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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 - Malta

Godfrey Baldacchino



European University Institute

**Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies**

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The Centre is home to a large post-doctoral programme and hosts major research programmes, projects and data sets, in addition to a range of working groups and *ad hoc* initiatives. The research agenda is organised around a set of core themes and is continuously evolving, reflecting the changing agenda of European integration, the expanding membership of the European Union, developments in Europe's neighbourhood and the wider world.

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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).

For more information: <http://indiveu.eui.eu/>



Integrating  
Diversity in the  
European Union

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## **Abstract**

Differentiated integration (DI) was a more important issue prior to Malta's accession to the European Union in 2004. It has turned up very rarely in Parliamentary debates or its standing European and Foreign Affairs Committee, and almost never in statements by politicians or electoral manifestos. Its occasional salience has been mainly to affirm the Maltese Government's position, shared with the Opposition, on upholding solidarity and the rule of law. Once part of the EU, the rhetoric of Malta's main political parties is one that (largely) expects EU member states to 'play ball' and respect the principles of solidarity and working together, certainly in relation to particular policy fields – such as how to negotiate with UK officials and their commitment to secure Brexit – and (especially for Malta) in the face of the Mediterranean migration issue.

## **Keywords**

Differentiated integration, salience, Malta, solidarity, multi speed Europe.

## **Summary of Results**

### ***I. Salience***

Differentiated integration (DI) was a more important issue prior to Malta's accession to the European Union than after its accession in May 2004. It has turned up very rarely in parliamentary debates or its standing European and Foreign Affairs Committee, and almost never in statements by prime ministers, other ministers, government statements or election manifestos. Treaty changes and Brexit have had some but minimal impact on its salience, mainly to affirm the Maltese government's position, shared with the opposition, on upholding solidarity and the rule of law. DI terms are technical and do not have commonly used Maltese translations. Hence, they are frequently referred to in their English language variants, which makes it easy to trace and identify their use. In any case, the paucity of references shows that DI is not a politically salient issue in Malta. Instead, there is a regular and heightened expectation of solidarity among all the EU Member States, particularly on the hot topics of migration and 'burden sharing.'

### ***II. Position***

In the period analysed (2000-2019), Malta has had five legislatures, all with majoritarian political parties in government and therefore without a need for coalition- or alliance-formation. The centre-right (Christian democrat inspired) Nationalist Party was in government from 1998 to 2013, having won the elections in 1998, 2003 and 2008, and the social-democratic Labour Party has been in power since 2013, having won the general elections in 2013 and 2017. Throughout these two decades, positions on DI have been mainly neutral, with an, often tacit, understanding that the ideal arrangement is for all the EU states to be on board the European project on equal terms, although there has also been some understanding that DI might be a necessary compromise in dire straits.

Politicians rarely discuss DI models, but have occasionally referred to the idea of a multi-speed Europe. Approaches to multi-speed integration have ranged across the spectrum: from begrudgingly positive to neutral to negative, since it allows moving forward with integration even when not all EU Member States wanted to get involved but at the cost of undermining cohesion and convergence. Enhanced co-operation and opt-outs have been discussed in very few instances, possibly because Malta itself does not have any opt-outs. DI instances have usually been viewed in the same light by both government and opposition parties.



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## 1. Introduction

This report investigates the salience of differentiated integration (DI) in Maltese government discourse. It also probes into the positions of Maltese governments on the issue of DI.

The results are based on an analysis of various government documents. Six document categories were selected to cover a broad spectrum of venues and government actors. The material analysed included official government documents, programmes and policy statements; the 2003, 2008, 2013 and 2017 election manifestos of the main political parties; the minutes of the Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Relations and European Affairs for the period 2004-2019, speeches by Maltese prime ministers (particularly when serving as President of the Council of Ministers in January-July 2017) and ministers of foreign (and/or European) affairs; and policy papers and occasional statements by the political parties. Additionally, the Malta government website, where all official press releases by the head of state, the prime minister and the various ministers are stored, was accessed (Government of Malta, 2020). This has a convenient search facility. Appendix 1 provides an overview of all the documents analysed.

The salience of DI was 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.

