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Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies
Integrating Diversity in the European Union (InDivEU)

The Politics of Differentiated Integration: What do
Governments Want? Country Report - Hungary

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Integrating Diversity in the European Union (InDivEU) is a Horizon 2020 funded research project aimed at contributing concretely to the current debate on the 'Future of Europe' by assessing, developing and testing a range of models and scenarios for different levels of integration among EU member states. InDivEU begins from the assumption that managing heterogeneity and deep diversity is a continuous and growing challenge in the evolution of the EU and the dynamic of European integration.

The objective of InDivEU is to maximize the knowledge of Differentiated Integration (DI) on the basis of a theoretically robust conceptual foundations accompanied by an innovative and integrated analytical framework, and to provide Europe's policy makers with a knowledge hub on DI. InDivEU combines rigorous academic research with the capacity to translate research findings into policy design and advice.

InDivEU comprises a consortium of 14 partner institutions coordinated by the Robert Schuman Centre at the European University Institute, where the project is hosted by the European Governance and Politics Programme (EGPP). The scientific coordinators of InDivEU are Brigid Laffan (Robert Schuman Centre) and Frank Schimmelfennig (ETH Zürich).

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Abstract

This paper evaluates the salience of differentiated integration (DI) and the positions of successive Hungarian governments since the country's EU accession. It finds that DI has a low-salience and tends to come up in relation to specific events or policy debates. DI-related discussions rarely cross the bounds of the parliamentary arena and references to DI in government programmes, prime minister speeches and European Council statements are rare. At the conceptual level, DI salience peaked in 2017, which can be attributed to the debates on the future of Europe, even though Hungary did not officially participate in this process. The European Public Prosecutor's Office has been the most important DI-related issue in the Hungarian context, linked also to broader problems of corruption and democratic backsliding in the country. In terms of DI positions, these tend to reflect a government-opposition pattern. More specifically, the opposition vocally rejects the concepts of 'two-speed Europe,' 'multiple-speed Europe' and most of all 'two-tier Europe' for fear that Hungary may be 'left out' or 'left behind' in Europe. On the other side, while successive Fidesz-governments have not embraced the concepts of two-speed or multiple-speed Europe per se, they have not completely rejected them either. Top government officials are particularly supportive of enhanced cooperation, which they view as a mechanism that empowers the Member States.

Keywords

Differentiated integration; Hungary; European Union; government; EPPO

Summary of Results

I. Salience

The salience of differentiated integration (DI) in Hungary is low. A slight increasing trend can be observed since the country's accession to the European Union, but this is primarily due to the very low salience in the years immediately after the accession (roughly the period 2004-2010). Instead, the ebbs and flows of DI salience are tied to specific events or policy debates. At the conceptual level, salience peaked in 2017, which can be attributed to the debates on the future of Europe, even though Hungary did not officially participate in this process. The most important DI-related issue that drove salience at the level of mechanisms and instances has been the debate on the European Public Prosecutor's Office. This was tied to a broader problematisation of political corruption, a mismanagement of EU funds and democratic backsliding in the country. Other relatively salient DI instances have been the EU's response to the euro crisis (2012) and the Prüm convention (2007). In Hungary, DI-related debates rarely cross the bounds of the parliamentary arena and references to DI in government programmes, prime minister speeches and European Council statements are practically non-existent.

II. Position

In Hungary, DI positions reflect a government-opposition pattern. The opposition vocally rejects the concepts of 'two-speed Europe,' 'multiple-speed Europe' and most of all 'two-tier Europe.' The country's peripheral position, situated as it is at the outer border of the EU and outside the euro area, fuels fears of being left behind or being left out of the club of powerful Member States. The opposition sees the Euroscepticism of the Fidesz leadership as further entrenching this unequal relationship and has consistently argued in favour of instruments that would close this gap, e.g. adopting the euro or joining the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO). On the other side, while successive Fidesz-governments have not embraced the concepts of two-speed or multiple-speed Europe per se, they have not completely rejected them either. In their most recent statements, top government officials, including the Prime Minister, have tended to present DI as a *fait accompli*, in relation to which Hungary should take a 'pragmatic' position. They have cast enhanced cooperation, in particular, as a mechanism that has the potential to empower the Member States to choose their pace and extent of integration according to their 'national interest.' This meshes well with the Fidesz-led government's stated preference for a 'Europe of nations,' and is also compatible with regional alliance patterns, such as the Visegrád Four, in which the participating countries have heavily invested as a means to gain increased influence in Europe.

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1. Introduction

This report investigates the salience of differentiated integration (DI) in Hungarian government discourse between 2004 and 2019. It also probes into the position of Hungarian governments on the issue of DI in the years 2008, 2012 and 2017-2020.

The report distinguishes three levels of abstraction in government discourse on DI. **First**, two different models of DI are distinguished at the conceptual level. On the one hand, the ‘multi-speed EU’ model depicts DI as a temporary phenomenon and implies that all Member States (MSs) will ultimately reach the same level of integration. On the other hand, the ‘multi-end EU’ model depicts DI as a potentially permanent feature of European integration. In this model, the MSs do not necessarily strive to reach similar levels of integration. Instead, each MS can ‘pick and choose’ to adjust its own level of integration to national preferences and capacities. **Second**, the analysis focuses on mechanisms of DI. On the one hand, the enhanced cooperation mechanism allows a limited group of MSs – under certain conditions – to pursue deeper integration without having to involve all MSs. On the other hand, the ‘opt-out’ mechanism allows MSs to refrain from participating in common policies. In short, enhanced cooperation allows a MS to integrate more than other MSs, while ‘opt-outs’ allow a Member State to integrate less than other MSs. **Finally**, the analysis looks at various instances of differentiated policies and policy fields. A total of twenty-one instances are included in the analysis. They are grouped in four different categories: (a) instances of enhanced cooperation, (b) instances of opt-out policy fields, (c) instances of inter se agreements and (d) instances of external agreements. Inter se agreements are agreements which EU Member States conclude outside the framework of the European Union. External agreements are agreements between the EU and non-EU states.

The results are based on an analysis of various government documents (Appendix 1). Six document categories were selected to cover a broad spectrum of venues and government actors. From the more abstract-programmatic to the more specific, the report looks at what government programmes say about DI, at what prime ministers say about DI and at parliamentary debates on DI. More specifically, we examined government programmes, prime minister first speeches in parliament after the formation of new governments, prime minister speeches and debates during Hungary’s Council presidency and parliamentary (committee) debates.

In terms of sources, a general observation is **there is a lack of them**. The illiberal tendencies of the ruling Fidesz party, which has dominated Hungarian politics since 2010, are well-known and well-documented. As part of this process, Fidesz has stopped publishing programmatic documents, stifling public debate. More specifically, the Fidesz-led government **has abolished the law requiring electoral winners to submit government programmes**, which would then be extensively debated in parliament. This leaves us with only two government programmes and debates on them for the years 2006 and 2010, but not 2014 and 2018. As part of this pattern, Hungary was also in the minority of Member States which **did not participate in the debates on the future of Europe**. For 2014 and 2018 we used as substitutes the speeches made by opposition leaders in parliament at the first sitting of the new parliaments before the start of daily business. Furthermore, in order to somewhat balance the lack of sources, two additional documents were included in the analysis of government positions (Category 7 in Appendix 1), comprising the transcripts of press conferences in which Prime Minister Viktor Orbán explicitly discussed DI.

The salience of DI models, DI mechanisms and DI instances is assessed by counting key words in the above-mentioned documents (Appendix 2). The assumption is that the more a government talks about DI, the more relevant it is. While key word counts in government programmes and PM speeches show the salience of DI at specific moments in time, the analysis of parliamentary debates allows us to identify trends over time and situational peaks. To enhance the reliability of the findings, the key word counts were triangulated with a close reading of selected key documents.

The key words were translated from English to Hungarian by the author. Multiple meaning-preserving translations and spellings were used in order to capture as much as possible salience, measured by the frequency with which political actors refer to these terms. We note that, first, some of the terms referring to DI (e.g. ‘concentric circles’ and ‘variable geometry’) are rarely if ever used in Hungarian. It is possible that the meaning of these terms is conveyed in other ways, e.g. by periphrasis, which cannot be fully captured in a key word-based search. Second, Hungarian speakers do not always meaningfully distinguish between the various forms of DI that we wish to keep separate for the purposes of this analysis. For example, the terms ‘two-speed,’ ‘multiple-speed’ and (more rarely) ‘two-tier’ Europe are sometimes treated as synonyms and at other times as alternatives. Furthermore, the term ‘two-tier Europe’ does not have a straightforward version in Hungarian. It translates into ‘two-level’ or ‘two-lane’ Europe, neither of which have produced hits in the repositories. The variant that is, however, used with some frequency is ‘second-class membership,’ which carries a pejorative connotation. In this report the term ‘two-tier’ refers to this alternative.

The key word-based searches were conducted in the repository of the website of the Hungarian National Assembly (available online at <https://www.parlament.hu>), which contains the minutes of parliamentary debates, including the **plenary sessions** and the meetings of the **European Affairs Committee**. The analytical window extends from 2004, the year of Hungary’s accession to the EU, to the end of the 2019 calendar year (note that the European Affairs Committee minutes are only available from 2006 onwards).

Regarding government positions on DI, the results are based on a manual attitude analysis of parliamentary debates. To this end, references to DI key words in parliamentary debates were manually coded as negative, neutral or positive. The second section of the report details the results of the salience analysis. The third section details the results of the position analysis.

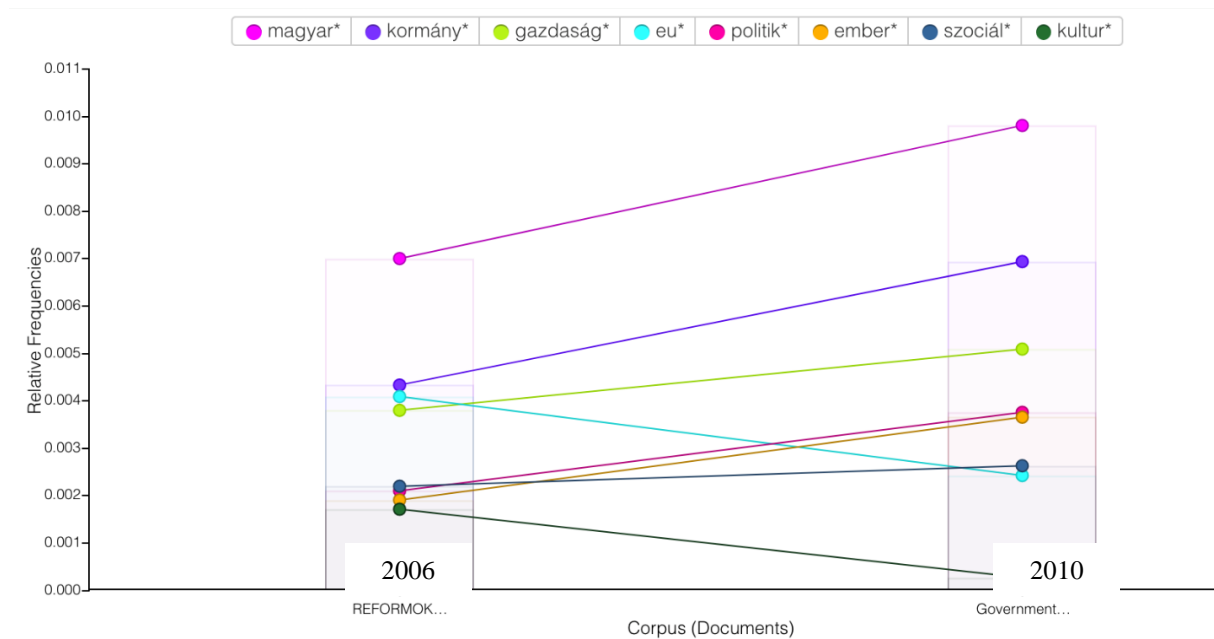
2. How salient is DI for Hungarian governments?

