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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 - Slovenia

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European University Institute

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EUI Working Paper **RSC** 2021/27

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ISSN 1028-3625

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Published in February 2021 by the European University Institute.
Badia Fiesolana, via dei Roccettini 9
I – 50014 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)
Italy

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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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The research leading to this report was conducted within the InDivEU project. The project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 822304. The funders had no role in the study design, data collection or analysis.

Abstract

The paper addresses a concept of differentiated integration in Slovenian politics. The analysis showed that the key words associated with the salience of DI are seldom used in parliamentary debates, coalition programmes or prime minister speeches. The issue of DI is more a topic for academic discussion than for daily politics. We identify that the common thread throughout Slovenian foreign policy from independence onwards has been that a strong and united EU is of key importance for Slovenia. Primarily because of a fear that a multi-tier EU would mean fewer opportunities for future Slovenian governments and in general fewer opportunities for smaller and/or less developed countries.

Keywords

Differentiated integration, Slovenia, multi-tier EU, white paper, future EU.

Summary of Results

I. Salience

The concept of differentiated integration is practically invisible in Slovenian politics. The analysis showed that the key words associated with the salience of DI are seldom used in parliamentary debates, coalition programmes or prime minister speeches. The issue of DI is more a topic for academic discussion than for daily politics. In fact, the document analysis reflected a low presence of discussion on the EU in general. More detailed research showed that even when the EU is being discussed the discussion is closely related to national topics such as the use of structural funds or the uptake of EU legislation.

II. Position

While direct reference to differentiated integration is almost non-existent, and therefore the government position on DI cannot be explicitly determined, the common thread throughout Slovenian foreign policy from independence onwards has been that a strong and united EU is of key importance for Slovenia. On a number of different occasions when referring to the EU, statements can be observed such as the following: “We will advocate for the existence of a strong and effective EU, which is in the national interest of Slovenia. The strategic interest of Slovenia is to be in the core of the EU, which will guarantee equal conditions for development” (Coalition programme of the Šarec government 2018-2022). The few instances where wording related to DI models was used reflect a concern about a multi-speed Europe, especially a fear that a multi-tier EU would mean fewer opportunities for future Slovenian governments and in general fewer opportunities for smaller and/or less developed countries.

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1. Introduction

This report investigates the salience of differentiated integration (DI) in Slovenian government discourse between 1990 and 2018.¹ It also probes into the position of Slovenian governments on the issue of DI.

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 the 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 DI mechanisms. On the one hand, the enhanced co-operation mechanism allows a limited group of MSs – under certain conditions – to pursue deeper integration without having to involve all the MSs. On the other hand, the ‘opt-out’ mechanism allows MSs to refrain from participating in common policies. In short, enhanced co-operation allows a MS to integrate more than the 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 co-operation, (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.

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 get a better idea of the discussions in the background of the peaks identified by key word counting, the authors looked at the original documents in the database. In this way, the context in which a particular DI model was addressed could be identified and instances of completely different uses of the specific terms eliminated.² To further enhance the reliability of the findings, the key word counts were triangulated with a close reading of selected key documents.

A major source was provided by the research group involved in the CLARIN project (European Research Infrastructure for Language Resources and Technology), a part of the EU infrastructure ESFRI.³ The relevant data are in the siParl corpus, a database included in CLARIN that “contains minutes of the Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia for the 11th legislative period 1990-1992, minutes of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia from the 1st to the 7th legislative period 1992-

¹ The data collection extended until May 2018. More recent data will only be accessible after the end of the current parliamentary term, approximately in 2022.

² The combination of the approaches proved to be fruitful since mere counting of the results in parliamentary debates only seldom included the key words identified as search variables. The authors did not only focus on keywords/catchphrases but also on the context, which in some cases revealed Slovenia’s (and its politicians) level of commitment and attitude to EU integration. For example, the term ‘differentiated integration’ was used during a parliamentary debate on the principle of involving children with special needs in the education system. This was then eliminated from our analysis.

³ For more, see <https://www.clarin.eu/content/clarin-in-a-nutshell>.

2018, minutes of the working bodies of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia from the 2nd to the 7th legislative period 1996-2018 and minutes of the Council of the President of the National Assembly from the 2nd to the 7th legislative period 1996-2018. The corpus comprises over 10 thousand sessions, one million speeches or 200 million words” (Pančur et al., 2020). The key words for DI were entered in the siParl database. The suggested key words were translated and adapted to the Slovenian language and jargon that is usually employed when discussing European affairs. Therefore, some Slovenian equivalents were not just translated but logically adapted to the political discourse in the country.⁴

Regarding the governments’ positions, the results are based on a manual attitude analysis of parliamentary debates. For the analysis of the government attitude to DI, we identified and analysed different documents in which EU issues were expected to be discussed. The selection included the last three coalition agreements (2014-2022), the three speeches by prime ministers (PMs) after their election in the National Assembly (2014, 2018, 2020), the speech by PM Janez Janša addressing the European Parliament during the Slovenian presidency of the European Council in 2008 and the transcript of the public debate in the National Assembly dedicated to the presentation of the White Paper by the European Commission held on 15 June 2017. In addition, different sessions of parliamentary committees where debates included some of the identified DI key words were analysed.

The Slovenian political context

Even before starting the research, the assumption was that in Slovenia a debate about differentiated integration (DI) is hardly present. The fact that Slovenia is committed to the European Union (EU) does not mean that there are many debates about EU issues in government bodies or among the public in general. In the National Assembly there is a Committee for EU Affairs (OZEU) and a Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Policy. OZEU meetings are traditionally held weekly on Friday mornings from 8:00 to 10:00. Taking into account the fact that the regular government sessions are scheduled for Thursdays and their decisions are known to the National Assembly’s bodies only by the late afternoon or even Friday morning, there is hardly any time to prepare a substantive debate on the different issues and the positions of the Government.

In addition, looking at the relationship between the government and the OZEU, it seems that the OZEU is not understood as an important factor in the EU-related decision-making process. What is usually expected of the OZEU is for it to confirm the government’s position on particular EU issues, and the position is then sent to the European Commission or transmitted to Slovenian politicians to be addressed at the appropriate bodies in Brussels.

Almost all the political parties⁵ in the National Assembly (except one: the Slovenian National Party, SNS) support Slovenian membership of the European Union. Nevertheless, there are differences in their

⁴ The authors wish to thank Tomaž Erjavec in the Slovenian CLARIN team for his valuable assistance and guidance with this.

⁵ In the Slovenian case, the left/centre/right party cleavage should not be understood in the same way as the traditional one in the European system, but instead in terms of a particular division resulting from positions regarding the second world war, intervention in the economy and particularly relationships with the previous (socialist) system. In recent years a new dividing line has become visible: attitudes to mass migration and refugees. In the Slovenian political system, the parties are distributed along the left/right spectrum as follows:

- LEFT: Levica (Left Party, Levica);
- CENTRE-LEFT: Socialni demokrati (Social Democrats, SD), Demokratična stranka upokojevcov (Democratic party of retired people, DeSUS – an ex-spin-off from the Social Democrats);
- CENTRE/LIBERAL: Stranka moderne centra (Party of the Modern Centre, SMC), Lista Marjana Šarca (List of Marjan Šarec, LMŠ), Stranka Alenke Bratušek (Party of Alenka Bratušek, SAB);
- CENTRE-RIGHT: Nova Slovenija – Krščanski demokrati (New Slovenia – Christian Democrats, NSi);
- RIGHT: Slovenska demokratska stranka (Slovenian Democratic Party, SDS);

perceptions of the European Union: whereas the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) argues that Slovenia should enhance its relations with the Visegrád Group (V4) and with the other central European countries, the liberal trio (the Party of the Modern Centre, SMC; the List of Marjan Šarec, LMSŠ; and the Party of Alenka Bratušek, SAB) emphasises that Slovenia is part of core Europe (in Slovenia this usually refers to Benelux + Germany + France).⁶ In geographical terms, the position of the Social Democrats (SD) is not so clear, but together with New Slovenia – Christian Democrats (NSi) they aim for Slovenia to be more proactive in the EU institutions, which implicitly means that Slovenia should rely on the support of Berlin.

2. How salient is DI for Slovenian governments?

2.1 Government programmes and prime minister speeches

The first step in the analysis was to grade the salience of DI in government programmes, first speeches, PM Janša's address to the EP and the national parliamentary debate on Juncker's five scenarios. We therefore analysed eight documents and scored them between 0 (no reference to DI) and 2 (direct reference to DI). The overall salience score was 0.625, which is low. The highest salience scores were in the 2018 PM first speech (2), the 2020 PM speech (1), and the 2017 parliamentary debate on Juncker's five scenarios (1). In the 2014 and 2020 government programmes there was no reference to DI, whereas in 2018-2020 there was a marginal reference. The overall salience amounted to 0.375 and the mentions were rather negative or neutral, with no really positive statements about the EU in the documents analysed.

