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Europeanization in the making. Perceptions on the Economic Effects of European Integration in Romania

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Introduction

- **The goal of the paper:** the study of the Romanian public's attitude towards the European Union
- **More exactly** - to observe and explain patterns of EU support in Romania



Context

- We challenge the utilitarian theory
- Citizens' perceptions over CEE countries' European integration are shaped by the economic benefits brought by integration



Premise of the study

- Based on previous studies (i.e. Fomina & Radu, 2016), Romanians' attitudes towards the EU are shaped mainly by instrumental and identity related motivations



Background

- According to the Standard Eurobarometer published August 2017, more than four in ten Europeans, representing 42% of the total sample, trust the European Union
- Comparing this percentage with results of a Eurobarometer published in autumn 2015, trust in the EU has raised with 10%



Background

- Eastern-European states such as Lithuania (65%), Romania (57%) or Bulgaria (54%) maintain a strong euro-optimistic orientation
- Romanians perceive the economic situation (15%) as the third most important concern of the union (Eurobarometer, August 2017)
- Still, Romanians are optimistic regarding the future of the EU (67%)

Predictors of EU support

Hard predictors - utilitarian predictors (economic interests)

Soft predictors - the degree of identification with one's national identity, perceived meaning of EU membership, political cues



Methodology

- **Step I:** analysis of hard data on the economic effects of European integration
- **Step II:** quantitative analysis of Romanian citizens' perceptions over the EU through a national survey conducted in September 2017, on a sample of 1107 respondents
- **The aim of the investigation** - to identify shifts (if any) in Romanians' attitudes towards the EU) and factors that can explain citizens' apparent unreserved trust in the EU



Research objectives

Ob.1 To investigate the impact of EU integration on Romania's economic performance based on the following indicators – GDP and GDP per capita, evolution of public debt, and the absorption of EU funds;

Ob.2 To investigate Romanian citizens' perceptions on the economic development of the country in the CEE region;

Ob.3 To investigate Romanian citizens' trust in the local political institutions as compared to the EU;



Research objectives

Ob.4 To investigate Romanian citizens' perception on the impact EU funds have on the economic growth of the country;

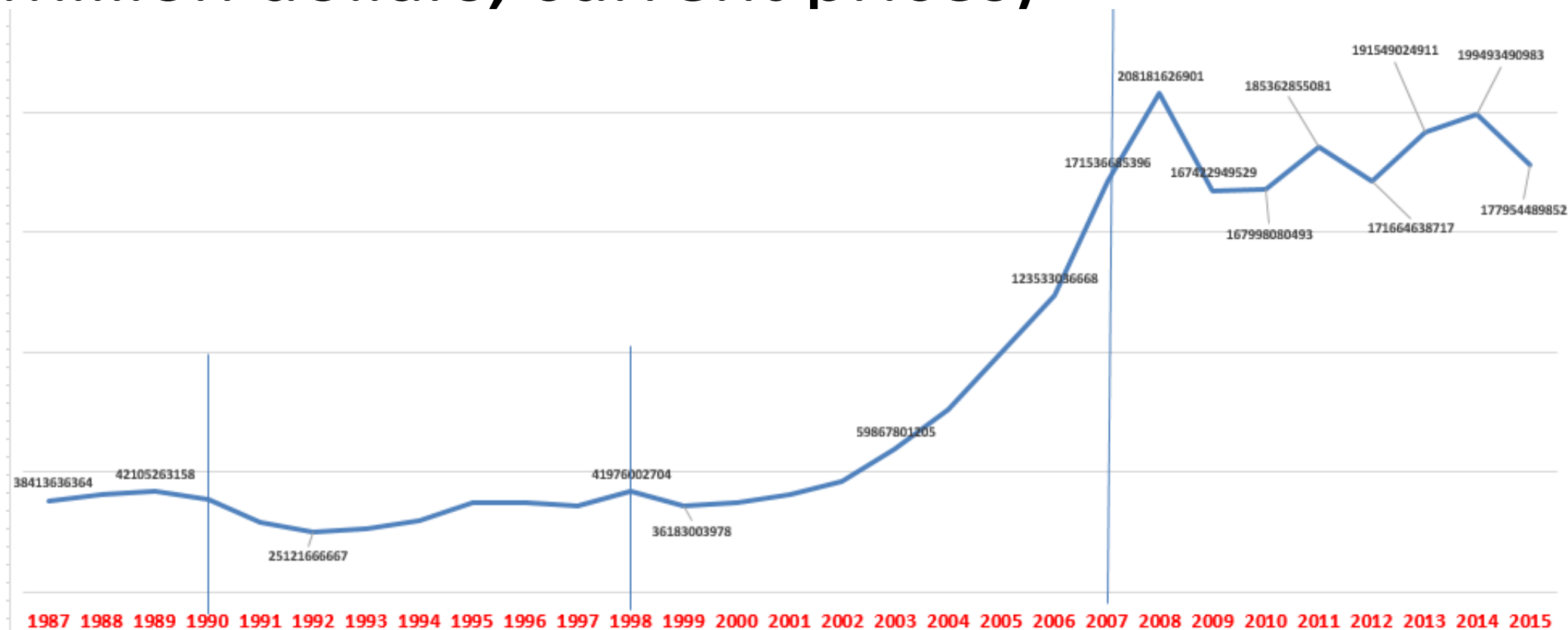
Ob. 5 To investigate Romanian citizens' personal evaluation of their life quality and its correlation with EU support.



