

Boštjan Udovič

**(GROWING) CULTURAL DISTANCE AND
STEREOTYPISATION IN SMALL TRANSITION
STATES: THE CASE OF THE
EX-YUGOSLAVIA COUNTRIES**

**Key Findings and Recommendations for
Political, Economic and Diplomatic Cooperation**



acta
Diplomatica

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Ljubljana, 2026

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Book Series: Acta Diplomatica

Series Editor: Boštjan Udovič

Ljubljana, 2026

Publisher: Fakulteta za družbene vede, Založba FDV

For the publisher: Samo Uhan, dean



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Reviewers: Marjan Svetličič and Faris Kočan

Cover design: Grega Tekavec

Layout: Zavod Vizar

Available at: <https://www.fdv.uni-lj.si/zalozba>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51936/9789612951658>

Kataložni zapis o publikaciji (CIP) pripravili v Narodni in univerzitetni knjižnici v Ljubljani

COBISS.SI-ID 290989315

ISBN 978-961-295-165-8 (PDF)

Table of Contents

FOREWORD	5
INTRODUCTION	8
SLOVENIA	18
Basic data	19
Research	19
CROATIA	25
Basic data	26
Research	26
How to negotiate with Croatians	28
Other recommendations	29
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	31
Basic data	32
Research	32
How to negotiate with Bosniaks	35
Recommendations	36
SERBIA	37
Basic data	38
Research	38
How to negotiate with Serbs	41
Recommendations	43
MONTENEGRO	44
Basic information	45
Research	45
How to negotiate with Montenegrins	47
Recommendations	49
KOSOVO	50
Basic data	51
Research	51
How to negotiate with Kosovars	53
Recommendations	55

NORTH MACEDONIA.....	57
Basic data	58
Research	58
How to negotiate with Macedonians	60
Recommendations.....	62
COOPERATION WITHIN AND BEYOND THE REGION.....	63
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE..	67
LITERATURE AND SOURCES	69
FROM REVIEWS.....	71

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Figure 1: The world's rulers at the time attempting to seal the Balkan cauldron (of problems).....	11
Figure 2: Understanding of truth in different cultures	16
Figure 3: Graffiti “Čefurji raus” on a wall in Slovenia	23
Figure 4: ‘Correction’ of street graffiti in Zadar.....	27
Figure 5: Respondents’ agreement with attributes relating to Croatians	28
Figure 6: ‘Correction’ of graffiti in Sarajevo (2020).....	33
Figure 7: How Bosniaks ‘view’ others	34
Figure 8: The view of one of the Serbian respondents on other nations of ex-Yugoslavia (focus on Kosovo)	40
Figure 9: Level of agreement with positive attributes of Montenegrins by nationality/country.....	46
Figure 10: Tampering with bilingual road signs as a form of expressing inter-ethnic tensions.....	52
Figure 11: Cross-cultural distance of Kosovars to members of selected nations/countries	53
Figure 12: The three most common stereotypes about Macedonians and agreement with them.....	59
Table 1: The top five stereotypes about Slovenians by frequency	21
Table 2: Average (dis)agreement on the given attributes of Slovenians by country...	22
Table 3: Attributes of Serbs as perceived by other nations in the post-Yugoslav region (the top three by frequency).....	40
Table 4: Levels of cooperation with regional actors	65

FOREWORD

This book is the result of several years' work in the field of stereotypes, prejudices and cross-cultural distance – a field that came about 'out of the blue' when Marjan (Svetličič) burst into my office at the end of 2009 and said that we had to start researching something new. Something that no one had yet explored, or at least not in the way we intended – and, as Marjan always says: 'Something that will be relevant for the economy.' And so, we began. First, by discussing what had not yet been researched in the field of diplomacy and international business in countries of ex-Yugoslavia, and what made sense ... Layer by layer, we discovered that stereotypes and prejudices (this was a time when, due to the economic crisis, relations in the post-Yugoslav region were even more strained than usual; and tensions had also escalated between Slovenia and Croatia due to the arbitration agreement) were not just interesting, but were becoming relevant again. The 2008 economic crisis had, in fact, caused countries to become increasingly inward-looking, whilst globalisation – which had promised to merge us all into a single economic entity – began to crumble. In such an environment, alongside frivolous economic promises of the imminent end to the crisis, political platitudes also began to proliferate. We witnessed the emergence of the first political populists and a time when prejudices and stereotypes began to re-flourish.

We started from scratch. We did not want to use 'Western' scales, as we felt they were largely unsuitable for *our* context. Consequently, we occasionally reinvented the wheel and developed our own research methodology. We wanted to combine qualitative and quantitative methods to be as *objective* as possible. Matevž (Rašković) was helping us, particularly in curbing our own desires and (un)reasonable musings; we then, *by hook or by crook*, drew him into our then joint project. Well, Matevž did not put up much of a fight, as he too was interested in economic sociology – a subject on which he now lectures and publishes with great success on the other side of the world.

We soon realised just how badly we had designed the initial methodology (before Matevž joined us) when he simply shook his head at what he was seeing. We then sorted things out and printed the first questionnaire. Marjan, together with the two of us, enthusiastically travelled abroad and helped us collect completed questionnaires. But when we received the results, it quickly became clear that, despite our efforts, we committed some methodological errors during questionnaire preparation. We did not lose hope that things would be better in the next attempt.

We sent the project proposal to the National Agency on stereotypes and prejudices and cross-cultural distance, and we won a project. However, as sometimes happens, our partner was not as committed to the project as we were, so we had to return it before it started. Nevertheless, two years later we won a basic project together with the Faculty of Economics and Business at the University of Maribor. The great amount of work done between 2013 and 2015 became clear only in 2015, when we had all the data in one place. In 2016, we published a thematic issue about the data obtained in *Teorija in praksa*, a year later, a book was issued presenting the data from seven countries of former Yugoslavia in a single analysis.

After 2015, the world changed in many ways: the migration crisis, Brexit, the first Trump administration, China's rise, COVID-19, and Russia's aggression against Ukraine. All these events led me to conclude that we should once again study stereotypes, prejudices, and cultural distance in ex-Yugoslav territories. My thesis was that these changes also influenced behaviour and perceptions in the territory. However, as you will see later, my thesis was rejected.

The project *(Growing) Cultural distance and stereotypisation in small transition states: the case of the ex-Yugoslavia countries*, which lasted from 2023 to 2026, was possible since I collaborated with an exceptional team of researchers from the Faculty of Social Sciences (Andreja Jaklič, Iris Koleša, Ksenija Šabec and Rok Zupančič), the Faculty of Economics (Tamara Pavasović Trošt) and the Faculty of Arts (Žan Lep and Žiga Mekiš Recek). Without them, their work, their insights and reflections, and above all Rok's (constructive) criticism that I sometimes tend to

oversimplify, neither the completion of the project nor the results – which are presented in this monograph would have been possible. That is why I thank them all, while also taking responsibility for any errors the reader may find in the book.

The ancient Romans used to say: ‘Habent sua fata libelli’, which means that books have their own destiny. What destiny this book will have depends on you, dear reader. Nevertheless, following the other Roman saying that *no book is so bad that there is nothing useful in it*, I hope that although you may sometimes disagree with the presented facts, findings and recommendations, you will find at least something tailored to your expectations.

Boštjan Udovič

Ljubljana/Sečovelje, August 2026

p.s. I would like to thank Noémi and Instatext for their helpful language suggestions and improvements to the manuscript.

INTRODUCTION

The basic research project titled (*Growing*) *Cultural distance and stereotypisation in small transition states: the case of the ex-Yugoslavia countries*, which took place between 2023 and 2026, was a conceptual continuation of research into cross-cultural distance, stereotypes and prejudices in the post-Yugoslav region, as conceived by Udovič and Svetličič (2010). This research was unstructured and stemmed primarily from the need to explore the field completely neglected 20 years after the break-up of Yugoslavia. With the break-up of the common state, Slovenia adopted a stance of keeping as large a distance as possible from the region, so that, during the bloody 1990s, no one would by any chance associate it with former Yugoslavia. However, this (politically motivated) distancing simultaneously triggered a process of estrangement and, above all, the loss of the comparative advantages that both Slovenian politics and the economy had enjoyed before 1991.

To be clear: the aim of research projects about cross-cultural distance in the post-Yugoslav region is not (and was not) to promote any sort of *jugonostalgia* or to revive times that had gone, but rather to investigate the socio-political factors that influence cooperation in a region in the last 35 years.

This state, which Josip Broz Tito supposedly described as one having two alphabets, three languages, four religions, five nationalities, six republics, seven neighbouring countries and eight minorities, faced various processes: fragmentation, wars, alienation among republics and nationalities, etc., that led to the emergence of six independent states, which are now internationally recognised and members of the United Nations, as well as Kosovo, which, although it declared independence in 2008, still has a status that remains unresolved. Of the states of ex-Yugoslavia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina do not recognise its independence; in the European Union, Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain also do not recognise Kosovo as an independent entity.¹ Nevertheless, in

¹ As with everything in the post-Yugoslav region, the debate over how many countries recognise Kosovo is relative and depends on one's point of view. Officially, there were 119 recognitions, but 20 countries are said to have withdrawn their

this tangled situation, countries of the post-Yugoslav region – whether all six or seven, depending on who is analysing the region – have been passing through a series of changes in the last 35 years – political, economic and socio-cultural. All these changes brought some positive and some negative impacts, but what remains usually neglected is the relevance of sociological, cultural and psychological factors that not only define the region itself, but have an influence on how others see the region. And here, many things remain as they have been in the past.

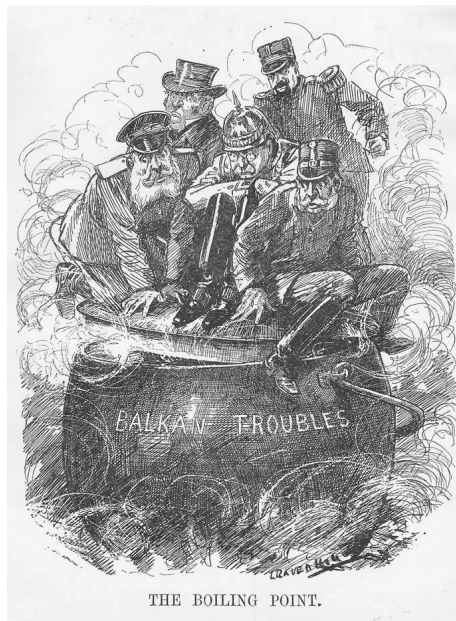
Why do we say this? Based on sources and the literature, it is clear that the term, concept, or however an individual chooses to define the word ‘Balkans’ is much more than just a geographically defined area. Branko Horvat (1971: 71) also draws attention to this when he states that Yugoslavia ‘lies in the heart of the Balkans, with all that this connotes historically’. With this statement, he is undoubtedly alluding to the historical roots of the perception of the Balkans as problematic, beginning with the first (inaccurate) account that Klemens von Metternich is said to have remarked that ‘the Balkans begin on the Rennweg’ or that ‘the Balkans begin behind his palace’.² Leaving aside the fact that there is no confirmation that Metternich really said this, what comes out of these words is that “behind his palace” something strange occurs. The *peculiarity* of the Balkans can be further illustrated by quotes from Otto von Bismarck, the Iron Chancellor, who is said to have remarked that one day a war would break out because of some ‘damned silly thing in the Balkans’. These words, spoken with cynicism and condescension, proved prophetic. The First World War began precisely because of *some silly thing* in the Balkans (with German reaction being part of this *silliness*). Adding to the previous quote, the Bismarck quote that the Balkans are not ‘worth the bones of a single Pomeranian grenadier’, it is possible to see that the attitude towards the Balkans

recognition (under pressure from Serbia). Therefore, the number of countries recognising Kosovo depends less on the act of recognition itself and more on whether we regard international recognition of another country’s independence as definitive or as an act that can be revoked or amended.