2.2 Parliamentary debates

Regarding the parliamentary debates, we focused on debates from 1992 to 2018, although Slovenia joined the EU in 2004. This timeline was taken into consideration because among the reasons for Slovenian independence was also the fact that the country already wanted to adhere to the EU (at the time, the EEC). It was therefore expected that as soon as possible after gaining independence, Slovenia would put much effort into presenting itself as a potential suitable EU member. Therefore, the expectation was that the key words linked to the EU should be more present. This assumption was only partially confirmed. As can be seen from Figure 1, there were just three breaking points in the last 25 years in which conceptual key words related to DI were present in parliamentary debates. These were the years 1993, 2004 and 2017.

While 1993 was a year of intensive activity related to the start of the integration process, 2004 was the year when Slovenia became a full member of the EU. In 2017, the debates were mostly linked to Juncker's five scenarios and the situation in Europe after the migration crisis. The debates in the National Assembly during this period were mostly linked to two key phrases (two-speed and multi-speed Europe) and to the overall discussion on the future of Europe. These key phrases were frequently used not only in the context of future EU developments but also in that of highlighting the position of Slovenia in the EU (such as stressing that Slovenia needs to be part of core Europe). Nevertheless, the key words which were identified were mostly linked to form and less to substance. Few speakers were presenting their positions on the future of Europe or DI models, while most were using these phrases in general terms.

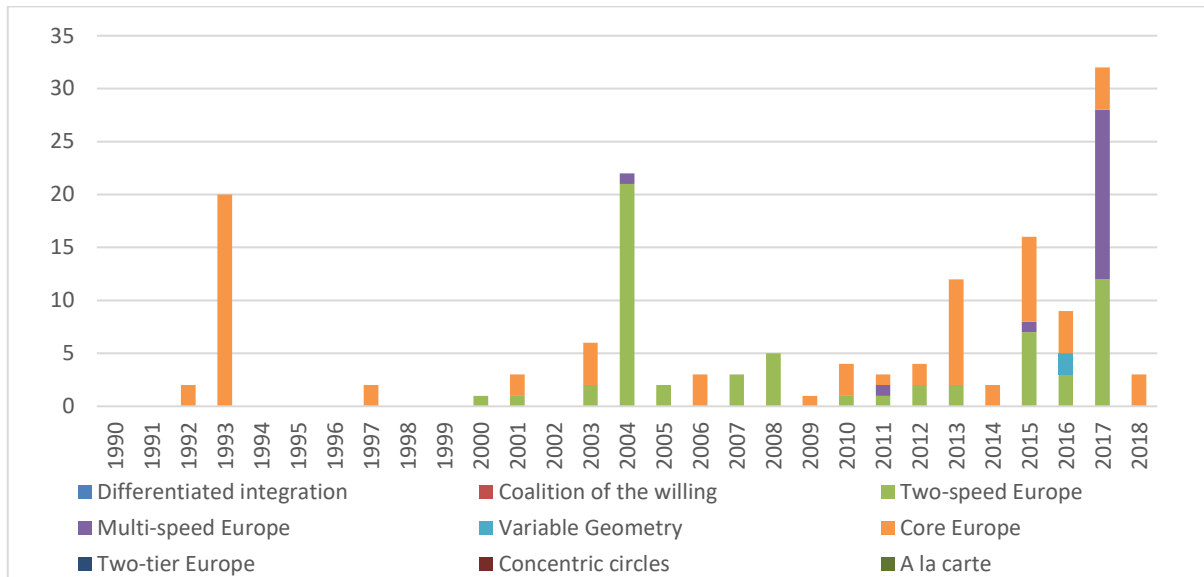
What can be seen from the debates is also that the concept of different speeds in the EU is always associated with the position of Slovenia. Therefore, speakers almost never discussed the relevance of possible differentiation for Europe but mostly only the Slovenian position in these potential

• FAR RIGHT: Slovenska nacionalna stranka (Slovenian National Party, SNS). This party builds its presence on anti-EU feelings and anti-migration feelings.

⁶ Države Beneluksa, Nemčije in Francije.

developments, urging the country to stay with the most dynamic group of countries. In general, substantial debate about the future of Europe was non-existent. Speakers only referred to the ‘future of Europe’ as something that should be debated and should evolve, but in fact this was just a euphemism for positioning Slovenia in core Europe.

Figure 1 - The salience of conceptual key words in parliamentary debates



In a further analysis, we analysed the distribution of the conceptual key words (Appendix 3). The finding was that ‘core Europe,’ ‘two-speed Europe’ and ‘multi-speed Europe’ were the key phrases most used in parliamentary debates, with ‘core Europe’ and ‘two-speed Europe’ representing more than 80% of all the key phrases. The reason behind this is that ‘two-speed Europe’ and ‘multi-speed Europe’ were issues debated mostly in the 3rd and 7th terms of the National Assembly. Whereas the 3rd term marked the last phase in Slovenia’s accession to the EU, the 7th term was in the time after the 2015 migration crisis and when the five scenarios were presented. On the other hand, debate on ‘core Europe’ was relevant mostly in the 1st term of the National Assembly (1992-1996) when Slovenia started its path towards EU integration and during the 7th term (2014-2018) when the PM decided that Slovenia should be part of the ‘core countries’ (this means that the Slovenian government coordinated its activities at the EU level with the three Benelux countries).⁷

The next part of the analysis is based on findings from the CLARIN database and presents the numbers of hits together with a detailed analysis of the peaks. This was done in two steps. First, we counted the number of hits and then looked at the context of the debate or statement by a politician/expert as presented in the database.

Diferencirana integracija, diferencirano povezovanje (differentiated integration)

As expected, the analysis of all the sessions in the National Assembly did not result in any entries for ‘differentiated integration.’ This can be explained by the fact that in the Slovenian language politicians do not use the term ‘diferencirana integracija/diferencirano povezovanje’ but instead the term ‘level of integration.’ The search therefore included this term as well. However, even so the results are quite scarce: only two instances were recorded.

⁷ ‘Core Europe’ is untranslatable in Slovenian. This is why in Slovenian EU jargon the synonym ‘countries in Benelux + Germany + France’ is used.

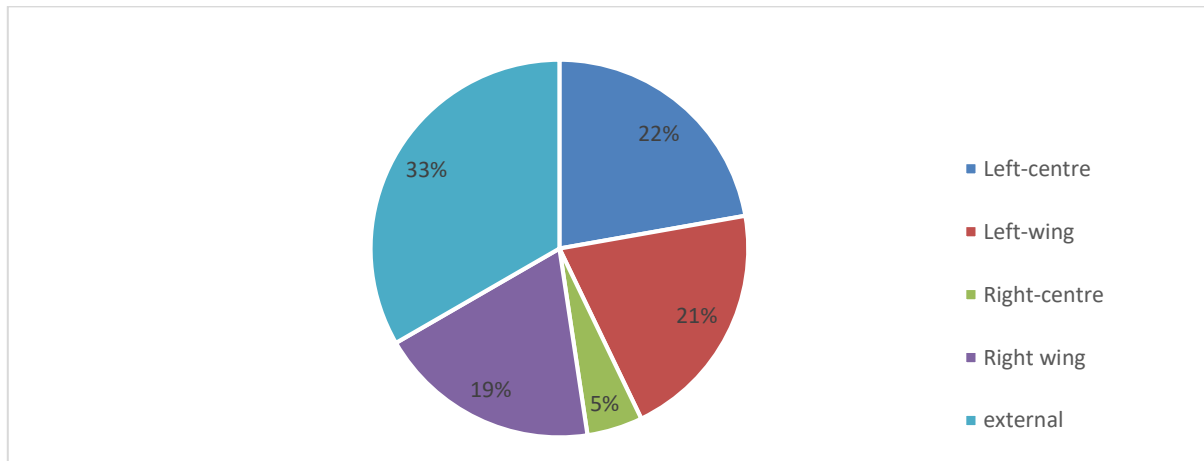
Evropa dveh hitrosti (two-speed Europe) in Evropa več hitrosti (multi-speed Europe)

The term ‘two-speed Europe’ was occasionally present in debates among the Slovenian public and in the Slovenian government. The analysis done using CLARIN showed that from 1992 to 2018 ‘two-speed Europe’ was used 63 times in debates in the National Assembly. Two more substantial peaks were identified in the legislative terms 2000-2004 and 2014-2018. The term ‘two-speed Europe’ was used 25 times in the 3rd term (2000-2004, particularly in 2004)⁸ and 22 times in the 7th term (2014-2018, particularly in 2017). What is interesting is that prior to Slovenian membership of the EU and again a decade later Slovenian politicians and decision-makers used the term ‘two speed Europe’ for differently intensified integration. However, in all the interventions Slovenia ‘wanted’ to be part of first-speed/core Europe.

