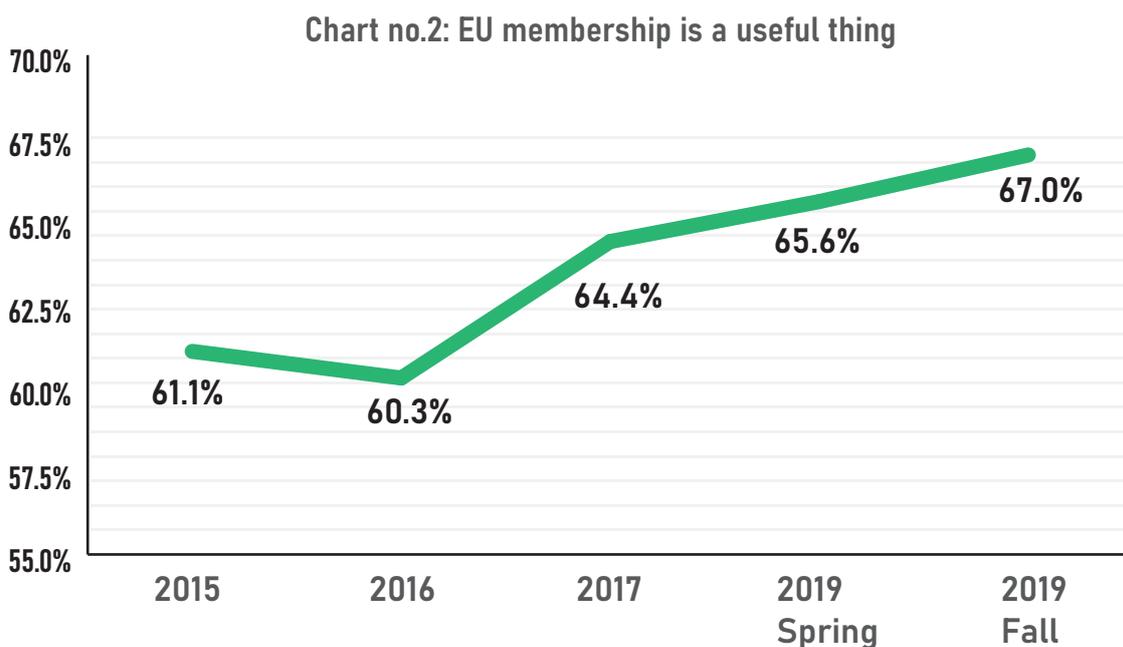
The idea behind the first statement is to inquire about ethical and emotional dimensions of the support, while the idea behind the second statement is to inquire about rational and economic dimensions. Similar questions, inspired by similar logics of explanation, are used by Eurobarometer survey, which is conducted by Eurostat. Numeric values in the Eurometer survey are grouped in the manner whereby scores 4 and 5 imply agreement with the statement, while scores 1 and 2 mean disagreement. Charts 1 and 2 below provide an overview of respective shares of respondents that indicated agreement with these statements in the analysed years.

¹ The public opinion survey was conducted by M-Prospect from Skopje by means of computer assisted telephone survey in the period 27 September – 14 October 2019, on representative sample of 1000 respondents with +/- 3.1% error margin. Correctness of the survey methodology is responsibility of M-Prospect, while the questionnaire was designed by the team at EUROTHINK.

² The complete question reads: "Now we have several questions that should be answered on the scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means complete disagreement with the statement and 5 means complete agreement. Please indicate your assessment for each of the following statements".



Data show stable and high support from 2014 to present, which has rarely dropped below 60%. According to expectations, agreement with both statements is at similar level.



The Eurometer survey also measures support for the EU accession by two questions that inquire about: 1) perceptions about the EU's credibility and the EU's treatment of North Macedonia; and 2) desirability of the EU as model of development against alternative models of development, whereby we actually test the political trope that "there is no alternative to EU accession".³ As shown on charts 3 and 4 below, in October 2019, high share of the public has positive perceptions about the EU's credibility and its treatment of North Macedonia and the EU is considered to be the best alternative for development.