We begin by assessing the degree to which Hungarian governments talk about DI and at which level of abstraction. We look at (1) government programmes, (2) prime minister first speeches, (3) parliamentary debates and (4) prime minister European Council statements, in this order. The methods employed are computer-assisted word count analysis and holistic grading. To foreshadow our results, we note that categories (1), (2) and (4) contain an extremely low number of references to DI. In fact, no Hungarian prime minister has ever referred to DI models in any of the contexts analysed here. For this reason, our computer-assisted word count analysis was used to assess whether and in what ways governments refer to EU-related issues at all in these documents rather than focusing narrowly on DI.

2.1 Government programmes

We begin with the analysis of government programmes (**Figure 1**). We note that the 2010 government programme submitted by Fidesz referred less frequently to the EU compared to the 2006 government programme submitted by the Socialists, with EU-related references falling from third to seventh place compared to the selected key words.

Figure 1 - Government programmes, 2006 and 2010, EU in context key words, relative frequencies



Notes: English translation of key words from left to right: Hung*, government*, econ*, eu*, polit*, people*, social*, cultu*. Documents used for the analysis from left to right: 2006 government programme, 2010 government programme

A closer qualitative analysis confirmed that DI was not on the political agenda of Hungarian governments for the entirety of the time period covered in this report. The 2006 programme of the Socialist government made one mention of ‘future of the EU’ in a very positive context: “Over the last four years, the international weight and prestige of our country has increased. We are not just participants, but active shapers of Europe’s future.” The programme also made three mentions of the Schengen Area, expressing an unequivocal desire to join it. Conversely, the 2010 government programme submitted by Fidesz made no reference to DI at all.

As was previously mentioned, there are no government programmes available for 2014 and 2018. We surmised that longitudinal patterns could be gathered from the first parliamentary speeches made by the newly elected prime ministers, but on close inspection it is hard to discern any meaningful trends. The only noteworthy development is a relative increase in mentions of the words ‘Hungarian’/‘Hungary’ and ‘people,’ which is probably driven by the Fidesz government’s populist outlook. We also observe a minor peak in economic issues in 2010, reflecting the ongoing economic crisis. A relative decrease in the salience of the ‘EU’ in 2010 seems temporary, and we see it pick up again in 2014 and 2018 (**Appendix 3**).

2.2 Key speeches by prime ministers

Next, we turn to an analysis of the Prime Minister’s speeches in the national and European parliaments on the occasion of taking over the presidency of the Council of the EU in 2011. Again, very few mentions were made of DI, but unsurprisingly EU-related issues appeared with higher frequency, especially in the European parliament (**Appendix 4**). An additional set of key words was used to analyse the salience of specific issues, such as EU enlargements, crises and democracy (**Appendix 5**). We note that the theme of ‘crisis’ runs through both prime minister speeches and the subsequent parliamentary debates. The theme of ‘enlargement’ is only relevant in the EU context while references to ‘government’ are only made in the national context. We also note a relatively high frequency of the key word ‘democracy,’ which is especially salient in the parliamentary context. The peak in the European Parliament reflects

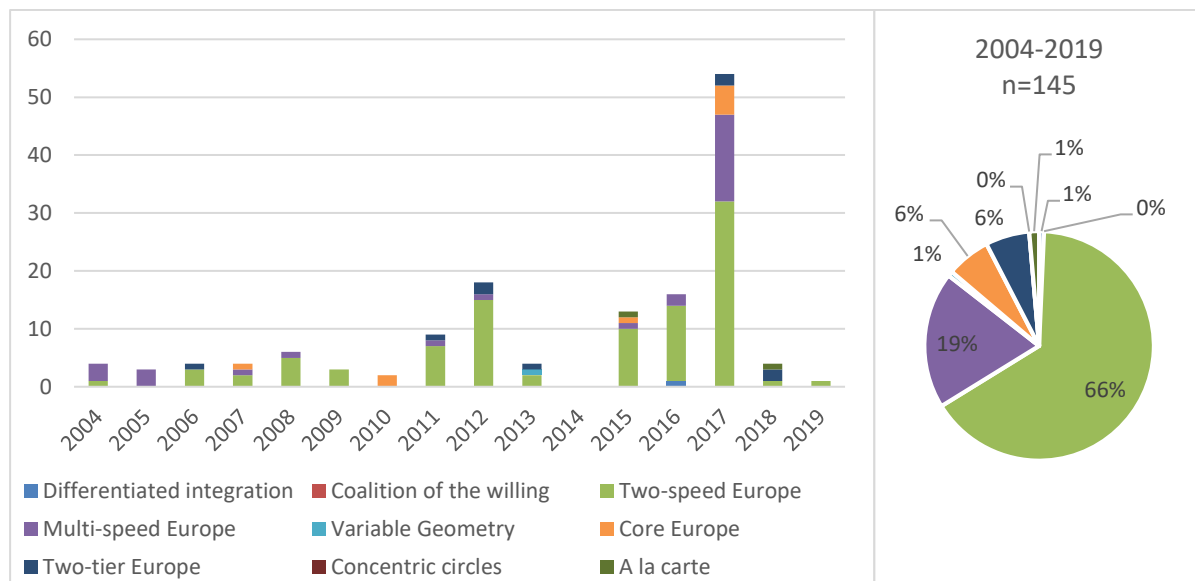
this institution’s early preoccupation with democratic backsliding in Hungary, for which a number of MEPs criticised Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

2.3 Parliamentary debates

Next, the analysis focuses on parliamentary debates between 2004 and 2019, in which salience was measured with a manual count of DI key words. For the plenary debates, the online repository of the Hungarian National Assembly was used. The minutes of the European Affairs Committee, which are available online starting from 2006, were downloaded as pdf documents and searched using Acrobat Reader’s Full Reader Search. As before, three sets of key words were used to capture DI at different levels of abstraction: models, mechanisms and instances.

We begin by plotting the frequency of key words referring to **DI models** over time. The resulting **Figure 2** demonstrates the low salience of DI in the Hungarian parliament, with a total of 145 references to it between 2004 and 2019. The salience varies over time and seems to increase from 2011 onwards, the year Hungary took the EU Council presidency, but in 2017 the trend reverses and low rates return in 2018 and 2019. References to DI models reach their peak in 2017 as a consequence of the debates on the Future of Europe (even though Hungary did not participate in them). The second highest peak in salience corresponds to the euro crisis (2012).

Figure 2 - The salience of conceptual keywords (DI models) in parliamentary debates

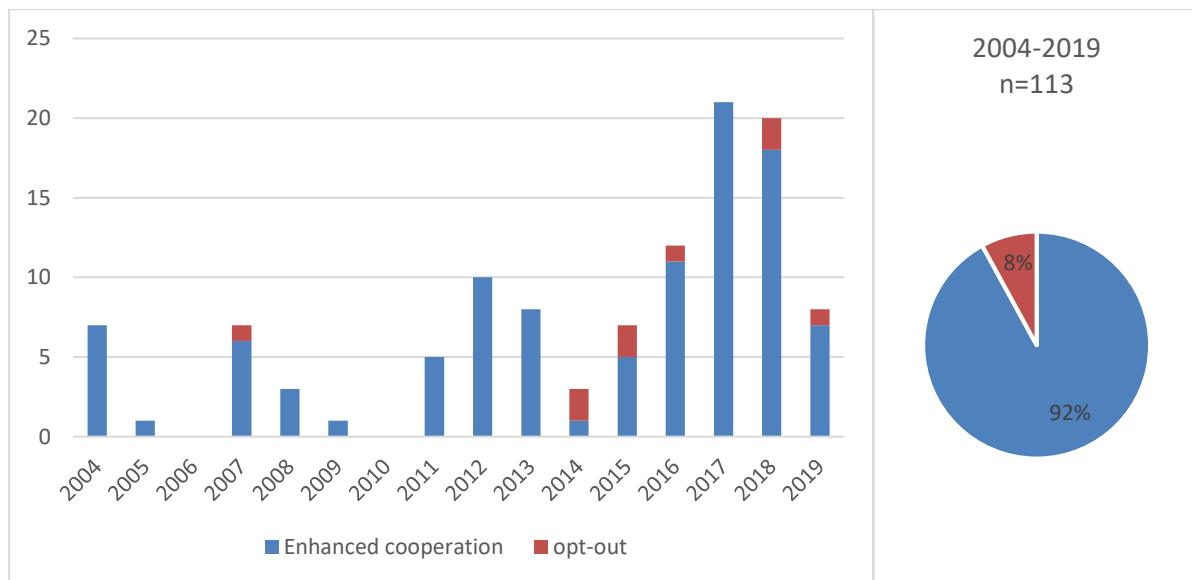


By far the most frequent DI model that came up in the debates was ‘two-speed Europe,’ which was followed by ‘multi-speed Europe,’ which together account for 85% of all the references to key words relating to DI models. Both terms belong to the ‘multiple speeds’ DI model and, as was also mentioned in the introduction, the two are sometimes used interchangeably. Terms describing the ‘multiple endpoints’ model of DI are second in frequency, with references to ‘two-tier Europe’ and ‘core Europe’ making up 12% of the mentions of DI models. A temporal breakdown into two peak years, 2012 and 2017 (Appendix 6), shows the increased sophistication with which DI is talked about in Hungary: not only do references to DI rise in number but also the distribution between the various models evens out over time, even though ‘two-speed Europe’ retains its leading position as the master DI concept in Hungary. Note also that the other key words referring to DI models are very rare in the Hungarian context.

To provide further context to the evaluation of DI models, the analysis then contrasted them with the incidence of the key phrase ‘future of Europe’ (Appendix 7). While in some years the two are on a par (including the two peaks in 2012 and 2017), in other years they appear to be independent, as, for example, in 2018 and 2019. These peaks can be attributed to the debates on the Future of Europe, in which the Hungarian government did not take part but which evidently did induce some reaction in the country. The peak we record in 2004 is linked to Hungary’s EU accession, while the 2007 peak is in part related to the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome.

Turning to the ‘enhanced co-operation’ and ‘opt-out’ DI mechanisms (Figure 3), we see that they are slightly less often discussed than DI models (145 versus 113 instances). The peak years are quite similar for both categories, but in the case of DI mechanisms we detect an increasing trend over time, especially since 2011. Breaking down the mechanisms, it becomes evident that ‘enhanced co-operation’ is much more often discussed in the Hungarian context than ‘opt-out’ (there is a chance that speakers may want to avoid anglicisms and refer to this term in ways that a key word-based search cannot capture).

Figure 3 - The salience of DI mechanisms in parliamentary debates



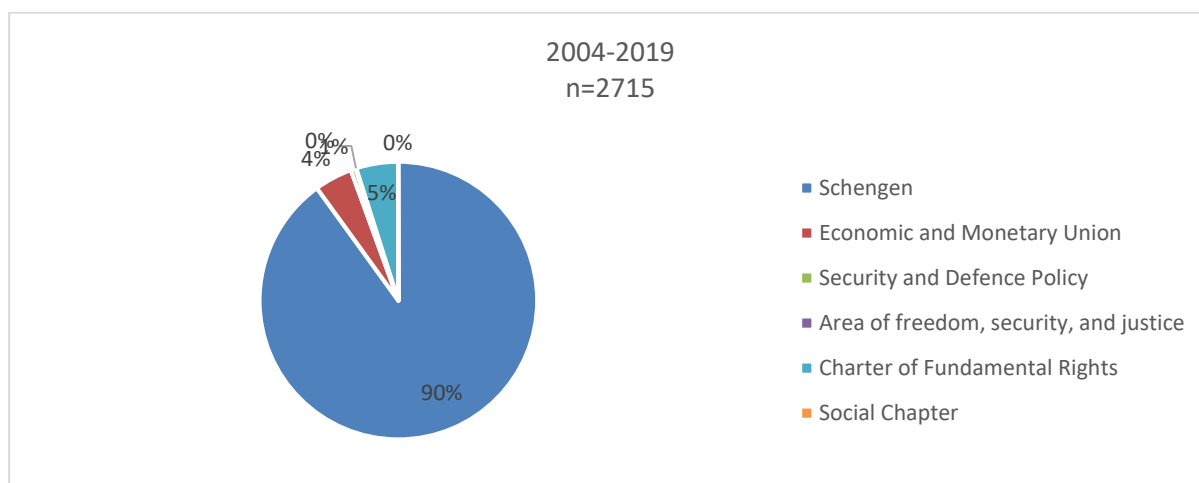
Next, the analysis focuses on instances of enhanced cooperation. The European Public Prosecutor’s Office has been by far the most salient instance of DI in Hungary (Figure 4). The only other instance that captured a significant amount of attention was the Financial Transaction Tax, which Hungary does not participate in.