² Metternich’s palace bordered what is now Vienna’s third district, of which Rennweg was also a part.

and the countries in the region has always been one of contempt. More quotes can be added that illustrate the Balkans as a troublemaker, but for sure the most famous is the quote usually attributed to Winston Churchill (although there is no record that Churchill said that) saying that ‘the Balkans produce more history than they can consume’. All these show that territories of ex-Yugoslavia and the Balkans as a whole was treated in the past with contempt and condescension. Today’s situation is, in most cases, similar.

Figure 1: The world’s rulers at the time attempting to seal the Balkan cauldron (of problems)



Source: Wikimedia Commons (2026).

However, the region of ex-Yugoslavia and the Balkans were not always only despised, but were linked to several romantic notions, usually from the Middle Ages legends, full of knights, behind-the-scenes

manoeuvres, conspiracies, rivalries, loyalty and disloyalty, betrayal, yet at the same time solidarity (Tomašić, 1946: 132–133). Such a romanticised view can also be found in the writings of the American journalist Cyrus Sulzberger (1969: 35), who described the Balkans in the following way:

The Balkans, which in Turkish means “mountains,” run roughly from the Danube to the Dardanelles, from Istria to Istanbul and is a term for the little lands of Hungary, Rumania, Jugoslavia, Albania, Bulgaria, Greece and part of Turkey, although neither Hungarian nor Greek welcomes inclusion in the label. It is, or was, a gay peninsula filled with sprightly people who ate peppered foods, drank strong liquors, wore flamboyant clothes, loved and murdered easily and had a splendid talent for starting wars. Less imaginative westerners looked down on them with secret envy, sniffing at their royalty, scoffing at their pretensions, and fearing their savage terrorists. Karl Marx called them “ethnic trash.” I, as a footloose youngster in my twenties, adored them.

The combination of wild romanticism and Western condescension is a deadly mix when it comes to understanding the Balkans, yet at the same time it is the only way to make sense of what is happening there. “You can’t understand this region unless you’ve experienced it,” was a comment from my colleague in Sarajevo years ago. It’s true. The first mistake Westerners usually make is that they (too) often approach the countries of ex-Yugoslavia either with a reserve stemming from a host of stereotypes and prejudices, or with a fear of these *savage tribes*. With such an approach alone, they make it impossible from the outset to understand this region, particularly its particularities, peculiarities and basic characteristics. Some of these can be learnt from textbooks and handbooks, but most of them cannot, since you have to ‘feel’ and ‘embrace’ them personally. This is especially valid for those customs that are written nowhere.

What is meant by ‘feeling’ and ‘embracing’? Without being part of the region, or at least having an experience with it, relying thus only on books and textbooks for suggestions on how to behave in the region,

a person usually tends to generalise, oversimplify and paint a uniform picture of the region. However, this region has never been uniform, and even from outside, the differences seem irrelevant; they can help you to do business or to fail. As such, they should not be underestimated. Let me illustrate this with two anecdotes.

As a child of the 1980s, I was part of the last generation to learn the Serbo-Croatian language in primary school. After a few lessons, we had our first test, and I barely scraped a *pass*, mostly because I did not understand that Serbo-Croatian does not have a *dual* like Slovenian, but that the Slovenian *dual* translates in Serbo-Croatian as *plural*. Damn! In the test, I translated all Slovenian *duals* to the Serbo-Croatian *duals*: ‘*dve deklici*’ to ‘*dvije djevojke*’, and not ‘*dvije djevojke*’, as is appropriate. My *tovariš* Rajko [even though at the time he was already ‘a teacher’ Rajko] tried to explain that Serbo-Croatian does not have a dual, but I resisted, arguing that if we were from the same country, all similar languages have to have similar grammatical structure. If they do not have it, so much the worse for them. By the end of the year, I had an *excellent* grade, but this dual/plural thing still caused several challenges in future decades.

In the second half of the nineties, a friend of mine – now a successful businessman – and I went to the beach at Savudrija. It was his n-th time there, my first. Even though it was just across the bay, we didn’t go there as children, as we had enough of the sea on our doorstep. We set off, each in our own car. On the way back, I stopped on my own at *trgovina* [I probably should write ‘*dućan*’; both words for a shop in Croatian] and bought *hljeb*. At the border crossing, a grumpy policeman stopped me and, when he asked what I had in the bag on the back seat, I gave a curt reply: ‘*Hljeb*.’ I was pulled over to the side, and they searched my car as if I were carrying at least 20 kg of some sort of banned substance. While they were checking what else I had in the car apart from the *hljeb*, I heard this policeman say, ‘I’ll give

me *hljeb* ...'. A few more swear words followed from his mouth – the sort of genuinely regional ones – and then, after an hour of being harassed, they let me go. When I got home and told my parents what had happened, they started with *litanies* that it was my own fault, that since the independence Croats no longer say '*hljeb*'³, but '*kruh*'... and that I have to be careful, because at that border crossing there were mainly Slavonians, who had borne the brunt of the Croatian War. Be that as it may, I realised that my knowledge of Serbo-Croatian was doing me more harm than good. So, for a few years, I cast it aside and consigned it to the dusty chest of history.

These two anecdotes that amuse me today, but they did not at the time, show just how important it is to know the local environment and how essential it is for success to understand the most subtle characteristics and differences between cultures.

However, it is not enough to understand the differences; it is also important to understand the context. This is where Westerners make

³ Here we are not concerned with so-called 'false friends' in language, of which there is no shortage in the Balkan languages. For example: my colleague from Zagreb is always teasing me, asking when we're finally going to open that '*zahod*' [note: in Croatian, '*zahod*' means a toilet] in Ljubljana, given that we already have the Ljubljana-West exit. Or take this example, which happened to me once in Montenegro, when, truly exhausted from a full day's travelling, asked the taxi driver – as I was feeling unwell – if he could drive a bit more slowly because I was tired (he was speeding at 120 km/h on a winding road where the limit was 50 km/h), saying: "Može malo počasnije, pošto ja sam jako trudan." [Note: 'To be *trudan*' in Montenegrin simply means 'to be pregnant'.] Let's leave aside the laughter of my colleagues in the car; the taxi driver didn't understand much of it anyway. And I could list many more such examples, which tend to crop up in the post-Yugoslav linguistic code. But let's move on to other experiences. One of my younger peers, an exceptional musician, replied to my question about how his (Serbo)Croatian was coming along something like this: 'Well, I speak a bit in our own way. I mean, I can get by in Croatia. I'm still missing a lot, though. I pick up a bit more every year when I'm at the seaside.' And he added: "Once at reception they asked me what sort of *jastug* I'd like ... so I said I didn't need a *jastug* since I don't eat it." [Note: in Croatian, *jastuk* means a pillow or headrest; in Slovenian *jastog* is a lobster (.)]

usually a mistake, especially those from ‘linearly active’ cultures (Lewis, 2006 et ff), because they think that a word is simply a word. Well, Udovič and Svetličič (2010) and, later, Udovič et al. (2012) discovered in their own research that this is not the case, when they obtained data on the attributes that Serbian students assigned to Slovenians. Among these, one attribute stood out in particular: one relating to same-sex orientation, expressed in the form that Slovenians are ‘*pederi*’ or ‘*gejevi*’ [in English both translation would be ‘fags’ or ‘faggots’].⁴ At first glance, this would appear to be a negative attribute, but Udovič and Svetličič (2010) did not dare to draw this conclusion by themselves, so they asked informants in Belgrade how to interpret the results. The information they received was that, as the survey containing these attributes was conducted during a football match between Slovenia and Serbia, it was likely due to the fact that the Serbs had equalised in the final minutes, meaning that the Slovenians had lost ... and as such were labelled as *losers*. Another explanation was that this attribute related to the fact that Slovenia had allowed a Pride Parade, whilst Serbia had banned it in the year the questionnaire was conducted. Therefore, Slovenians are ‘*faggots*’ because they have a Pride Parade – this was perhaps simply the logical conclusion drawn by the Serbian respondents.

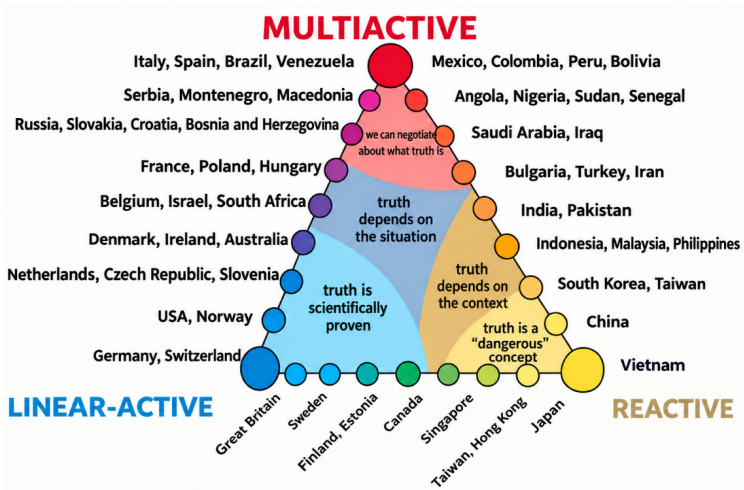
Whether these explanations are true or not will never be clear, but my own observations when visiting Serbia have, in a way, confirmed the stereotype of Slovenians as being *gentle*, *friendly*, *soft-spoken* and *non-aggressive*. However, this example highlights the importance of the context – or contextuality – which is always essential in cross-cultural studies, and is even more essential in the post-Yugoslav region, as these are multi-active cultures that are *verbose*, stretch the facts, emotional, based

⁴

In the past, the expression ‘Gdje si pederu’ was not uncommon in the former Yugoslavia, nor was it intended to be taken negatively. On the contrary, amongst lads it was used to express positive feelings when meeting someone you hadn’t seen for a while (Berend, 2025: 14). However, political correctness has also swept through the former Yugoslav states, so that today this form of expression has disappeared (Firez, 2026; Radičević, 2026) or is generally frowned upon and used only in lower-class social circles or amongst individuals who are considered *unusual* (Radičević, 2026).

on personal relationships, and always have a new excuse ready as to why something you agreed on was not done (Lewis, 2018: 27–28). Another important point: the post-Yugoslav countries have different approaches to the truth. Slovenia understands the truth as an objective fact, whilst other countries see it as something that can be negotiated (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Understanding of truth in different cultures



*The figure was adapted with the use of ChatGPT.

Source: Adapted from Svetličič and Udovič (2024: 178).

Finally, it is also necessary to be aware of the local particularities of each culture – not just the cultures and their characteristics in the capital cities, but also, and above all, in towns that may be some distance from the capital. Research shows that viewing a country or culture as a monolithic entity often distorts local particularities, which must be taken into account and always considered in international business, political relations and diplomatic cooperation.