³ The first question reads: "Sometimes people discuss the EU's treatment of Macedonia. Generally speaking, how would you assess this treatment on the scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means that EU's treatment is unfair, superior and conditional, and 5 means that EU's treatment is fair, friendly and correct." The second question reads: "Now we would like to ask you about a dilemma that exists in the public. I will read you two statements and please indicate which one of them is closer to your opinion: A) European Union is the best alternative for Macedonia; B) Macedonia should look for its own model of development outside the EU; C) None of them (not to be read); and D) Don't know (not to be read)".

Chart no.3: EU's treatment

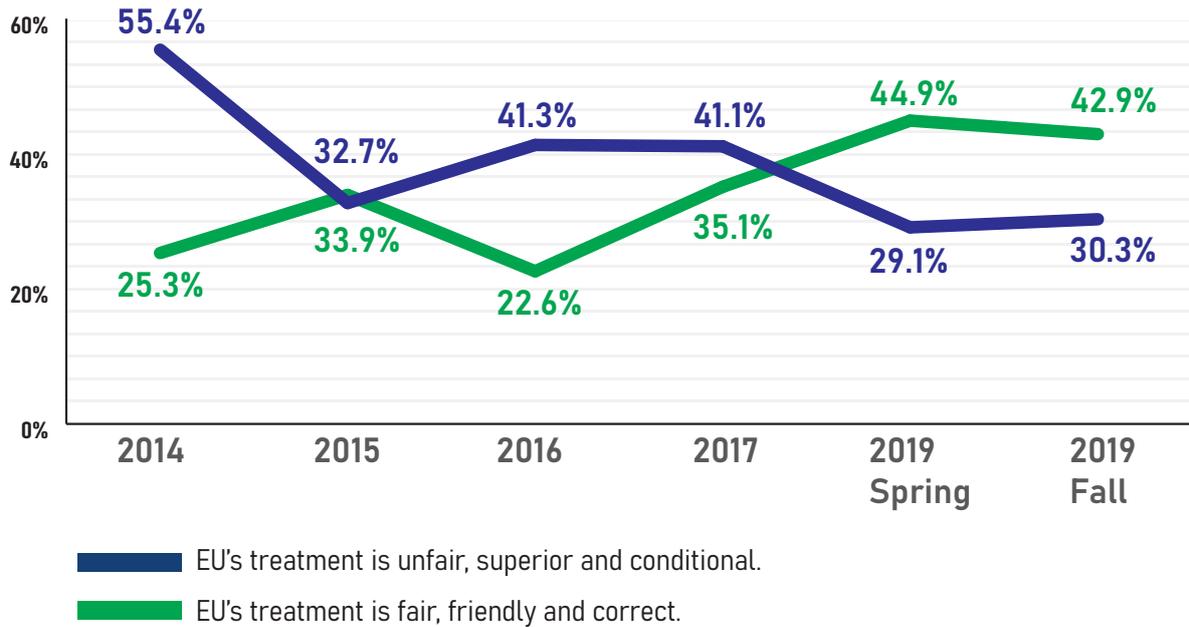
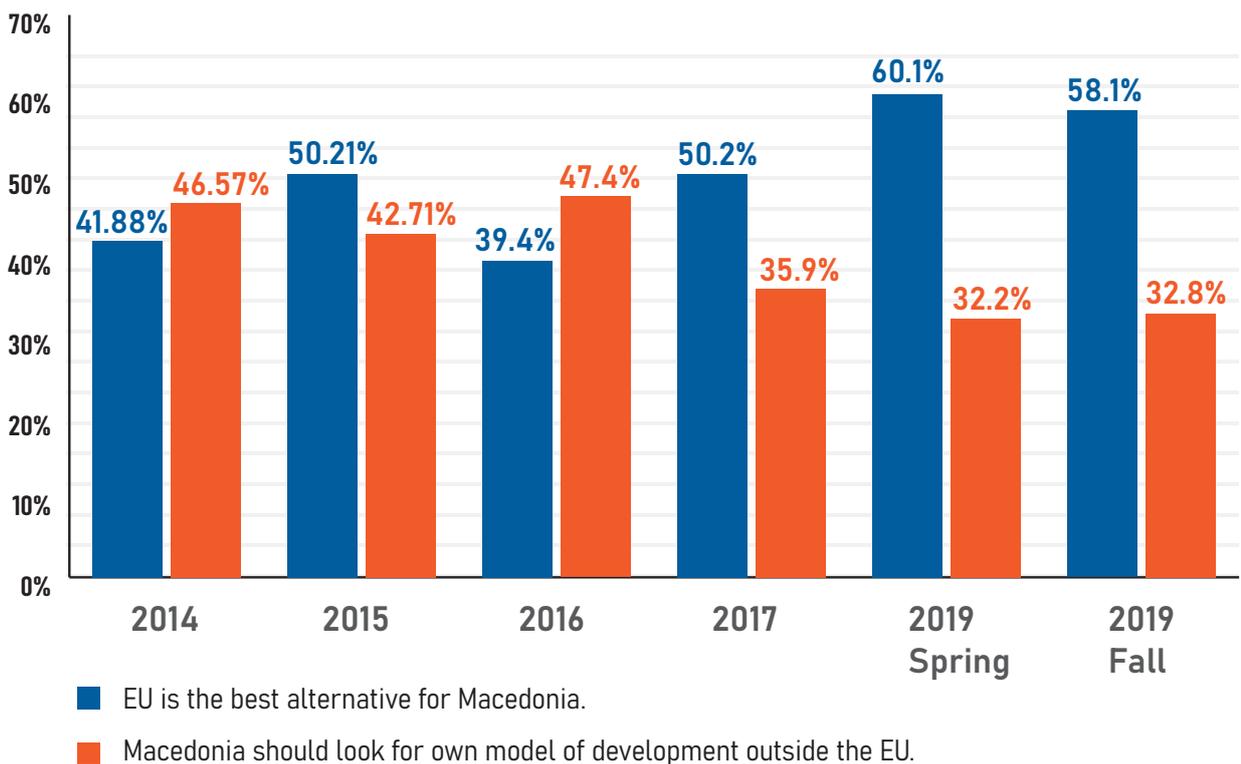