Figure 4 - The salience of instances of enhanced cooperation in parliamentary debates



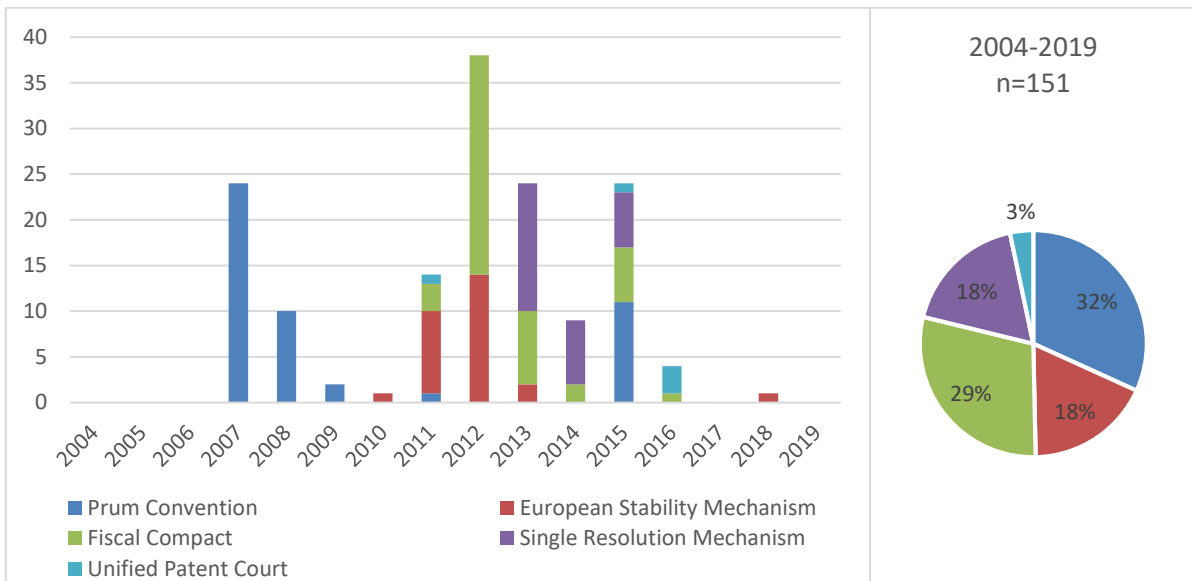
As **Figure 5** shows, key words related to opt-out policy fields represent the most numerous references to DI by far in our data (N=2715). They are driven by a high incidence of the key word ‘Schengen’ (N=2444). Note, however, that these instances are not with reference to specific policy debates but in broader contexts.

Figure 5 - The salience of opt-out policy fields in parliamentary debates



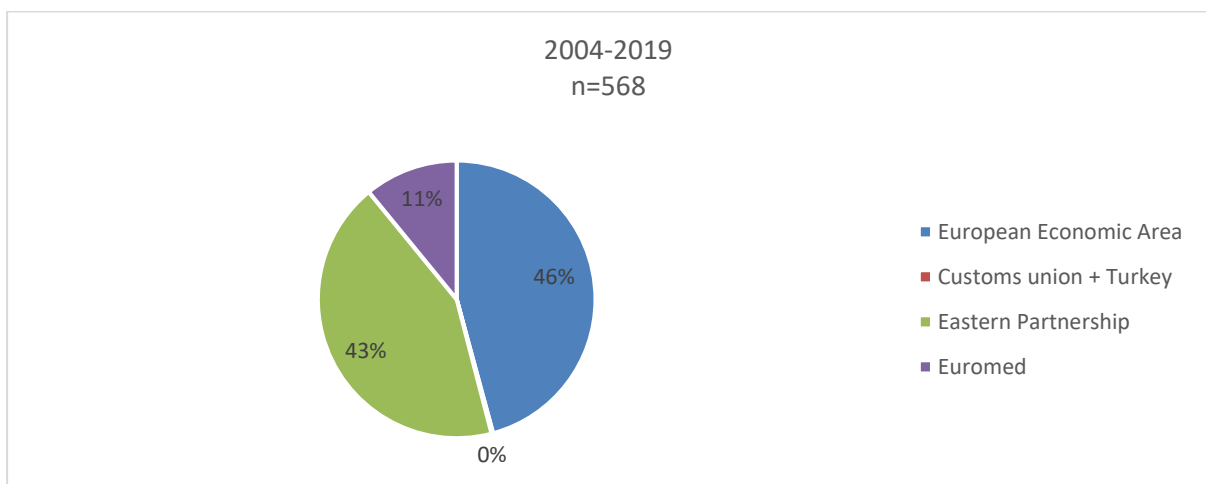
Next, we turn to an analysis of instances of *external DI*, such as inter se agreements and association agreements. The temporal analysis of all external DI key words presented in **Figure 6** shows that these appeared in Hungarian parliamentary debates in particular time periods and were linked to specific proposals. One cluster emerged in 2007-2008 and corresponds to the Prüm Convention (which also returned in 2015). A second cluster is related to the response to the euro crisis; it stretches between 2011 and 2015 and covers the debates relating to the European Stability Mechanism, the Fiscal Compact, and the Single Resolution Mechanism. Being outside the euro area, in Hungary these debates attracted little attention, with a total of 151 references in the entire period of interest.

Figure 6 - The salience of instances of inter se agreements in parliamentary debates



Finally, in terms of *external agreements*, we see that equal weight was placed on the EEA and on the Eastern Partnership, with Euromed gaining some visibility and the customs union with Turkey not being discussed.

Figure 7 - The salience of instances of external agreements in parliamentary debates



2.4 Prime minister Council statements

Finally, we examine prime minister Council statements delivered in parliament during the time period of interest (2004-2019). In these statements, the Prime Minister provides information about the contents and outcomes of European Council meetings. We note that Hungarian prime ministers do not deliver these statements in a systematic manner. Sometimes they reflect on the work of the Council while also taking stock of domestic developments, e.g. in conjunction with the opening of a new term in the first sitting of parliament in the autumn or spring. Given their sporadic nature, and since they are not separately categorised in the parliamentary records, we used specific key words to identify these speeches (e.g. 'European Council'), resulting in 16 documents in total.

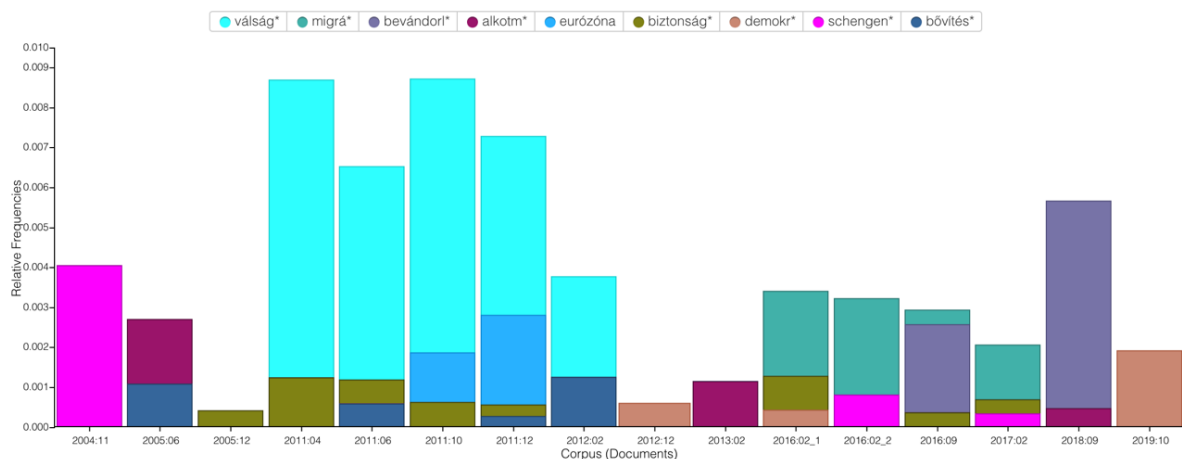
These statements are useful in that they are situated at the intersection between domestic and European politics, and therefore it can be reasonably assumed that prime ministers are likely to articulate their positions on EU membership and integration in them. That said, key word searches performed on these documents yielded only five references to DI in the entire corpus: ‘fiscal compact’ (1x), ‘unitary patent’ (1x), and ‘future of Europe’ (2x in 2005 and 1x in 2012). This further confirms the low salience of DI in Hungary.

Given the few references made to DI, we opted to look for more general EU-related key words in these documents. **Figure 8** presents the results. The two peaks correspond to two major European crises. The first and highest peak was driven by the euro crisis and is reflected in the spike in the frequency of the word ‘crisis’ itself. It is temporally concentrated in 2011 and is still quite high at the beginning of 2012, but afterwards it tapers off. This time period also corresponds with Hungary’s Council presidency, which may also explain why the Prime Minister made four such statements, which is by far the highest relative number of individual speeches.

The second peak in **Figure 8** corresponds to the European ‘migration crisis’ and is reflected in the increase in related key words: ‘bevándorlás’ and ‘bevándorló,’ which are the established terms for ‘migrant’ and ‘migration’ in Hungarian and ‘migráció’ and ‘migráns,’ which are neologisms that carry a more pejorative connotation.

Other noteworthy developments are the relatively high salience of ‘Schengen’ in the year of Hungary’s EU accession, the moderate increase in salience regarding ‘enlargement’ in 2011-2012 and a spike in references to ‘democracy’ in 2019, which are factually related to local elections taking place that year in Hungary, but also to some extent are meant to rebuke augmenting criticism of democratic backsliding in the country.

Figure 8 - The salience of EU-related issues in PM Council updates 2004-2019 (relative frequencies)



Notes: English translation of key words from left to right: crisis*, migration* (version I), migration* (version II), constitution*, eurozone, security*, demok*, Schengen, enlargement*. Documents used for the analysis from left to right: 16 prime minister Council updates, ordered chronologically

3. The Hungarian government’s position on DI

We now turn to the positions of successive Hungarian governments regarding DI. We examine parliamentary (committee) debates that contain references to the most salient DI models in the case of Hungary (‘two-speed’ and ‘multi-speed’ Europe for multiple speeds and ‘core Europe’ and ‘two-tier’ Europe for multiple ends) and DI mechanisms (i.e. ‘enhanced cooperation’ and ‘opt-out’). Given the almost complete silence of the Prime Minister regarding DI, the transcripts of two press conferences in

which Viktor Orbán directly addressed DI were added. The selected documents are limited to three points in time (2008, 2012 and 2017-2020) and amount to a total of **69 items**.

The analysis proceeds in two steps. First, we present an overview of the distribution of positive, neutral and negative statements regarding DI models and DI mechanisms with the help of qualitative data analysis software (QDA Miner Lite). This is followed by a qualitative assessment of selected statements. The discussion proceeds in chronological order.

3.1 Quantitative overview of government positions

Regarding DI models, an analysis of parliamentary (committee) debates shows that their assessment is generally **negative** but with some qualifications (Tables 1 and 2). The negative evaluation of DI applies more to ‘multi-end Europe’ (which is rejected across the board) and less so to ‘multi-speed Europe’, even though the latter is far more salient overall. In addition, ‘two-speed Europe’ is more negatively evaluated than ‘multi-speed Europe’ because of fears that in a two-fold distinction Hungary would end up on the disadvantaged side, while multiple speeds would allow for more room for manoeuvre.

There are significant differences in the assessments of DI by the government and the opposition, with the government more often taking neutral positions and even supporting DI models on occasions, while the Hungarian opposition tends to challenge DI models, fearing the prospect that other Member States will move ahead without Hungary.

Neutral accounts are also quite widespread. Some of these refer to factual statements, passing mentions, questions and clarifications solicited or provided about DI. We note, however, that neutrality in the Hungarian context does not reflect uncertainty, as, for example, in the case of Ireland. On the contrary, the participants seem to have a good grasp of the nature and potential effects of DI. Instead, neutral positions, especially those expressed by the government, reflect appraisals of DI models **weighing their potential advantages and disadvantages in terms of Hungarian national interests** (and the government’s political projects).