In the following discussion, key findings regarding stereotypes, prejudices and cultural distance are presented for each country of

ex-Yugoslavia, based on the research by Udovič and Svetličič (2010), Udovič et al. (2012), Udovič et al. (2015 and 2017) and Udovič et al. (2026). The points highlighted here are exclusively those of the author; they should not be generalised or taken as established facts but rather understood primarily through the interpretative lens of the author's scientifically relevant insights, personal experiences and data obtained either directly or second-hand. This applies particularly to the second and third parts of each chapter, being pragmatic and recommendation-oriented. The recommendations are formulated with an emphasis on aspects that I consider important for understanding a particular culture, as well as specific negotiation tactics. It makes sense to take these recommendations into account, but they should not be regarded as 'truth' or even as nation-valid characteristics. They are more intended as warnings about potential tactics or strategies that individual members of the presented nations or nationalities tend to employ when negotiating with foreigners. To put it another way: it makes sense to view this advice as probable tendencies of a particular nation or nationality, rather than as fixed characteristics of entire communities.

SLOVENIA

Basic data

Area	20,271 km ²
Population	2.14 million
GDP <i>per capita</i>	€33,062 (2025)
Ruling party	SDS (conservative centre-right party)

Source: SURS (2026).

Research

Several surveys have been carried out on Slovenians and the Slovenian national character, and several books have also been published (*cf.* Musek, 1994; Trstenjak, 1995). The Slovenian Public Opinion and Mass Communication Research Centre has been conducting annual surveys on the values of Slovenians since 1986; naturally, other studies are also available that examine changes in the values of Slovenians, Slovenian youth and shifts in voters' preferences.

In studies conducted in 2010 and 2012, Udovič and Svetličič (2010) and Udovič et al. (2012) found that there were five most common stereotypes about Slovenians in ex-Yugoslavia, namely that we Slovenians are *hard-working* (15.8%), *envious* (15.1%), *reserved* (8.9%), *well-educated* (5.3%), and *obedient* (5.3%) (Svetličič and Rašković, 2012). Bosnian Croats described Slovenians as an *European nation* (31%), *good people* (25%), and *stingy* (15%); Bosnian Serbs used similar attributes, describing us as *stingy* (33%), *Europeans* (26%), and *resourceful* (15%). Serbs described Slovenians as *good* (23%), *Europeans* (16%) and *hard-working* (14%), though there was also a high proportion of negative stereotypes, amongst which those regarding our '*homosexuality*', *coldness*, *demanding nature* and *calculating nature* stood out in particular. Montenegrins largely shared the Serbs' views on Slovenians: they described us as *homosexuals or faggots* (25%), *Europeans* (17%) and as *stingy* (13%). Kosovars had more positive things to say about Slovenians. Their descriptions

of a 'typical Slovenian' defined us as *hard-working* (23%), *calm/peaceful* (16%) and *cultured* (10%). Among the negative stereotypes, only the perception of *stinginess* stands out in Kosovo (Udovič et al., 2012). If we summarise the key stereotypes that emerged across the studies, we can conclude that, in the years 2010–2012, stereotypes about Slovenians in the post-Yugoslav region were strong, whilst at the same time they were said to describe three key characteristics of Slovenians: (as is proverbial) Slovenians are *hard-working*, *resourceful* and *stingy*.

Rašković and Svetličič (2011: S12), drawing on data from Udovič and Svetličič (2010), found that Slovenian respondents were exceptionally self-critical, holding more negative than positive stereotypes about themselves. They note that the proportion of positive autostereotypes among Slovenians was 38%, among Croats 54%, among Serbs 57%, and among Kosovars 73%. The authors also note that cross-cultural distance and negative stereotyping of the '*Other*' are not necessarily always linked. As an example, they present the case of Slovenia and Croatia, 'which, among all the compared countries of the former Yugoslavia, have, relatively speaking, the lowest levels of cross-cultural distance, yet at the same time the highest proportions of markedly negative stereotypes about representatives of the other country' (ibid.: S11). In their view, this is 'largely attributable to short-term explanatory factors. Among these is certainly the rather negative media portrayal – coming from the long-standing border dispute, which has been reflected in negative media coverage in recent years' (ibid.).

In the study by Udovič et al. (2015), the authors found that cross-cultural distance to Slovenians in the region was highest (after Kosovars), whilst the lowest distance was towards Bosnians and Serbs. The cross-cultural distance of Slovenians was somewhere in the middle, meaning it did not stand out either positively or negatively. However, in this study, we Slovenians were once again very self-critical. Among the top five autostereotypes, we defined ourselves as *friendly* (12.2%), *hard-working* (10.1%), *envious* (5.4%), *arrogant* (3.1%) and *jealous* (3.0%). An overview of the key stereotypes about Slovenians is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: The top five stereotypes about Slovenians by frequency

	<i>Slovenians about</i>	<i>Serbs about</i>	<i>Macedonians about</i>	<i>Croats about</i>	<i>Monte-negrins about</i>	<i>Bosnians about</i>	<i>Kosovars about</i>
<i>Slovenians</i>	Friendly (12.2%) Hard-working (10.1%) Envious (5.4%) Arrogant (3.1%) Jealous (3.0%)	Friendly (14.1%) Hard-working (11.4%) Cultured (5.7%) Arrogant (4.6%) Calm (4.3%)	Hard-working (11.4%) Intelligent (10%) Sociable (6.2%) Cultured (5.2%) Commun-icative (5.2%)	Friendly (6%) Small (3.9%) Hard-working (3.6%) Smart (3.4%) Arrogant (3.1%)	Hard-working (9.6%) Friendly (5.2%) Thrifty (4.5%) Hard-working (4.2%) Stingy (3.8%)	Europeans (7.2%) Funny (6.5%) Friendly (5.2%) Stingy (4.6%) Arrogant (4.6%)	Hard-working (13.4%) Cultured (10.8%) Civilised (8.9%) Europeans (8.3%) Disciplined (7.6%)

Source: Udovič et al. (2017: 188–189).

Udovič et al. (2017: 191) found

1. that Slovenians were rated lowest on the attribute of *nationalism*;
2. that Kosovars and Serbs in particular perceived Slovenians as very *entrepreneurial*, whilst Macedonians perceived them as the least *entrepreneurial*;
3. that the smallest relative differences in the ratings of Slovenians among the individual nations of ex-Yugoslavia can be observed for the attribute of *intelligence*;
4. that Serbs and Kosovars had slightly more favourable perceptions of Slovenians across all positive attributes compared with other nations of ex-Yugoslavia, and the lowest ratings across all negative attributes compared with other nations of ex-Yugoslavia.

Udovič et al. (2026) conducted another study examining stereotypes and cross-cultural distance between Slovenians and other nations from ex-Yugoslavia.

Table 2: Average (dis)agreement on the given attributes of Slovenians by country (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree)

Country	Disciplined	Patriotic	Hospitable	Conservative	Lazy	Uncultured	Honest	Friendly	Stubborn	Arrogant	Reliable
SLO	4.56	3.89	4.15	3.69	2.47	2.05	4.49	4.33	4.36	3.59	4.67
CRO	4.87	4.08	4.18	3.10	2.39	2.31	4.44	4.20	3.74	3.43	4.52
B&H	4.78	4.56	4.36	3.03	2.16	2.09	4.36	4.44	3.28	3.21	4.31
SRB	4.77	3.63	3.76	2.50	2.28	1.93	4.21	4.10	2.99	2.86	4.29
MNE	5.33	5.00	4.63	3.37	2.14	1.92	4.67	4.53	3.48	2.80	4.70
KOS	4.55	4.23	3.82	3.45	2.64	2.27	4.33	4.27	3.55	2.94	3.98
North MAC	5.09	4.13	4.22	3.20	2.07	2.13	4.76	4.37	3.15	3.67	4.43
AVERAGE	4.85	4.22	4.16	3.19	2.31	2.10	4.47	4.32	3.51	3.21	4.41

Source: Calculated on the basis of Udovič et al. (2026).

As shown in Table 2, across ex-Yugoslavian states, there is the greatest agreement that Slovenians are *disciplined*, *reliable*, *honest* and *patriotic*, whilst the greatest disagreement is with the notion that they are *lazy* and *uncivilised*. The 2026 survey thus confirms that the stereotypes/attributes about Slovenians, which were already identified by Udovič and Sverličič (2010) and Udovič et al. (2012) as well as Udovič et al. (2015 and 2017), are still very much present or remain valid and have not changed significantly in and of themselves. In the collective psyche of ex-Yugoslav nations, Slovenians remain perceived as *hard-working* (the attributes ‘disciplined’ and ‘lazy’) and *reliable*, and as a *developed, culturally advanced* nation. When it comes to the perception

of (our own) *arrogance*, we are our own worst enemy. Our self-criticism then reflects in other cultures' perceptions, as Svetličič explained already in 2016.

Figure 3: Graffiti “Čefurji raus”^{} on a wall in Slovenia*



^{*}*Čefurji raus* means “ex-Yugoslav people out of Slovenia” [*Čefur* is a label in the Slovenian language for somebody with roots in one of the ex-Yugoslav nations, living in Slovenia].

Source: Roman Šipić/Delo (undated)

If we analyse the frequency of contact between Slovenians and other nations from ex-Yugoslavia, we can see that Slovenians have the most contact with Serbs and Croats, followed by Bosniaks, whilst contact with other nations is less frequent. In this case, as in the cases analysed previously, contact frequency and stereotyping do not reflect cross-cultural distance from other post-Yugoslav nations. Thus, based on the data from Udovič et al. (2026), we can conclude that Croats are closest to Slovenians, followed by a group comprising Bosniaks and Serbs, then Montenegrins and Macedonians, with Kosovars standing out significantly. Roma are the least desirable category for social contact. On the other hand, it is interesting – not least because surveys indicate low

support for the US among Slovenians (*cf.* Gallup, 2011) – that the study by Udovič et al. (2026) does not corroborate this. Respondents, in fact, would include Americans and Russians in their inner circle more readily than Montenegrins, Macedonians and Albanians. And this despite having less frequent contact with them than with members of other nations in the region.

Žan Lep, Boštjan Udovič and Žiga Mekiš Recek also analysed the results of a representative survey conducted amongst the population of Slovenia in 2025. They found that this survey, based on a representative sample, confirms what was already known: Slovenians consider themselves to be *disciplined*, *reliable*, *honest*, *cultured* and *hospitable*, with no significant differences between the sexes regarding these fundamental attributes, nor in terms of education or age. Respondents in this survey also state that they would accept Croats into their inner circle, followed by Bosnians, Serbs, Montenegrins and Macedonians, with Kosovars coming only after them. Americans and Russians rank ‘behind’ the nations of ex-Yugoslavia.

What is observed is that there are no differences in terms of gender; differences are partly evident in terms of education. Indeed, the cross-cultural distance towards all mentioned groups decreases with a higher level of education. The trend is the opposite with regard to age: the older an individual is, the more reluctant they are to engage with other nationalities. However, it should be noted here that these differences also diminish with the physical/geographical distance between the nations of ex-Yugoslavia (Lep et al., 2026).

CROATIA

Basic data

Area	56,964 km ²
Population	3.87 million
GDP <i>per capita</i>	€24,227 (2025)
Ruling party	HDZ – Croatian Democratic Union (conservative-right party)

Source: Izvozno okno (2026).