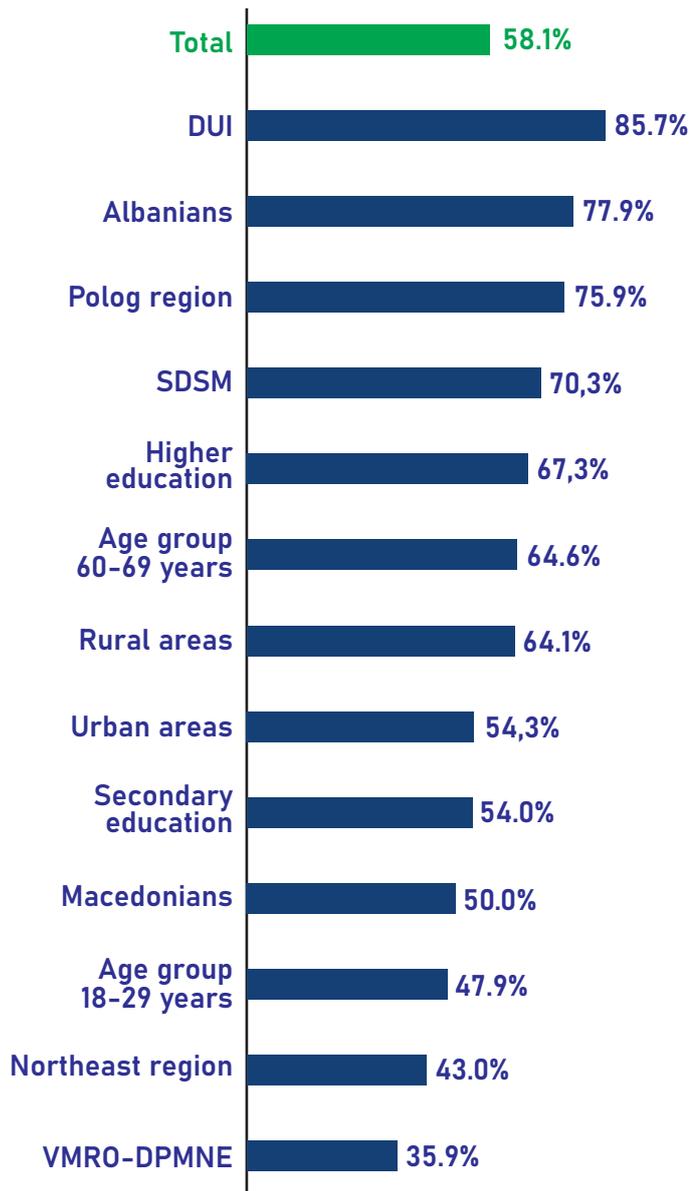
Chart 3 provides an overview of fluctuations in citizens' perceptions throughout the years and how they changed according to the political context. From 2017 onwards, i.e. after the state exited the political crisis (in whose resolution the European Commission played a major role), there is a trend of stabilized perception that the EU is credible actor whose treatment of North Macedonia is "fair, friendly and correct". Chart 4 presents a similar trend: after 2017, the share of respondents that believe the European Union is "the best alternative for Macedonia" is stabilized (at around 60%).

