

IMAGE OF HUNGARY IMPROVES IN NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES



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Among neighbouring countries, Slovakia has the largest majority of respondents who tend to have a good opinion of Hungary (78 percent) while Hungarians continue to think favourably of Austria in the largest numbers (82 percent). Hungary's perception has improved in Slovakia, Austria, Croatia and Slovenia even over the past year, and on average 60 percent of the populations of neighbouring countries have a good opinion of Hungary, which is an encouraging sign at the time of the 100th anniversary of the Trianon Dictum of Peace, reveal 2020 data from the Institute of Central European Perspectives.

The experiences of recent years have shown that the wounds Hungary suffered 100 years ago, and which have been kept open since primarily in the interests of

the great powers, can be healed, albeit slowly, through Central European cooperation and mutual respect. This is why Hungary's improved image in the Carpathian basin, going from strength to strength even during the past year, makes welcome news.

According to the 2020 Hungary barometer, Slovakia has the most respondents who tend to have a good opinion of Hungary (78 percent), ahead of Croatia (68 percent) and Serbia (60 percent). In the neighboring countries, the proportion of those who judge Hungary positively is over 50 percent, with the exception of Romania, where 47 percent of respondents regard Hungary positively. According to the data, the biggest progress compared to last year was made in Croatia (12 percentage points), Slovakia (11 percentage points) and Austria (10 percentage points). Data indicating a decrease were registered in Romania and Serbia only. There is clear improvement over the longer term, though. According to all our similar surveys since 2016, opinion in Slovakia have improved by 19 percentage points in four years, while in Austria by 14 percentage points. For the first time this year, the absolute majority of respondents in Austria (51 percent) regard Hungary positively.

		2020*	2019	2018	2017
1.	Slovakia	78	67	76	59
2.	Croatia	69	57	63	57
3.	Serbia	60	75	80	76
4.	Slovenia	58	54	65	58
5.	Austria	51	41	42	37
6.	Romania	47	55	52	51

**Ratio of respondents who „tend to have a good opinion” of Hungary (all data listed in percentages)*

The increase in confidence showing in neighbouring countries is also reflected in the Hungarian public. Hungary's perception of Austria has also improved in recent years: 82 percent of Hungarian respondents tend to have a good opinion of their western neighbour (an increase of 9 percentage points compared to 2019). Four years later the second place still belongs to Croatia. Perhaps the Adriatic also has a role to play in the fact that 74 percent of Hungarians tend to have a good opinion of their south-western neighbor (an increase of 7 percentage points

in one year). 64 and 62 percent of Hungarians think positively about Slovenia and Slovakia, respectively.

The only two countries of which less than half of the respondents have a good opinion are Serbia (40 percent) and Romania (36 percent). This is an improvement of 8 percentage points in one year for Serbia and 3 percentage points for Romania. The anti-Hungarian sentiment often seen in Bucharest politics hardly contributes to a greater improvement in the opinion of Hungarians. At the same time, based on data of the Hungary barometer in 2020, it can be said that the nations of the Carpathian Basin have a growing confidence in each other.

		2020*	2019	2018	2017	2016
1.	Austria	82	73	73	74	71
2.	Croatia	74	70	68	66	59
3.	Slovenia	64	55	57	57	52
4.	Slovakia	62	57	58	59	50
5.	Serbia	40	32	32	33	30
6.	Romania	36	33	35	38	34

**Ratio of Hungarian respondents who „tend to have a good opinion” of neighbouring countries (all data listed in percentages).*

Data presented at the panel discussion was evaluated by CEPER analysts Gergely Illés and Géza Tokár, experts on Romania and Slovakia, respectively, while the meeting was moderated by Mihály Rosonczy-Kovács.

Regarding the background of the constantly improving trend in Slovakia, Géza Tokár said that previously conflict-generating issues, such as the Malina Hedvig case, had been removed from the agenda and replaced by those in which the official positions of the two countries were closer aligned, and that these were also shared by the majority of the public. Examples include managing the issue of asylum seekers or representing Christian-conservative values in the discourse on the future of Europe. Tokár emphasized that the Slovak society in general is even more conservative than the Hungarian, and the positive opinion about Hungary is also a reflection of the fact that Hungary strongly represents conservative values at the international level as well.

In addition, Slovakia unlike Romania, is committed to Central European cooperation. Géza Tokár said that Slovak diplomacy is characterized by a high degree of pragmatism. "If there is a Slovak foreign policy doctrine, it is to try to work with everyone in the light of the possibilities." The V4 currently has no alternative, its economic benefits are known to the entire Slovak political elite, so Slovakia is expected to remain a secure partner in regional cooperation.

In connection with the events in Romania in the recent period, Gergely Illyés emphasized that President Klaus Iohannis had been condemned by leading Romanian and Western, mainly German-speaking circles, which otherwise supported him, for his anti-Hungarian statements. The Romanian President's actions were primarily driven by domestic politics, the analyst added. Regarding the opportunities for co-operation in Central Europe, Illyés explained that the basic principle of Romanian diplomacy was to consider the United States as their main ally, followed by the large EU member states, primarily Germany. They are trying to strengthen Romanian-Polish bilateral relations in the region, thus trying to move Poland away from the V4 and reduce Hungary's influence in the region. According to Illyés, any initiatives in Romania that would call for the strengthening of the Central European region do not currently receive media coverage. The view often expressed by Iohannis, which considers regional cooperation to be unnecessary and remains committed to the federal European Union, can be considered as the generally accepted position of the Romanian political and diplomatic elite. According to Illyés, the spread of pro-Central European views would require a radical, systemic change, for which there is very little chance in the short term.

[Click here for full length video of the panel discussion](#)

The Institute of Central European Perspectives (CEPER) analyses the region's political, economic and social processes aiming to improve information exchange as well as mutual understanding and respect.