Since Malta has two official languages, Maltese and English, many documents that are relevant to this analysis are also available in English and so require no translation, making the task of identifying key words and principles easier. All the relevant key words were searched for in the repository of the Maltese Parliament in both languages. However, no instances of the use of the terminology in Maltese was encountered in the course of this research. Even in debates undertaken in the Maltese language – as is common, for example, in Parliament – such key terms as ‘*a’ la carte*,’ ‘*opt out*,’ ‘*two speed*,’ ‘*multi-speed*,’ ‘*variable geometry*’ and ‘*differentiated integration*’ were still used in English. One reason for this is the absence of a vernacular tradition of referring to such matters in a language other than English – although technical equivalences of these terms in Maltese do exist. Therefore, the English phrases are habitually resorted to, even when the conversation is mainly in Maltese.

The paragraphs, sentences and clauses that are indicative of positions or opinions on DI were then identified. In most cases they were printed and collated so that a more detailed and qualitative analysis could be undertaken (as follows below).

## 2. Malta’s political system and position in the EU

Malta is a small island archipelago located in the centre of the Mediterranean Sea. With an area of 316 km<sup>2</sup>, it is the tenth smallest country in the world by land area. Its population stood at around 494,000 in 2018, making it the world’s fifth most densely populated country. In spite of its small size, it has a fairly diversified economy: construction, tourism, financial services, manufacturing, electronic gaming and public administration are important sectors. With poor soil and limited and uneven rainfall, Malta lacks a strong agricultural sector and therefore has never operated as a plantation economy. Instead, it had spent centuries as a ‘fortress economy,’ serving as a strategic naval base to a series of regional powers, the last of which – Britain – governed Malta as a colony from 1814 to 1964, when independence was achieved.

Britain bequeathed to Malta an electoral system based on the principle of proportional representation by single transferable vote in multi-seat constituencies. However, unlike other countries where such a system has largely necessitated coalition governments (e.g. Ireland), the story in Malta has been starkly

different. Between 1966 and 2017, the system became a pure two-party system. Only the Malta Labour Party (MLP, now *Partit Laburista*, PL) and the Nationalist Party (*Partit Nazzjonalista*, PN) have had candidates elected to parliament. (The Democratic Party, *Partit Demokratiku*, PD) contested the 2017 election in association with the PN and had two members elected). This has meant that single political parties have secured absolute majorities in parliament over all this period, albeit with razor-thin majorities on occasions (usually of just one or three seats, and with a slender 1,600 vote gap between the two main parties in the 2008 election). This situation avoids the horse-trading that invariably accompanies coalition-building and -maintenance, which is standard fare in most contemporary democratic states.

## 2.1 Malta and the EU

Since 2004, Malta has been the smallest Member State in the European Union. It was one of the first countries to enter into an association agreement with the then EEC in the late 1960s, but then any closer association was stalled by a series of governments led by the MLP (1971-1987), which were keener to protect the country's economy from globalisation while various core national industries – sea transport, energy, air transport, broadcasting – were built up, often from scratch, with state support. At the same time, the principles of neutrality and non-alignment were enshrined in the 1974 republican constitution, which weaned the country away from a neo-colonial political hiatus.

The return of the Christian democratic PN to government in 1987 ushered in economic liberalisation and, in parallel, Malta's application to join the EU was submitted in 1990. The MLP was systematically against EU membership, preferring a 'Switzerland in the Mediterranean' option, which indeed represented a form of differentiated integration for the small state premised on the threat of being overwhelmed by European corporate interests on EU accession. In the brief 22-month interlude when the MLP returned to government (1996-98), Malta's application to join the EU was 'frozen' (but not withdrawn), and it was then reactivated again in 1998.

Dr Alfred Sant, Prime Minister of Malta (1996-1998) and leader of the opposition thereafter, explained his understanding of the 'partnership' that he wanted to develop with the EU (instead of full membership). This would be "an engagement that reflected the needs of both sides, rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all model" which was particularly unsuitable given Malta's small size (Sant, 1995).