In terms of a temporal trend, positions related to DI seem to **polarise over time**, as Hungarian governments become more sympathetic to the idea of DI models, while the opposition remains negative (but this is quite conjectural, due to the low number of observations).

Figure 9 - Position on multi-speed Europe (two-speed + multi-speed)

(n = 51)	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Government	11	13	4
Opposition	18	5	0
2008	4	1	0
2012	10	3	0
2017-2020	15	14	4

Figure 10 - Position on multi-end Europe (core Europe + two-tier)

(n = 19)	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Government	10	2	0
Opposition	4	3	0
2008	0	0	0
2012	5	2	0
2017-2020	9	3	0

The evaluation of DI mechanisms is overall more positive than that of DI models (Tables 3 and 4). Enhanced cooperation emerged as an important reference point for DI in the post-2017 period, but it was primarily tied to debates about Hungary’s participation in the EPPO and less to the debate on the future of Europe (although the latter was still relevant). A clear government-opposition pattern emerges in this category too, with the opposition embracing enhanced cooperation and arguing for Hungary to make use of its concrete manifestations. As with DI models, the government’s position is more neutral than positive due to a predominance of factual statements, explanations and clarifications related to enhanced cooperation.

We register some ideological differences within the opposition, namely between the radical right on the one hand and the liberals and socialists on the other hand. While the latter oppose DI for fear of being left behind in the process of EU integration, a project that they fully support, Jobbik’s reticence stems from its extreme nationalism, Euroscepticism and anti-capitalist ideology, which imply a view of DI as potentially damaging national sovereignty. However, ideological differences have abated over time, in part because of Jobbik’s efforts to rebrand itself as a less radical formation and to move away from the far-right fringe. Emblematic of this shift has been the party’s switch from opposing Hungary’s membership of the EPPO to vocally supporting it (we discuss this in more detail below).

Figure 11 - Position on enhanced cooperation

(n = 31)	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Government	1	10	3
Opposition	1	2	14
2008	0	1	1
2012	1	4	0
2017-2020	1	7	16

The question of opt-outs from common European policies has never been salient in the Hungarian context, as Table 4 shows.

Figure 12 - Position on "opt-outs"

(n = 3)	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Government	0	2	1
Opposition	0	0	0
2008	0	0	0
2012	0	0	0
2017-2020	0	2	1

3.2 Qualitative assessment of government positions

The qualitative analysis further unpacks the quantitative results regarding DI-related positions in Hungary. One major factor that informs the assessments by political elite members is a perception that DI poses a risk to Hungary, a Member State already situated on the periphery of Europe which could be marginalised and left behind as other countries move forward. The opposition – especially but not only Hungary’s anti-capitalist far-right party, Jobbik – rejects DI models because they are seen as the latest manifestation of Hungary’s secondary status, stemming from entrenched inequalities and structural imbalances among the EU Member States. This is compounded in successive Fidesz governments’ Eurosceptic rhetoric and apparent lack of commitment to taking integrative steps (e.g. a recurring theme is the reluctance to introduce the euro). Conversely, the Fidesz governments tend to take a less negative more pragmatic stance vis-à-vis DI models as a *fait accompli*.

The government and the opposition generally support the enhanced cooperation mechanism, but for different reasons. The government sees it as an effective means to pick and choose policies that suit its agenda while being free to discard the ‘uncomfortable’ ones, such as the EPPO. Enhanced cooperation also fits with the government’s orientation towards the V4 regional alliance, which sees this club as an effective instrument to increase political influence in the EU. The opposition supports the use of enhanced cooperation not only in principle but also in practice as an instrument that would enable Hungary to gain a more favourable place in a transforming EU.

3.2.1 2008: The Lisbon Treaty

By 2008 Hungary had for a few years been an EU Member State led by a left-liberal coalition government. Support for the EU was widespread among both the political elite and the broader public. Fidesz, which was the largest opposition party at the time, had not yet begun to pivot towards Euroscepticism. While the radical right Jobbik had risen to prominence in the protracted anti-government protests that broke out in 2006 prompted by a major political scandal, the party’s electoral breakthrough would only come in the 2009 EP election.

In this context, DI was barely discussed in the Hungarian parliament, with the government taking a neutral-to-positive approach, and the opposition seeking to make sense of DI and its potential effects on Hungary’s future position in the EU.

The government’s position

More specifically, if they talked about DI at all, government officials offered assessments of it such as the following:

“[...] the Treaty of Lisbon creates one thing, one new thing that we ourselves have already supported in the Constitutional Treaty. This is the possibility of **enhanced cooperation**, which has been taken verbatim from the Constitutional Treaty. This refers to [...] a type of cooperation between those Member States that want to advance the cause of the Union in a given policy, in a given community, and if there is a certain number of Member States who are able to do so, they can start this cooperation in such a way that this cooperation has to remain open, and **those Member States that are not yet in a position to participate, these Member States should be offered assistance**. [...] I think this is a fair text and it provides for this large community to move forward on issues that are shared by all, shared by all Member States, on issues that are shared by all Member States, but that not necessarily all Member States can achieve at the same time. Incidentally, Hungary’s goal is to participate in such co-operations, if there are any, on the basic condition that these co-operations are forward-looking for the Union”¹ (Gábor Iván, State Secretary, MSZP, European Affairs Committee, 2008/03/04).

This text reveals a quite optimistic conception of DI as a means of further integration. The consent and participation of all Member States in the long run (in this particular instance in relation to the monetary

¹ “A lisszaboni szerződés egy dolgot hoz létre, egy új dolgot hoz létre, amit már az alkotmány szerződésben mi magunk is támogattunk, ez a megerősített együttműködések lehetősége, amely szó szerint került át az alkotmány szerződésből. Ez egy olyan együttműködést jelent, a tagállamok egy olyan együttműködését, amelyek egy adott politikában, egy adott közösségben előre kívánják vinni az Unió ügyét, és ha van a tagállamoknak egy meghatározott száma, akik erre képesek, azok ezt az együttműködést megkezdhetik úgy, hogy ennek az együttműködésnek nyitottnak kell lennie, és azokat a tagállamokat, amelyek még nem képesek arra, hogy ebben az együttműködésben részt vegyenek, azokat a tagállamokat segíteniük kell. Ezt mondja a szerződés szövege. Azt gondolom, hogy ez egy korrekt szöveg, és magában hordozza azt a lehetőséget, hogy ez a nagy létszámú közösség előre tudjon haladni olyan kérdésekben, amelyet valamennyien osztanak, valamennyi tagállam oszt, olyan kérdésekben, amely célokat valamennyi tagállam osztja, de nem biztos, hogy minden tagállam ugyanabban az időben tudja megvalósítani. Egyébként Magyarországnak az a célja, hogy ha vannak ilyen együttműködések, akkor ezekben részt vegyen, azzal az alapfeltétellel, hogy ezek az együttműködések előremutatóak az Unió szempontjából.”

union) is taken for granted, and what is called into question is not the intention but the ability to participate.

The opposition's position

On the side of the opposition, once again we see few mentions of DI, with politicians for the most part trying to understand how Hungarian interests would be affected by DI, what kind of strategies Hungary should pursue, and so on. Contrasting the somewhat idealistic picture painted by government officials, the opposition seems to take a more sceptical position on DI as a potential threat, as for example in the following excerpt:

“So here Hungary needs to be terribly sensible, if the Lisbon Treaty enters into force in the next period, in which legislative area and with which Member States it will be able to reach a common deal, **so that the Hungarian national interests adequately prevail when a decision is taken.** [...] It is no accident that I have mentioned **two-speed Europe**”² (József Ékes, MP, Fidesz, European Affairs Committee, 2008/03/04).

3.2.2 2012: The euro crisis

By 2012 many things had changed in Hungary. First, there had been a change of government, with a Fidesz-led national-conservative coalition³ winning a parliamentary supermajority in 2010 and soon afterwards initiating a project of gradual de-democratisation. Second, the economic crisis came earlier in Hungary than in other parts of the EU and hit the country particularly hard. However, Hungary was not subjected to adjustment programmes like Greece and other hard-hit Member States, but continued to be in deep recession in 2012. Moreover, given the relatively small economic weight of Hungary in the EU, and that it is not a member of the euro area, the debate over the response to the crisis, including forms of DI, was quite muted. That being said, references to DI show a modest increase compared to 2008. Political actors talked about DI with increased sophistication, and their statements acquired a more negative hue overall, with many expressing fears of being left behind.

The government's position

Government actors at this point in time continued to provide neutral explanations and clarifications relating to DI, including on the EU crisis response instruments. At the same time, the first negative evaluations of DI models also emerged, and political rhetoric became increasingly challenging:

“I note that, unfortunately, it is now clear that the Competitiveness Pact was not enough to restore financial confidence in the Union, and that **the agreement unfortunately created another dividing line towards a multi-speed Europe**, which we definitely wanted to avoid”⁴ (Richárd Hörcsik, MP, Head of the European Affairs Committee, Fidesz, Plenary session, 2012/02/13).

This quotation reveals a worry that as the euro area countries were devising collective efforts to combat the euro crisis it would bring them closer together and further apart from non-members.

² “Tehát itt Magyarországnak rettentően észnél kell lennie, ha a lisszaboni szerződés életbe lép a következő időszakban, hogy mely törvénykezési területen mely tagállamokkal tud közös alkut kialakítani annak érdekében, hogy a magyar nemzeti érdekek kellőképpen tudjanak érvényesülni egy-egy döntés területén. Ezt mondom azért is, és nem véletlenül említettem a kétsébséges Európát.”

³ Fidesz is in permanent alliance with the Christian Democratic People's Party (Hungarian: Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt, KDNP), which is formally independent but in essence serves as Fidesz's satellite.

⁴ “Megjegyzem, hogy mára sajnos nyilvánvaló, hogy a versenyképességi paktum sem volt elegendő, hogy visszaállítsa a pénzügyi bizalmat az Unió irányába, ráadásul a megállapodással sajnos újabb választóvonal született, amely a többsebességes Európa felé vezet, amit mindenféleképpen szerettünk volna elkerülni.”

The handling of the euro crisis coincided with the first serious criticisms and infringement proceedings levelled against the Hungarian government regarding democratic backsliding and the increasing Euroscepticism of the Fidesz government, resulting in evaluations such as the following:

“Of course, the European Union is not without flaws. We believe that the slogan of the peace march, according to which **we will not be a colony**, is to be interpreted in this way, i.e. **we are not willing to put up with being second-class members of the European Union, we are not willing to put up with Hungarians being a second-class nation in Europe**. We must fight and the government also aims to ensure that all members, all nations, are equal within the European Union. Let there be no double standard, judge us by the same standard”⁵ (Tibor Navracsics, Minister, Fidesz, Plenary session, 2012/02/27).

The opposition's position

Echoing the government discourse presented above, members of the opposition too tended to view the euro crisis-related measures as potentially damaging Hungary's interests in the long run. Commenting on the Fiscal Compact, an MP from the green-liberal party Politics Can Be Different said the following:

“The fact of the matter is, I think, that there is a danger that neither the euro nor even the EU could be saved in this way, in this form. In the short term, **this treaty is a kind of fortification of a two-speed Europe, where we are cementing a model that maintains the competitive disadvantages of the European periphery**, southern Europe and eastern Europe, a system in which these countries have virtually no chance of gaining access to the **elite club which is organised around the European centre**, Germany, the Netherlands, France and others. In practice, this is the real two-speed Europe, not who can take part in negotiations and who cannot take part in negotiations. This is a question of minor importance compared to **whether there is a chance for the European periphery to really catch up except for consuming the goods produced by the central countries**”⁶ (Scheiring Gábor, MP, LMP, Plenary Session, 2012/02/13).

This MP saw in the two-speed Europe concept a fortification of inequalities between states, which were not only (or even predominantly) about political influence but rather about its socio-economic basis: peripheral countries are excluded from the ‘*elite club*’ of wealthy Member States, trapped in a situation of perpetual inequality in which the citizens of the periphery are reduced to their capacity to consume.