Chart no.4: Model of development



However, significant number of respondents also support the contrary statement whereby **“Macedonia should look for own model of development outside the EU”**, and careful analysis of cross-referenced data shown on charts 5 and 6 below provides more details about positions of different groups in the society. Two lines of division seem to be of key importance: ethnic and party affiliation. Chart 5 shows that DUI supporters, Albanians and SDSM supporters demonstrate above-average enthusiasm that **“EU is the best alternative”**.

**Chart no.5: EU is the best alternative
(cross-referenced data)**



**Chart no.6: Own model of development
(cross-referenced data)**

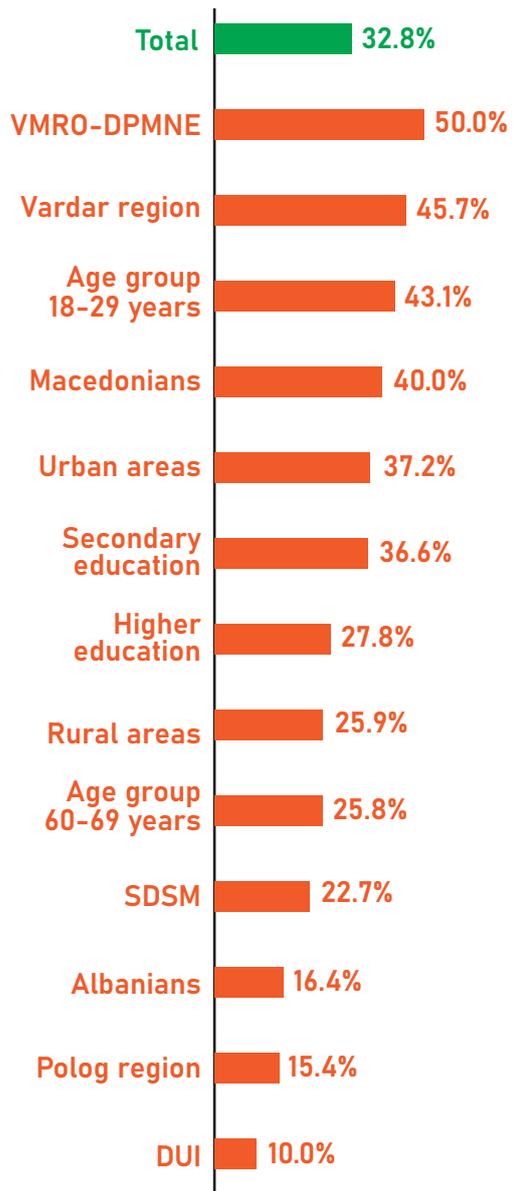
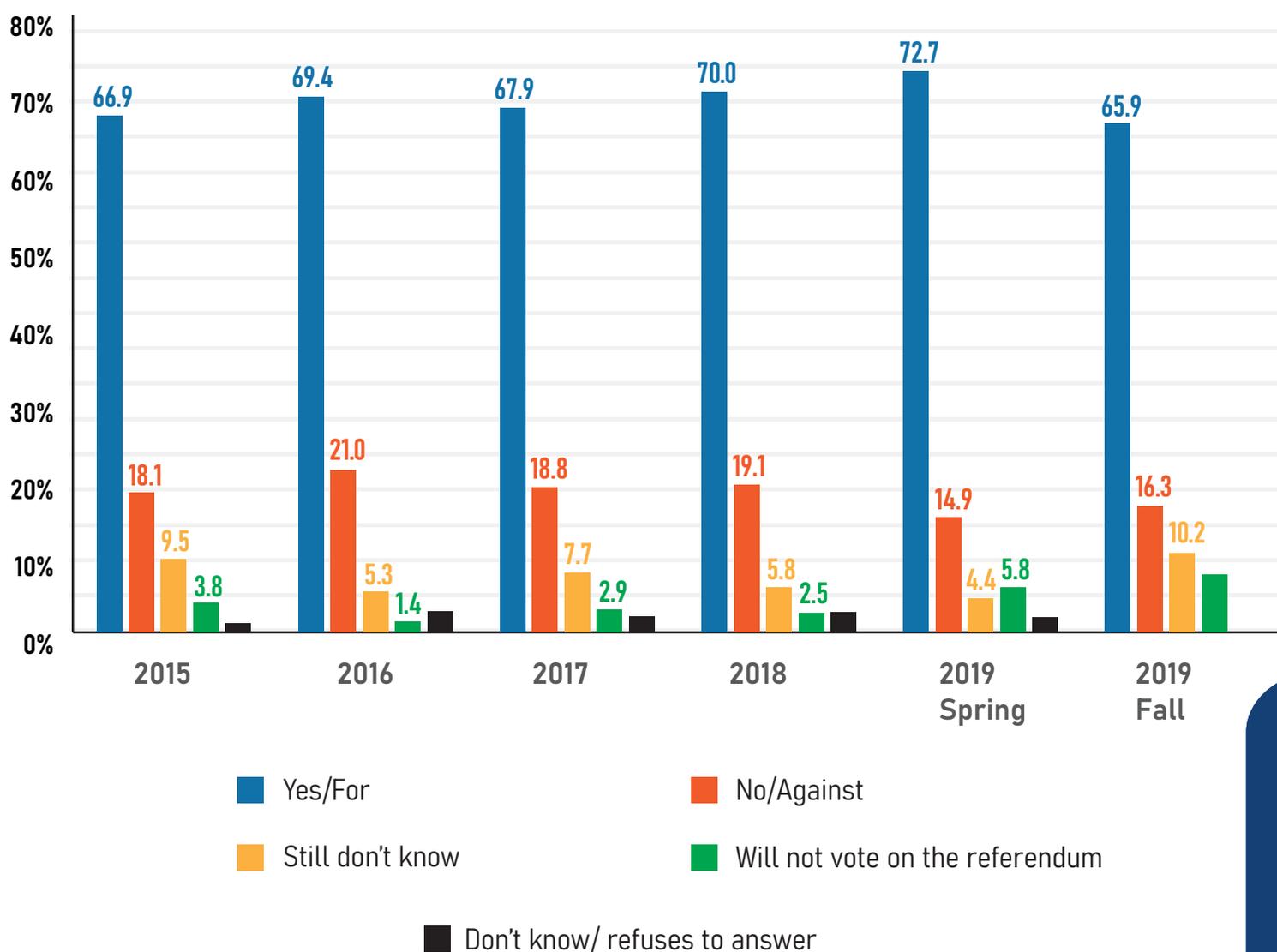