Most references to ‘two-speed Europe’ were made by male MPs (Appendix 5). This reflects the situation in the National Assembly, which is predominantly composed of men. In addition, women are seldom members of the two committees where the EU is debated (the Committee for European Affairs and the Committee for Foreign Affairs). This is further reflected in practically no mentions by women parliamentarians of issues related to the EU in the parliamentary debates.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the term ‘two-speed Europe’ by party ideology. There are two surprising observations here. The first is the percentage of external speakers using ‘two-speed Europe,’ representing a third of all the interventions on the topic. We expected this share to be even higher since the Slovenian administration often uses EU jargon in domestic debates. On the other hand, what is also surprising is that interventions on ‘two speed Europe’ are more present in speeches by left-centre party members than in those by centre-right ones. The share of interventions from the left is almost twice that from the right. In Slovenia, where all the parties are committed to the EU and its core, it would be expected that both wings would be more leveraged.

Figure 2 - Mentions of two-speed Europe by a political party (1990-2018)



All the parties agreed that Slovenia should not be part of a ‘second-speed’ Europe. There was a consensus in the National Assembly that Slovenia should accelerate its speed to be an integral part of core Europe.

In the Slovenian case, ‘two-speed Europe’ is also used as a synonym for three-, four- or multi-speed Europe. Therefore, the key phrase ‘multi-speed Europe’ was found in few debates in the National Assembly. Of 19 entries, 17 were in the last legislative period (2014–2018). This relatively high number of hits can be attributed to the fact that there was a special session of the Parliamentary Committee on

⁸ The mandate when Slovenia was actively working to become a member of the EU.

European Affairs discussing the White Paper in June 2017.⁹ In this session, ‘multi-speed Europe’ was mentioned six times by a scholar from the Faculty of Social Sciences in his speech, seven times by centre-right party members of parliament (MPs) and three times by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. ‘Multi-speed Europe’ was mostly linked to a negative perception.

Koalicija voljnih (Coalition of the willing)

Taking just quantitative entries for the ‘coalition of the willing’ key phrase would be misleading. In the Slovenian case, no such entry is related to the EU, but instead related to the war in Iraq (2003) and the activities of the then coalition of the willing. Therefore, the analysis showed that ‘coalition of the willing’ was not used by the government in debating the salience of DI or other future EU integration scenarios.

Variabilna geometrija, variabilno povezovanje (variable geometry)

‘Variable geometry’ was used only twice in government debates, in both instances by the Head of the EU Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the 28th session of OZEU in 2016, commenting on a presentation by a member of the committee on two-speed EU.

Države Beneluksa, Nemčija in Francija (core Europe)

‘Core Europe’ is untranslatable in Slovenian and so Slovenian EU jargon uses the synonym ‘countries in Benelux + Germany + France.’ What emerges from the quantitative research is that ‘core-Europe’ was relevant for government speakers in the first (1992-1996) and the last (2014-2018) parliamentary terms (Appendix 6). The explanation is quite straightforward. In the first term, use of ‘Benelux’ (as the equivalent of ‘core-Europe’) referred to Slovenia’s accession to the EU. Mentions of Benelux between the first and the last mandate were mostly linked to the EU Court of Justice. In the last mandate, the identification of ‘core-Europe’ with Benelux (+ Germany + France) increased. Appendix 7 shows the distribution by party ideology.

Koncentrični krogi (concentric circles)

The quantitative research for the ‘concentric circles’ concept resulted in 18 entries distributed equally among the mandates. Most of the interventions were linked to other issues (education, social cohesion, etc.) and some were part of formulations of the country’s foreign policy strategy. Only three of the interventions that used the term ‘concentric circles’ related to the EU. Two of these were by scholars and one by a centre-right MP. Looking at the discourse of these three speakers, it is clear that when they used the term they did not debate or even analyse it.

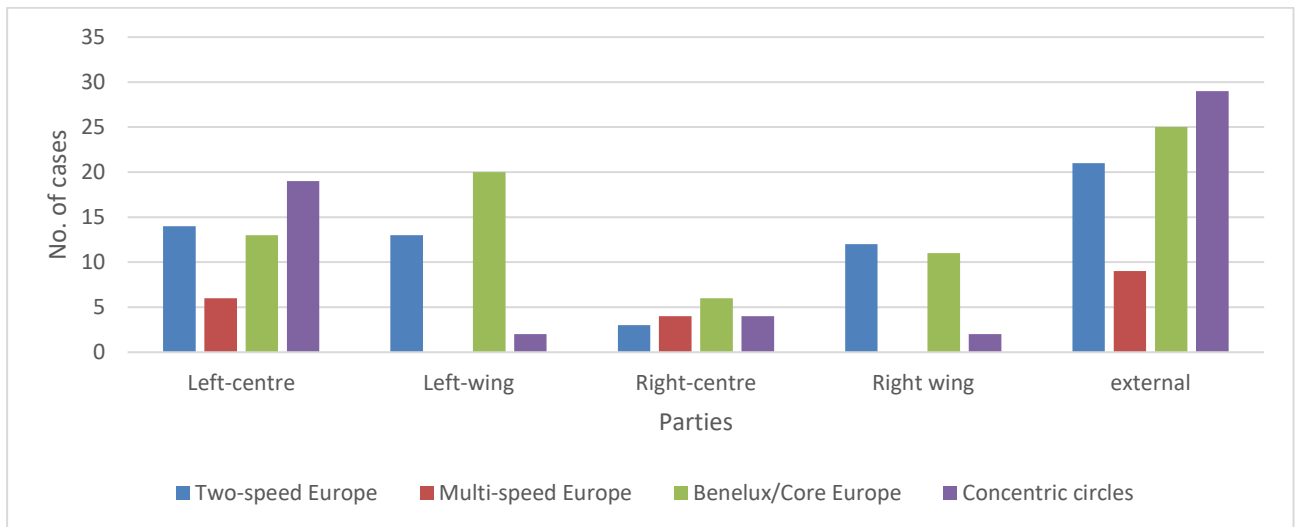
Dvotirna Evropa (two-tier Europe), A-la-Carte Evropa (Europe à la carte), Prihodnost Evrope (future of Europe)

The two concepts were not used in government debates. The search was expanded to also include ‘multi-tier Europe’ but no entry was found. There were 271 entries related to the ‘future of Europe,’ mostly linked to the Convention on the future of Europe (2002-2004) and to the presentation of the White Paper (2017). There was almost no debate on the topic or on how the future of the EU should develop.

Figure 3 provides an overview of the distribution of the most frequent conceptual key words by political ideology.

⁹ This is presented in detail in the next section.

Figure 3 - DI conceptual key word usage by the political orientation of the speakers

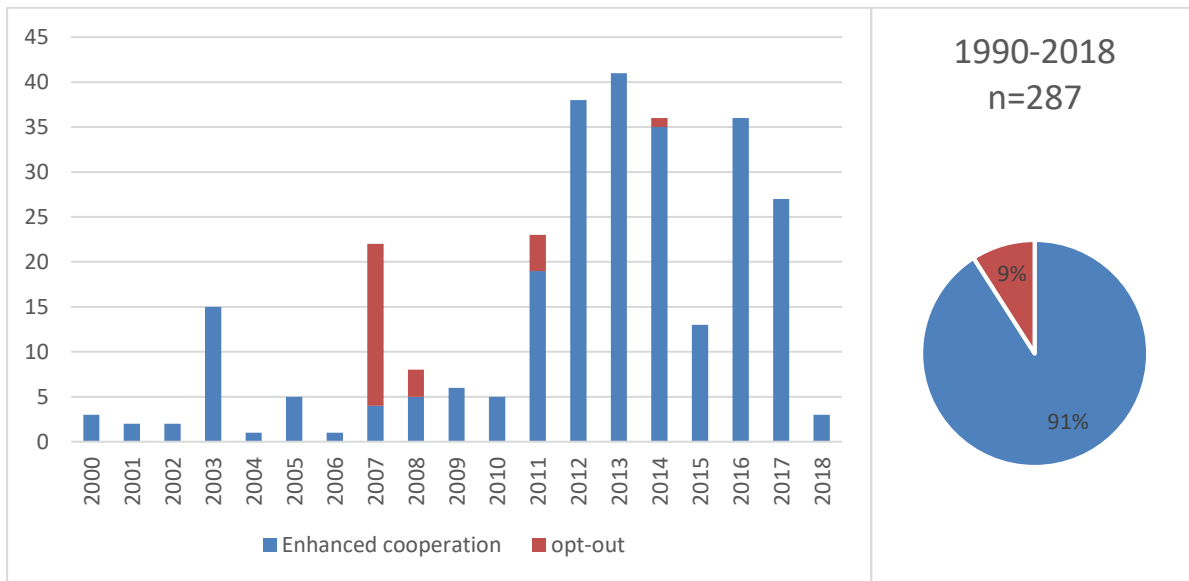


Source: Calculated using CLARIN data (2020).