These details were spelt out by Dr Sant in the run-up to the 'EU membership referendum' (Times of Malta, 2003). Membership of the EU would mean the adoption of all the EU's rules, even when they were unsuitable for a small island state like Malta. It would mean transferring the country's decision-making powers to Brussels-based bureaucrats whose job was to apply the rules to all the Member States. He argued that the structure of Malta's economy was different to that of all the other EU Member States and candidates, with imports and exports being greater than GDP. None had such a high dependence on tourism. None had such a concentration of people in a small area. Applying all the EU's rules was therefore inappropriate. EU membership would undermine the competitiveness of local industry; imports to Malta from non-EU countries would be subject to tariffs; Malta's tiny agricultural sector could not benefit from the Common Agricultural Policy; EU nationals would be able to work and buy property in Malta; the Maltese government would forfeit the right to subsidise Malta's shipyards beyond a maximum of seven years; and Malta would be forced to import soft drinks in plastic containers.

In summary, Sant's argument, and that of the MLP, was that given its small size and heft Malta would suffer heavily from being obliged to adopt the *acquis Communautaire*, but the same smallness might provide the leverage necessary to get the EU to agree to a very special *à la carte* arrangement. This was an appeal for differentiated integration by another name to safeguard national interests. Malta's small size, heft and market size would make it the smallest player in the EU and effectively oblige it to adopt EU legislation without having much more than a symbolic role in shaping it. As an EU member, Malta would have to implement economic policies that would undermine local industry and benefit European capital. It would mean abandoning state aid to local companies, thus ensuring their demise. It

would also mean adopting a common external tariff, which would disadvantage trade with Malta's non-EU trading partners, and EU nationals would have to be allowed to seek work in Malta, possibly competing with the local workforce. These were some of the key arguments proposed by the MLP, then in opposition, in favour of a bespoke 'partnership' agreement between Malta and the EU. The party therefore urged its supporters to vote 'no' in the 2003 EU accession referendum.

The Nationalist Party, in government, criticised this approach in multiple ways: it deemed it to be a whimsical and totally unworkable arrangement with no evidence that the European Commission was remotely interested in considering it; it did not send a strong signal that Malta was willing to participate as an equal member in the European Community and its institutions; it would cheat Malta out of various sources of EU funding; and would deprive Malta (despite its small size) of a seat in the decision-making fora. Instead, EU membership would create a climate of stability which in turn would be a key attraction for foreign direct investment and would catalyse local job creation.

The Nationalist Party's fear that Malta's EU application could be embarrassingly rejected was critical in its decision to 'wind down' the offshore financial services sector that it had spawned in the previous few years. By 1994, almost two dozen acts of parliament had been revoked or revised in order to bring the local financial sector in line and so reduce what was seen at the time as a potential source of tension and collision with Brussels (Fabri & Baldacchino, 1999).

Thus, in 2003 among the 10 EU applicant states Malta had, in proportional terms, the largest and most formidable political party and followership against EU membership. Therefore, when the referendum on joining the EU held on 8 March 2003 was won with a majority of 53.6%, the European Union breathed a sigh of relief (Fenech, 2003). Malta, along with nine other countries, duly acceded to the EU on 1 May 2004.

In parallel with this development, the EU was taking its own initiatives to streamline its voting mechanisms in such a way as to account for such a large number of Member States, most of which were now small. All ten newly acceding EU Member States in 2004 except Poland were smaller in population than Belgium or the Netherlands. Luxembourg was being joined in the EU by small countries like Malta, Cyprus, Slovenia and the three Baltic states (and later by Croatia), each of which had populations of less than four million. Few Council decisions now required unanimity, other than in the EU's 'second and third pillars': the Common Foreign and Security Policy and Justice and Home Affairs.

The Malta EU membership referendum of 2003 saw the highest turnout in an EU membership referendum (91%) and the lowest support for joining in any of the nine countries that held referendums on joining the EU (53%). These statistics indicate the high levels of electoral participation in Malta, but also a fair degree of scepticism about the suitability and strategic advantage for Malta, a small state, of joining the EU (Cini, 2004).

Some of these concerns were addressed in the run-up to EU accession. Just like Ireland (another relatively small state) in 1973, Malta went for and clinched a number of opt-outs. By the end of the negotiations, Malta had secured 70 derogations (one of which is permanent) from the EU's *acquis communautaire*. (For the sake of comparison, Poland secured the next largest number of derogations: 43; followed by Latvia with 32.) It has been argued that size and scale had much to do with this relative success: Malta "... won the right to bar foreign labour for up to seven years, and also the right to block non-residents indefinitely from buying second homes on the Maltese islands: the only permanent derogation granted to any accession country" (The Economist, 2004).