Reflecting on the measures taken to fight the euro crisis, a Socialist MP said the following:

“We would like to add that, okay, we support the European Union, we support the euro in adopting this package, which is primarily aimed at strengthening confidence in the euro, **but in return we are asking for things with which we can move this two-speed Europe towards a Europe that is catching up**, that is a united Europe, and we can put next to it steps that create jobs and growth too”⁷ (Gábor Harangozó, MP, MSZP, European Affairs Committee, 2012/02/14).

⁵ “Természetesen nem hiba nélküli az Európai Unió. Mi úgy gondoljuk, hogy a békemenet azon jelszava, miszerint nem leszünk gyarmat, így értelmezendő, azaz nem vagyunk hajlandóak beletörődni, hogy másodrangú tagállamai legyünk az Európai Uniónak, nem vagyunk hajlandóak beletörődni abba, hogy a magyarok másodrangú nemzetek legyenek Európa nemzeteinek. Azért kell küzdenünk és a kormánynak is az a célja, hogy az Európai Unión belül minden tag, minden nemzet egyenrangú legyen. Ne legyen kettős mérce, azonos mérce mentén ítéljenek meg minket.”

⁶ “Az a helyzet, azt gondolom, hogy sem az euró, de még akár annak a veszélye is fennállhat, hogy az EU sem menthető meg így, ebben a formában. Rövid távon ez a szerződés nem más, mint egyfajta kétsebességes Európa bebetonozása, ahol az európai periféria, Dél-Európa, Kelet-Európa versenyhátrányát fenntartó modellt betonozunk be, egy olyan rendszert, amiben gyakorlatilag ezeknek az országoknak esélyük sincs arra, hogy bebocsátást kapjanak abba az elitklubba, amelyik az európai centrum, Németország, Hollandia, Franciaország s a többi köré szerveződik. Gyakorlatilag ez az igazi kétsebességes Európa, nem pedig az, hogy ki az, aki részt vehet tárgyalásokon, és ki az, aki nem vehet részt tárgyalásokon. Az egy huszadrangú kérdés ahhoz képest, hogy van-e esélye az európai perifériának arra, azon kívül, hogy elfogyasztja a központi országok által megtermelt javakat, hogy érdemben felzárkózzon.”

⁷ “Melléraknánk azt, hogy rendben van, mi támogatjuk az Európai Uniót, támogatjuk az eurót abban, hogy ezt a csomagot elfogadjuk, amely elsősorban azt a célt szolgálja, hogy az euróba vetett bizalom megerősödjön, cserébe viszont kérünk

This quotation suggests that in the understanding of opposition MPs, DI is not merely about selective participation in this or that EU policy but also deeper structural and socioeconomic imbalances of the kind that EU integration was supposed to eradicate.

The measured criticism by the liberal and leftist opposition becomes more radical on the far right, with Jobbik politicians offering interpretations of DI models through a prism of ‘colonialism’ and anti-capitalism:

“In addition, I would add that for foreign companies established in Hungary, i.e. for companies with a majority ownership in Western Europe, this pay gap is much larger than the EU average. But I ask then [...] the main problem is that no one is tackling this inequality, and the European Commission should speak out the loudest, which means **there is currently a block-based, first-class and second-class membership of the European Union**”⁸ (Tamás Gaudi-Nagy, MP, Jobbik, Plenary Session 2012/03/20).

3.2.3 2017-2020: The Future of Europe and Brexit

While Hungary did not formally participate in the Future of Europe debates, the Commission’s White Paper and related initiatives did start a conversation about DI in the country, which peaked in 2017. Moreover, while direct references to the UK’s exit from the EU were rare in the texts we have studied, Brexit induced a reckoning regarding Hungary’s strategic position in the EU.

The government’s position

Even though the Hungarian government prefers to stay silent about DI, the numerous initiatives addressing the future of Europe post-Brexit, including the Commission White Paper, the Rome Declaration and the Juncker and Macron speeches, elicited a modest reaction. First, there was a clear rejection of DI models of the multiple endpoint type, that is of ‘second-class Europe’ and the core/periphery distinction. At the same time, however, high-ranking government officials seem more accepting of DI models of the multiple speed variant and enhanced cooperation. The justifications provided by these actors appear, as a rule, pragmatic, presenting DI as a *fait accompli* and seeking to position Hungary as well as possible in the transforming space of the EU.

While repudiating the formation of a ‘core Europe,’ one government official nonetheless offered the following assessment of the options outlined by Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker:

“I think that, unfortunately, we have to talk about core Europe and the periphery, because there is a realistic chance that a core Europe will emerge. [...] if implemented as set out in the Macron plans, it could also result in a parallel institutional structure.”

[...]

“We believe that Option 3, which means **a multi-speed Europe with a focus on enhanced cooperation, would provide the flexibility for the current development of the European Union that the Member States could take advantage of.** Here, too, it is important to recall the guarantees set out in the treaties, which ensure that these forms of enhanced cooperation cannot be abused or cause any problems. One is that those who do not wish to join these enhanced collaborations at some point may do so later. Also, that the unity of the internal market and the four fundamental freedoms and their functioning must not be jeopardised by instances of enhanced cooperation. By the way, I

olyan dolgokat, amivel ezt a kétsebességes Európát egy felzárkózó, egységes Európa irányába tudjuk eltolni, és mellé tudjuk tenni a munkahelyteremtő és növekedésserkentő lépéseket is.”

⁸ “Ráadásul, hozzáteszem, a Magyarországra települt külföldi cégek, tehát nyugat-európai tulajdonú, többségű cégeknél sokkal nagyobb ez a fizetési különbség, mint az európai uniós átlag. De megkérdezem akkor - végül is visszakanyarodok Zoltánhoz, ahhoz a kedves barátomhoz, aki elmondta ezt a véleményét, a lelkekre kötötte, hogy mondjam el -: kérem szépen, az a legfőbb probléma, hogy az ellen az esélyegyenlőtlenség ellen senki nem lép föl, és az Európai Bizottságnak kellene a lehangosabban fellépnie, ami jelenleg egy blokkosított, első osztályú és másodosztályú európai uniós tagságot jelent.”

think that multi-speed Europe is the reality today, and a multi-speed Europe has been with us for a good few decades. If we look at it, for example, the Schengen system is a very good example of a multi-speed Europe”⁹ (Balázs Péter Molnár, Deputy State Secretary, Fidesz, European Affairs Committee, 2017/10/16).

This quotation is instructive for a number of reasons. First, note the managerial style and seemingly pragmatic approach to DI as something that is “the reality,” leaving no other option but acceptance. Second, the speaker positions himself quite favourably towards enhanced cooperation which, in his view, combines flexibility with assurances that no Member State will be sidelined.

The following statement rehearses the same themes in a similar language, signalling a crystallisation of the government’s position on DI. At the same time, the statement also introduces a few more elements that help shed additional light on the internal logic of this position:

“With the eurozone or the Schengen system, more speeds are already present in the European Union. That is why we are ready to accept that if other Member States want to move forward with each other, we call this enhanced cooperation, which may be suitable for coordinating **national specificities**. In accordance with the joint statement of the Visegrád Four of 2 March, as the Hungarian side we can support the development of enhanced co-operation in some areas **with the participation of various groups of Member States** while respecting the conditions set out in the EU Treaties. Hungary is interested in a strong eurozone, so we do not want to hinder its deepening, but it is important for both monetary union and future cooperation that **no Member State is discriminated against on this basis** so that they can participate in enhanced cooperation later of their own free volition”¹⁰ (Szabolcs Ferenc Takács, State Secretary, Fidesz, Plenary session, 2017/03/27).

Again, DI is presented as an opportunity, and the minimalist condition of non-discrimination between participating and non-participating states is seen as a sufficient guarantee. The references to the “national specificities” and “groups of Member States” in the context of the V4 alliance suggest that the Hungarian government sees DI as a means to empower like-minded sets of countries in the EU.

The joint statement the speaker refers to was the input provided by the V4 for the Rome Declaration, in which they summarised their vision as follows:

“The EU’s unity is of vital importance and should always be the starting point of our approach. Reaching consensus is indispensable if we want to foster confidence in our activities. Regardless of the speed of integration, we all need to pull in one direction, have a common objective, vision and

⁹ “Én azt gondolom, hogy sajnos muszáj beszélnünk a mag-Európáról és a perifériáról, mert van reális esély arra, hogy kialakul egy mag-Európa. Ezt a macroni ötletek sajnos nagymértékben veszélyeztetik, ilyen például az Európa újjraalapítóinak a gyűlésezése, ami, ha úgy valósulna meg, ahogy a macroni tervekben szerepel, akkor egy párhuzamos intézményi struktúrát is eredményezhetne.” [...] “Mi azt gondoljuk, hogy a többsebességes Európát jelentő, a megerősített együttműködések előterbe helyező 3. opció az, amely olyan rugalmassági lehetőségeket biztosítana az Európai Unió jelenlegi fejlődéséhez, amelyekkel tudnának élni a tagállamok. Itt is fontos, hogy ideidézünk azokat a szerződésben rögzített garanciákat, amelyek biztosítják azt, hogy ezekkel a megerősített együttműködésekkel sem lehet visszaélni, illetve hogy ezek sem okoznak problémákat. Az egyik az, hogy akik egy bizonyos pontban nem kívántak csatlakozni ezekhez a megerősített együttműködésekhez, azok később megtehetik azt. Illetve az, hogy a belső piac és a négy alapszabadság egységét, illetve azok működését nem veszélyeztethetik ezek a megerősített együttműködések. Azt gondolom amúgy, hogy a több sebességes Európa realitás ma is, a több sebességes Európa jó pár évtizede velünk van. Ha azt nézzük például, a schengeni rendszer egy nagyon jó példa a több sebességes Európára.”

¹⁰ “Az eurózóna vagy a schengeni rendszer révén az Európai Unióban már most is jelen van a több sebesség. Ezért készek vagyunk elfogadni, ha más tagállamok előre kívánnak haladni egymás között, ezt nevezzük megerősödött együttműködésnek, ami alkalmas lehet a nemzeti sajátosságok összehangolására. A visegrádi négyek március 2-ai közös nyilatkozatával összhangban magyar részről támogatni tudjuk, hogy az uniós alapszerződések által meghatározott feltételek tiszteletben tartása mellett megerősödött együttműködések alakuljanak ki egy-egy területen, a tagállamok különböző csoportjainak részvételével. Hazánk az erős eurózónában érdekelt, így továbbra sem szeretnénk akadályozni annak mélyítését, azonban mind a valutaunió, mind a jövőbeli együttműködés tekintetében fontos, hogy egyik tagállamot se érje diszkrimináció ez alapján, hogy részt vehessenek később a megerősödött együttműködésben, saját szabad akaratuk alapján.”

trust in a strong and prosperous Union. However, **to ensure a necessary flexibility**, we can take advantage of enhanced cooperation, as stipulated in the Treaties. Yet any form of enhanced cooperation should be **open to every Member State and should strictly avoid any kind of disintegration of the Single Market, the Schengen area and the European Union itself**. We must safeguard the greatest achievements of the EU” (Joint Statement by the Heads of Governments of the V4 Countries “A Strong Europe – a Union of Action and Trust,” Input to the Rome Declaration 2017).

This statement is not particularly revealing in terms of its content – it expresses vague and qualified support for enhanced cooperation – but is more a gesture, i.e. coming from the V4 together. The emphasis (indeed, the overemphasis) on EU unity (“unity,” “consensus,” “one direction,” “common objective,” “Union”) fits the discursive shift in the wake of Brexit, when declarations and demonstrations of unanimity of the EU27 became ubiquitous.