Research

Udovič and Svetličič (2010) and Udovič et al. (2012) used the attribute method to investigate what Croats and other citizens of ex-Yugoslavia ‘think’ about the *typical Croat*. They found that Croats have a positive self-image, but that this varies by region: in their research it was relatively strongest in Dubrovnik, whilst Croats were relatively most critical of themselves in Istria. In terms of positive self-image, Croatians ranked fourth, behind Kosovo (73%), Serbia (57 %) and Montenegro (56%). However, other ex-Yugoslav nations did not attribute only positive characteristics to Croats during that period. Among Slovenians, negative stereotypes about Croats accounted for 79% of all responses, with *nationalism* being the most frequently cited attribute. This was also the most common attribute cited by both Serbs and Montenegrins, whilst Kosovars and Bosnians were more lenient towards Croats.

A study by Udovič et al. (2015) showed that not much had changed in five years; if anything, attitudes towards Croats in the region had deteriorated. Slovenians, Serbs, Montenegrins and Bosnians described Croats as *arrogant* and *nationalistic*, whilst Kosovars and Macedonians had a more positive view of them, describing them as *hard-working*, *sociable* and *cultured*. Croat autostereotypes were mostly positive, including that they are *friendly* (7.4%), *passionate* (6.3%), *loud* (3.9 %), and *sociable* (3.1 %) (Udovič et al., 2017: 188–189).

Figure 4: 'Correction' of street graffiti in Zadar

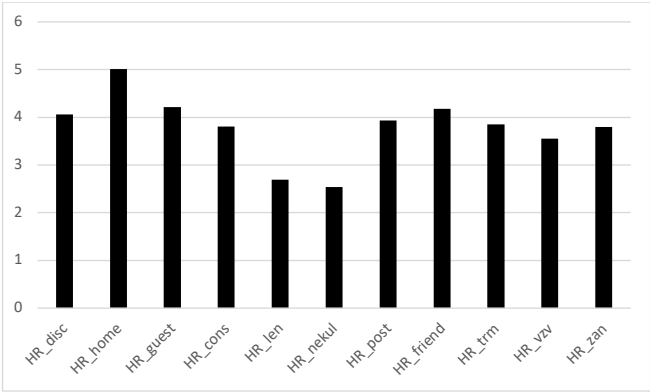


*The original quote in the graffiti was 'Death to the Serbs', while the correction was 'Love for the Serbs'.

Source: Romić (2024).

Ten years later, we can see that the results are similar. Croatians describe themselves as *patriotic*, *hospitable*, *cultured*, and *friendly*; the proportion of positive stereotypes in 2025 continues to outweigh the negative ones. Other nations from the post-Yugoslav region assess Croatians much the same way as they did in 2015 (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Respondents' agreement with attributes relating to Croatians
(1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree)



*disciplined, patriotic, hospitable, conservative, lazy, uncultured, honest, friendly, stubborn, arrogant, reliable

Source: Own calculation based on Udovič et al. (2026).

Udovič et al. (2026) also measured the cross-cultural distance between Croats and other nations from ex-Yugoslavia. The data show that Croats have the lowest cross-cultural distance towards Slovenians and Bosniaks, followed by Montenegrins, Serbs and Macedonians; Kosovars rank lowest in terms of acceptability, but above the Roma. However, according to this study, Croats have relatively few contacts with individuals from the post-Yugoslav region: they have the most contacts with Bosniaks, followed by Serbs and then Slovenes. Croats have almost no contact with Montenegrins and Macedonians.

How to negotiate with Croatians

According to Lewis's classification, Croatians belong to a multi-active culture, whilst Hofstede's classification (The Culture Factor, 2026) finds that there is a significant power distance and a high level of risk aversion in Croatia. Croatian society is organised along collectivist lines

and is relationship-oriented. On this basis, we propose the following starting points for negotiations:

1. Compliment your Croatian counterparts on Croatia, the Croatian coast and the countryside.
2. Learn a few polite words and phrases; your Croatian counterparts will appreciate this.
3. Be aware that, in personal relationships, there is no such thing as 'the Croats'; there are many different types of 'Croats'. Croats in Slavonia are more reserved than those in Dalmatia. Be mindful of regional differences.
4. Make eye contact, but not for too long or too intensely.
5. Pay attention to non-verbal communication.
6. Do not force them to conclude the deal if they are not prepared to do so; this will scupper the deal.
7. Be aware of the importance of non-verbal communication.
8. Croats are generally punctual, but if they are slightly late and apologise, accept their apology.
9. Don't be surprised if they ask you about your salary and other personal matters.
10. Croats tend to focus on relationships, so do not rush things or pressure them into anything that might be seen as illogical or too hasty.

Other recommendations

Given that Croats are generally process- and people-oriented, we recommend that you to:

- a. build and strengthen relationships before deciding to enter into business or political cooperation with them. Only in this way will you succeed in achieving the desired results;

- b. invite them to visit you, show them around your town, and welcome them into your home. This will make them feel accepted and help you establish contacts more quickly;
- c. familiarise yourself with the differences between modern Croatian and other languages from the region so as not to make any mistakes, as Croatians are sensitive about this;
- d. maintain as many personal contacts as possible, as for Croatians it is only these contacts that count (email, social media, etc., count less than personal contact). This will help you break down your stereotypes about them and theirs about you;
- e. be aware that Croatians are skilled lobbyists and enjoy being socially active, so if they are sometimes unable to achieve something directly, they will try to obtain it indirectly.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Basic data

Area	51,209 km ²
Population	3.4 million
GDP <i>per capita</i>	€8,467 (2025)
Ruling party	A complex political system with a rotating presidency based on ethnic groups

Source: Izvožno okno (2026).

Research

Udovič and Svetličič (2010) and Udovič et al. (2012) conducted a study across all three parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Banja Luka, Sarajevo, Mostar), asking respondents what attributes they would ascribe to a ‘typical Bosnian’ and how they would describe their own entity. They found that Bosnian Croats, like Croats in Croatia, largely described themselves using positive attributes. They perceived themselves as *funny* (41%) and *food lovers* (21%). The situation was different among Bosnian Serbs, who attributed far more negative attributes to themselves than Bosnian Croats. The top self-attribute among Bosnian Serbs was *being stupid* (31%), followed by the positive attributes of *funny* (23%) and *hospitable* (24%). Among Bosniaks, the attributes were generally positive, but more scattered, making it impossible to group them into clear categories. In terms of how respondents assessed what Slovenians are, it is possible to see that Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs attributed to Slovenians the traits of *stinginess*, *being difficult*, *‘homosexuality’* and *self-importance*.

Figure 6: 'Correction' of graffiti in Sarajevo (2020)



*As can be seen, the wall originally read: 'Ubi pederà' [Kill the faggot]. Someone added 'Lj' before the 'u', so that the corrected graffiti appears as shown in the image, being 'Ljubi pederà' [Love the faggot].

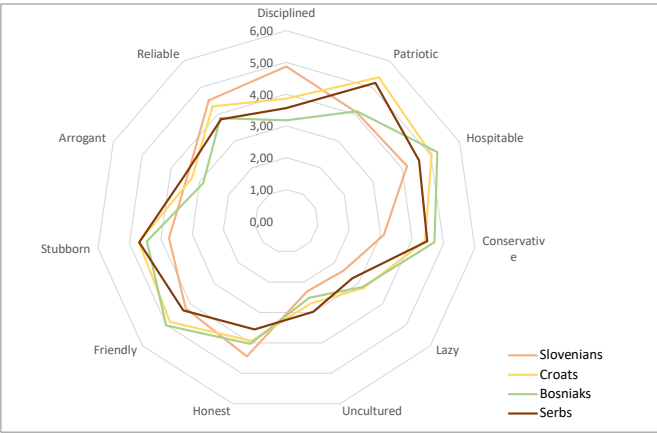
Source: lgbti.ba (2020).

A study by Udovič et al. (2015) found that Bosniaks predominantly held positive stereotypes about other nations from ex-Yugoslavia. Among the predominant negative stereotypes were that Croats are *arrogant* (7.8%), and that Croats and Serbs are *nationalistic* – 4.2% of respondents agreed with this in the case of Croats, and 6.4% in the case of Serbs. Bosnians described Bosnians as *funny* (12.3%), *loud* (7.7%) and *friendly/kind*, which would imply *open-minded* (7.7%). The attribute with the highest level of agreement among respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina was that Montenegrins are *lazy* (24.8%) (Udovič et al., 2017: 188–189).

In 2026, Udovič and his colleagues conducted a similar study in which Bosniaks showed a moderately high level of positive autostereotypes, and a moderately low level of negative autostereotypes. In their

view, Bosniaks are *patriotic*, *hospitable*, *friendly*, *reliable* and *stubborn*; other nations of ex-Yugoslavia view them in a similar way (Udovič et al., 2026).

Figure 7: How Bosniaks ‘view’ others (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree)



Source: Own calculation based on Udovič et al. (2026).

As the figure above shows, Slovenians are regarded as *disciplined*, *hard-working* and *cultured*, whilst Serbs, Bosniaks and Croats are seen as *patriotic*. Among the negative attributes, Bosniaks attribute to Serbs the fact that, of all the nations listed, they are the most *arrogant* and the least *cultured*, which is perhaps not surprising given all the unresolved issues concerning the entities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Regarding the frequency of contact and the desire to consider someone from another nation as a close friend, the following can be observed: Bosniaks have the most contact with Serbs and Croats, followed by Montenegrins and Slovenians. Among the major powers, they have the most contact with Turks and the least with Russians. As for the desirability of such contacts, the order is as follows: respondents would welcome Slovenians closest to them, followed by Croats, Montenegrins,

Macedonians, Kosovars and, lastly, Serbs. In terms of desirability, the Turks 'leapfrog' only the Kosovars and Serbs. Other major powers are rated significantly lower in terms of desired contacts.

How to negotiate with Bosniaks

Lewis (2006 et ff) does not analyse Bosniaks as a distinct culture, nor does he feature them in his latest book. Hofstede's classification (The Culture Factor, 2026), however, identifies patterns for Bosniaks similar to those for Croats, though even more pronounced. Among Bosnians, there is thus a significant power distance and a high degree of risk aversion; society is even more collectivist than in Croatia, although in this context the collectivism of society must be understood as intra-organisational rather than nation-state collectivism. Activities are geared towards short-term satisfaction; however, relationships are built for the long term, and only such relationships yield results. On this basis, we propose the following starting points for negotiations:

1. Be aware that there is not 'one Bosnia and Herzegovina', but at least three. Do not approach negotiations with all entities in the same way.
2. Be mindful of religious differences and, to some extent, linguistic differences.
3. Begin negotiations by first accepting the so-called 'food and drink terror'. Do not be surprised if your hosts order food for you, which they expect you to eat.
4. Give a firm handshake and make eye contact, but do not hold it for too long. Although Bosniaks are Muslim, this does not usually mean that women are treated as unequal in society, business or politics.
5. Always have a gift ready; it should be modest and symbolic. Ideally, the gift should be something from your own country or something that was common in ex-Yugoslavia (e.g. Kraš chocolates, etc.).
6. Be aware that conversations and negotiations can be lengthy, and non-verbal communication plays an important role.