Malta's Prime Minister Dr Lawrence Gonzi (2004-2013) praised the EU as a big family, a mosaic and an ongoing project. In his speech on the day of Malta's accession to the EU (1 May 2004), he pledged that Malta would keep and treasure its identity within the Union (also acknowledging that the EU had agreed to recognise the Maltese language, spoken in Malta by half a million people at most, as an official EU language). It was a project to which Malta would now be party with a voice (albeit small) at the table, and not merely a target or victim.

The MLP has, in the meantime, changed its position to wholehearted support for EU membership. However, an undercurrent of suspicion about whether the EU is ‘right for us’ prevails, and it surfaces in relation to particular ‘hot button’ topics. One of the confrontations that is taking shape, and especially now with the UK exiting the EU, is about tax harmonisation. At 35%, Malta has had the highest effective rates of corporate tax in the EU since 2016 (Delgado et al., 2019). However, after all possible refunds are applied for, the effective rate works out at 5% (Gouder & Scicluna, 2018). Malta is one of the countries that defends its low tax regime and is also arguing that maintaining differential levels of tax across the EU is actually a competitive advantage for Europe.

## ***2.2 The Migration Conundrum***

However, the main terrain of current contestation is migration. Malta’s geographical predicament places it barely 250 kilometres away from Libya and directly in the path of many undocumented migrants leaving North Africa and attempting the crossing to Sicily, Italy and southern Europe. Malta was the landing site of thousands of such migrants in the early 2000s and its overtures to Brussels for ‘burden sharing’ were largely ignored. Ironically, the country that agreed to take the most undocumented migrants from Malta during this period was a non-EU Member State, The United States (Lutterbeck, 2009).

The sombre tone struck by Prime Minister Joseph Muscat (2013-2020) on 4 July 2017, when Malta had just completed its six-month stint as President of the EU Council of Ministers, was very different from the upbeat one of his predecessor 13 years before: “For all the good intentions which we all declare in signed declarations,” he said, “when it boils down to real effective solidarity, we as Member States should all be ashamed of our record.” The bone of contention was migration. He continued, “In the absence of real solidarity by all Member States, no one should blame affected Member States for trying to protect their own national interest.” These ‘protective measures’ included initiatives that have also involved Italy over the years. Italy is Malta’s closest neighbour and a natural ally in the EU when dealing with undocumented migrants from Africa who opt for the central Mediterranean route. Although common positions have also been taken with France, Spain and Greece – coastal EU Member States with a concern for migration from the south and east – the Malta-Italy co-operation on this thorny issue has been significant. Its initiatives have included the criminalisation of rescue operations by NGOs registered under foreign flags to avoid human trafficking.

They have also included a refusal to land migrants who have been saved from the high seas. An informal arrangement has seen various EU Member States offering to welcome a number of ‘saved’ migrants in their countries. Only when these migrants have been allocated to other countries in this way are they then allowed to enter a safe port and/or disembark. A high point in this tense showdown was reached in April and May 2020 when, citing Covid-19 security concerns, Malta allowed 425 migrants (all men) it had saved from their sinking boats to spend up to 40 days living (often seasick) on four chartered tourist boats just outside Malta’s territorial waters, while Malta mounted a valiant diplomatic effort to have these men ‘assigned’ to EU Member States before allowing them to land (Agius, 2020; Falzon, 2020). The attempt was not successful. The migrants were agitating for change and the press was rife with appeals for justice and respect for human rights. The migrants were brought to shore in Malta, although a few countries did pledge to take a number of them. On 22 May 2020 Minister of Foreign Affairs Evarist Bartolo, a veteran MP recently appointed to this portfolio, reminded the EU Member States that Malta had understood that they were a group of countries that shared responsibilities, aspirations and values. Instead, Malta had been left alone: as of 20 May 2020, 3,405 irregular migrants had been landed in Malta that year; of these, just 610 had been earmarked for relocation elsewhere. Malta, Minister Bartolo added, would not allow itself to become Europe’s undocumented migrant crisis centre. The Minister appeared on a short video to appeal for solidarity and fairness (Bartolo, 2020).