The economic effects of EU integration in Romania – average growth, great inequalities

- The European integration constituted an impulse for the growth of the Romanian GDP, especially comparing its values before 2007
- The peak in terms of GDP was reached in 2008, one year after the EU integration but dropped in in 2009 and has fluctuated ever since
- Romania's GDP depends on the economic performance of the Bucharest-Ifov region and there are still great economic cleavages between the urban and the rural areas

Evolution of Romania's GDP (1987 – 2015, million dollars, current prices)





The economic effects of EU integration in Romania – average growth, great inequalities

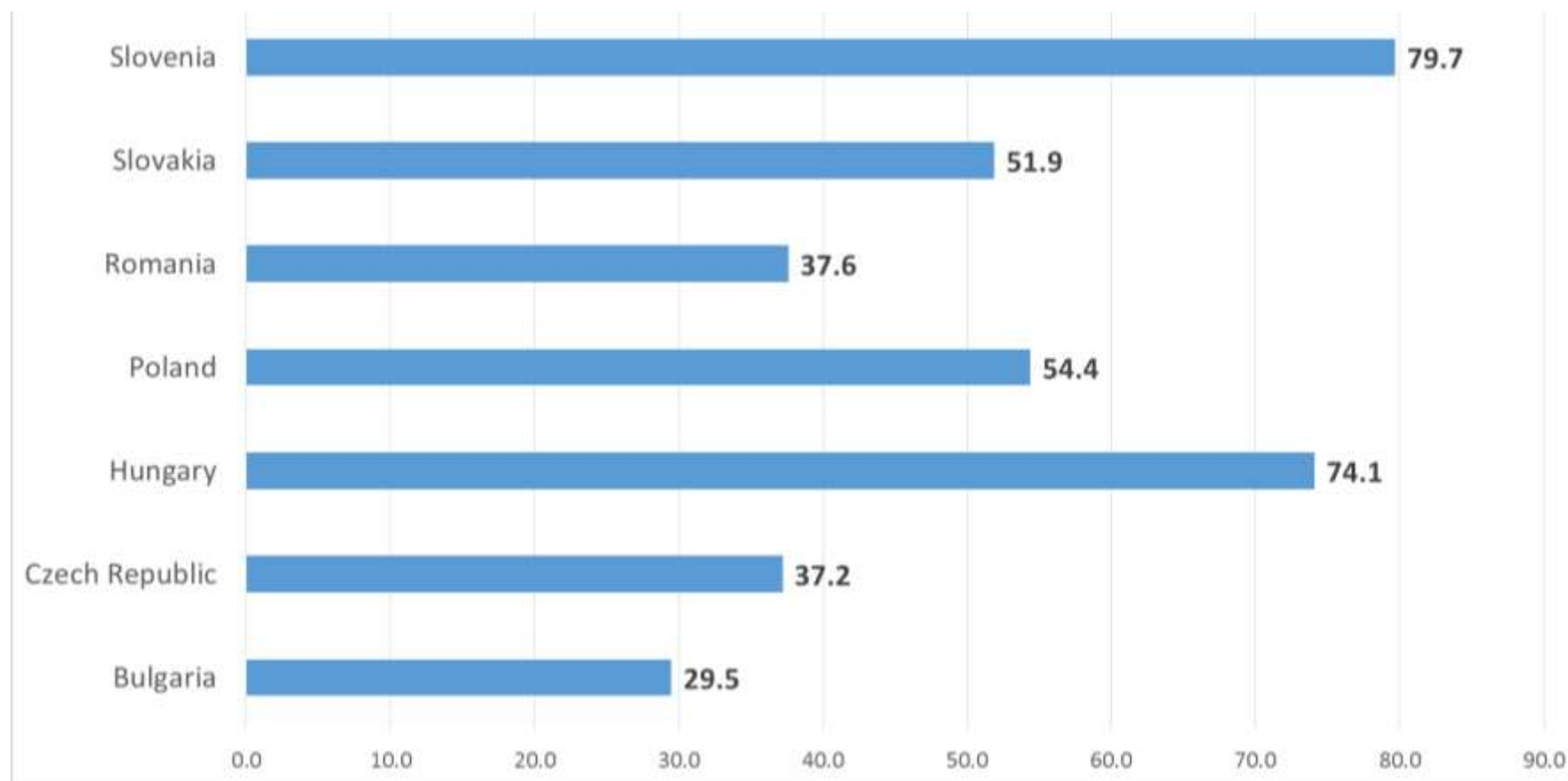
- In the last 10 years Romania has not managed to reduce the disparities with the Euro-Zone in what concerns the economic well-being of its citizens
- Even though in absolute terms Romania has seen a progress in terms of GDP after the EU integration, this does not reflect in the GDP/capita
- Compared to other CEE countries, Romania is only above Bulgaria in terms of GDP/capita, but has had a modest growth in comparison with Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Hungary or Slovakia
- There are regions in Romania, that barely reach 40% of Bucharest's performance in terms of GDP per capita



The economic effects of EU integration in Romania – average growth, great inequalities

- Compared to other CEE countries, Romania is performing well in terms of public debt, being placed on third place after Slovenia and Slovakia
- While countries such as the Czech Republic and Bulgaria have managed to reduce their public debt, in Romania the value of the debt increases year by year

Public debt in CEE Countries (2016)





The economic effects of EU integration in Romania – average growth, great inequalities

- Starting January 2009 until November 2016 - constant growth of the absorption of European funds, but this growth has been slow – Romania has barely absorbed 45.5% of the European funds
- Romania is not one of the best players when talking about absorption