7. Bosniak humour is considered to be the most sophisticated and well-known in ex-Yugoslavia. Respect it, as Bosniaks are very fond of making fun of themselves. Never tell jokes about Mujo and Haso ...
8. A promise is a debt; do not make promises if you cannot keep them.
9. Do not be surprised if Bosniaks tell you straight out what they think of your suggestion. They are considered to be the most forthright of all nations ex-Yugoslavia. They expect the same from you.
10. Do not haggle in shops, and it is best not to do so at the market either, although this depends on the situation. Prices are fixed.

Recommendations

Given that Bosniaks are largely process- and people-oriented, we recommend that you:

- a. prepare your activities with Bosnians thoroughly and draw up several scenarios. You must be aware that relationships with Bosniaks are a long-term endeavour, for which trust is a prerequisite;
- b. bear in mind that Bosniaks value reciprocity. This means that whatever they do for you, they expect you to do the same for them;
- c. do not concern yourself with linguistic variations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as this is less important to Bosniaks than to other ethnic groups in the country. Also, be careful not to draw parallels with Arabs or Turks. They do not like it;
- d. maintain as many personal contacts as possible, as for Bosniaks only these contacts count (email, social media, etc., do not count as contacts). This will help you break down your stereotypes about them and theirs about you;
- e. Bosniaks love to travel, so give them the opportunity to get to know you by inviting them to visit you (of course, if possible, in such a way that you cover the costs).

SERBIA

Basic data

Area	77,474 km ²
Population	6.5 million
GDP <i>per capita</i>	€13,526 (2025)
Ruling party	Serbian Progressive Party (pragmatic populist party)

Source: Izvozno okno (2026).

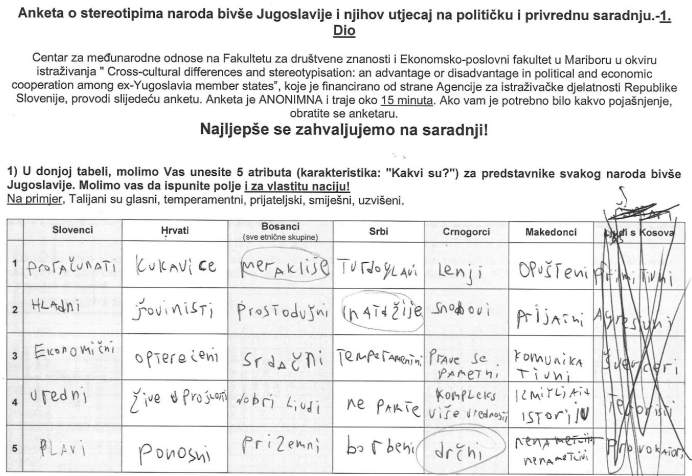
Research

Udovič and Svetličič (2010) and Udovič et al. (2012) conducted a study on (auto)stereotypes of Serbs and found that Serbs most frequently perceive themselves as *hospitable* (30%), *lazy* (21%), *kind* (16%) and *funny* (14%); whilst the negative attributes by which they defined themselves were *laziness*, *nationalism*, *self-importance* and *corruption*. The authors also identified an interesting difference between what Serbs from Serbia and Bosnian Serbs thought about the ‘typical Serb’. The latter, in fact, attributed far more positive attributes to the ‘typical Serb’ than those from Serbia. The most common positive attributes attributed to Serbs by Bosnian Serbs were that they were *intelligent* (10%), *kind* (10%) and *attractive* (10%), whilst Serbs from Serbia described themselves as *kind* (6%), *hospitable* (6%) and *open-minded* (6%). In these surveys, Serbs perceived Slovenians as *kind* (23%) and *hard-working* (14%); amongst the negative stereotypes, those linked to ‘*homosexuality*’, *coldness*, *stubbornness* and of *calculating behaviour* were most prominent. Other nations from ex-Yugoslavia, however, did not attribute many positive attributes to Serbs: amongst the relatively more positive attributes were those cited by respondents from Croatia and Slovenia, whilst negative attributes regarding Serbs predominated amongst Bosniaks, Montenegrins and Kosovars. The latter, when assessed using the five-key-attributes method, had only negative attributes regarding Serbs (*arrogant*, *occupiers*, *untrustworthy*, *criminals*, *nationalists*), which,

given the situation at the time the survey was conducted (2010) – two years after Kosovo’s declaration of independence and Serbia’s efforts to restore the status quo – is hardly surprising.

In the study by Udovič et al. (2015), the results were already somewhat different: Serbs still had a very high proportion of positive autostereotypes, and there was also a high proportion of positive stereotypes regarding Slovenians, Macedonians, Montenegrins and Bosnians. Among Croats and Kosovars, however, negative attributes predominated. Croats were thus described as *arrogant* (11.4%), *unfriendly* (8.3%) and *conceited* (7.2%), whilst Kosovars were described as *closed-minded* (8.9%), *unfriendly* (5.2%), *rude* (5.23%) and *aggressive* (3.8%). A different picture emerges when we analyse what other nations from the post-Yugoslav region said about Serbs: Slovenians, Croats, Bosniaks and Montenegrins held mostly positive stereotypes about Serbs, whilst Macedonians and Kosovars held the most negative ones. Slovenians most frequently agreed that Serbs are *passionate*, *loud* and *friendly* (together accounting for 30% of all attributes), whilst Croats agreed that they are *friendly*, *loud*, *likeable* and *passionate* (together accounting for over 23% of all attributes). On the other hand, Macedonians described Serbs as *nationalists* (12%), *savages/uncouth* (8.3%) and *arrogant* (7%). The descriptions provided by Kosovars were similar to those of the Macedonians, with the notable difference that they were significantly less negative than in the 2010 survey. Whilst Udovič and Svetličić (2010) and Udovič et al. (2012) did not record any positive labels for Serbs from Kosovars, Udovič et al. (2017: 188–189) found that, in 2015, Kosovars also described Serbs in positive terms, using the attributes *passionate* (7.6%) and *open* (5.8%).

Figure 8: The view of one of the Serbian respondents on other nations of ex-Yugoslavia (focus on Kosovo)



Source: Udovič et al. (2015).

The study by Udovič et al. (2026) confirmed that Serbs define themselves as *patriotic*, *hospitable*, *friendly*, *cultured* and *stubborn*, whilst acknowledging that they are not *disciplined*. Similar attributes can also be found among other nations from the region (Table 3).

Table 3: Attributes of Serbs as perceived by other nations in the post-Yugoslav region (the top three by frequency)

	Positive attributes	Negative attributes
Slovenians on Serbs	patriotic	stubborn, arrogant
Croats on Serbs	patriotic, hospitable	stubborn
Bosnians on Serbs	patriotic, hospitable	stubborn
Montenegrins on Serbs	patriotic, hospitable, friendly	-
Kosovars and Macedonians on Serbs	patriotic	arrogant, stubborn
Macedonians on Serbs	patriotic, hospitable, friendly	-

Source: Compiled on the basis of Udovič et al. (2026).

Serbs have the most frequent contact with Montenegrins, Bosnians and Croats, whilst they have the least contact in the region with Kosovars. They also perceive the greatest cross-cultural distance from them, whilst cultural distances from other nations in the post-Yugoslav region are relatively low, though still noticeable: Serbs perceive the greatest distance from Croats and Bosniaks, and the smallest from Slovenians and Montenegrins. When it comes to cross-cultural distance towards superpowers (USA, Russia, China, Turkey) active in the Balkans, there are *prima facie* almost no differences; however, upon closer analysis, it is possible to find that the cross-cultural distance is smallest towards Americans and greatest towards Turks.

How to negotiate with Serbs

Lewis (2006 et ff) still analyses Serbs within the context of the joint state of Serbia and Montenegro. As he notes, Serbs value status and prestige, enjoy physical contact and hugging, and have a flexible understanding of time, which means they are often late. As a nation, they are proud, but they are also hospitable and open-minded (Lewis, 2018: 271–272). Hofstede (The Culture Factor, 2026) notes even more pronounced power distance and risk aversion among Serbs; he also argues the society is more collectivist than in other countries of ex-Yugoslavia. Hofstede (ibid.) also notes that it is important for Serbs to be ‘in line’ with social expectations (which are, admittedly, subject to change), although this is not always the case everywhere. When negotiating with Serbs, one must pay attention to an activity known as *nadmudrivanje* [usually translated into English as *outsmarting*, which is only an *approximative translation*]. Serbs are champions in this activity among all ex-Yugoslav nations.

Based on the above, we propose the following starting points for negotiations:

1. Serbs often place great importance on relationships, so build relationships with them; above all, focus not just on one negotiator, but on the team.

2. Serbs usually view negotiations as a game, so you must play along. Of course, the game must be based on facts. Do not allow their interpretation – that facts are relative – to dictate your negotiations with them.
3. Prestige, wealth and status are extremely important to many Serbs. Therefore, wear a suit at negotiations to demonstrate your experience and status. This will make it easier for them to respect you and regard you as an equal partner.
4. Present your opening positions and negotiate with charisma. Serbs usually appreciate this. Even if it sometimes requires a slightly *tougher* start. Do not worry; Serbs will understand this, and you will thereby gain greater respect.
5. Always have a little story or anecdote to hand. Serbs often appreciate vivid (exaggerated) illustrations of facts. The facts themselves, without such illustrations, are of little importance to them. In presentations, too, use as many diagrams, graphs, dynamic visualisations, etc., as possible.
6. View *complaining* as part of their tactics rather than a sign that they are genuinely lacking something. Be sparing with your promises, as they will remember what you promised. Do not promise what you will not deliver, even if they do exactly that.
7. Avoid negotiation tactics such as a ‘limited-time offer’, as this will make them think you are desperate to have a deal and they will squeeze you even harder. Instead, frame this tactic as an exclusive offer that is tailor-made, ‘just for them’, of course, ‘because you value them’.
8. Serbia is a highly bureaucratic country. Things usually get done if you ‘know someone’. So do not be surprised that in Serbia, informality takes precedence over formality.
9. Directness is what Serbian negotiators value. Anything else plays into their hands (and works against you).
10. As with other multi-tasking and reactive cultures, respect is important in Serbia; this includes helping the other party *to save face*, especially if the matter does not go in their favour.

Recommendations

Given that Serbs are process- and people-oriented, we recommend that you:

- a. take sufficient time to get to know the other party. Not just professionally, but personally as well. Only this will create the framework for building trust;
- b. analyse what they have told you. Do not take their words at face value, but put them into context. Strip away the *fluff* and focus on the facts;
- c. express genuine respect for Serbian culture and for the person you are speaking to, and above all, take care not to mention sensitive political topics;
- d. flatter and praise, but at the same time always present the facts. They will do the same. Above all, do not allow them to twist your facts to suit their own needs;
- e. be persistent; keep your interests at the top of the agenda at all times.

MONTENEGRO

Basic information

Area	13,812 km ²
Population	0.6 million
GDP <i>per capita</i>	€13,083 (2025)
Ruling party	Europe Now! (Liberal-right party)

Source: Izvozno okno (2026).

