



European
University
Institute

ROBERT
SCHUMAN
CENTRE FOR
ADVANCED
STUDIES

WORKING PAPERS

RSC 2021/26

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

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

Kristína Janková

European University Institute

Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

Integrating Diversity in the European Union (InDivEU)

The Politics of Differentiated Integration:

What do Governments Want? Country Report - Slovakia

Kristína Janková

EUI Working Paper **RSC** 2021/26

Terms of access and reuse for this work are governed by the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC-BY 4.0) International license. If cited or quoted, reference should be made to the full name of the author(s), editor(s), the title, the working paper series and number, the year and the publisher.

ISSN 1028-3625

© Kristína Janková, 2021

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC-BY 4.0) International license.
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

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

Views expressed in this publication reflect the opinion of individual author(s) and not those of the European University Institute.

This publication is available in Open Access in Cadmus, the EUI Research Repository:
<https://cadmus.eui.eu>

Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

The Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, created in 1992 and currently directed by Professor Brigid Laffan, aims to develop inter-disciplinary and comparative research on the major issues facing the process of European integration, European societies and Europe's place in 21st century global politics.

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.

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

The EUI and the RSC are not responsible for the opinion expressed by the author(s).

European Governance and Politics Programme

The European Governance and Politics Programme (EGPP) is an international hub of high-quality research and reflection on Europe and the European Union. Launched in 2018, it is part of the research programmes of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at the European University Institute.

The EGPP maintains its core activities through externally funded research projects, including financial support from the European Commission through the European Union budget, and is animated by the Programme Associates, leading scholars from different disciplines brought together by their interest in European integration and its future development.

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

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**

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 results show a relatively low salience of DI before 2017 that relates rather to concrete instances than to conceptual understanding of the DI itself. ESM turned out to be the most problematic and most salient instance as it played crucial role in the government fall in 2012. In general, the DI debate appeared mainly in the parliament, and some references to fragmentation trends in the EU were made during the 2016 Slovak presidency and the Future of Europe debate. For Slovakia, one-speed Europe was the preferred model, however, if the EU would decide on a differentiated integration, Slovakia should belong to 'core EU'. Here, the model of enhanced cooperation was supported as well, especially when it comes to PESCO, European Public Prosecutor and the Financial Transaction Tax. The position of Slovakia may not be understood in terms of the rational evaluation of the policies, but rather in terms of the fear of being identified as second-class citizens. That is also supported by the fact that Slovakia does not have any opt-outs. From 2018, after the resignation of Robert Fico, the 'core EU' debate lost its momentum.

Keywords

Differentiated integration, European Union, Slovakia, core EU, enhanced cooperation.

Summary of Results

I. Salience

Analysis of seven data sets shows a relatively low salience of DI before 2017. In this period, the debate moved around concrete instances, especially the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) and the Financial Transaction Tax (FTT), rather than a conceptualisation of DI. The debate appeared mainly in the parliament, and some references to fragmentation trends in the EU were made during the 2016 Slovak presidency of the Council of the EU and the Future of Europe debate. Explicit discussion on DI intensified in 2017 after French President Emmanuel Macron's and German Chancellor Angela Merkel's statements on core EU and multispeed Europe. In Slovakia, 'core EU' became the most salient model for Slovakia's future position in the EU and was internalised in EU jargon, mainly by the former Prime Minister (PM), Robert Fico. From 2018, after the resignation of Robert Fico, the 'core EU' debate lost its momentum.

II. Position

In 2016, then PM Fico shifted from a conservative position rejecting and preventing any form of fragmentation to a more median position favouring a core EU, mainly because DI became a more probable reality than a united EU. However, at the same time he preferred one speed in the eurozone, thus expecting all eurozone countries to be in the core too. He argued that the eurozone could not have one currency with several fiscal and monetary policies. He also expected security and defence to play a crucial role in further integration. It is necessary to keep in mind that a united and one-speed Europe, not a core EU, was the preferred option for Fico. After the introduction of Juncker's scenarios and after a multi-speed Europe became more probable, he repeatedly positioned Slovakia in the EU's core, stressing that Slovakia had "no alternative" to EU membership and that the EU was Slovakia's "living space." This position was generally very welcome to most of the members of parliament (MP), even those in the opposition. Some of the opposition MPs, however, tended to remind the former PM about the domestic problems that a country in the core EU should not have and thus used the popular phrase 'core EU' to point to domestic political issues. Last, Eurosceptic and anti-EU politicians took a negative stance, not only on the idea of a core EU but also on the EU and NATO in general.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Saliency analysis	2
2.1 Government programmes	2
2.2 Key speeches by prime ministers and subsequent debates	3
2.3 European Council statements	4
2.4 Parliamentary and committee debates	7
3. Government positions on DI	12
3.1 Quantitative analysis	12
3.2 Qualitative analysis	14
3.2.1 2008 – the Lisbon Treaty and EMU: a unified approach	14
3.2.2 2012 – Financial crisis, the fall of the government and ESM	15
3.2.3 2013-2016 – the migration crisis, the presidency and fragmentation.....	16
3.2.4 2017-2020 – the rise and fall of the core EU debate	17
Appendices	22