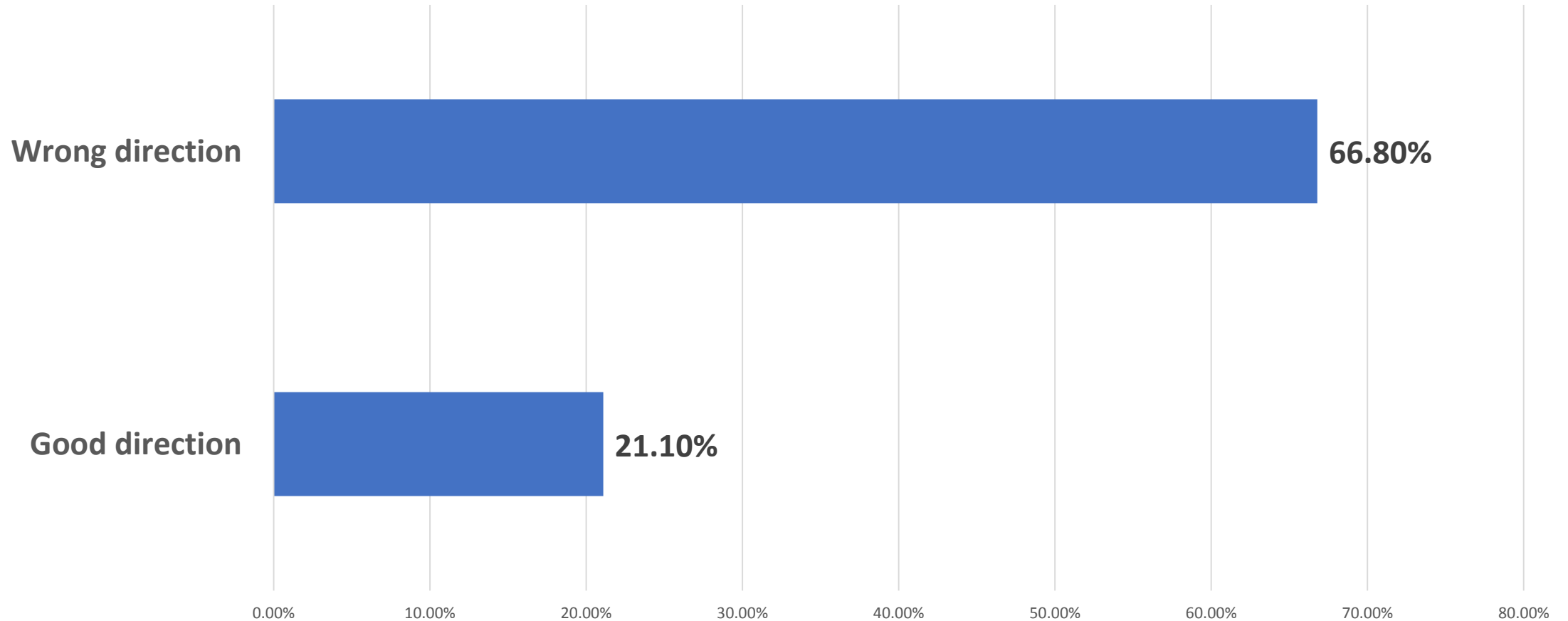


Pessimistic economic evaluations and soft-Euro-optimism

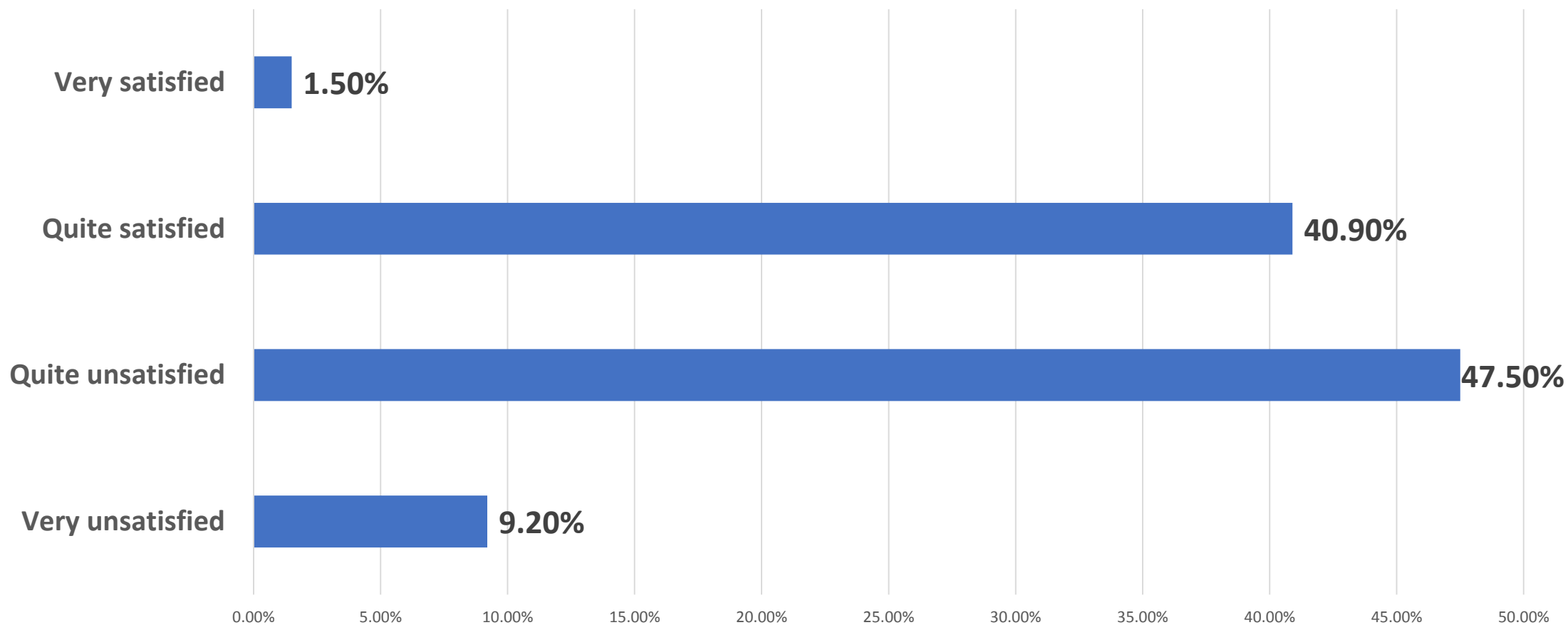
- The data collected through the national survey show a rather pessimistic view of the Romanian citizens over the economic growth following EU integration