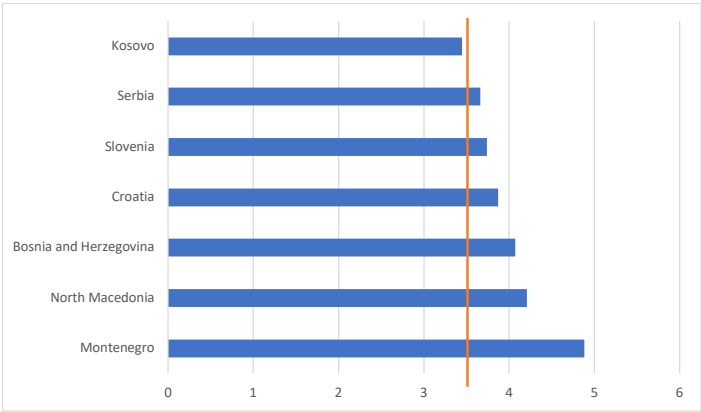
Research

The studies by Udovič and Svetličič (2010) and Udovič et al. (2012) showed that Montenegrins most frequently perceive themselves as *lazy* (30%), *attractive* (27%) and *good people* (17%). There were more positive self-attributes among Montenegrins than negative ones, although there was no shortage of the latter either. These included, in particular, attributes such as *laziness*, *self-centredness*, *self-sufficiency* and *stubbornness*. The stereotype of Montenegrins as lazy is present in the aforementioned studies across all countries of ex-Yugoslavia and remains consistent, suggesting that it is deeply entrenched in the socio-psychological context. An interesting finding is that the authors of these studies identified a high proportion of negative stereotypes held by Montenegrins about Slovenians. Thus, Slovenians were perceived as *homosexuals* or *'faggots'* (25%) and as *stingy* (13%), as well as being seen as *cold*, *tiresome* and *strange*. The main positive stereotype is linked to the proverbial Slovenian work ethic. Among Croats, negative attributes regarding Montenegrins did not predominate, nor did they among Bosnians and Kosovars. The results regarding Serbs are interesting: among the most common attributes that Serbs attributed to Montenegrins were that they are *deceitful*, *insecure* and *rude*. Only the fourth most common attribute attributed by Serbs to Montenegrins was positive (*hospitable*).

Udovič et al. (2015) once again confirmed the stereotype of Montenegrins' *laziness*, as all nations from the post-Yugoslav region cited *laziness* or *idleness* to be the most common attribute associated with Montenegrins. The highest level of agreement that Montenegrins are *lazy* was recorded in Bosnia and Herzegovina (24.8%), Croatia (24.7%) and North Macedonia (30.2% of all respondents), whilst the lowest was in Kosovo (15.8%). If we exclude this attribute, the other attributes were mostly positive. Respondents described Montenegrins as *open*, *friendly*, *spirited* and *sociable* (Udovič et al., 2017: 188–189).

Data from the study by Udovič et al. (2026) show that, after Kosovars, Montenegrins gave themselves the highest ratings for positive attributes. Thus, the average rating given by Montenegrins for their own positive attributes is 4.88 (the average rating for Kosovars' positive attributes is 5.36; ratings range from 1 to 6), whilst they were more sparing in highlighting negative attributes. In any case, they defined themselves as *patriotic*, *hospitable*, *honest*, *friendly*, *down-to-earth* and *reliable*.

Figure 9: Level of agreement with positive attributes of Montenegrins by nationality/country (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree)



Source: Prepared on the basis of Udovič et al. (2026).

Montenegrians generally have the most contact with Serbs and Bosniaks, and considerably less with Slovenians and Kosovars. However, this absence or presence of contact is not directly reflected in cross-cultural distance: namely, in terms of acceptance into the inner circle, Serbs, Slovenians and Macedonians are in the lead, followed by Croats and Bosniaks. Well ahead of all others are Kosovars, who are very close to the Roma. All the major powers are certainly ahead of the Kosovars and the Roma.

How to negotiate with Montenegrians

Lewis (2006 et ff) treats Montenegrians together with Serbs in his analyses and consequently attributes the same characteristics to them. Hofstede (The Culture Factor, 2026) also provides similar data, emphasising in particular the exceptionally strong presence of collectivism in society, as well as – stemming from this collectivist orientation – the subordination of the individual to society and the prioritisation of social needs over individual ones.

Based on the above, we suggest the following starting points for negotiations:

1. Montenegrians are proud of their history and their nation, so learn about these things and praise their towns and countryside (particularly Cetinje, St. Stefan and Budva).
2. Montenegrians often view money simply as a means of payment. It is nice to have it, but it is not essential to live. Therefore, do not place too much emphasis on money-related matters, such as price, etc. You will not impress them with the amount of money you have.
3. Montenegrians generally do not care much for contracts. For them, a deal is done when the parties shake hands. However, do not let this mislead you into thinking that you should not formalise business deals legally.

4. As with other South Slavic nations, it is often said that Montenegrins strike their best deals over food and drink. On the one hand, this is a tactic to wear you down so they can get their way more easily; on the other hand, it is an expression of hospitality and friendly relations.
5. Montenegrins will always pay for lunch or dinner if they have invited you. They, however, expect you to invite them in return, in which case you pay for lunch or dinner. Never split the bill with Montenegrins, as they will take this as an insult.
6. Dress appropriately: more casually in coastal areas and more formally in the interior of the country. And this applies regardless of the heat. Formal attire in the interior conveys a sense of seriousness, just as casual business attire does on the Montenegrin coast.
7. Saving face is extremely important to most Montenegrins, so never raise your voice at them in public or publicly reject their suggestions. Even public dissent can be problematic. Unlike Serbs, Montenegrins prefer things to be slightly embellished, which means that indirectness is more highly valued than directness (read between the lines, not the lines themselves).
8. Montenegrins like clear requirements and clear tasks, and they state this clearly; at the same time, they dislike conflict, which means that if you disagree with them, tell them so in a tactful manner (businesspeople would call this ‘direct in tasks, indirect in relations’).
9. Before formal negotiations, get to know each other on a social level. If they do not suggest an informal meeting, suggest one yourself. When doing so, involve them in the planning by asking them which restaurant or bar is their favourite.
10. Montenegro is a highly bureaucratic country. Things usually get done if you ‘know someone’. So do not be surprised that in Montenegro, informality takes precedence over formality.

Recommendations

Given that Montenegrins are generally process- and people-oriented, we recommend that you:

- a. take enough time to get to know the other party. Not just professionally, but personally as well. Only this will create the framework for building trust;
- b. analyse what you have been told, whilst being alert to any tricks, potential delaying tactics, reframing and context;
- c. avoid mentioning sensitive topics during negotiations (relations with Russia, Serbia, Montenegrin politics, the country's small size, etc.);
- d. be firm on issues and flexible with people, but above all emphasise the importance of cooperation for the common good. Montenegrins believe in *win-win* solutions;
- e. allow yourself plenty of time. Time passes more slowly in Montenegro than in any other country of the former Yugoslavia.

KOSOVO

Basic data

Area	10,887 km ²
Population	1.6 million
GDP <i>per capita</i>	€6,993 (2025)
Ruling party	Vetëvendosje (left-wing social democratic party)

Source: Izvozno okno (2026).

Research

Udovič and Svetličič (2010) and Udovič et al. (2012) found that Kosovars attribute extremely positive characteristics to themselves (73% positive autostereotypes). In their studies, Kosovars described themselves as *hard-working* (13%), *hospitable* (13%), *loyal* (8%) and *vivacious* (7%). However, this self-image was not reflected in other nations; indeed, the attributes associated with Kosovars (based on the ‘first five attributes principle’) were negative in the studies by Udovič and Svetličič (2010) and Udovič et al. (2012). The attributes found in the authors’ data suggest that, according to other nations of former Yugoslavia, Kosovars are perceived as *poor*, *backward*, *lazy*, *criminal*, *dangerous*, *thieving*, *stupid*, etc. (Udovič et al., 2012). The study by Udovič et al. (2015) had already shown a shift away from the negative image of Kosovars in the post-Yugoslav region. With the exception of Serbia and, to some extent, Montenegro, the attributes attributed to Kosovars were much more positive compared to the previous investigations. Slovenians, for instance, had almost no negative attributes associated with Kosovars, nor did Croats or Bosniaks. Serbs defined them as *reserved* (8.9%), *unfriendly* (5.2%), *rude* (5.2%), and *aggressive* (3.8%), whilst Montenegrins described them as *nationalists* (6.5%), *stubborn* (4.9%), and *reserved* (4.4%). Kosovars did not attribute almost any negative (and highly prevalent) autostereotypes or attributes to themselves (Udovič et al., 2017: 188–189).

Figure 10: Tampering with bilingual road signs as a form of expressing inter-ethnic tensions

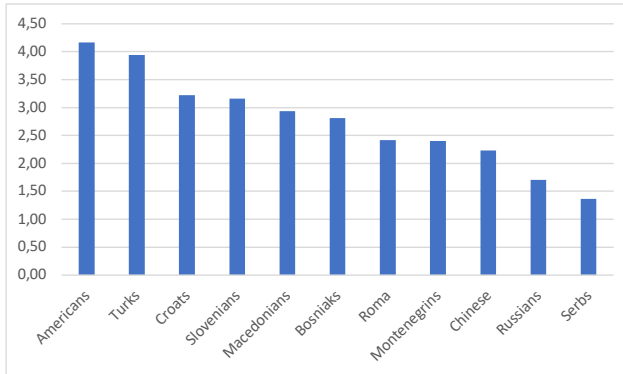


Source: Rok Zupančič (author's photograph).

Similarly to the studies mentioned above, Kosovars also defined themselves in an extremely positive light in the study by Udovič et al. (2026). In doing so, they emphasised their agreement, in particular, with statements that they are *patriotic*, *hospitable*, *honest*, *friendly* and *reliable*; however, they did not agree with statements that they are *lazy* and *uncivilised*. In their self-assessment of positive stereotypes, Kosovars thus rank ahead of all other nations in the post-Yugoslav region.

Generally speaking, Kosovars have the least contact with other nations in the region, which could also be linked to the fact that the EU's visa liberalisation was adopted only in January 2024. In terms of the frequency of contact, Kosovars have the most contact with Macedonians and Roma; the second category comprises Serbs, Montenegrins and Bosniaks; the third category comprises Croats and Slovenians, with Kosovars having the least contact with Slovenians in the region.

Figure 11: Cross-cultural distance of Kosovars to members of selected nations/countries (1 = greatest distance, 6 = lowest distance)



Source: Prepared on the basis of Udovič et al. (2026).

As far as cross-cultural distance is concerned, the situation is reversed – meaning that the absence of contact does not affect cross-cultural distance directly. Kosovars from the region would admit Croats and Slovenians into their innermost circle, followed by Macedonians and Bosniaks, then Roma and Montenegrins. Among the major powers, however, cross-cultural distance is distributed in a specific way: Kosovars would place Americans in their innermost circle, ahead of all members of the post-Yugoslav region, and the same applies to Turks. Kosovars would also place the Chinese and Russians closer to them than the Serbs.

How to negotiate with Kosovars

Udovič et al. (2012, np.) wrote on this subject that the question of ‘how to negotiate in Kosovo is primarily a question of which entity’s representative you are negotiating with. If you are negotiating with a Serb, then similar rules apply as for Serbs from Serbia; if, however, you are negotiating with an Albanian from Kosovo, then similar rules

apply as if you were negotiating with an Albanian from Albania or North Macedonia.’ Although this is still partly true, one must be careful not to make the mistake in negotiations of equating Kosovars with Albanians from Albania, which politicians and businesspeople are prone to doing. There is, in fact, a fundamental difference between them: Albanians from Albania are mostly oriented towards Italy and thus adopt Italian negotiating styles, whilst Albanians from Kosovo are culturally mostly oriented towards the German-speaking world (Germany, Austria, Switzerland); consequently, they share more similarities in negotiations with other nations of former Yugoslavia than with Albanians from Albania.