We were also interested in whether debates on differentiated integration took place in the context of wider debates on the ‘future of Europe’ (FoE). To this end, the frequency of the conceptual key words was compared to the frequency of the key phrase ‘future of Europe.’ In the Slovenian case, the period in which their co-occurrence was mostly relevant was 2000-2004 (Appendix 4). This was the case first because Slovenia was joining the EU and second because the Convention on the future of Europe was ongoing. All the debates in that period were mostly linked to the ‘future (of Slovenia) in Europe.’ Speakers used ‘future of Europe’ to debate on Slovenia’s accession and not issues actually related to the future of the EU. The period 2005-2008 is mostly linked to the ratification of the Constitution of the EU (and later the Lisbon Treaty) and to the forthcoming (2008) Slovenian presidency of the Council of the EU. 2017 was the next peek of the key phrase ‘future of Europe.’ This can be attributed mostly to the presentation of the White Paper on the future of Europe in the Committee for European Affairs (OZEU) and also to public discussion of the five scenarios.

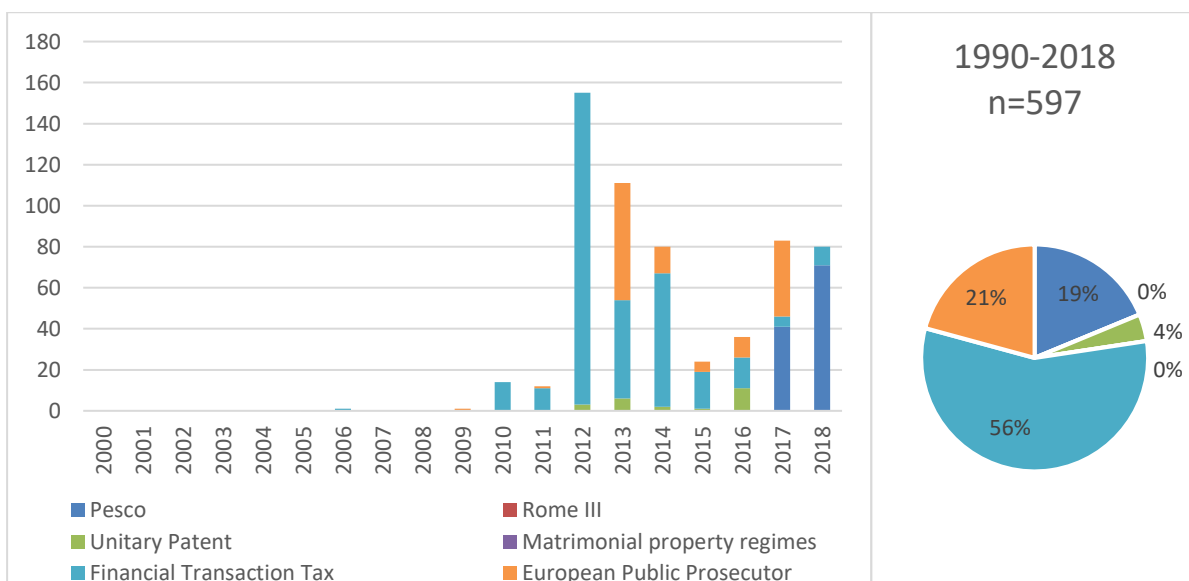
Next, we looked at specific DI mechanisms, namely enhanced co-operation and opt-outs (Figure 4). In Slovenia, opt-outs were barely mentioned and if they were the term was mostly used in a general way (for instance, “there are some opt-outs”). The key DI mechanism phrases did not appear in parliamentary debates before the year 2000. In 2007, opt-outs were mentioned 18 times, representing 70% of all the mentions of opt-outs in the last 25 years. This can be attributed to the debate on the Lisbon treaty and opt-outs that some of the EU15 countries had. On the other hand, the term ‘enhanced co-operation’ was by far the most present in Slovenian parliamentary debates. The issue was mostly present between 2011 and 2014 and in 2017. The first period was when Slovenia was dealing with a relatively harsh economic crisis. At that time, debates were mostly linked to issues related to the crisis and especially to its solution. In 2017, the debate on enhanced co-operation was linked to Juncker’s five scenarios and to co-operation with ‘core Europe’ countries.

Figure 4 - The salience of DI mechanisms in parliamentary debates



Finally, we looked at specific DI instances. We first looked at instances of enhanced co-operation (Figure 5). What is interesting is that in Slovenia the key phrase related to a DI instance most used was the financial transaction tax, followed by the European public prosecutor and PESCO. The peak in uses of these three DI instances was in 2012, when the financial transaction tax was referred to 152 times. For references to the European public prosecutor the peak was in 2013 with 57 entries, while for PESCO the peak was in 2018 with 71 entries. Taking into consideration all three DI instances, the high number of entries can be attributed to the financial tax in 2012, 2013 and 2014, while the situation reversed in 2017 when the European public prosecutor and PESCO became more visible. For 2018, the high numbers can only be attributed to PESCO. The Unitary Patent was mentioned for the first time in 2012 and reached a peak in 2016. After that, there were no more entries in parliamentary debates. The mentions of the Unitary patent represented 4% of the total references to DI instances. Finally, other instances of enhanced co-operation, such as Rome III, were not mentioned in parliamentary debates.

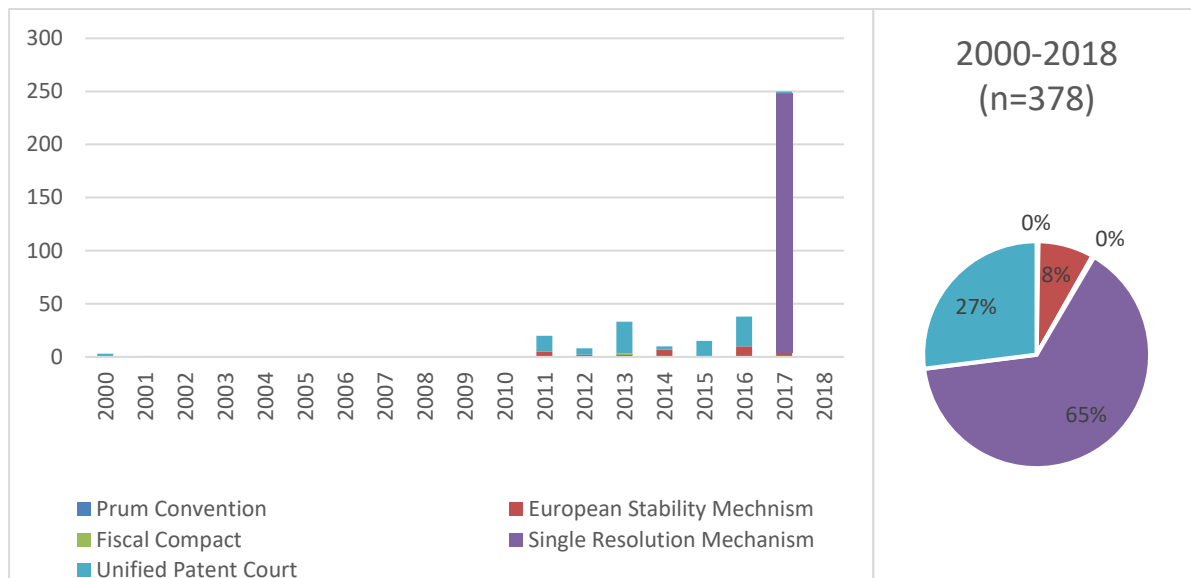
Figure 5 - The salience of instances of enhanced co-operation



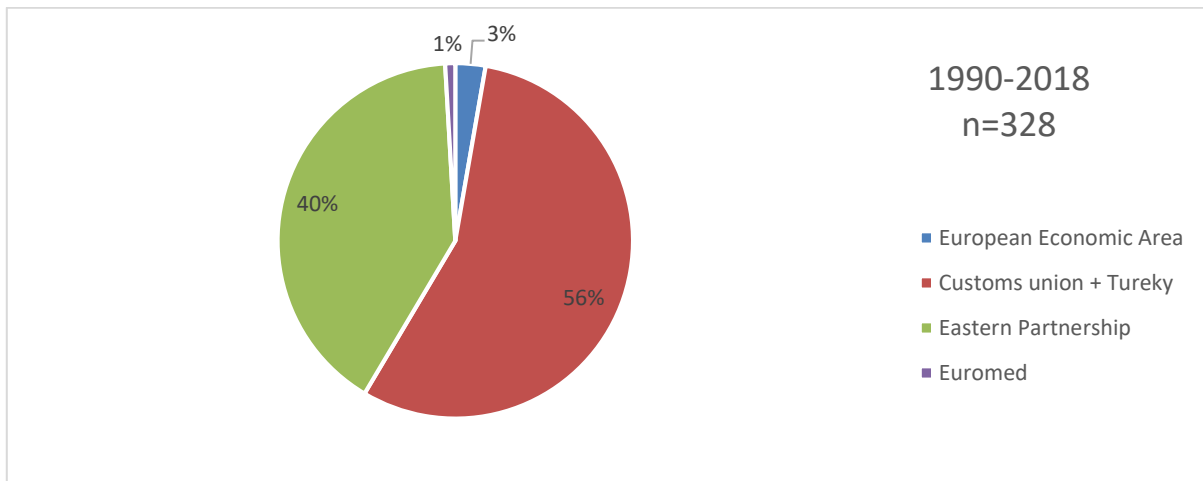
Regarding opt-out policy fields, in Slovenia the debates were vague and at a general level. Opt-outs were only mentioned as observations but not discussed in detail.