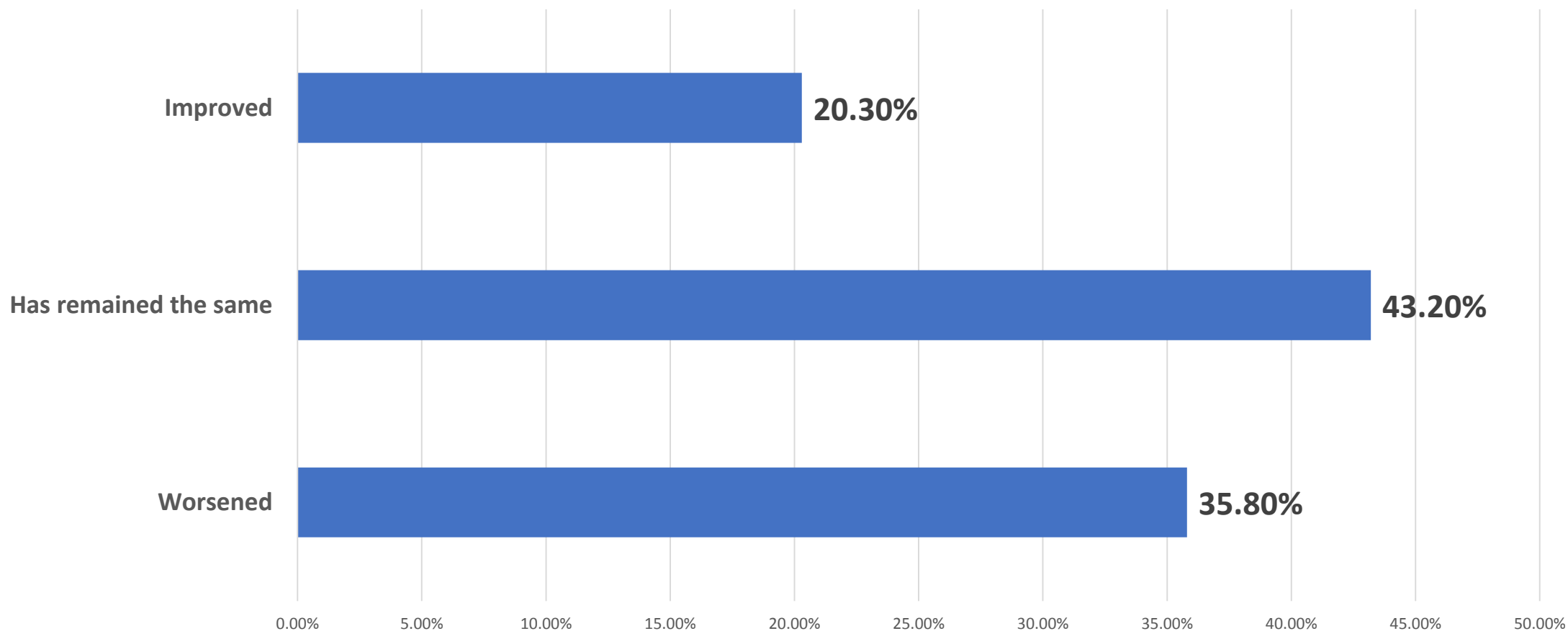
Direction Romania is heading



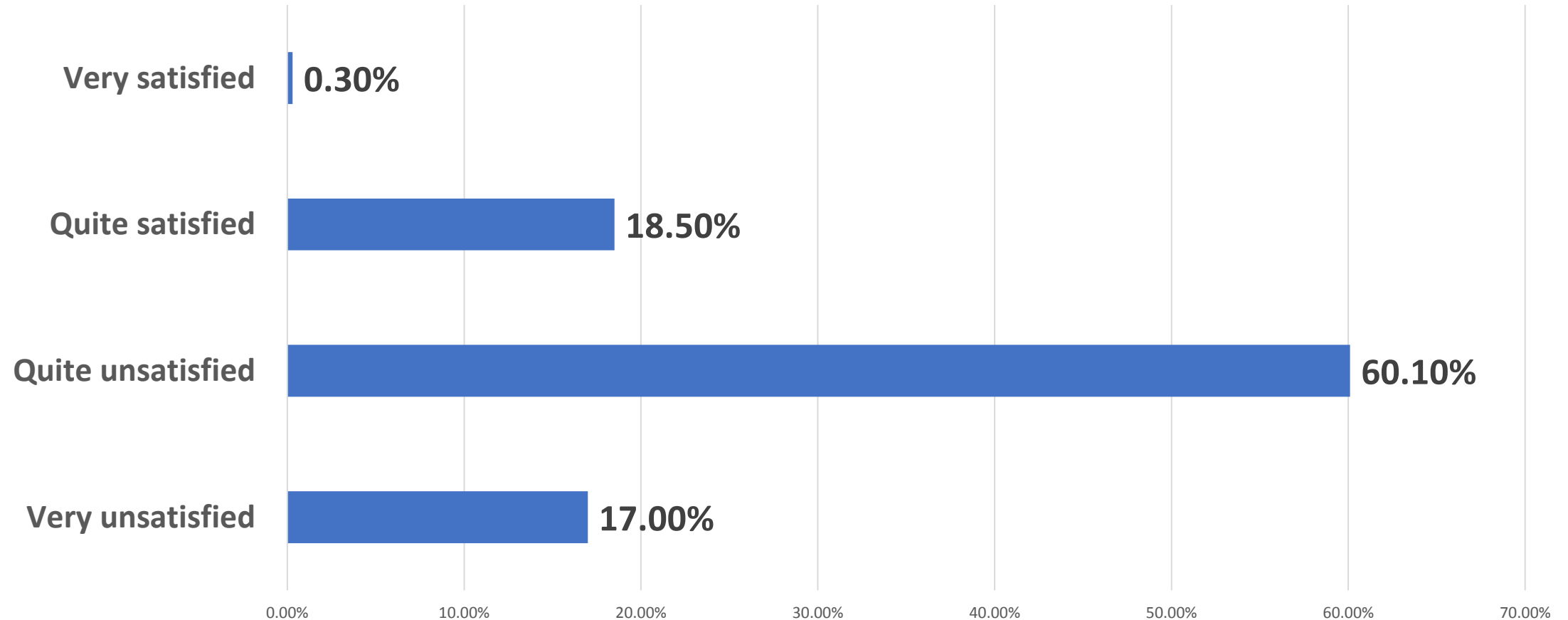
Life satisfaction



Evaluation of personal economic evolution