Ten tips for effective negotiations in Kosovo:

1. Take into account the specific characteristics of the population of Kosovo or the person with whom you are negotiating. Never raise topics that may be politically, personally or socially sensitive.
2. If you are negotiating with a Kosovar, emphasise the importance of your cooperation. This will help establish a framework for the negotiations.
3. Like other post-Yugoslav nations, Kosovars are very much relationship- and people-oriented. Build a rapport with them; do not expect quick solutions; and, above all – just as with Montenegrins – be ruthless with the problem and friendly towards the person.
4. Use titles, and if you do not know the Albanian language, use English. Do not attempt to use variations of ex-Yugoslav languages, unless they suggest it themselves. These variations are mainly known to the older generation; the younger generation is fluent in spoken English (and possibly German).
5. Before making an offer, make sure the time is right. Sometimes a deal requires more socialising to get it off the ground; sometimes less. The older generation tends to require more socialising, whilst the younger generation approaches business much more directly.
6. The pressure of the “food terror” is less prevalent in Kosovo than in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina or Montenegro, but it is still

customary to be invited for a coffee or tea. This means you should set aside at least an hour for this occasion, as it is not merely about drinking coffee but a social event during which your business partner wishes to get to know you better or simply create a setting for negotiations.

7. You do not order Turkish coffee in a café unless it is offered to you; you only get it at your host's home. In cafés, you drink regular *café* coffee.
8. You do not split the bill; whoever invites pays. However, it is expected that if the other party invited you this time, you would invite them next time (soon!).
9. If you're invited to a dinner, bring a small gift with you. Avoid flowers. Coffee or a box of chocolates will be a perfectly suitable gift. If possible, choose something from the region (e.g. Kraš chocolate).
10. Respect religious customs, though do not be surprised if someone who publicly declares themselves to be a devout Muslim has no qualms about knocking back a pint of beer or a glass of wine with you.

Recommendations

Like other members of the post-Yugoslav nations, Kosovars are largely relationship-oriented and focus on the individual; we therefore recommend that

- a. bear this in mind and allow yourself plenty of time to get to know them. Precisely because Kosovars speak Albanian, they are perceived as even more *alien* by people from the ex-Yugoslav region. Getting to know them is therefore more challenging, even though they share many customs with other nations from the former Yugoslav republics;
- b. bear in mind that Kosovars are exceptionally hospitable. So do not be surprised if someone you have only just met invites you to their home. Naturally, they will expect the same in return;

- c. be considerate and respectful towards all aspects of Kosovar culture. It is important to acknowledge the achievements of Kosovars in their culture, of which they are very proud;
- d. be aware of the significant divide between urban and rural areas. Whilst you can behave in the city as you would in most Western cities, you must be much more reserved in rural areas. Customs in the countryside are also often deeply rooted in history and may seem very unusual to Westerners;
- e. bear in mind that Kosovars are generally very tactile when explaining things to you and are also prone to hugging. Personal space is therefore smaller than, for example, with Slovenians or Croats.

NORTH MACEDONIA

Basic data

Area	25,713 km ²
Population	1.8 million
GDP <i>per capita</i>	€9,332 (2025)
Ruling party	VMRO-DPMNE (Conservative centre-right party)

Source: Izvozno okno (2026).

Research

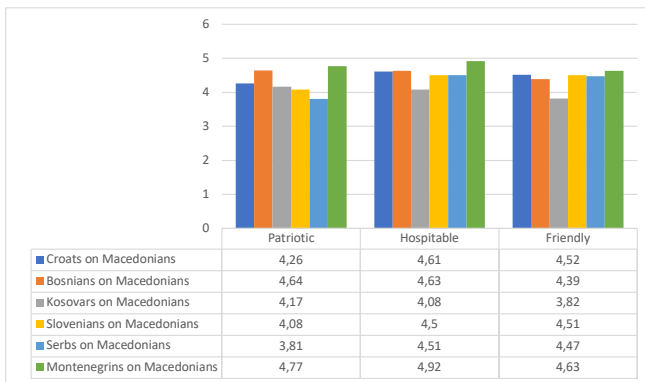
Udovič and Svetličič (2010) and Udovič et al. (2012) found that, in their studies, Slovenians’ stereotypes about Macedonians were relatively the highest compared with all other stereotypes in the region. In these studies, Slovenians perceived Macedonians as *hard-working* (15%), *friendly* (11%) and *open-minded* and *hospitable* (18% in total). There were also some negative stereotypes among Slovenians regarding Macedonians, amongst which the stereotype of *a lack of education* stands out in particular. Other nations in the post-Yugoslav region also had difficulty listing attributes of a ‘typical Macedonian’. Thus, Udovič and Svetličič (2010) and Udovič et al. (2012) found that, when it came to Macedonians, respondents resorted to certain generalised stereotypes which they had already applied to other post-Yugoslav nations/countries, with the sole difference being that, due to a lack of ‘stereotypes’ – or indeed any clear idea of how to describe a typical Macedonian – there was a noticeable *tendency* for respondents to refer to prominent Macedonian figures. Alexander the Great, Toše Proeski and Boki 13 thus stand out prominently in the results.

In the study by Udovič et al. (2015), Macedonians attributed mostly positive characteristics to themselves. They described themselves as *so-ciable* (8.6%), *hard-working* (7%), *hospitable* (5.4%) and *lively* (4.8%). Members of other nations of former Yugoslavia defined them similarly. 14.4% of Slovenians, 23.5% of Serbs, 7.4% of Croats and 6.8% of Bosniaks agreed that Macedonians are *friendly*. Other stereotypes

include *hard-working*, *temperamental*, *hospitable*, *sociable*, *funny*, etc. (Udovič et al., 2017: 188–189). Interestingly, Kosovars considered Macedonians to be *nationalists* (9.9%), *lazy* (6.6%) and *selfish* (6.6%), whilst others did not hold similar negative stereotypes.

Udovič et al. (2026) found that positive autostereotypes also predominate among Macedonians (as with the other nations they studied), although the difference between positive and negative autostereotypes is relatively smaller here than among most other nations. Macedonians thus generally consider themselves *hospitable*, *patriotic*, *honest* and *friendly*; however, the responses of Macedonian respondents were more varied when it came to other attributes they ascribed to themselves. Figure 12 shows the three key stereotypes/attributes that received the highest levels of agreement in other countries of former Yugoslavia.

Figure 12: *The three most common stereotypes about Macedonians and agreement with them* (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree)



Source: Prepared on the basis of Udovič et al. (2026).

With whom do Macedonians have the most contact? According to their own self-assessment, with Montenegrins and Serbs, followed by Bosniaks. Slovenians are at the bottom of the list, even behind the ‘superpowers’. In this case too, it is confirmed that the absence of contact does not have a directly proportional effect on cross-cultural distance.

According to the respondents, Macedonians would admit Montenegrins into their inner circle by a far wider margin than any other group, followed by Serbs and Slovenians, with a considerable gap between them. They wish to have the least contact with Kosovars and Roma. In terms of desired contact, Kosovars are almost on a par with Turks, i.e. far behind Russians, Americans and Chinese (Udovič et al., 2026).

How to negotiate with Macedonians

The smallness, geographic distance of North Macedonia, the specific nature of the Macedonian language (compared to the other ex-Yugoslav languages, Macedonian does not have the form of declension), etc., create a kind of ontological distance between Macedonians and the rest of the post-Yugoslav conglomerate. This is also reflected in the absence of studies on the specifics of how to negotiate with Macedonians. Lewis (2006 et ff), for example, does not discuss Macedonian characteristics (he omits them), whilst Hofstede (The Culture Factor, 2026) does so and concludes that the characteristics of Macedonians are similar to those of Serbs and Montenegrins. In his view, Macedonian culture is based on hierarchy, is collectivist, and adheres to established social patterns and institutions. Mutual cooperation is also important for the functioning of this culture, which runs counter to classic Western patterns of competition in society.

Based on the above and on our experiences, we suggest that when negotiating with Macedonians, you bear in mind that:

1. Macedonians are, for the most part, exceptionally hospitable, and it means a great deal to them that you accept their hospitality. Therefore, take your time when negotiating with Macedonians, as – just as with Montenegrins – time is a relative concept for them.
2. During negotiations, Macedonians want to know in advance what they stand to gain from the deal. Therefore, make it clear to them what their contribution will be and what their benefit will be. If they do not see a benefit in the deal, it usually falls through. Agreements are concluded in such a way that you must monitor them throughout; otherwise, they will not be implemented. Above

all, it is important to understand that no agreement will be implemented if the Macedonian side does not understand what they stand to gain from it.

3. For Macedonians, family is sacred, and everything must be subordinated to it. What does this mean? Don't be surprised if, having received a call from home, they leave in the middle of negotiations, apologising that they have to go home. You are expected to understand and support this.
4. Unlike Bosniaks, Serbs and Montenegrins, Macedonians are not particularly tactile unless you are part of their inner circle. A handshake will suffice; save the hugs for later, if they let you get close enough.
5. Macedonians are quite formal, which means you must take into account both the person's age and their rank or title when addressing them.
6. As with Serbs and Montenegrins, keep the situation under control. You can easily be led astray.
7. Macedonians also practise the 'food and drink pressure', but you can avoid it by leaving a little food on your plate. They will take this to mean you are full, and they will stop pressuring you to eat.
8. You are expected to be punctual, even though they will be late without any qualms. Do not expect more than a polite apology – and sometimes not even that. Above all, do not demand it. Factor this into your negotiation schedule.
9. Macedonians prioritise the matters that are important to them on the agenda, whilst frequently reiterating them. They are direct and clear about matters in their own interest, whilst neglecting other matters or brushing them aside with phrases such as 'we'll discuss that later, as there'll be plenty of time'...
10. The clothes you wear to a meeting are also important to them. You should wear business attire to a business meeting (regardless of the temperature outside), whilst for lunch or dinner you may dress more casually.

Recommendations

Like other post-Yugoslav nations, Macedonians are focused on the individual and their relationship with them; therefore, recommendations for working with Macedonians are a combination of recommendations for neighbouring nations, including:

- a. allow sufficient time for *a brief chat* before a meeting or negotiations begin. This demonstrates respect for their culture and helps to create a sense of closeness;
- b. understand that Macedonians are exceptionally hospitable, so it is important to keep even informal processes under control. It is not uncommon, if you do not keep this in mind, for the process to be very informal, yet no decisions to be made. Macedonians tend to avoid decisions they do not like or which they believe could be harmful;
- c. praise them, including their history. Do not bring up sensitive topics (politics, relations with Greece, Bulgaria and Albania); instead, praise their hospitality and friendliness. Build a rapport with them by inviting them to visit you on a business trip, so that they can get to know you in a non-business context;
- d. avoid stereotypes about paprika, ajvar and similar things. Macedonians often perceive these stereotypes as demeaning. Instead, praise the natural beauty of their country, such as Lake Ohrid;
- e. always carry a small, symbolic gift with you to give them (chocolate, Slovenian wine, or another small gift), but ensure it is not linked to the company, but rather to non-work-related activities.