### **2.3 Malta as a small state**

Before getting to grips with the characteristics of differentiated integration (DI) in Malta, it is pertinent to point out that dealing with DI is invariably impacted by the smallness of this jurisdiction. Small states are states, and therefore – as a matter of principle – they are expected, and they often expect themselves, to be able to behave like other (larger) states. This includes pursuing various policy developments, having opinions on many policy positions, deploying their administrative cadres to fulfil various functions, nurturing specialists and so on. In practice, things do not necessarily quite unfold in this way. Even when it comes to international and European institutions, small countries may find themselves obliged, by sheer human resource constraints, to focus energies on a few files, possibly disregarding others that may be considered less significant or critical for national interests. Boards and committees, including those set up in parliament, may have broad-ranging remits, and so their members would be expected to cover various policy domains and they typically wear many ‘hats,’ finding themselves engaged in various capacities and therefore having more complete ‘helicopter views’ of the state of play but then being less able to dedicate time to specialist concerns (e.g. Brown, 2010; Sarapu & Randma-Liiv, 2020).

On the other hand, a particular policy issue may galvanise national politics and the public. A single agenda item can serve as the hook with which a small state may urge the rest of the European Union to address its concerns. Small states, by definition, find solace in the rule of law and the international order that protects them in spite of their absolute small size and puny heft. And so, Malta in the EU tends to uphold the ‘rule of law’ and disapprove of ‘adventures’ that involve departures from agreed principles. Like other small states, Malta prefers working within “... an institutional setting that presumes some basic rules of the game” because this provides shelter against great power aggression or intransigence (Baldacchino & Wivel, 2020, p. 11; also Thorhallsson, 2017).

These episodes include Brexit. Malta had been a British colony for some 160 years before securing independence from the UK in 1964. Apart from Ireland, it is the only EU post-Brexit Member State where English is an official language. Its first development plan in the 1950s was supported by the UK government and its fledgling tourism policy in the 1960s was kept afloat by British tourists (Smith, 2008). For Malta, and especially after the Second World War, the UK has been the natural ‘pole of attraction’ for commerce, trade and pursuit of higher education (Sultana & Baldacchino, 1994). The positive and negative impacts of Brexit on the Maltese economy have been examined and discussed since the June 2016 Brexit plebiscite. All along, Malta never argued for a special deal with the UK. Indeed, the typical ministerial comment has been to affirm, time and time again, the importance of a common front with the other EU26 in dealing with London.

It is in this light that one needs to acknowledge the extent to which ‘burden sharing’ in the context of Europe’s handling of ‘the migration crisis’ is a key Maltese policy position. Successive Maltese governments have not held back their explicit disapproval of the inability of the EU to ‘get its act together’ and approach the migration question with one voice. The conundrum of combining refugee protection and border control in the Mediterranean Sea glaringly persists (Klepp, 2010).

### **3. The workings of the Parliament**

In the period under review, 2000-2020, the most vociferous Maltese politician to express his thoughts on the matter of differentiated integration has been Dr George Vella. A medical doctor by profession, Dr Vella served as Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs until 2013, and then Minister of Foreign Affairs until 2017. After a two-year hiatus, he was sworn in as President of the Republic of Malta in 2019, the position he currently occupies. Dr Vella dominated the meetings of the Foreign and European Affairs (FEA) Committee with his detailed and elaborated interventions articulating the implications of legislative or policy developments in Brussels, and what they would mean for Malta (and for his Labour Party or the Labour Government). The tacit or explicit agreement by the other members of the

Committee – from both parties represented in parliament – indicated the deep respect held by the members for Dr Vella, who also for a time was the most senior member of the House.

The meetings of this FEA Committee ranged over many policy fields. They also often consisted in meeting international visitors to Malta on courtesy calls or fact-finding missions (such as European Commissioners, members of parliament from other countries, ministers and senior officials in regional or international organisations). The FEA Committee is one of 17 house standing committees and is the only one that deals with regional and international affairs (including European, Council of Europe and EU Affairs). With such a broad scope, there is, quite expectedly, a dearth of references to the same policy issue. When it comes to differentiated integration, and using a broad-brush approach, the FEA Committee has addressed this matter on several occasions during the period under review (see below). Having looked at the transcripts, one can say that Dr George Vella's contributions alone represented around half of all the statements made.