Chart 6 shows VMRO-DPMNE supporters and ethnic Macedonians as categories of citizens marked by above-average inclination towards the thesis whereby “Macedonia should find own model of development outside the EU”. These survey findings, analysed in the context of the European Council’s inability to open the accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania in October 2019 and the uncertain future of the enlargement, are also indicative of the danger for this trend to further increase.

Finally, the Eurometer survey measures support for EU membership among Macedonian citizens with the standard question: **“How would you vote if a referendum is organized on Sunday with the question Do you want the Republic of Macedonia to join the EU?”** Answers to this question in the period 2015 – 2019 are shown on chart 7 below. These data provide a positive image, which is also reflected in the stable support for EU membership over the entire analysed period.

Chart no. 7: Referendum for EU membership



Citizens' expectations for fast membership in the EU remain high, although in October 2019 they are significantly lower compared to February 2019. It can be expected that optimism will continue to “deflate”, having in mind betrayed expectations from the European Council in October 2019.

Under its Eurometer Program, from 2014 onwards, EUROTHINK measures expectations and optimism among citizens related to the state's EU membership. Chart 8 below shows the share of citizens which throughout the years believed that the state could be expected to join the Union in the next 5 years, while chart 9 shows the share of citizens which believed that this will happen in the next decade. Lowest expectations among citizens were observed in 2016 amidst the political crisis, while 2017 represents a turning point after which optimism for fast integration is continuously increasing and reached its peak in the spring 2019 when almost 64% of respondents expected North Macedonia to become EU member-state in the next decade. The most recent Eurometer survey already observes a decrease in optimism (drop of almost 12.4 percentile points over a period of only 6 months (from 64% in February to 51.6% in October 2019).