Our data show that no Hungarian prime minister has ever made a reference to DI models in the parliament, and we find very few mentions of DI mechanisms either. For this reason, we have included in this analysis two additional documents, namely the transcripts of two press conferences held by Viktor Orbán, in March 2017 and in January 2019.¹¹

When explicitly asked about DI, the Prime Minister offered qualified support for it. In a press conference following a meeting of the European Council, he explained his position as follows:

“We also sought to explore the issue of a multi-speed Europe. The equality of the Member States is important for Hungary, of course. At the same time, we don’t want to be like a poorly-run family which can only decide either to all go on a trip together or all stay at home together. We wouldn’t want such a state of affairs. In our view, living in such a family would not be too promising or attractive, because those who want to go on a trip should be able to, in the knowledge that their home will be the same, and they will remain with the rest of the family. If we are to live together we must all observe certain rules, but we shouldn’t force things on each other that are not wanted by all of us. **So the Hungarian position is that we cannot have a two-speed Europe, there is no first-class or second-class Europe, and there is no core and periphery**. In general, this whole question of a two-speed Europe is one of the most abhorrent ideas for us. **At the same time, using the system of strengthened cooperation,¹² we do not oppose the idea that on some issues some countries could make more progress, more headway, than others**. There are also **positive central European examples** which we cited at the meeting today. For instance, in the field of patent rights there’s an arrangement that most central European countries have joined, and quite a few western European countries have not. Or there is the issue of the European Public Prosecutor’s Office, which some central European and western European countries have chosen not to join, while others have created or seek to create such an institution. **So, in line with individual countries’ interests, we allow countries to move further forward than others – but within certain boundaries**. Those who want to go on a trip can go on a trip, and those who want to stay at home should be allowed to stay at home” (Viktor Orbán press conference after the meeting of the European Council,¹³ 2017/03/10).

In this text Viktor Orbán fully rejects a two-speed Europe, characterising it as an “abhorrent idea.” Note also the fusion of the various terms which are sometimes kept separate, i.e. two-speed, second class (versus first class) and European core (versus periphery). At the same time, the Prime Minister sees no contradiction between rejecting DI models on the one hand and supporting DI mechanisms on the other. In particular, he provides a defence of enhanced cooperation as a means to realise “individual countries’ interests.” His reference to the EPPO is instructive too, and we will return to it shortly.

¹¹ The texts are available in English translation on the government’s official website, www.kormany.hu

¹² The text cited here is the English translation of Orbán’s statement as it can be found on the government’s website. The original Hungarian refers to “enhanced cooperation.”

¹³ <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-press-conference-after-the-meeting-of-the-european-council-20170310>

Before that, we turn to another issue of crucial relevance in Hungary: euro area participation. Hungary has committed to join the euro area, and the Socialist governments had planned to replace the forint since the early 2000s, but the country did not meet the Maastricht criteria at that point in time. After the change in government in 2010 the Fidesz leadership became more and more opposed to introducing the euro, and currently there are no concrete plans to join. The usual justification given revolves around the outbreak and response to the euro crisis, which the Hungarian government has cast as a deep failure of the EU. From a DI point of view, Hungary's retaining its own currency is seen as a potential danger to the country's position in the EU, and the eventuality of being sidelined is something that the opposition periodically refers to (see below).

Asked about Hungary's plans to join the euro area, the Prime Minister provided the following insight:

"We have no target date, and there are two reasons for this. One of these is that we cannot clearly see the future of the euro. The other one is that although we agreed to enter the eurozone, at that time the eurozone was not what it is today: since then many new regulations have been introduced, and new institutions have come into being. So no one knows which way the eurozone will be heading in the period ahead. So I'm following my instinct and the wait-and-see policy of a 'cautious daredevil.' **We must acknowledge that today three Europes exist side by side.** I always smile when people talk about the desirability of a two-speed Europe, because **there are already three Europes:** there is the Europe of the eurozone; there is the Europe of the Schengen Area; and there is the entire membership of the European Union. These are three distinct regions. **I believe that it is possible for Europe to continue with such a three-way division in the future. I don't think it's necessary for every country to be part of the eurozone.** Whether or not it will be in Hungary's national interest at some time in the future is something we must continually examine and assess, and we may adopt such a decision if it is in our interest to do so" (Viktor Orbán's answers to journalists' questions at his international press conference,¹⁴ 2019/01/18).

As this text shows, the Hungarian government advocates for indefinitely retaining the national currency based on the "national interest," treating it as a de facto opt-out. Note also the evident ease with which the Prime Minister states that there already exist "three Europes," seeing this three-way division as a viable model for the EU.

The opposition's position

During this period the opposition continued to criticise DI models, fearing not only that Hungary may be sidelined through DI, but also expressing wider concerns about socio-economic divergences. The practice of using DI concepts in relation to social issues, such as poverty or labour migration, continues in this period too.

For example, reacting to the country-specific recommendations in the context of the National Reform Programme and the Convergence Programme, a Socialist MP said the following:

"[...] although the recommendation does not yet refer to it – I do not understand why it has not received more emphasis – the most active, most productive, about half a million Hungarian workers, do not work at home, but in the west. So the fact that the report has skipped so generously over these problems, which are a very serious problem within a year or two and which are already specific problems in health care, is only a manifestation, in my opinion, **that the Union has given up on Hungary, this is the de facto written recognition of two-speed Europe.** Gentlemen, here is two-speed Europe, this is the second speed that is falling behind"¹⁵ (István Józsa, MP, MSZP, European Affairs Committee, 2017/06/12).

¹⁴ <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/viktor-orban-s-answers-to-journalists-questions-at-his-international-press-conference>

¹⁵ "Nagyon örülök, hogy igazgató úr azért megemlítette, hogy legalább a tehetségekkel foglalkozni kellene; na, ezek a tehetségek mennek el Magyarországról dolgozni, és noha az ajánlásban még nem szerepel - nem értem, hogy miért nem kapott nagyobb hangsúlyt -, a legaktívabb, a termelésben leghatékosabb, mintegy félmillió Magyar munkavállaló nem itthon dolgozik, hanem tőlünk nyugatabbra. Tehát az, hogy ezeken az egy-két éven belül nagyon súlyos problémát jelentő,

A second major issue of lasting relevance is the successive Fidesz governments' reluctance to adopt the euro. The opposition has periodically attempted to put the country's membership of the euro area up for a debate but has no power to challenge government policy. Remaining outside the euro area is cast as a risk because as the other Member States move forward and gain experience in how to manage the common currency, the rest are relegated to the outside of the 'heart of Europe':

"What is certain is that the euro will go through a lot of other rationalisation processes, the European Central Bank and the Member States have gained a lot of experience with the euro in the crisis, and in part there will be a rationalisation process. At the same time, the European Union will introduce new incentives, which is clear from all the concepts so far. It is therefore worthwhile for Hungary to start this process, and my proposal is aimed at this. I must add that the euro poses a very serious requirement for compromise for the Member States. **The countries that are ready to make these compromises belong to the core, the centre of Europe, and this membership will create the security of these countries in the future.** So joining the euro is not just a financial issue, not just a social policy issue, but also an issue of stability and security. I think it is in our national interest, in Hungary's national interest, to create this capacity for compromise, to be at the core, and to get the security that comes from it"¹⁶ (Zsuzsanna Szelényi, MP, Independent, European Affairs Committee 2017/10/02).

The following statement conveys an even more pressing sense of urgency (which contrasts with the calculated managerial assessments usually given by the Hungarian government):

"We are facing a negative process, the formation of a two-speed Europe. This danger is very great. There will be an inner core in this two-speed Europe, this inner core will be comprised of the countries that have adopted the euro. This is their national currency. It is a huge danger for Hungary to miss out on this club and be pushed to the periphery in a two-speed Europe. Knowing the situation that Hungary can fulfil a good part of the system of conditions for the introduction of the euro, therefore our position is that in order to **ensure the security of the country and to prevent it from falling behind, it is necessary to join the euro area as soon as possible**"¹⁷ (Sándor Burány, MP, MSZP, Plenary session, 2017/10/30).

3.2.4 The debate over enhanced cooperation and the EPPO

In closing this report, we turn to the instance of DI that has been by far the most salient in the Hungarian context: the European Public Prosecutor's Office, the competence of which is "to investigate, prosecute

az egészségügyben már ma kifejezetten ellátási gondokat jelentő problémákon ilyen nagyvonalúan átsiklott a jelentés, ez csak annak a megnyilvánulása véleményem szerint, hogy az Unió lemondott Magyarországról, ez de facto a kétsésszerű Európa a papíron történő elismerése, megjelenése. Uraim, itt van a kétsésszerű Európa, ez a második, leszakadó sebesség."

¹⁶ "Ami biztos, hogy nagyon sok egyéb észszerűsítő folyamaton fog az euro átmenni, az Európai Központi Bank és a tagországok nagyon sok tapasztalatot szereztek az euróval kapcsolatban a válság kapcsán, és részben egy észszerűsítési folyamat is fog zajlani, ezzel párhuzamosan újabb ösztönzőket fog bevezetni ez Európai Unió, ez minden eddigi koncepcióból világos. Magyarországnak tehát érdemes megkezdeni ezt a folyamatot, és az én javaslatom erre irányul. Hozzá kell tennem, hogy az euró egy nagyon komoly kompromisszumigényt jelöl meg a tagországok számára. Azok az országok, amelyek ezekre a kompromisszumokra készen állnak, Európa magjához, közepéhez tartoznak, és a jövőben ez fogja megteremteni ezeknek az országoknak a biztonságát. Tehát az euróhoz való csatlakozás nem csupán pénzügyi kérdés, nem csupán társadalompolitikai kérdés, hanem a stabilitás és a biztonság kérdése is. Azt gondolom, a mi nemzeti érdekünk, Magyarország nemzeti érdeke, hogy ezt a kompromisszumképességet létrehozzuk, a belső magban legyünk és ennek a biztonságát megszerezzük."

¹⁷ "Szemünk előtt zajlik egy negatív folyamat (Dr. Rétvári Bence: Az MSZP szétesése!), egy kétsésszerű Európa kialakulása. Ez a veszély igen nagy. Ebben a kétsésszerű Európában lesz egy belső mag, ezt a belső magot azok az országok alakítják, amelyek bevezették az eurót, ez a nemzeti valutájuk. Magyarország számára óriási veszély, ha ebből a klubból kimarad, és egy kétsésszerű Európában a perifériára szorul. Ismerve azt a helyzetet, hogy Magyarország az euró bevezetésének feltételrendszeréből a jó részét teljesíteni tudja, ezért a mi álláspontunk az, hogy az ország biztonsága, a lemaradás megakadályozása érdekében az euróvezetethez minél előbb csatlakozni kell."

and bring to judgment crimes against the EU budget, such as fraud, corruption or serious cross-border VAT fraud.”¹⁸

The Hungarian parliament was among those raising subsidiarity concerns regarding the EPPO proposal in 2013, arguing that prosecution was a matter of national sovereignty. Apart from the government’s parliamentary majority (Fidesz and KDNP), the liberal and radical right opposition parties also voted in favour of the “reasoned opinion” against the EPPO, with only the Socialists dissenting.

Since then, Hungarian politicians have closely followed the development of the EPPO and there has been a reconfiguration of the conflict lines, with the government continuing to counter Hungary’s participation and the opposition increasingly supporting it. The opposition has linked the issue of the EPPO to high levels of political corruption and widespread mismanagement of public funds in Hungary. However, with its large parliamentary majority the government has been able to block efforts to put the issue up for a vote, first in 2017 and then again in 2018.

Independent MP Péter Kónya took up the issue first in the European Affairs Committee, with the following justification:

“I think it would be a very bad message if Hungary, as the country with the highest per capita EU funding, were left out of this enhanced cooperation [...] while otherwise surveys and research also show that Hungary is unfortunately in a very bad position in terms of transparency and corruption. I could say that, unfortunately, our Prime Minister is counted among the most corrupt politicians [...]”¹⁹ (Péter Kónya, MP, Independent, European Affairs Committee, 2017/10/30).

He then took up the issue again in the parliament’s plenary session, prompting the following response from the government:

“[...] under the current conditions, it is not in Hungary’s interest to participate in enhanced cooperation. The symbolic, let alone political, message of joining the European Public Prosecutor’s Office should not override the professional aspects of effective law enforcement and constitutional and public security aspects. Following the preliminary resolution of the National Assembly, the Hungarian government therefore decided not to participate in the establishment of the European Public Prosecutor’s Office [...]. **I would note, moreover, that it is not alone in the ranks of the EU Member States, as the United Kingdom, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Malta and Poland have also been left out of this cooperation**”²⁰ (Pál Völner, State Secretary, Fidesz, Plenary session, 2017/11/27).