Figure 6 shows that references to inter-se agreements reached the highest frequency in 2017. This was mostly because of the debate on the Single Resolution Mechanism (SRM) in Slovenia. Because of the economic crisis, the Bratušek government made a commitment to the European Commission that Slovenia would privatise all banks that were still state-owned by 2018. As Cerar’s government (2014-2018) accelerated the process of bank privatisation in 2017, this was also reflected in parliamentary debates. Therefore, the SRM was mentioned several times in the context of Slovenian bank privatisation, and it de facto had little to do with inter-se agreements. The other two inter-se agreements important in parliamentary debates were the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) and the Unitary patent court. However, in relative terms, the latter was more relevant for the parliamentarians since 102 entries could be found for it and only 30 for the ESM. The Prüm convention was mentioned only once (by the Minister of the Interior, who called it the Prüm Treaty). Similarly, the fiscal compact was mentioned once by the Minister of Finance.

Figure 6 - The salience inter se agreements in parliamentary debates



The analysis showed that in the Slovenian case all four instances of external association agreements were mentioned, but the largest shares were for the Customs Union+Turkey and the Eastern Partnership (Figure 7). Euromed and the European Economic Area (EEA) were treated as far less relevant than the Eastern Partnership and the Custom Union + Turkey. This can be explained by the fact that the EEA and Euromed in the perception of Slovenian politicians did not directly affect the role and position of Slovenia in the EU. On the other hand, the Eastern Partnership was for Slovenia far more important since it affected its relations with Russia. In addition, Slovenia was a supporter of Turkish membership of the EU since during the Pahor Government (2009-2011) the country signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement with Turkey.

Figure 7 - The salience of instances of external association agreements

3. The government position on DI in selected government documents

As expected, differentiated integration was not a common topic in Slovenian parliamentary debates. In fact, EU issues are given only limited attention in everyday politics. The word count analysis showed no use of DI key words and even very limited use with reference to EU-related issues. There were occasions when more/some attention was given to the position of Slovenia in the EU and the need for Slovenia to play a more active role in European integration, but often with less specific wording. However, the analysis of prime minister speeches in the national parliament on the occasion of addressing the parliament after taking office or in the European Parliament when taking over the presidency of the Council of the European Union showed no use of DI-related key words. Therefore, the analysis of the set of government documents also looked at the position of particular governments/prime ministers on the EU in general and the Slovenian position, trying to identify in more general terms attitudes to the future of the EU.

3.1 Government programmes and coalition agreements

A qualitative analysis of the government programmes was conducted to see what activities were planned in the EU area. Three coalition agreements were analysed: the government of Miro Cerar, which was a coalition of three parties and was in office from 2014 to 2018; the government of Marjan Šarec, a minority coalition of five parties which stepped down at the beginning of 2020; and the current government of Janez Janša, a coalition of four parties expected to be in power until 2022. The documents confirm speculation that DI and even general discussion on the future of the EU and the role of Slovenia within it attracted only limited attention by the government and political parties.

First, we looked at the coalition agreement of the Cerar government for the period 2014-2018, which was signed in September 2014. In the chapter on future external policy, two paragraphs were dedicated to the EU.

“Within the EU framework, Slovenia will actively and credibly use the advantages offered by its membership. The coalition parties will actively promote discussion on strengthening the EU, will support the strengthening of internal integration in the EU and its role in international relations, also by strengthening its voice in third countries. We will remain active proponents of the enlargement process, especially in the western Balkans.”

“The coalition will, in co-operation with the opposition, comprehensively integrate the prospect of working within the EU in the everyday workflow of the Slovenian state and society. The activities of the Republic of Slovenia within the EU expand beyond the foreign policy dimension and the

capacities/responsibilities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which requires the EU dimension to be more fully integrated in the entire workflow of the Slovenian state and society within sectors, and coordination between sectors and strategically managing and providing project-based financing.”

No other part of the agreement mentioned anything related to the EU except for the need to promote the use of structural funds. As seen in these two paragraphs, the discussion never moved beyond standard phrases on the need to strengthen the EU.

The next coalition was formed under the leadership of Marjan Šarec, whose party signed a coalition agreement in August 2018. In its opening statement, the agreement stated that the work of the coalition would be towards “active, progressive and pro-European foreign policy.” When discussing foreign policy in more detail, two paragraphs were devoted to the EU.

“We will advocate for the existence of a strong and effective EU, which is in the national interest of Slovenia. The strategic interest of Slovenia is to be in the core of the EU, which will guarantee equal conditions for development. Slovenia will advocate for a further deepening of the European Monetary Union, a strengthening of the Common Foreign and Security Policy with its upgrading to a common defence policy, along with respect for the Schengen system and the protection of the EU external borders. In order to achieve this pro-European policy, we will develop ad-hoc partnerships with member countries based on past positive practice and experiences.”

“We will strive for a renewal of the Union, which will be based on common social, environmental and democratic standards and devoted to securing peace and friendly relations with other parts of the world. With this in mind, we will support reforms such as the setting of minimum social rights and the development of a common European fiscal policy in order to preserve the greatest possible resources for the cohesion and financing of green investments and democratisation of the European institutions.”

Again, we were able to identify only a single mention of the term ‘core EU,’ but only in the context of where Slovenia should strive to be.

The last document analysed was the coalition agreement of the current (2020) government. Since this government was formed after previous Prime Minister Šarec stepped down, its term in office will only be two years. Therefore, a very short (13-page) document was prepared focusing on domestic issues and only very briefly addressing the external agenda. Only two points were found where the EU was mentioned. One referred to strengthening the role of Slovenia in the EU and NATO and the second to devoting increased attention to the forthcoming Slovenian EU Council presidency. Neither of them were further elaborated so no specific position of the government either on the EU or on DI can be derived from the text.

3.2 Prime minister addresses

Three prime minister speeches delivered at the inauguration of their mandates were analysed. Most of the addresses focused on domestic issues with the EU being barely mentioned. Even though each of the prime ministers represented different political positions, the attitude to the EU did not differ much between them. Once again, there was one reference to DI: a two-tier EU was commented on by one of the PMs and a belief that Slovenia should strive towards staying in the core of the EU was stated.

The address by Prime Minister Miro Cerar on 25 August 2014, when discussing the role of Slovenia in the EU, stated that Slovenia aimed to exploit the opportunities offered to the Member States even more actively and credibly by further providing its own views in debates and negotiations at the EU level. In this way the country would try to more actively shape EU policies:

“We will fully support the strengthening of the internal integration of the EU and the strengthening of the EU's role in international relations and become active advocates of the enlargement process, especially in the Western Balkans.”

The following Prime Minister, Marjan Šarec, in his address on 17 August 2018 explicitly used the term ‘two-tier Europe.’ He acknowledged that the EU was at a certain crossroad since the Eurosceptics succeeded with Brexit, which by itself would have long-term consequences for the entire integration. The first problem he identified was agreement on the EU budget:

“On top of this, we can observe in praxis a two-tier Europe already. The EU will have to find the answers to the common questions as soon as possible, since without them the future may be bleak. Slovenia needs to struggle towards remaining within the so called ‘core countries.’”

Much more critical towards the EU was the current Prime Minister Janez Janša. In his inaugural address on 13 March 2020 he spoke in particular about the tasks facing Slovenia with regard to the forthcoming presidency of the EU Council.¹⁰ In his opinion, the EU was in a critical moment, in particular due to Brexit. Brexit was for the European Union the most important strategic catastrophe since its establishment, and at a time when there was no time for experimentation in Europe.

“In the coming years, also during the period of increased responsibility of Slovenia, the Lisbon treaty will have to be defended as a basis for the EU, enabling relative equality of the Member States.”