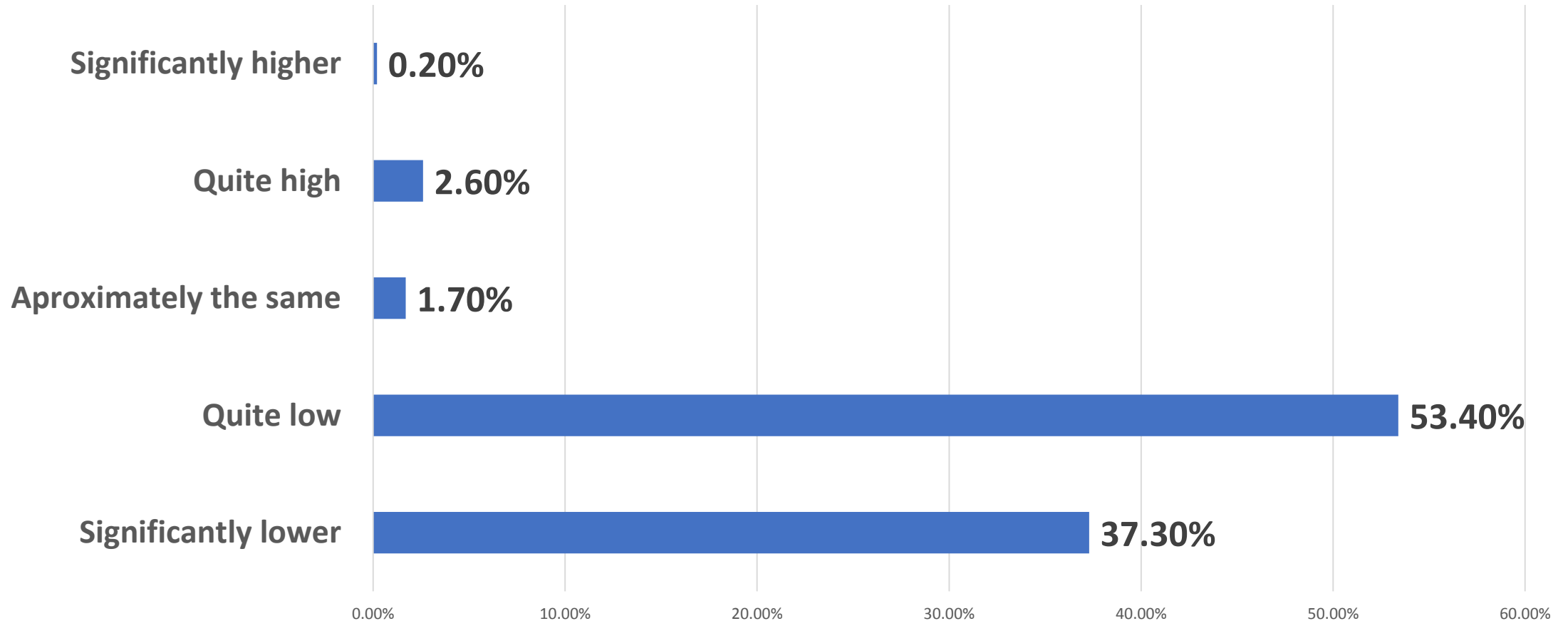


Level of satisfaction with Romania's economic growth



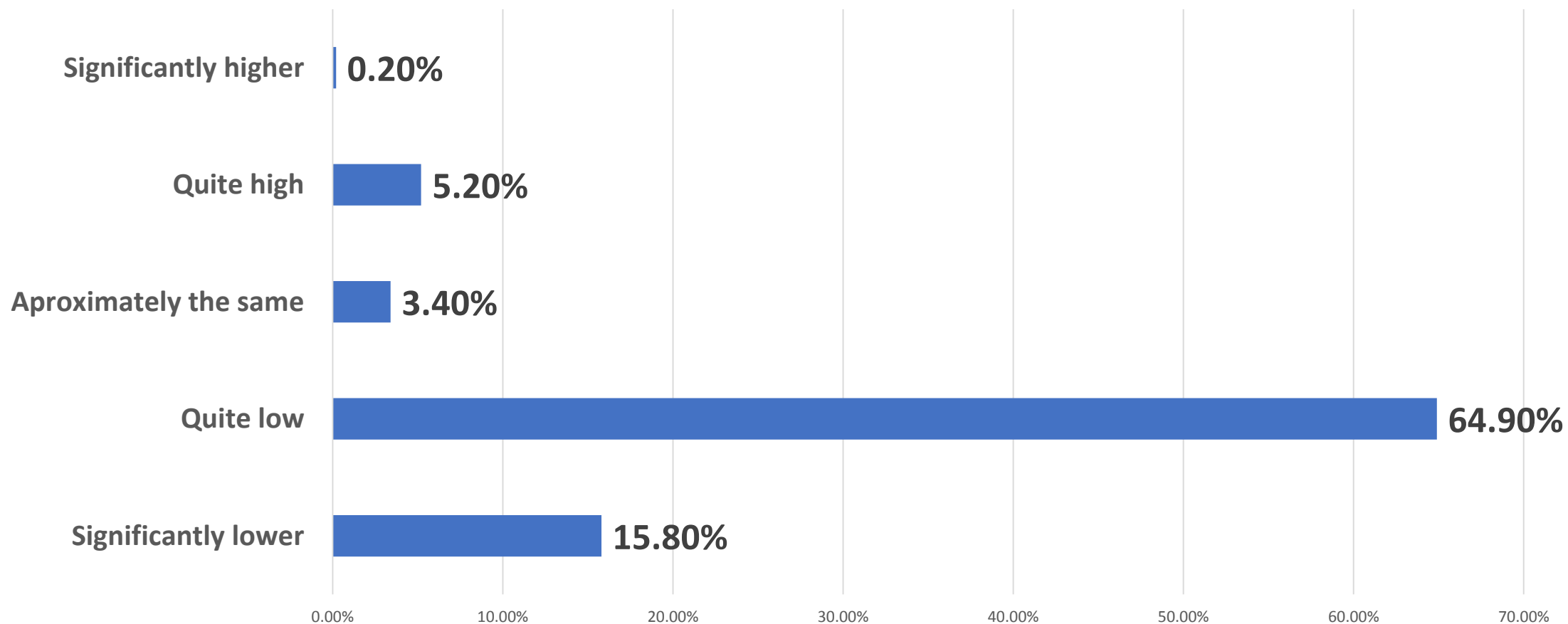