¹⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/cross-border-cases/judicial-cooperation/networks-and-bodies-supporting-judicial-cooperation/european-public-prosecutors-office_en

¹⁹ “Én azt gondolom, nagyon rossz üzenet értéke lenne annak, ha Magyarország mint egyébként az egy főre jutó legmagasabb európai uniós támogatást kapó ország kimaradna ebből a megerősített együttműködésből, és azt üzennék az európai uniós állampolgároknak, hogy egyébként mi majd ezt megoldjuk, miközben egyébként a különböző felmérések és kutatások is azt mutatják, hogy Magyarország sajnálatos módon az átláthatóság és a korrupció tekintetében nagyon rossz pozíciót foglal el, mondhatnám egyébként, hogy sajnálatos módon a miniszterelnökünket is egyébként a legkorruptabb politikusok között tartják számon különböző kutatásoknál.”

²⁰ “Sajnos, a lefolytatott tárgyalások során, bár mindvégig kompromisszumkészségünkről tettünk tanúbizonyságot, nem az az eredmény született, amely tiszteletben tartotta volna ezeket a törekvéseket, és a jelenlegi feltételek mellett nem áll Magyarország érdekében, hogy részt vegyen a megerősített együttműködésben. Az európai ügyészséghez való csatlakozás esetleg szimbolikus, pláne politikai üzenete pedig nem írhatja felül azokat a szakmai szempontokat, amelyek a hatékony bűnüldözést, valamint az alkotmányossági és a közbiztonsági szempontokat tartják szem előtt. A magyar kormány az Országgyűlés előzetes állásfoglalását követve ezért úgy döntött, hogy nem kíván részt venni az európai ügyészség létrehozásában, így a megerősített együttműködésben sem. Megjegyezném egyébként, hogy nincs egyedül az uniós tagállamok sorában, hiszen az Egyesült Királyság, Dánia, Írország, Hollandia, Svédország, Málta, Lengyelország ugyanígy kimaradt ebből az együttműködésből. Tehát amikor rajtunk kérik ezt számon, talán meg kellene kérdezni a többi államtól is, hogy milyen szempontok alapján jutottak el ehhez a döntéshez.”

In the following year Jobbik, which had previously supported the reasoned opinion against the EPPO on the grounds that it breached the subsidiarity principle, attempted to put the issue on the agenda once more, linking it not only to corruption but also to Hungary's democratic decline:

“In central and eastern Europe, apart from Poland, only Hungary has not joined the European Public Prosecutor's Office under the enhanced cooperation procedure, i.e. two EU Member States with extremely serious problems with the level of corruption on the part of the government. **In the next financial planning period, 2021-27, the rule of law mechanism may be introduced in connection with the allocation of EU funds**, which may have clear negative consequences for Hungary, with the government and **the Fidesz-KNDP party alliance trampling on the democratic institutional system**. Our negotiating position is clearly weakened by the fact that you are rigidly refraining from supporting the European Public Prosecutor's Office”²¹ (Tibor Bana, MP, Jobbik, Plenary session, 2018/07/02).

For more context, we mention that at this point in time democratic backsliding in Hungary had gone so far that the absence of meaningful EU sanctions became untenable. The European Parliament finally triggered Article 7 proceedings against Hungary in September 2018. Moreover, it was becoming increasingly clear that funds arriving from the EU were actually contributing to the backsliding through the appropriation of these resources by the ruling elite.²² It was therefore floated that one way to put pressure on the Hungarian government would be to impose stricter conditions on the allocation of such EU funds.

Unsurprisingly, the Hungarian government vehemently opposed the idea:

“The Hungarian government continues to oppose in principle the attempts related to the 2021-27 multiannual financial framework which would link the allocation, disbursement and control of the use of EU funds in any way with participation in the European Public Prosecutor's Office. This is contrary to the Treaty of Lisbon. [...] **In addition to Hungary, Poland, Ireland, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden have not yet joined this pan-European project**. [...] under the Treaties such cooperation must not discriminate against Member States and must respect the competences, rights and obligations of those Member States which do not participate in the cooperation. Hungary's interests would be jeopardised exactly if it abandoned, for an initiative contrary to the spirit of the Treaties, its professional convictions in the interests of law enforcement and did not consistently adhere to the fundamental values of the European Union”²³ (Pál Völner, State Secretary, Fidesz, Plenary session, 07/02/2018).

Government officials continued to line up a wide array of justifications for not participating, including utilitarian/efficiency-based arguments (“the EPPO does not make sense professionally”), a constant

²¹ “Kelet-Közép-Európából Lengyelországon kívül csak Magyarország nem csatlakozott a megerősített együttműködési eljárással létrejövő európai ügyészséghez, vagyis két olyan európai uniós tagállam, amelyben rendkívül komoly problémák merülnek fel a korrupció szintjét illetően kormányzati oldalról. A következő, 2021-27-es pénzügyi tervezési időszakban bevezethetik a jogállamisági mechanizmust az uniós források odaítélése kapcsán, ami hazánk esetében egyértelműen negatív következményekkel járhat, hiszen a kormány és a Fidesz-KNDP-pártszövetség lábballal tiporja a demokratikus intézményrendszert. A tárgyalási pozíciókat kimondottan gyengíti, hogy önök mereven elzárkóznak az európai ügyészség támogatásától.”

²² András Bozóki & Dániel Hegedűs (2018) An externally constrained hybrid regime: Hungary in the European Union, *Democratization*, 25:7, 1173-1189, DOI: 10.1080/13510347.2018.1455664

²³ “A magyar kormány továbbá elvi szinten szembehelyezkedik a 2021-27 közötti többéves pénzügyi kerettel kapcsolatos olyan törekvésekkel, amelyek az uniós források odaítélését, folyósítását, felhasználásának ellenőrzését bármilyen módon összekapcsolják az európai ügyészségben való részvétellel. Ez ellentétes a lisszaboni szerződéssel. Az európai ügyészség több tagállam egyetértésének hiányában, kiegészítő képviselő úr felsorolását... Magyarország és Lengyelország mellett Írország, Dánia, Hollandia és Svédország sem csatlakozott még az összeurópai tervezethez. Így jött létre a megerősítés az együttműködés keretében, márpedig a szerződések értelmében az ilyen együttműködések nem eredményezhetnek diszkriminációt a tagállamok között, és tiszteletben kell tartaniuk azoknak a tagállamoknak a hatásköreit, jogait és kötelezettségeit, amelyek az együttműködésben nem vesznek részt. Magyarország érdekeit éppen az veszélyeztetné, ha egy, a szerződések szellemével ellentétes kezdeményezéstől tartva feladná a bűnüldözési érdekek szem előtt tartásával kialakított szakmai meggyőződését, és nem ragaszkodna következetesen az Európai Unió alapértékeihez.”

repetition that other countries did not participate either, even though this happened for substantively different reasons to those of Hungary and Poland, together with principled arguments that belie a specific ‘vision’ of EU integration and that interpret the EPPO as a move in a “federal direction,” which Fidesz rejects.

“I have always said that there are countries where they have an opt-out, including Denmark, Ireland and Great Britain, where the question of joining the European Public Prosecutor’s Office does not arise because they can participate in this home-judicial cooperation in such an à la carte way. If they want, they participate; if they don’t want to participate, they don’t participate. So there is no question of participation. Poland and Hungary took a principled position, which was that it was also a question of sovereignty, which I think is a fundamental issue in practice: **the European Union is turning in a federal direction, and then we will create supranational new agencies, organisations, we can go to this. There is a political view that sees this as very good, and there is one that says that we are creating a European Union of nation-states**”²⁴ (László Trócsányi, Minister nominee, Fidesz, European Affairs Committee, 2018/05/15).

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, we note that even though DI is not a salient issue in Hungary it is nonetheless a complex one. A transversal finding is that all actors reject the idea of Hungary’s ‘second class membership.’ However, the Fidesz-led government tends to argue that differentiation is already happening and that therefore Hungary had better find an advantageous position within the given framework. Therefore, the government’s position does not stem from principled considerations (i.e. wanting to preserve a united Europe) but rather from an instrumental view of EU integration, including differentiation. This translates into ad hoc decisions conforming to the requirements of the ‘national interest’ (and the government’s own ideological and political projects). This leads the Hungarian government to reject ‘two-speed Europe’ in principle while also failing to take concrete steps, such as adopting the common currency or joining the EPPO. Conversely, the opposition parties view DI with concern and routinely warn of the danger of Hungary falling behind because of the country’s distinct vulnerabilities stemming from its peripheral position in relation to the European core, which is compounded by the Fidesz government’s Euroscepticism and illiberalism.

²⁴ “Mindig elmondtam, hogy vannak olyan országok, ahol opt outtal rendelkeznek, idetartozik Dánia, Írország, Nagy-Britannia, ahol föl se merül az Európai Ügyészséghez való csatlakozás kérdése, mert ők ebben a belügyi-igazságügyi együttműködésben ilyen a la carte módon tudnak részt venni, ha akarnak, részt vesznek, ha nem akarnak részt venni, nem vesznek részt. Tehát nem merül föl a részvétel kérdése. Lengyelország és Magyarország egy elvi álláspontot vallott, ami az volt, hogy ez egy szuverenitási kérdés is, ami gyakorlatilag azt gondolom, egy alapvető kérdés: föderációs irányba fordul el az Európai Unió, és akkor létrehozunk szupranacionális, újabb ügynökségeket, szervezeteket, lehet menni ebbe az irányba, van ilyen politikai nézet, amelyik ezt nagyon jónak tartja, és van, amelyik azt mondja, hogy a nemzetállamok Európai Unióját hozzuk létre.”

Appendices

Appendix 1 Documents included in the analysis of DI salience and positions in Hungary

Category of document	Time period	Details
1 Government programmes	2004-2020	2006 and 2010 The Hungarian governments did not submit government programmes in 2014 and 2018
2 First speeches (and parliamentary debates)	2004-2020	2006 and 2010 First speech by the PM and subsequent parliamentary debates on the government programme 2014 and 2018 First speech by the PM and first debate substitutes (first MP speeches after the formation of the government)
3 European Council presidency	2011	PM European Parliament speech and debate First speech during the EU Council presidency by the PM in the national parliament and the immediately following parliamentary debate
4 Future of Europe speeches		-
5 Prime Minister European Council Statements	2004-2020	17 documents: 2004, 2005x2, 2011x4, 2012x 3, 2013, 2016x3, 2017, 2018, 2019
6 Parliamentary (committee) debates	2008; 2012; 2017-2020	63 documents containing one of the following key words: two-speed Europe, multi-speed Europe, core Europe, two-tier Europe, enhanced cooperation, opt-out
7 Miscellaneous documents referring to DI	2017; 2019	2 PM press conferences with mentions of DI

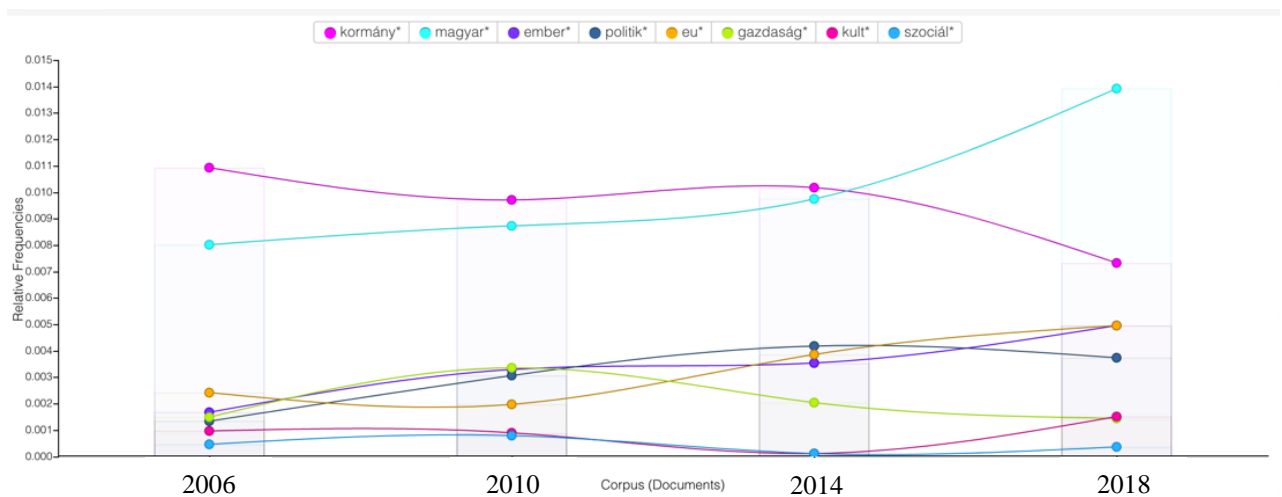
Appendix 2 English to Hungarian translations of DI key words²⁵