He went on to suggest that there were significant efforts by the bigger Member States to change the decision-making processes within the Union by giving more weight to bigger countries and by increasing the use of majority voting. This, according to his assessment, was the essence of the proposals in the discussion on the future of the EU. In spite of these trends, Janša still believed that the EU was a strategic interest for Slovenia:

“It is a strategic interest of Slovenia that both the EU and NATO operate in accordance with their founding goals and principles. The European Union is a historical and civilisation achievement of the European continent and the opportunities offered to Slovenia by this are far from being sufficiently exploited.”

According to his opinion, one cannot expect there to be equality in the EU.

“A country with 400 thousand people and a country of 90 million cannot have the same weight anywhere in the world, and this is true of the EU too. We are not equal, we have as much weight as can be expressed through GDP, population size, etc. The impact may be more significant if you are more skilful and here we are with the question of equality.”

Janša cited his experience during the Council presidency, recalling that if a proposal came from a smaller country the Council administration often found a number of legal obstacles to its implementation. However, once one of the bigger countries sponsored the proposal, the legal counterarguments evaporated. He concluded “In this way we were a witness of how equality works.”

3.3 The address to the EP during the presidency

With Slovenia taking over the presidency of the EU Council in 2008, Prime Minister Janez Janša addressed the European Parliament on 16 January 2008 presenting the priorities of its EU Council presidency as the first new Member State holding the presidency. In his speech, the Prime Minister did not use any of the phrases associated with DI. Nevertheless, there were instances in which he referred to the future of the EU and Slovenia’s views in this regard. With the signing of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2007, the first priority of the Slovenian presidency was to promote its ratification. The promotion of economic growth (at the time the third cycle in the Lisbon strategy) was the second priority, which was not yet overshadowed by the financial and economic crisis of the following years. The fight against climate change was the third priority, in which the global leadership of the EU was to be continued. When addressing the four freedoms, the Prime Minister suggested adding a fifth freedom: the free flow of knowledge:

¹⁰ The first Slovenian presidency in the first semester of 2008 was during the period of his government as well.

“In the spring European Council, we therefore wish to add a fifth freedom – the free flow of knowledge – to the four existing freedoms of the European Union, where the EU has so far achieved remarkable progress. A greater mobility of students, researchers and professors will also contribute to this. The advantages of the EU internal market must become more accessible to consumers and small and medium-sized enterprises. Further rapid progress in the actual setup of the internal market for services and innovations is of vital importance for the implementation of the EU reform strategy.”

Slovenia advocated for further EU enlargement as an instrument for the development and greater security of the EU:

“We would like the EU to actively intervene in this area and to step up its involvement in assisting these countries [i.e. the western Balkans] in their reform processes. Let us not forget that a solid and tangible European prospect is an indispensable lever for necessary change and reform in these countries.”

Probably the most direct reference to the EU’s future was the following:

“Because the way we address these four key questions in the future, the way the European Union exercises its greater role and influence in the global world, will be critical in determining the following:

1. peace and security for our citizens,
2. sustainable and secure European Union energy supplies, and
3. managing migration pressures on the European Union.

The more the European Union is capable of acting as a global player on this basis, the stronger the guarantees for its citizens to lead peaceful and safe lives, and for stable economic and social development.”

Analysis of his speech shows that there was no direct or even indirect mention of differentiated integration or a two-tier EU. Obviously, at that time the Slovenian government did not attach any attention to these issues and saw the future of the EU as shaped primarily by the main EU Treaties (the Lisbon Treaty in particular) and strengthening of the Union.

3.4 The White Paper Parliamentary Committee debate

Under the auspices of the Parliamentary Committee for European Affairs, a public discussion on the White Paper and the proposed five scenarios on the future of the EU was held on 15 June 2017. The event was attended by representatives of all the political parties, members of the Committee, members of the government, academics, non-government organisations and other interested parties.

What is surprising is that in spite of it being an event dedicated to the EU’s future, words describing differentiated integration were only used by few participants in their elaborations. Most commonly used was wording on a multi-speed EU or a variable-speed EU. Several participants stated that for Slovenia the only option was “more EU,” with Slovenia’s ambition to be in the EU core. In addition, warnings against loosening the EU’s unity were stressed, suggesting that any move towards a two- or multi-tier EU was problematic in particular for the new small members, which faced a danger of being disregarded in decision processes. Several discussants mentioned the importance of ever stronger economic ties within the EU, including withing the eurozone.

Among specific references to the future of EU integration which relate to DI, a statement by the advisor to the Prime Minister on EU matters needs to be mentioned:

“If the EU wants to be strong, it needs to be united. Therefore, it needs to develop in a manner in which all the members are committed to the common framework and the same goals, even if the speed to reach these goals is exceptionally different among different members. The key condition to allow this differentiation is an overall benefit to the EU, that the activity is open to all who wish and

can participate, that it is carried out under the principle of equality of the Member States and is within the framework of the existing treaties” (Igor Mally).

A multi-tier EU was mentioned by a parliamentary member of the ruling party at the time (SMC):

“The so-called Europe of multiple speeds should not worry us. Our country is actively participating in all forms of strengthened co-operation and is a member of Schengen and the eurozone and is also striving for all the common values and practices which bond the most integrated.”

This statement was debated by some other discussants (particularly from other political parties), who criticised the lack of capacity in the government to fully engage in EU matters. While they agreed with the need for a joint effort to strengthen the EU, they felt that the government was not doing enough at home to promote support for the EU.

On the other hand, representatives of academia were more cautious and warned that the EU already showed two- or multiple-tier integration but that the treaties put convergence toward a more unified EU as one of the most important elements in its future development. Adopting a long-term DI strategy would be a step away from this, which particularly for the smaller (and less developed) countries would mean leaving decision-making to the big powers:

“As we can see in practice, the big member countries support the so-called EU of multiple speeds. France, Germany and Italy will agree on the main issues by putting all the others in the position to ‘take it or leave it’” (Marko Lovec, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana).

Lovec also assessed that a multi-tier EU meant fewer opportunities for future Slovenian governments:

“Less of everything. Significantly less money in the EU budget, significantly less impact on individual EU policies, etc.”

This, in his opinion, would be additionally problematic due to a lack of detailed knowledge about the EU among politicians and the poor negotiating skills of public representatives. So again the debate on DI was used to criticise government inactivity in EU matters.

In the final summary of the debate by the chair of the parliamentary committee on EU matters, it was reiterated that the future of the EU was important for Slovenia, with a strong and united EU being a priority.

3.5 Parliamentary debates

While the CLARIN database provided quantitative data on DI, examples of the debates in various parliamentary committees were analysed to see what the positions of different members of parliament were.

During the last legislative term (2014-2018) there was just one instance in which the debate was about **differentiated integration** (as understood from the guidelines on DI):

“I would like to emphasise that the **current level** of integration, since there is no solidarity within the EU [...] is extremely socially harmful” (Miha Kordiš, Levica, 37th session of OZEU, 15 May 2015).

In the previous legislative term (2011-2014), there were two mentions of different levels of integration. In a speech by Jožef Horvat (NSi), the problem of differentiated integration is implicitly tackled:

“The financial crisis showed the deficiencies in the EMU, which is not fully integrated [...]. Slovenia should support the **deepening and empowering** of the EMU and with this encourage its own economic growth, employability and social cohesion” (11th Regular session of the National Assembly, 7 March 2013).

With regard to **two-speed or multi-speed EU**, we can detect a negative connotation on these developments, particularly concerns whether the new Member States like Slovenia would be able to participate fully in the what was considered a more privileged first-tier.

Two-speed

Term 3 (2000-2004):

- “There is some informal information that the EU would diverge into a **two-speed Europe**, being formed of the EU15 on the one side and the newcomers on the other” (Franci But, Minister of Agriculture, 21th session of the Committee for agriculture, 12 December 2001).
- “There is a question whether the EU would divide itself on the CFSP. If there would be such a division, frankly speaking, should we have a **two-speed Europe** in this field, Slovenia should be in the inner circle, in the first category of countries” (Dimitrij Rupel, Minister of Foreign Affairs, 36th Extraordinary session of the National Assembly, 9 December 2003).
- “The Constitution of Europe is a main remedy against a **two-speed Europe**. I want the Constitution of Europe to be adopted as soon as possible. If it will not be the case, then we will have a **two-speed Europe**” (Feri Horvat, SD/ZLSD, 75th Session of the Committee for Foreign Affairs, 14 January 2004).

In term 7, there were two approaches to the definition of a two-speed Europe:

- **some of them are just observations** (Romana Tomc, MEP: “If we want, we can say that we do not have a **two- or three-speed Europe**, but the fact is that we have a multi-speed Europe” 155th Session of OZEU, 20 December 2017);
- **others are more propulsive or engaging**, stating the position of Slovenia in a two-speed Europe (Karl V. Erjavec, MFA: “Angela Merkel in Malta for the first time used the term **two-speed Europe**. In this context, our scenario is clear – Slovenia has the euro, Schengen, a well-performing economy, respects all the criteria in the EU [...] Therefore we belong to core Europe. We are already there” 28th Session of the National Assembly).