21 January 2008 (Discussion on the Lisbon Treaty). The debate included a reference to the FEA Committee's support for the hallowed principle of subsidiarity and proportionality in the EU's legislative process. The FEAC recommended endorsement of this Treaty as long as it safeguarded Malta's interests (including a sixth seat in the European Parliament). There were references to (but no opinion expressed in favour or against) the proposed (a) co-decision mechanism with the European Parliament as a new ordinary way of taking decisions; (b) the enhanced co-operation mechanism; (c) the protection of unanimity in most cases; (d) the possibility of a constructive abstention; and (e) the mechanisms for qualified majority and double majority voting. There was also a discussion of the 'Ioannina Compromise,' whereby a substantial minority which is not enough to block a decision can still request a reconsideration or delay of the decision. The FEAC noted these innovative tools and reaffirmed Malta's commitment to the EU project, with no suggestion of disagreement. There was also a passing reference to how any 'opt-outs' may create a "simpler and more transparent" EU, but that in any case the EU can only deploy and exercise those powers that have been ceded to it by the Member States.

On 7 July 2008, the FEA Committee discussed its reticence to engage with NATO's *Partnership for Peace* (PfP) programme, preferring to stick to the common defence and security policy of the EU. The Committee reminded itself of Malta's constitutional safeguards: in favour of peace, neutrality and non-alignment. (Malta joined the PfP in April 1995, withdrew in October 1996 and reactivated its membership in March 2008) (Pace, 2013).

22 October 2008 – In the wake of the results of the Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty, the FEAC reaffirmed the position of the Maltese Government not to create a 'two speed' Europe if it would mean leaving the Republic of Ireland behind the main EU pack. The result may have been disappointing for Malta yet the FEA Committee noted it was played fairly and one should grant the Irish the time and space for another 'electoral consultation.'

10 November 2008 – The Foreign Minister (Dr Michael Frendo at the time) discussed with the FEAC Malta's desire to introduce a 'burden sharing' mechanism among the EU countries as a whole when undocumented migrants were saved in international waters or in the maritime zone of non-EU Member States (notably Libya, in Malta's case). This would supplement the 'voluntary burden sharing' already in place when migrants were saved from within the maritime zones of EU Member States.

20 March, 21 May and 2 July 2012 – Once again, the FEA Committee debated Malta's role in the 'Partnership for Peace.'

2017-2019 – Brexit was discussed a number of times. There was a reaffirmation of the need to respect the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, and that the UK could not be treated preferentially as an EU Member State once it was outside the EU.



#### 4. The workings of the State

Dozens of speeches by the President of the Republic (as head of state), the Prime Minister and various Ministers over the period 2000-2020 were also scanned for their references and nods to differential integration, as exemplified by their mentions of the terms ‘à la carte,’ ‘opt out,’ ‘two speed,’ ‘multi-speed Europe,’ ‘variable geometry’ and ‘differentiated integration’. A couple of observations ensuing from this exercise are warranted here:

First, very few references to these terms were found over the 20-year span: only 10, and mainly since 2013 (Table 1).

**Table 1 Frequency of references to DI key words in key speeches**

2000		2010	
2001		2011	
2002		2012	
2003		2013	1
2004	1	2014	
2005		2015	2
2006		2016	1
2007		2017	3
2008		2018	1
2009		2019	1
		Up to May 31, 2020	

Of course, this does not necessarily mean that the matter of differentiated integration did not feature in any official documents other than on these ten rare occasions but it could have been discussed using other language or terms.

Second, in these ten statements, the context makes it clear that Malta’s position on DI was not one that was rigorously kept, in favour or against, over time. In various statements, the Maltese government is effectively saying that European values, human rights and solidarity – all in relation to undocumented migration – are not optional *à la carte* options but are at the very core of the European project. Neither is Malta’s international reputation (this statement was made with respect to the country’s financial services sector) or Malta’s security. A concern was expressed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the creation and evolution of a two-speed Europe in 2015, an echo of a statement in 2004 by the same Ministry which argued that all talk about a ‘two speed Europe’ was not conducive to consensus. But then a 2013 statement by the Office of the Prime Minister benignly referred to ‘multi-speed Europe’ as an idea which may be necessary to secure some kind of compromise situation acceptable to all the EU Member States. A flat May 2019 statement signed by all the EU Heads of State (including Malta) called for a wide integration process in the EU and the eurozone or a multi-speed Europe, urging strong voter participation in the European Parliament election. The blandness of this statement reflected deep divisions over the speed and tenet of European integration at that point in time.