Chart no.8: Macedonia can expect to join the EU in the next 5 years

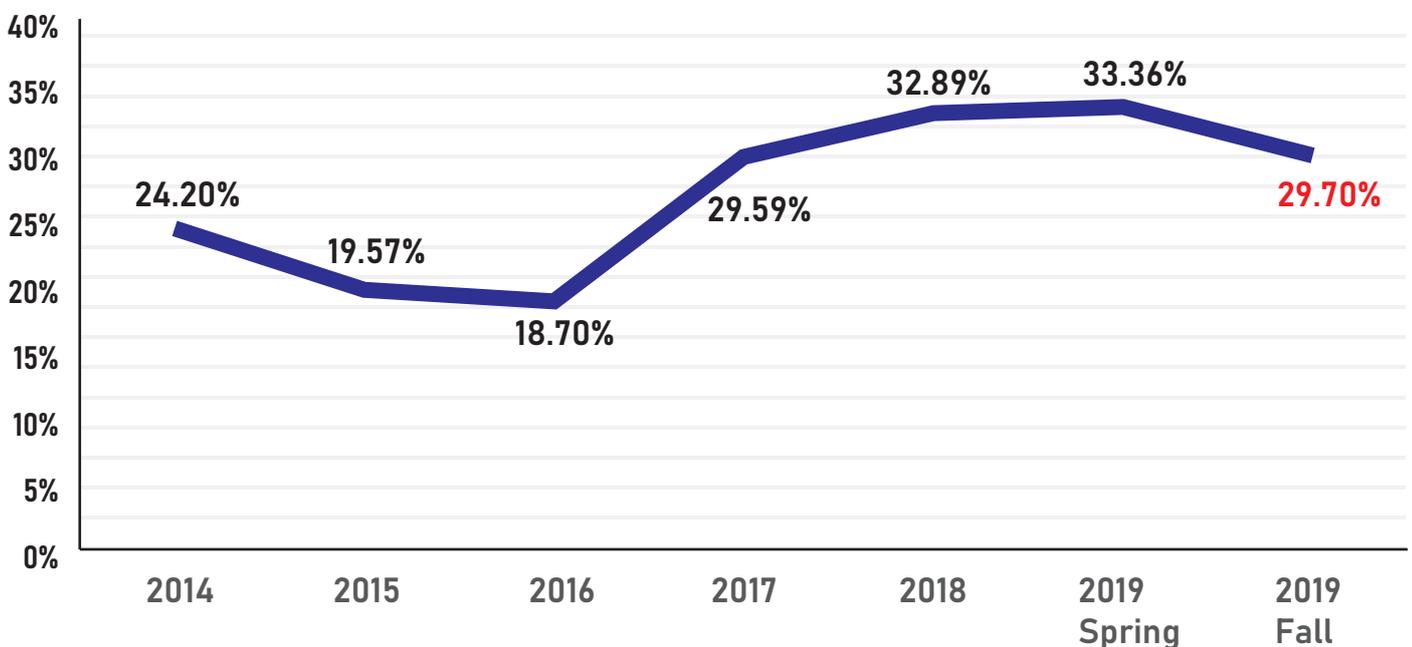
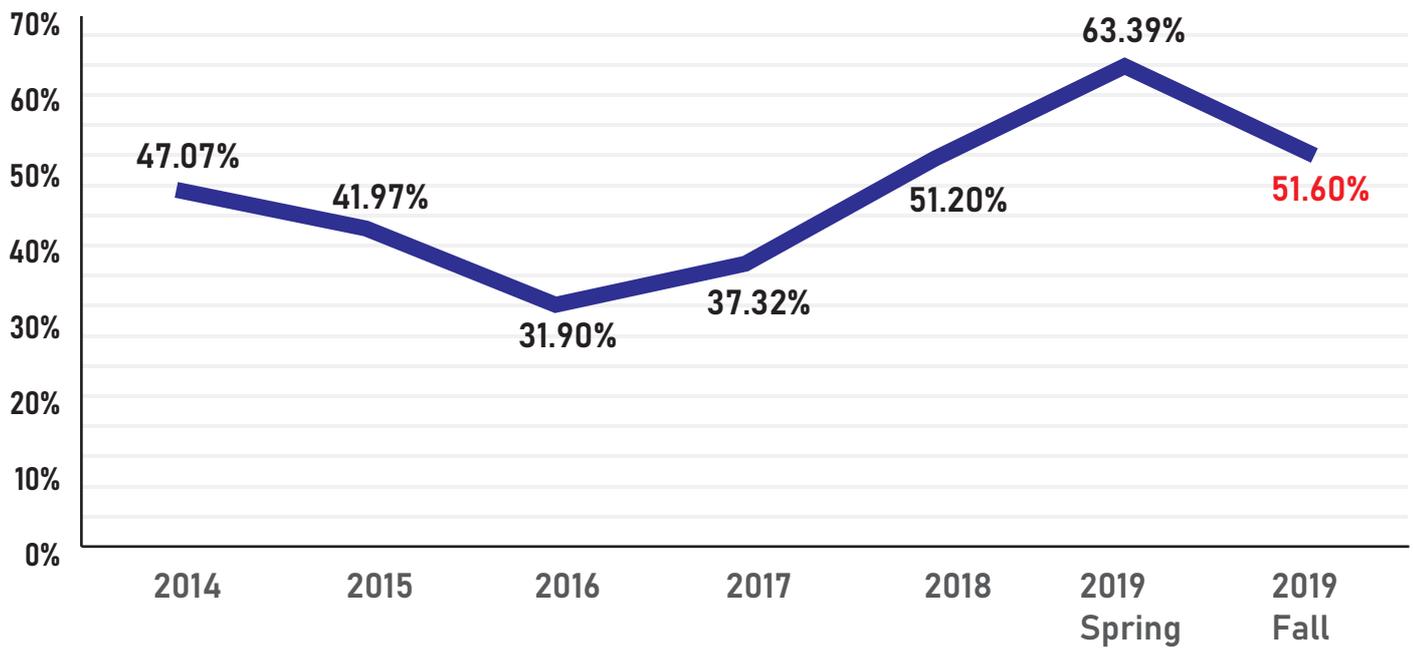