	Keyword	Main translation	Alternative key words/Notes
DI models (conceptual key words)	Differentiated integration	differenciált integráció	Alternative forms/translations: differenciált tagság eltérő mértékű integráció eltérő mértékű tagság differenciálódás
	Coalition of the willing	tette kész országok	Alternative forms/translations: hajlandók koalíciója önkéntes koalíció All the forms are somewhat awkward. The meaning is more naturally conveyed with syntax (e.g. 'the countries which wish to participate') rather than with one of these expressions
	Two-speed Europe	kétsebességes Európa	
	Multi-speed Europe	többsebességes Európa	
	Variable geometry	változó geometria	
	Core Europe	mag-Európa	
	Two-tier Europe	kétszintű Európa (literal meaning closer to 'two-level Europe')	Alternative forms/translations: 'kétsávos Európa' ('two-lane' Europe) Semantically close but pejorative alternative: elsőosztályú/másodosztályú tagság elsőrangú/másodrangú tagság (<i>'first/second class membership'</i>)
	Concentric circles	koncentrikus körök	
	à la carte	à la carte	
	Future of Europe	Európa jövője	Sometimes 'EU's future'
DI mechanisms	Enhanced cooperation	Megerősített együttműködés	
	opt-out	opt-out	The English version is used
DI instances – enhanced cooperation (+ PESCO)	Pesco	<i>állandó strukturált együttműködés</i> <i>Pesco</i>	
	Rome III	Róma III (rendelet)	
	Unitary patent	Egységes szabadalom	
	Matrimonial property regimes	Házassági vagyoni jogi rendszerek	
	Financial Transaction Tax	Pénzügyi tranzakciós adó/illeték	
	European Public Prosecutor	Európai ügyészség	
D – – – €	Schengen	Schengen	

²⁵ All the translations are by the author unless otherwise specified.

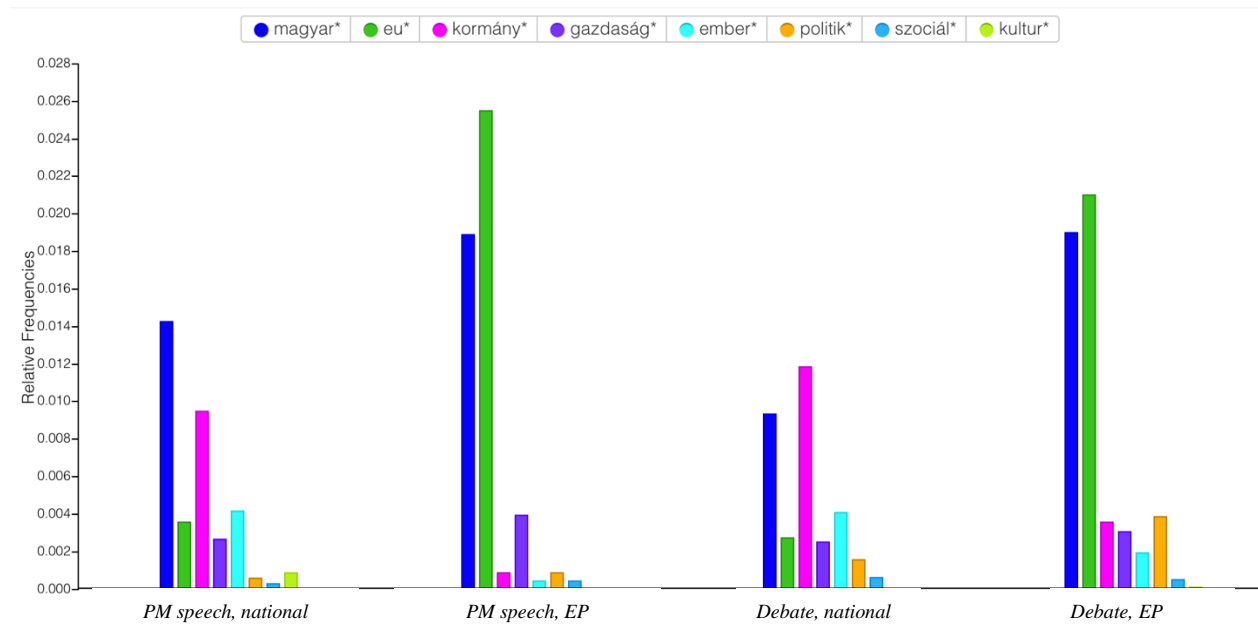
	Economic and Monetary Union	Gazdasági és monetáris unió
	Security and Defence Policy	Biztonság- és védelempolitika
	Area of Freedom, Security and Justice	A szabadságon, a biztonságon és a jog érvényesülésén alapuló térség
	Charter of Fundamental Rights	Alapjogi Charta Alapvető Jogok Chartája
	Social Chapter	Szociális fejezet
DI instances – internal agreements	Prüm Convention	Prümi Szerződés / egyezmény
	European Stability Mechanism	Európai Stabilitási Mechanizmus
	Fiscal Compact	Költségvetési paktum
	Single Resolution Mechanism	Egységes szanálási mechanizmus
	Unified Patent Court	Egységes szabadalmi bíróság
DI instances – external agreements	European Economic Area	Európai gazdasági térség/EGT
	Customs Union + Turkey	vámunió + Törökország
	Eastern Partnership	Keleti partnerség
	Euromed	Euromediterrán partnerség/megállapodás Euromed

Appendix 3 Prime minister first speeches and debates, 2006-2018, EU in context key words (relative frequencies)



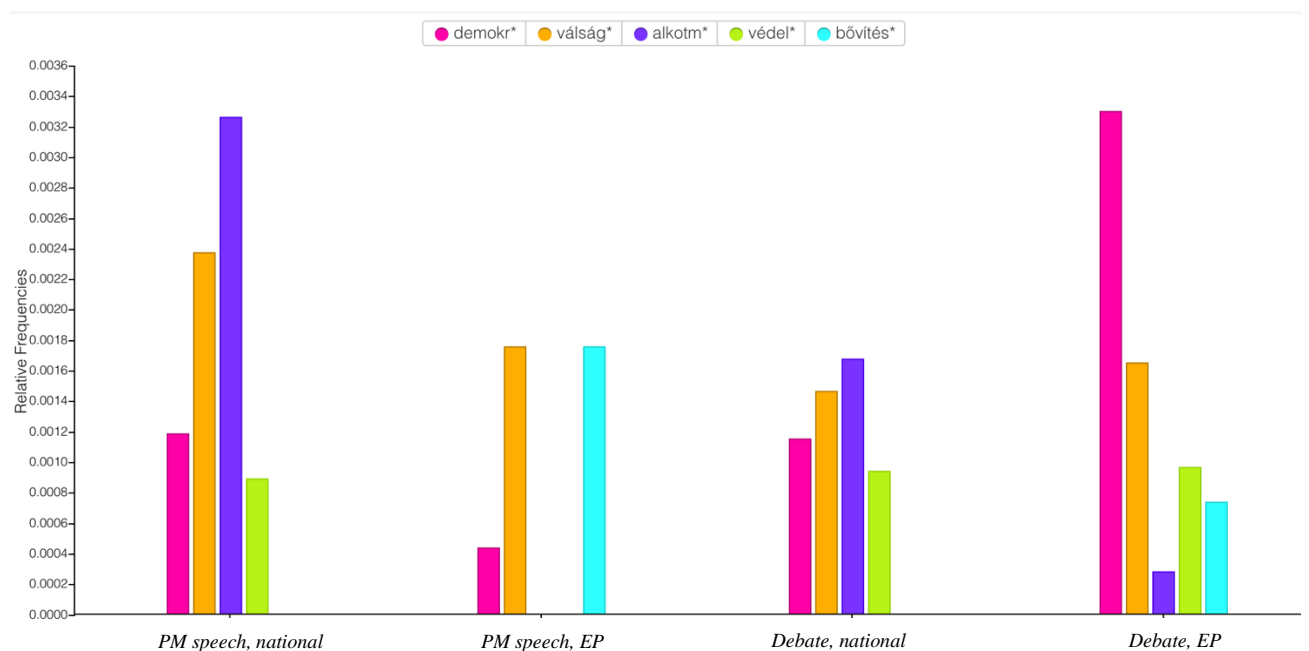
Notes: English translation of key words from left to right: government*, Hung*, people*, polit*, eu*, econ*, cultu* social*. Documents used for the analysis from left to right: PM first speeches and parliamentary debates (or substitutes), 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018, ordered chronologically

Appendix 4 Prime minister EU presidency speech and debates in the national and European parliaments, EU in context key words (relative frequencies)



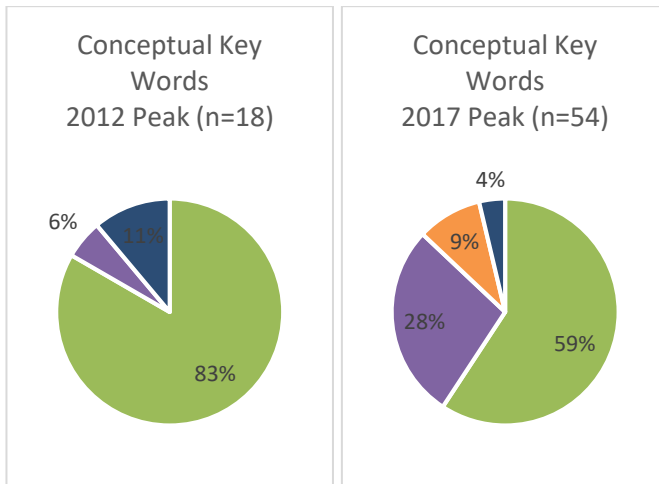
Notes: English translation of key words from left to right: Hung*, eu*, government*, econ*, people*, polit*, social*, cultu*. Documents used for the analysis from left to right: prime minister speech in the national parliament, prime minister speech in the European Parliament, national parliament debate, European Parliament debate

Appendix 5 Prime minister EU presidency speech and debates in the national and European parliaments, EU-related issues (relative frequencies)

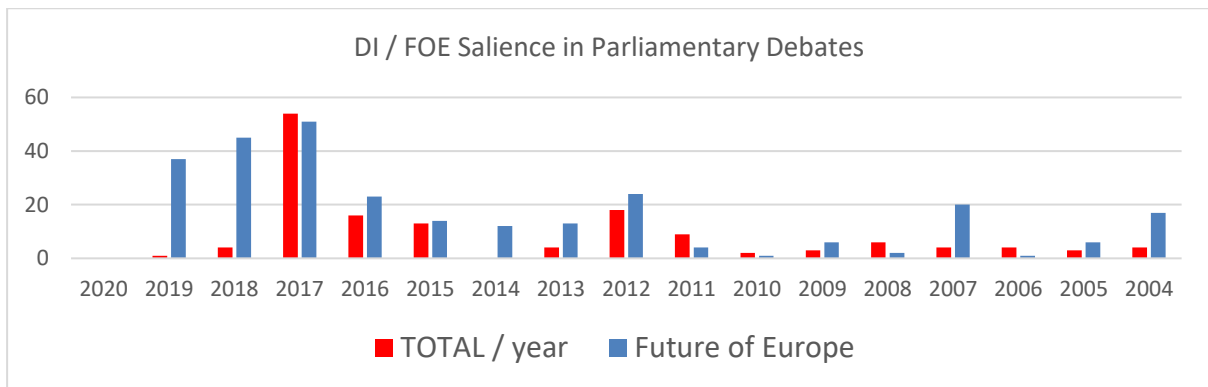


Notes: English translation of key words from left to right: democr*, crisis*, constitution*, defense*, enlargement*. Documents used for the analysis from left to right: prime minister speech in the national parliament, prime minister speech in the European Parliament, national parliament debate, European Parliament debate

Appendix 6 Salience of conceptual DI key words in parliamentary debates in 2012 and 2017



Appendix 7 Comparison DI conceptual key words vs. ‘future of Europe’



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