COOPERATION WITHIN AND BEYOND THE REGION

In their study, Udovič et al. (2026) asked respondents how important it was to them to be a citizen of their country of origin, and which countries their country should cooperate more closely with. They could choose from the European Union, the Russian Federation, China, or the USA.

The researchers asked respondents whether they were proud of their nation and what they thought of the statement that their nation was better than other nations. In doing so, the researchers were primarily examining the attribute of nationalism, which in the post-Yugoslav region is often portrayed as a source of conflict or tension in the area. All respondents agreed that they were proud of their nation. Kosovars showed the highest level of agreement (average: 6.9),⁵ followed by Slovenians (average: 5.82) and Montenegrins (average: 5.62). The overall average score for the region regarding pride in one's nation is 5.6, which is quite high. Consequently, we can conclude that patriotism and a sense of national belonging are strongly present in the region and, as such, also shape individuals' behaviour and other activities.

Respondents were more reserved when asked about the exclusivity of their own nation or the nation to which they belong. Kosovars strongly agreed that their nation is better than others (average: 5.37), followed by Montenegrins (average: 4.44) and Serbs (3.54). Croatian respondents were among the most reserved regarding this statement (average: 3.08). The overall average for the region is 3.8; however, if we exclude Kosovars from the analysis due to their exceptionally high level of agreement and their divergence from the others, the average rating falls to 3.5, which indicates a degree of reservation regarding this statement across the region as a whole (and is even somewhat illogical given current events in the post-Yugoslav region). This could probably be explained by two other variables: firstly, the survey was conducted amongst students at social sciences faculties, and so the results differ from what they would be in the general population; and secondly, it

⁵ Ratings ranged from 1 to 7, where 1 means 'I completely disagree' and 7 means 'I completely agree'.

was carried out in the country's capital, which typically has a different *daily atmosphere* from the rest of the country.

With whom should their country cooperate more closely, or where should it position itself within the turbulent global geopolitical landscape? The answers we received come as no surprise: the European Union is far ahead of the other major powers in the region. The average level of agreement that their country should cooperate closely with the EU is 5.3, with Kosovo being the most favourable for it (average: 6.91), followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina (average: 5.53), whilst support for the European Union is relatively lowest in North Macedonia (average: 4.36) (*cf.* Table 4).

Table 4: Levels of cooperation with regional actors (1 = I completely disagree, 7 = I completely agree)

	Our country should cooperate more with the EU	Our country should cooperate more with the Russian Federation	Our country should cooperate more with China	Our country should cooperate more with the USA
SLO	5.27	3.26	4.5	3.79
CRO	5.11	2.54	3.29	3.98
B&H	5.53	3.25	3.74	4.33
SRB	4.76	3.66	4.08	4.39
MNE	5.1	4.18	4.4	3.97
KOS	6.91	2.06	3.00	6.72
NORTH MAC	4.36	4.13	3.91	4.47
AVERAGE	5.3	3.3	3.8	4.5

Source: Calculated on the basis of Udovič et al. (2026).

Respondents from Montenegro are the most supportive of cooperation with the Russian Federation of all countries (average: 4.18), followed by Macedonians (average: 4.13); whilst Kosovars (average: 2.06) and Croats (average: 2.54) are the least in favour of it. Surprisingly, Slovenians are the most in favour of their country cooperating more

closely with China (average: 4.5), whilst Kosovars (average: 3.00) and Croats (average: 3.29) are the least in favour. As for the USA: as expected, Kosovars are the most favourable towards it (average: 6.72), followed at a considerable distance by Macedonians (average: 4.47) and, somewhat surprisingly, Serbs (average: 4.39)

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

In 2005, Macedonian singer Tijana Dapčević released the pop song *Sve je isto, samo njega nema*, in which she presents, in an entertaining (and parodic) way, key stereotypes prevalent in the post-Yugoslav region about the nations of that same region. Musically, the song is nothing special in itself; what is special is the emphasis which – as we have also shown in our research – applies to the post-Yugoslav region and could be summed up by the French proverb: *the more things change, the more they stay the same* (plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose). Dapčević further reinforces stereotypes and prejudices in the region in her music video, in which news presenters – one from each country of former Yugoslavia – star as the main characters and *embody* all the major national stereotypes. E.g., the Slovenian newsreader has a bob, is well-groomed, and, unlike the others, is also the most scantily clad. All of the above could be quite amusing in itself, were it not for the grain of bitter truth that, 35 years after the break-up of Yugoslavia, things in the post-Yugoslav region have not changed all that much; and where they have, they have certainly not changed for the better in many areas.

An overview of the key findings from the studies presented shows that stereotypes and prejudices stem largely from the time of the common state and are passed down uncritically from one generation to the next. Both the media and primary and secondary socialisation play a role in this, as does the lack of contact between young people from the region – a factor that is all the more significant given that young people today have far more formal opportunities to travel than they did a decade ago, yet still travel relatively little. The reasons for this can be found in several areas. Firstly, travel is relatively expensive for most people in the region who still live there. They therefore travel to places where they have relatives, reducing their costs. The second reason is a lack of interest in the region: many of those living in the region would like to go abroad and stay there, at least temporarily. Therefore, if they are interested in anything, it is not the countries and nations of the post-Yugoslav area, but the countries and cultures where they can find a job and the standard of living they desire. Here I am reminded of one of my ex-students, who now lives in Germany, who once said that she cannot return to her own country because there is no future there and

that she wants to secure a future for herself. She would stay in Slovenia, but here she has no chance of getting a job or other opportunities because she does not have citizenship ... When I said that life abroad is not *a bed of roses*, she replied resignedly that she knew that, but she had no choice. And there are probably many such fates out there, about which we ask too few questions in the countries of the former Yugoslavia.

Taking into account the results of the research we have presented, this calls for certain actions or recommendations on the part of Slovenian politics, the economy and diplomacy, namely:

1. We must recognise that stereotypes about Slovenians are deeply ingrained and as such difficult to *dismantle*. Therefore, the easiest way to tackle them is to acknowledge them and counter them through concrete actions. However, these actions must not be based solely on promises, but on concrete measures. Particularly in countries that are more physically distant from Slovenia and with which there is little contact, greater investment is needed to foster mutual contacts among younger people. This could be achieved through professional study trips, visits, exchanges and similar initiatives.
2. Slovenian enterprises have lost their *first-mover advantage* in these markets. Older generations are still familiar with them and value them, whilst younger generations are less familiar with them or do not know them at all. To remain economically competitive in this region – where Slovenia still accounts for around 70% of its outward foreign direct investment – we must also invest in raising the profile of Slovenian products, as this is no longer a given.
3. The recommendation by Udovič et al. (2017: 205) has stood the test of time and remains just as relevant as it was in 2017. Educational systems must incorporate more information and knowledge on overcoming cross-cultural differences, as well as topics relating to the religions and cultures of partner countries and their history. On this basis, it is equally important to provide training on how to engage with these cultures in the political,

economic, and diplomatic spheres, as well as how to negotiate in these environments and achieve the best possible results.

4. Language is an extremely important matter. Language knowledge adds value. As early as in the study by Udovič et al. (2015), researchers in the field observed that the main problem facing younger generations is a lack of knowledge of local languages, or at least one of the languages of former Yugoslavia. Of course, you must be careful not to offend the person you are speaking to, but in most cases, they will greatly appreciate it if you make an effort to use their language, at least to some extent. This raises another point for consideration: accelerated supplementary language teaching from former Yugoslavia, perhaps as part of compulsory elective modules in secondary school or as an optional subject at university.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Strengthening mutual understanding and knowledge of culture, language and customs.

Recommendation 2: Strengthening contacts between young people through various social or educational programmes, perhaps including scholarships. ‘Tuition fees’ as a form of international development cooperation are insufficient or ‘outdated’.

Recommendation 3: Strengthening relations with the people and countries of the post-Yugoslav region. This is not (as some might say!) a matter of reviving *jugonostalgia*; it should be a primary and vital Slovenian interest in this region.

In case these three steps will not be taken as soon as possible, Slovenia will, within a generation, definitively lose even those comparative advantages it currently possesses. From that point onwards, it

will be on a completely equal footing with other actors in international relations – politically, economically and diplomatically – and it will likely become even less significant for relations in the post-Yugoslav region than it is today.

LITERATURE AND SOURCES

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FROM REVIEWS

Prof. Em. Dr Marjan Svetličič

This book provides a thorough analysis of the civilisational differences between the nations of the ex-Yugoslavia region, based on extensive and original empirical research. This is its greatest merit, as it underpins the theoretical frameworks of the discussion with a wealth of empirical data. The value of the work is further enhanced by the fact that, although it is an individual work, it rests on the collective efforts of a number of contributors from all parts of the former country. This ensures an accurate interpretation of the results obtained, as it is noted that differences sometimes arise simply from a poor or incorrect understanding of languages, expressions or the context in which they are used.

The wealth of empirical evidence can therefore serve as a sound basis for devising simple, 'telegraphic' advice for businesspeople – or indeed anyone who works with other stakeholders in this field – on how, through a better understanding of the 'cultural essence' of their partners, to foster cooperation or avoid trivial mistakes. After all, they simply do not have the time to grapple with complex theoretical debates, all too often shrouded in even more convoluted academic language, frequently comprehensible only to a narrow circle within the academic community. Underestimating cultural differences can be costly, as at first sight seemingly minor details – such as certain expressions or gestures – can offend a partner, and it is sometimes almost impossible to rectify them. Some mistakes are remembered for years and passed down from generation to generation. A lack of understanding of cross-cultural differences is no trivial matter, contrary to what many a businessman – and indeed politician – might think.

I am convinced that Boštjan Udovič's work is therefore a highly valuable, theoretically and empirically grounded contribution to a better understanding of the region of the former Yugoslavia and, as such, can help to foster mutual cooperation in this area, which has deep

historical roots. For almost all stakeholders, this is one of the priority areas not only for economic but also for cultural cooperation. It can contribute to reducing both inherited and newly created conflicts in both spheres.

Assist. Prof. Dr Faris Kočan

The monograph addresses the research- and practice-relevant issue of cross-cultural distance, stereotypes, and their impact on relations between societies in the region of the former Yugoslavia. Its strength lies in its longitudinal perspective, as the author situates new findings alongside the results of research conducted in this field since 2010. It is precisely this ability to compare different time periods that lends the work additional weight. The initial assumption that the geopolitical and social changes of the last decade have significantly altered mutual perceptions in the region has not been confirmed, according to the author's findings. This is a significant finding in itself: the political and institutional environment can change considerably faster than societal perceptions of others.

I see the value of this monograph also in the way it links research findings with practical recommendations. The author highlights the importance of mutual contacts, particularly among younger generations, as well as language skills and knowledge of the history, culture, and social environment of the countries in the region. For Slovenia, this issue is also relevant in terms of foreign policy and the economy: the generational shift means that the shared Yugoslav experience and the direct knowledge of the region associated with it can no longer be regarded as a lasting comparative advantage. Precisely for this reason, the monograph's argument that regional knowledge must be actively reproduced through education, language, mobility, and direct contacts is one of its most valuable contributions.



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