Chart no.9: Macedonia can expect to join the EU in the next 10 years



Before the Summit in October 2019, almost half of citizens expected that the European Council will adopt a decision for our state to start accession negotiations with the EU (chart 10), and 6 of 10 citizens believed that North Macedonia is either fully prepared (22.9%) or partially prepared (36.8%) to start the accession negotiations. The high expectations, combined with good assessments about the state's preparedness, are in collision with the political reality whereby EU member-states have different visions about the enlargement. All that could lead to disappointment and lost hope for changes in the Macedonian society, which has made grand compromises and unpopular steps, legitimized by the promise of fast integration in the EU.

Chart no. 10:
European Council will take the decision for Macedonia to start accession negotiations with the EU

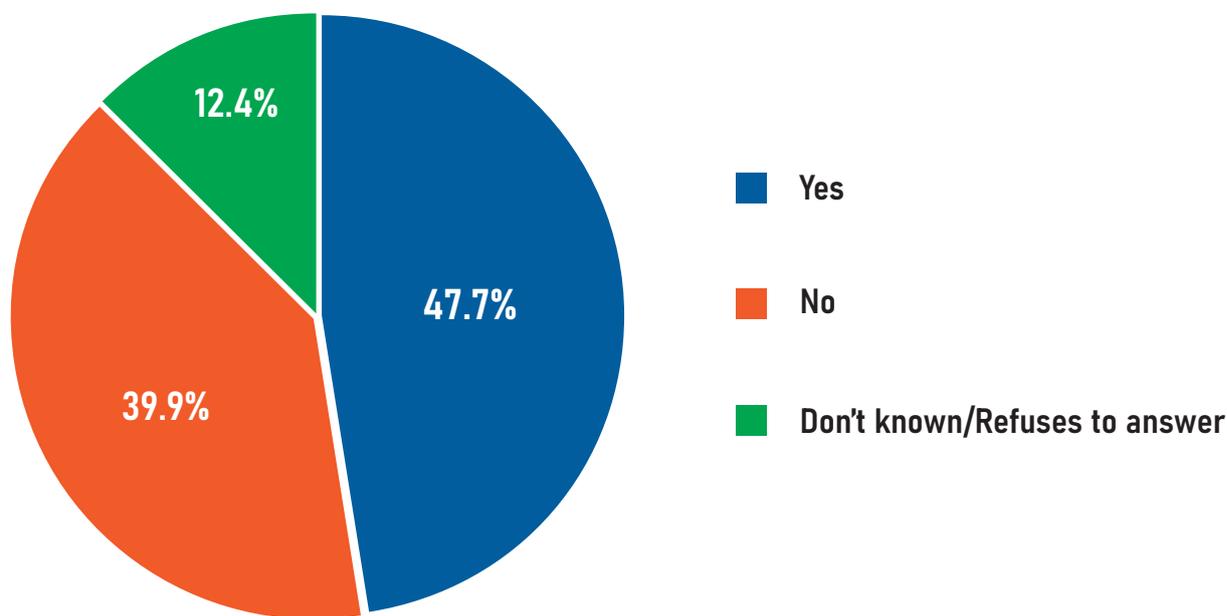


Chart no. 11:
Is North Macedonia prepared to start accession negotiations with the EU