#### 5. Conclusion

The positions of the two main political parties in Malta on European questions are (now) remarkably (and boringly) similar. Such a consensus obviates the need for local debate. Instead, there is a rare reference to, and articulation of, common positions on European issues. This consensus diminishes the amount of time and space dedicated to internal discussions in Malta about the EU. It may sound ironic that Malta tried to make the best of its particularities – smallness, islandness, high population density – in the run-up to its EU accession in 2004, securing the one permanent derogation and various transitional

arrangements in the process. However, since 2004, and once part of the EU, the rhetoric of Malta's main political parties is one that (largely) expects EU Member States to 'play ball' and respect the principles of solidarity and working together, certainly in relation to *particular* policy fields – such as how to negotiate with UK officials and their commitment to secure Brexit – and (especially for Malta) in the face of the Mediterranean migration issue. What the two main political parties may disagree on is the actual mechanics, diplomatic effort and politics involved in trying to get the EU and its other Member States to accept that migration is a European problem and therefore that all the EU Member States need to shoulder their responsibilities.

## Appendix

### Appendix 1 Overview of the documents analysed

	Category of document	Time period	Details
1	Government programmes	2004-2020	2008, 2013, 2017 (PM Lawrence Gonzi in 2008; PM Joseph Muscat in both 2013 and 2017).
2	First speeches and parliamentary debate	2004-2017	The first speech after the election of each PM in parliament and the subsequent debates (years same as above).
3	Prime Minister European Council Statements	2004-2019	All post-Council statements by the PM in the Maltese Parliament.
4	Parliamentary debates	2006-2008 2012–2014 2017–2020	Documents with one of the following key words: multi-speed Europe, two-speed Europe, coalition of the willing, core Europe, à la carte, enhanced co-operation, opt-out
5	Government's EU policy statements during Council presidency	Jan-June 2017	Prime Minister's statements

### Appendix 2 Translations of the key words used

Key word	Maltese Translation	Notes
Differentiated integration	Integrazzjoni differenzjata	
Future of Europe	Futur / Gejjieni ta' l-Ewropa	
<b>DI Models: Different Speed</b>		
Coalition of the willing	Koalizzjoni ta' min ghandu r-rieda	
Two-speed Europe	Ewropa b'zewg velocitajiet	
Multi-speed Europe	Ewropa b'velocitajiet varji	
<b>DI Models: Different Endpoints</b>		
Variable geometry	Geometrija varjabbli	
Core Europe	Il-qalba ta' l-Ewropa	
Two-tier Europe	Ewropa b'zewg saffi	
Concentric circles	Crieki koncentrici / crieki go xulxin	
à la carte	à la carte	Does not have an established translation
<b>DI Mechanisms</b>		
Enhanced co-operation	Koperazzjoni mizjuda	
opt-out	opt-out	Does not have an established translation
<b>DI Instances – Enhanced co-operation</b>		
PESCO	PESCO	Does not have an established translation
Rome III	Ruma III	
Unitary patent	Patent unitarja	

Matrimonial property regimes	Regim ta' propjeta matrimonjali	
Financial Transaction Tax	Taxxa dwar transazzjonijiet finanzjarji	
European Public Prosecutor	Prosekutur Pubbliku Ewropew	
<b>DI Instances – Opt-out</b>		
Schengen	Schengen	Does not have an established translation
Economic and Monetary Union	Ghaqda Ekonomika u Monetarja	
Security and Defence Policy	Politika ta' Sigurta u Difiza	Used also in national contexts
Area of Freedom, Security and Justice	Qasam ta' Helsien, Sigurta u Gustizzja	
Charter of Fundamental Rights	Karta ta' Drittijiet Fundamentali	
Social Charter	Karta Socjali	
Fiscal Compact	Patt Socjali	
Single Resolution Mechanism	Mekkanizmu Uniku ta' Rizoluzzjoni	
Unified Patent Court	Qorti ghal Patent Maghqud	
<b>DI Instances – external integration</b>		
European Economic Area	Qasam Ekonomiku Ewropew	Also referred to as EEA
Customs Union + Turkey	Ghaqda Doganali mat-Turkija	
Eastern Partnership	Shubija tal-Lvant	
Euromed	Euromed	Also referred to as the Barcelona process

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