Romania's economic growth vs. EU member states

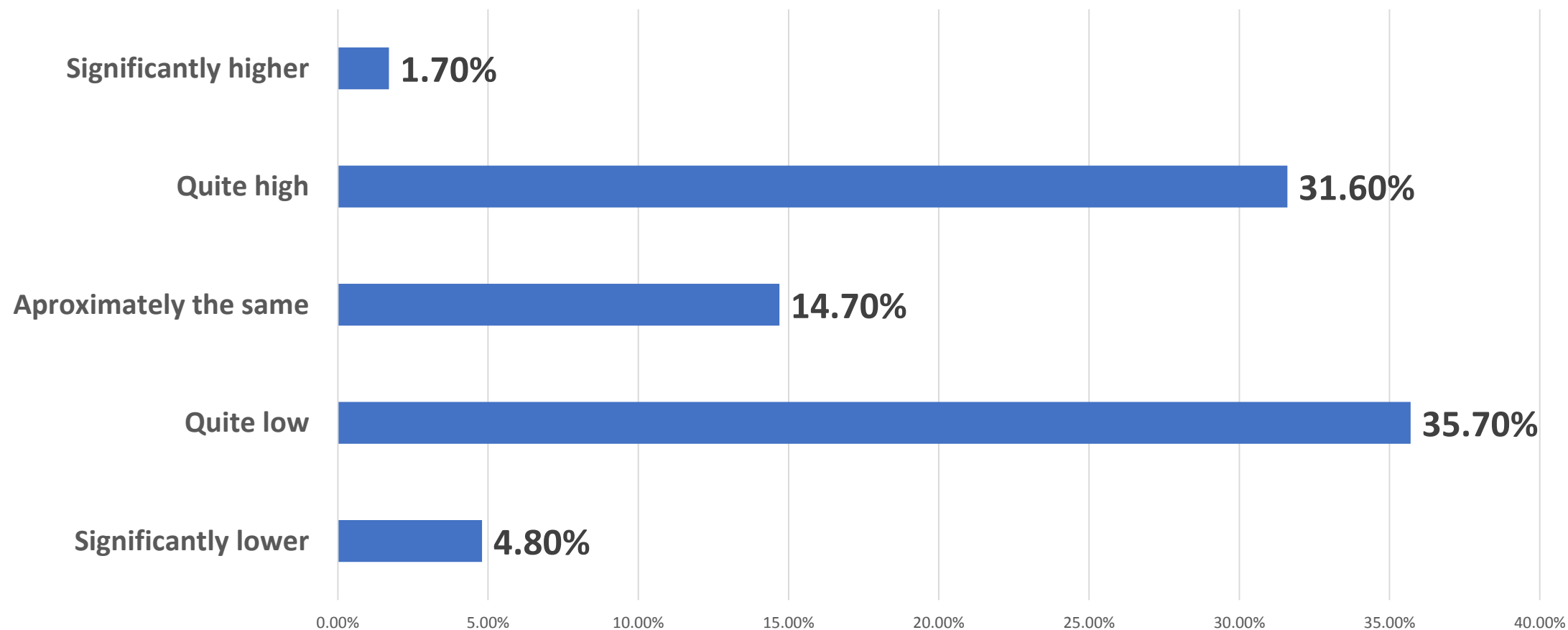




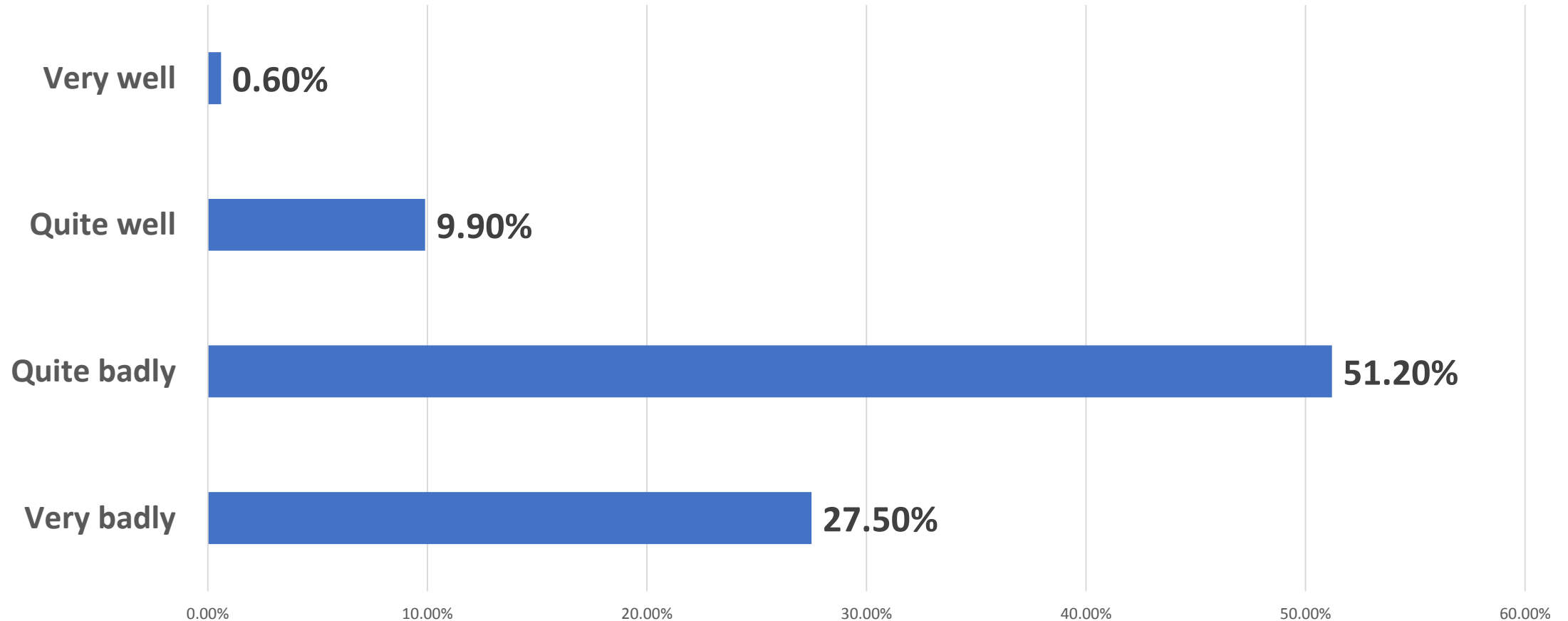
Romania's economic growth vs. CEE countries