Multi-speed EU

Marko Lovec, a scholar from the Faculty of Social Sciences (University of Ljubljana) envisaged that “A **multi-speed Europe** means fewer possibilities for future Slovenian governments. Less money, less influence, etc.” (Parliamentary Committee on European Affairs discussing the White Paper, 15 June 2017).

A negative scenario in which a multi-speed Europe would be established, was also presented by MP Andrej Čuš (centre-right, officially a member of the non-aligned group in the National Assembly):

“The PM is supporting the idea of a **multi-speed Europe**, as this idea is also supported by Germany and Benelux. How about other countries? I say, a **multi-speed Europe** means the end of Europe and the rise of extremists” (28th session of the National Assembly, 23 March 2017).

There were also some questions about a multi-speed Europe, such as who was going to be where (at which speed). Jožef Horvat (NSi), claimed:

“We all support Slovenia being in the group of 17 countries, the countries **with the highest speed**, but one thing is our wishes and the other is reality. Who is going to accept us in this group?” (Parliamentary Committee for Foreign Affairs, 15 March 2017).

Somewhat similar is the undertone of discussions in which reference is made to **the core of the EU**. Slovenia wanted to see itself aligned with the EU founding countries but was a bit worried if these countries would accept/allow this positioning. Among the entries we find these statements:

“We have the support of the **Benelux countries** etc. but I would ask for more. Those **old EU countries** should invest more in advocating international law” (Marko Ferluga – SMC, 93rd Session of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, 8 September 2017).

“I have to confirm that our positions are close to the position of the **EU founding countries, i.e. Germany, Italy, France, Luxembourg, Benelux** [...] we want a more efficient EU” (Karl V. Erjavec – MFA, 98th Session of the Committee for Foreign Affairs, 8 November 2017).

“We are working together with **like-minded countries, especially with the Benelux countries** and 13 other countries. We want the single market to start to work effectively as soon as possible. That is why we signed a letter to the EC [...]” (Igor Mally, adviser on EU Affairs to the PM, 166th Session of OZEU, 16 March 2018).

“My activities and the MFA activities show that we want to cooperate strongly with those **EU members that are its founding members**, those that are in the core and have strong connections. **My activities with Benelux countries** etc. show that we link our activities to countries that shares the basic values of the EU [...]” (Miro Cerar, PM, 66th Urgent session of the Committee for Foreign Affairs, 5 April 2018).

The selected quotations show that the discussions were not about the substance of DI but referred to Slovenia’s response to potential future EU developments. This might be a harsh conclusion, but we fear that the very understanding of the possible scenarios and detailed knowledge of EU processes are insufficient to generate any more substantial debate in the Parliamentary Committees.

4. Conclusion

The analysis has shown that, overall, the government position on European affairs is not as present in Slovenian politics as one would expect in the light of the fact that Slovenia has been a full member of the European Union for 15 years. As all three types of analysis have shown, the terms with which the government’s position on DI should be identified were not often used. The lack of discussion on the EU and the Slovenian position within it is quite surprising in government documents such as coalition agreements and inaugural speeches by prime ministers. In each of these texts, we could identify a single or at most two paragraphs related to the EU. In addition, the DI issue is only mentioned indirectly – at most, the position identified in these documents is that Slovenia should maintain its stance in favour of close integration by the Member States, strengthening the EU and with active participation by Slovenia in all EU policies.

There was a peak in discussion about DI in 2017 after the presentation of the White Paper on the possible scenarios for the future of Europe. Even this dedicated discussion showed that the terms identified as signalling DI were not commonly used. In the discussion, only a few academics, politicians and a few others participated. Their positions can be grouped into the following categories:

- a) An overall position in many discussions related to the EU is that a strong and united EU is in the interest of Slovenia;
- b) Slovenia should try its best to remain in the ‘core,’ within the ‘first tier’ EU, and strive towards strengthening the EU;
- c) Any differentiated integration (even if not explicitly called such) can be harmful for Slovenia as a small and less developed member country since it increases inequality among the member countries and gives an even stronger voice to the bigger members.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Overview of the documents analysed

Category of document	Time period	Details
1 Government programmes ¹¹	2014-2020	We identified three coalition agreements for the more recent governments: Cerar (2014-2018) Šarec (2018-2020) Janša (2020-ongoing) Earlier texts are no longer available.
2 First speeches (and parliamentary debate)	2014-2020	The three speeches by the newly elected prime ministers Cerar (2014), Šarec (2018) and Janša (2020) were analysed.
3 European Council Presidency speeches (and parliamentary debate) a. in the national Parliament b. in the European Parliament	2004-2020	A speech by Prime Minister Janez Janša delivered to the European Parliament during the Slovenian presidency of the EU Council, 2008. Prime ministers Cerar and Šarec did not address the EP. Cerar was never offered the opportunity while Šarec declined the invitation.
4 Future of Europe speeches (and parliamentary debate) a. in the European Parliament b. for citizen consultation	2017-2020	No data found
5 Prime minister European Council Statements	2004-2020	No data found
6 Parliamentary (committee) debates	1992-2018 2017	The CLARIN database ¹² of all the transcripts of parliamentary debates was used to search for the key words multi-speed Europe, coalition of the willing, core Europe, á la carte, enhanced co-operation, opt-out etc. Furthermore, we analysed the transcript of a debate in the Parliamentary Committee on European Affairs discussing the White Paper, 15 June 2017.

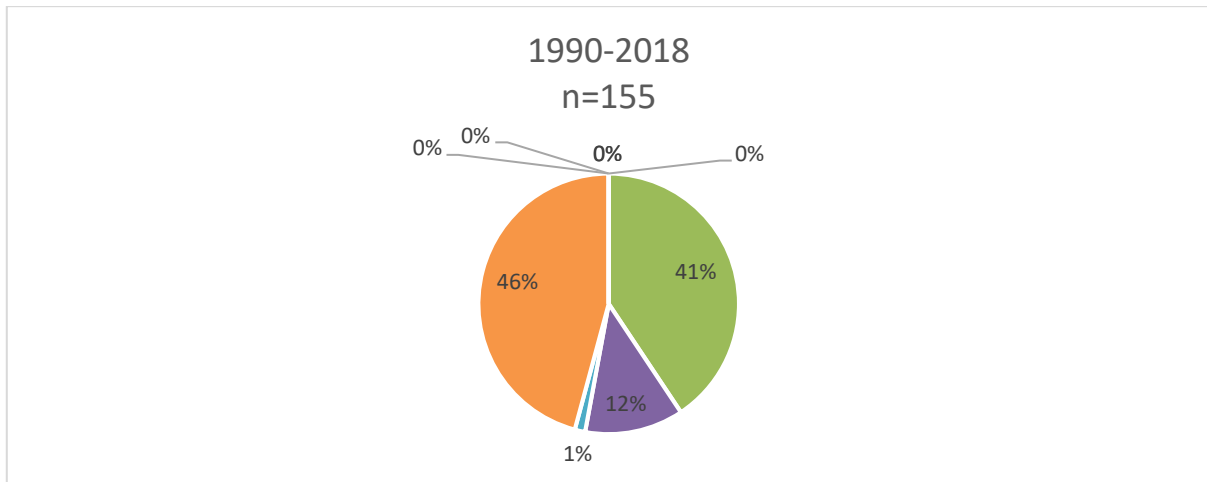
¹¹ In Slovenia, government programmes are issued on a yearly basis, but they only present which legal acts are planned to be adopted in the following years. There is no text related to the situation in the country or abroad.

¹² For details, see Tomaž Erjavec, Andrej Pančur (2020).