Romania's economic growth since 2007

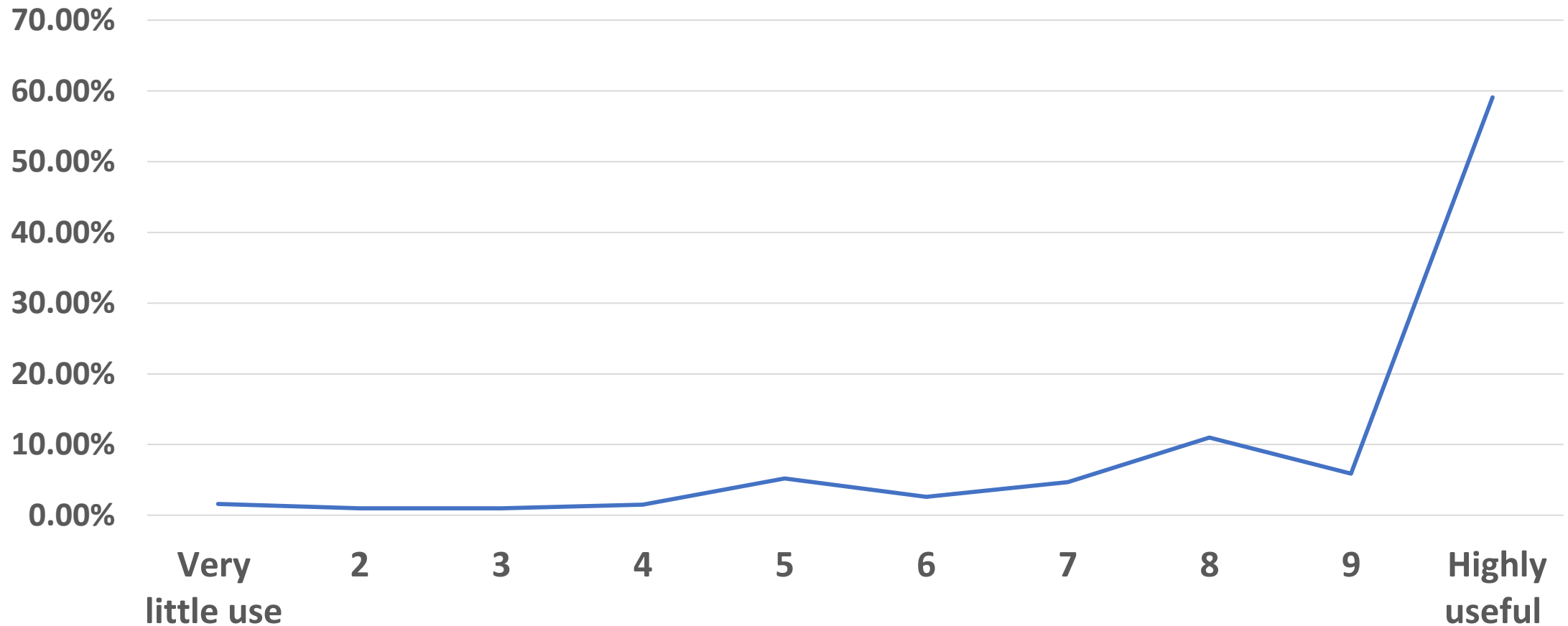


Romanian's evaluation of Government's spending of public money





Usefulness of EU funds on economic growth



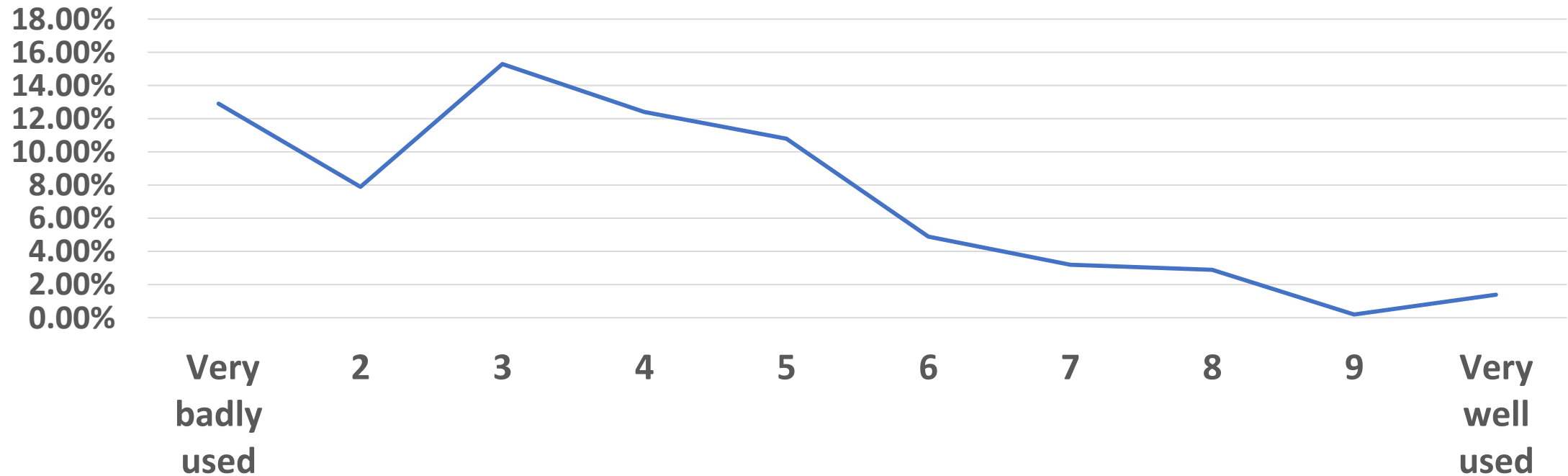


Use of EU funds for Romania's economic growth

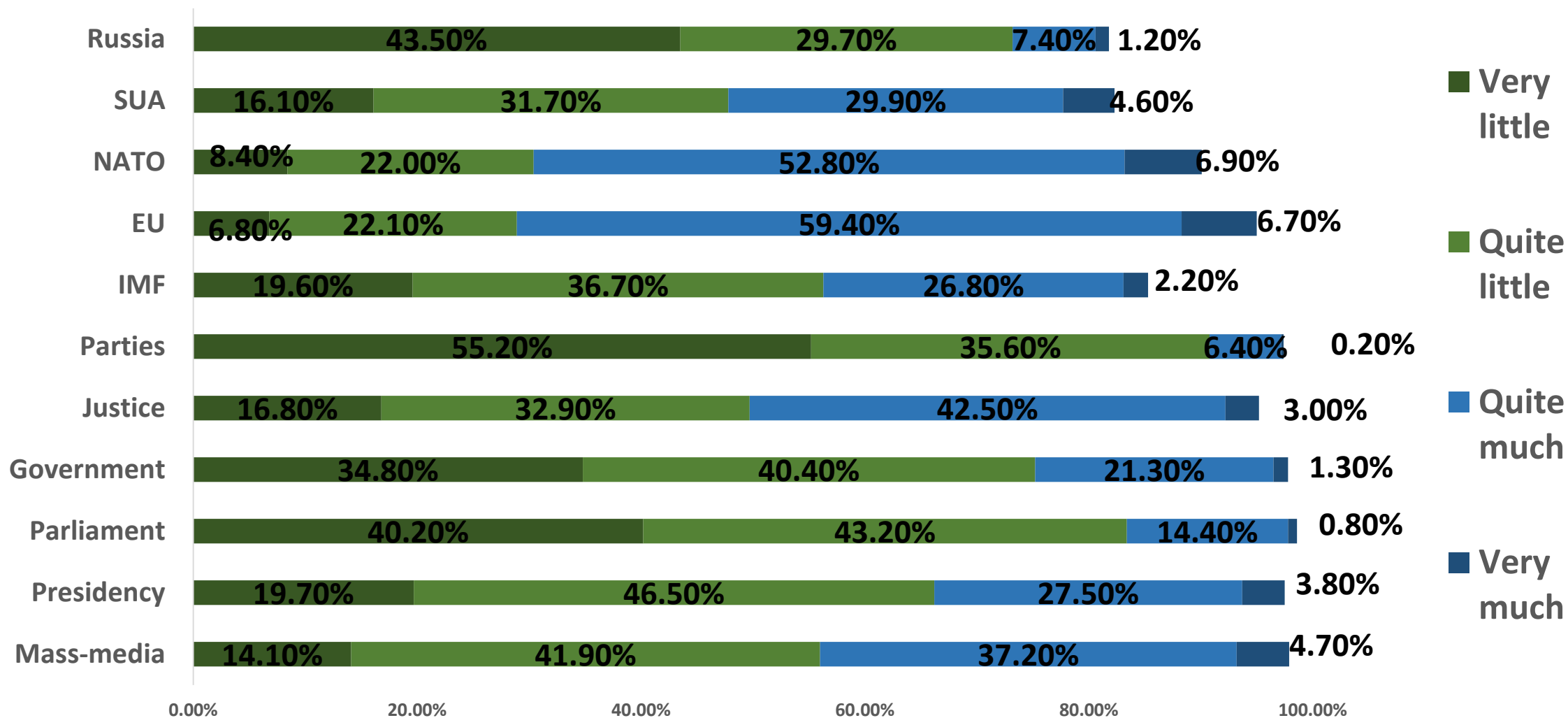




Use of EU funds for Romania's economic growth compared to other CEE countries



Overall trust





Conclusions

- The results of this study show little support for the utilitarian approach of EU support among Romanian citizens – latent utilitarian evaluations
- Romanian citizens have a pessimistic evaluation over the economic performance of the country compared to other EU members states, and state that Romania is heading in a wrong direction
- Romanian citizens tend to trust supranational organization such as the EU or NATO more than they trust the Presidency, Parliament, Government, or the internal Justice system
- The lack of trust in the Government can be associated with a lack of satisfaction with its policies and ability to adequately manage the public money



Conclusions

- The symbolic meaning of EU membership, which is perceived as desirable compared to other geopolitical options
- In Romania, where EU political issues are still scarcely discussed in the public sphere and where trust in the national political institutions and media system is low, EU continues to keep its aura of desirability



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