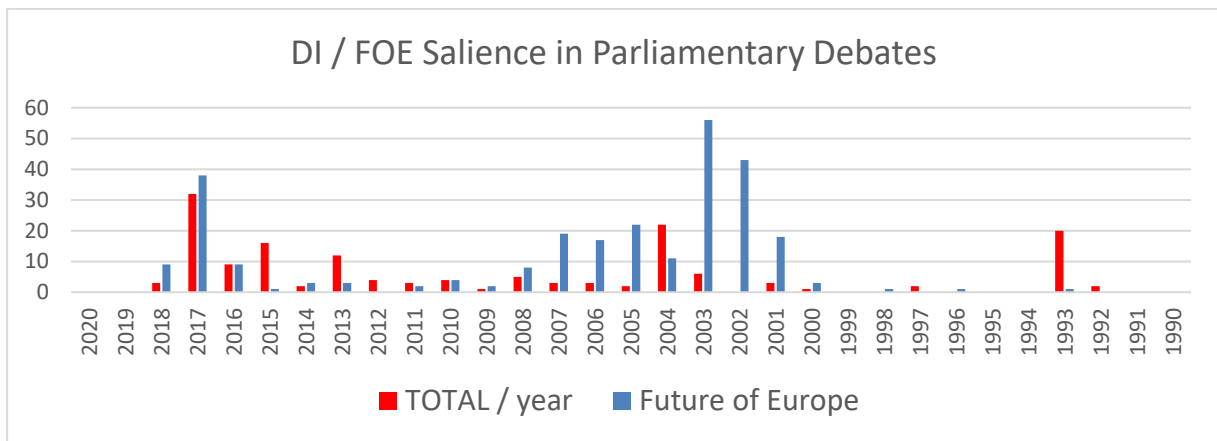
Appendix 2 Key DI words

Key word	Slovenian translation	Notes
DI models (conceptual key words)		
Differentiated integration	Diferencirana integracija, diferencirano povezovanje	
Coalition of the willing	Koalicija voljnih	The key word in Slovenia is only linked with the Iraq war.
Two-speed Europe	EU/Evropa dveh hitrosti	
Multi-speed Europe	EU/Evropa več(ih) hitrosti	
Variable geometry	Variabilna geometrija, variabilno povezovanje	
Core Europe	Države Beneluksa (+Nemčija+Francija)	Usually core Europe in Slovenian is 'Benelux countries' (države Beneluksa) or is expanded with Germany and France (+Nemčija+Francija)
Two-tier Europe	Dvotirna Evropa/EU	
Concentric circles	Koncentrični krogi	In 2011 the Slovenian MFA presented a strategy that would base Slovenian FP on concentric circles. These entries were not taken into consideration.
à la carte	à la carte	
(Future of Europe)	Prihodnost Evrope/EU	
DI mechanisms		
Enhanced co-operation	Okrepljeno sodelovanje	
opt-out	opt-out	Does not have an established translation
DI instances – enhanced co-operation		
Pesco	PESCO or PESKO	
Rome III	Rome III	
Unitary patent	Enotni patent	
Matrimonial property regimes	n.a.	
Financial Transaction Tax	Davek na finančne transakcije	
European Public Prosecutor	Javni tožilec EU, Evropski javni tožilec	
DI instances – opt-out policy fields		
Schengen	Schengen, šengen	
Economic and Monetary Union	Ekonomska in monetarna unija, EMU	
Charter of Fundamental Rights	Listina temeljnih pravic	
DI instances – inter se agreements		
Prüm Convention	Prumska pogodba	
European Stability Mechanism	ESM, Evropski stabilnostni mehanizem	
Fiscal Compact	Fiskalni pakt	
Single Resolution Mechanism	Enotni finančni mehanizem	
Unified Patent Court	Enotni patent	
DI instances – external agreements		
European Economic Area	EGS, Evropsko gospodarsko/ekonomsko območje, EEA	
Customs Union + Turkey	Carinska unija + Turčija	
Eastern Partnership	Vzhodno partnerstvo	
Euromed	Euromed	

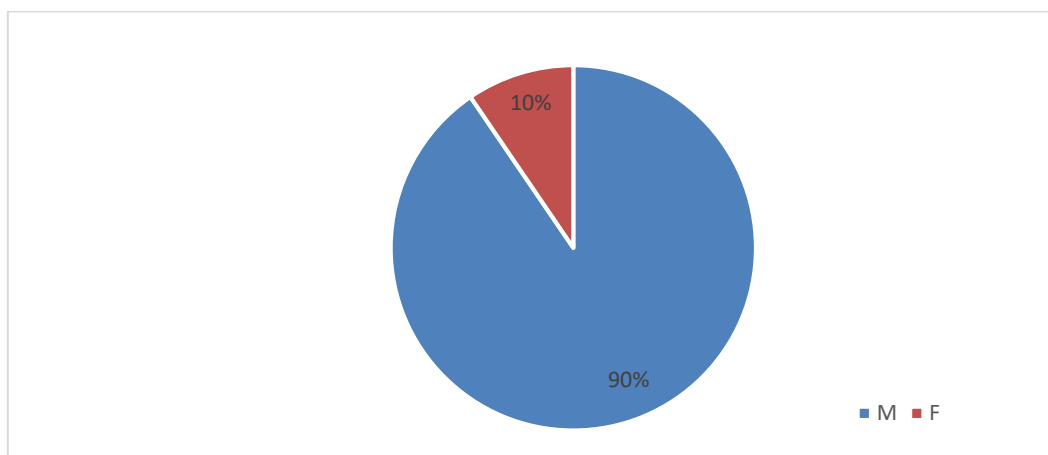
Appendix 3 Breakdown of conceptual key words in parliamentary debates (1990-2018)



Appendix 4 The salience of conceptual key words in parliamentary debates – relative to the FoE debate

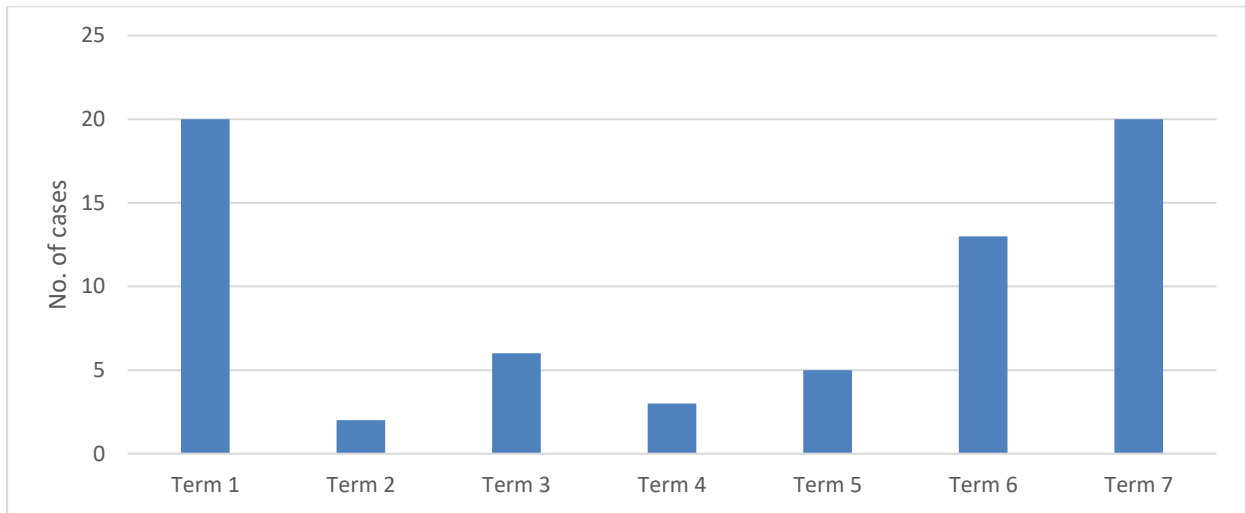


Appendix 5 Mentions of ‘two-speed Europe’ by gender (relative calculation)



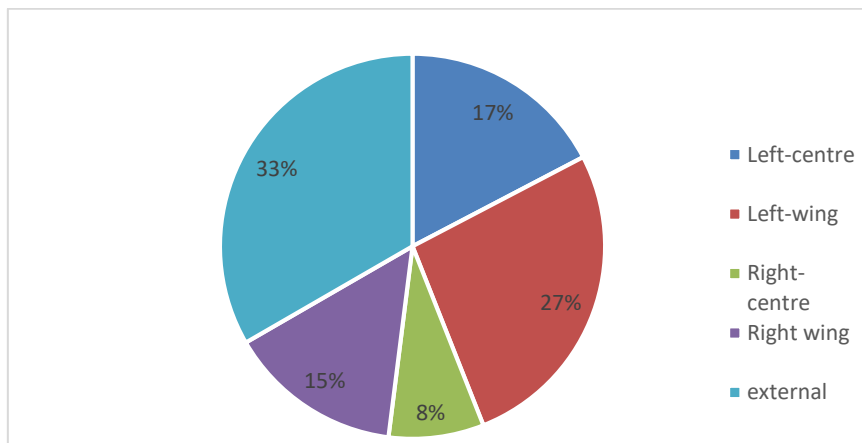
Source: Calculated on the basis of CLARIN data (2020).

Appendix 6 Frequencies of the use of ‘core-Europe’ (i.e. Benelux), by term



Source: Calculated on the basis of CLARIN data (2020).

Appendix 7 Mentions of ‘core-Europe’ by political party (left vs. right)



Source: Calculated on the basis of CLARIN data (2020).

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With the support of the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

The European Commission supports the EUI through the European Union budget. This publication reflects the views only of the author(s), and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.