List of Figures

Figure 1 - The saliency of mentioned DI instances mentioned in government programmes	2
Figure 2 - Saliencies over time in the European Council statements	5
Figure 3 - The saliency of DI models (n=15), mechanisms (n=9) and instances (n=79) during in 2004-2020 in European Council statements (according to governments).	6
Figure 4 - The saliency of conceptual key words in parliamentary (NC) and committee (CEA) debates.....	7
Figure 5 - The saliency of DI mechanisms (enhanced cooperation / opt-out) in parliamentary and committee debates	8
Figure 6 - The saliency of instances of enhanced co-operation in parliamentary and committee debates	9
Figure 7 - Saliency of opt-out policy fields (n=1527) in 2004-2019.....	10
Figure 8 - The saliency of instances of inter se agreements in parliamentary and committee debates.....	10
Figure 9 - Saliency of external association agreements (n=326).....	11
Figure 10 - The saliency of DI models, mechanisms and instances in selected press releases 2012-2017	11
Figure 11 - The saliency of DI models in press releases 2012-2017.....	12
Figure 12 - The saliency of DI instances in selected press releases 2012-2017	12
Figure 13 - Deeper Europe.....	13
Figure 14 – Position on multi-speed Europe (two-speed and multispeed)	13
Figure 15 – Position on multi-end Europe (core EU)	13
Figure 16 - Position on enhanced co-operation.....	14

1. Introduction

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

The report distinguishes three levels of abstraction in government discourse on DI. **First**, two different models of DI are distinguished at the conceptual level. On the one hand, the ‘multi-speed EU’ model depicts DI as a temporary phenomenon and implies that all 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 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). Seven 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 studies (a) government programmes; (b) prime minister first speeches and the subsequent parliamentary debates; (c) Slovak presidency speeches; (d) Future of Europe debates; (e) reports on PM statements on European Council meetings in the parliamentary committee on European affairs; and (f) transcripts of parliamentary debates and reports from the parliamentary committee on European affairs referring to DI models and mechanisms.

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.

Despite being precise, the Slovak translations of the key words analysed were insufficient to conduct the analysis, as the Slovak language has its own EU jargon and politicians use several terms to name a concrete issue. Therefore, some of the key words were expanded using an inductive approach arising from the documents analysed. The key term ‘deeper integration’ was added to refer either to differentiated integration (when it referred to deeper integration of the Economic and Monetary Union or just the vision of deepening integration in general) or to enhanced co-operation (when it referred to concrete enhanced co-operation DI instances). A major problem arose with the key word ‘core’ as in Slovak it is used mainly in the context of nuclear energy. Therefore, it was necessary to make sure that all the references to ‘core’ were actually made in the context of the EU. Similarly, ‘enhanced co-operation’ refers not only to DI mechanisms but also to closer co-operation with other states, especially the neighbouring countries in the Visegrad group. Problems also arose as politicians used different key words to name the same issue and did not differentiate between the models, mechanisms and instances themselves – often more than one key word was used in one sentence (this will be elaborated on more

in the position section of the report). To enhance the reliability of the findings, the key word counts were triangulated with a close reading of selected key documents.

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

2. Salience analysis

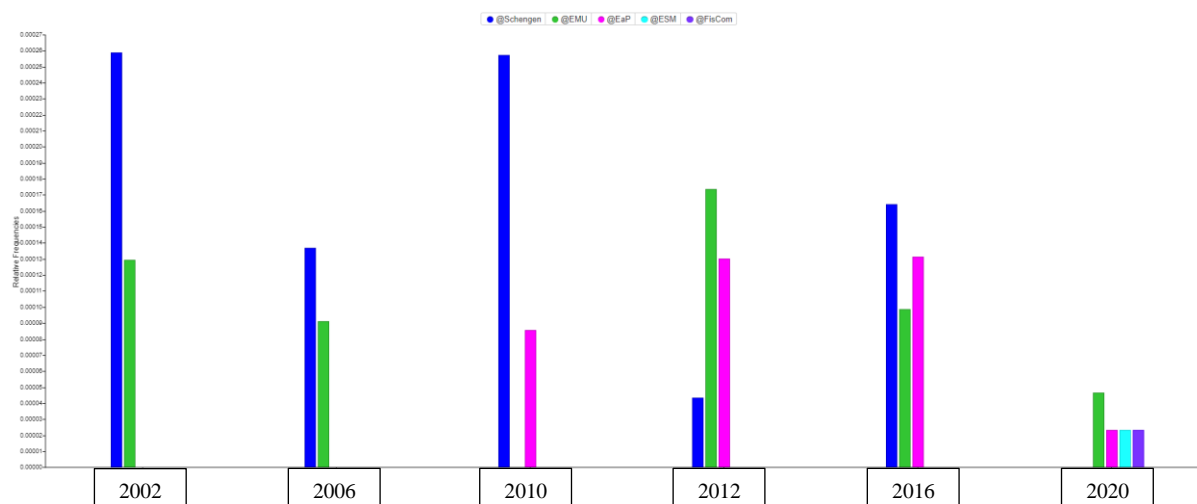
To assess the salience of DI in Slovak government discourse, three levels of abstraction were distinguished: DI models, DI mechanisms and DI instances. A range of methods (i.e. computer-assisted word counts, manual word counts, close reading) were employed to assess the degree to which and the level of abstraction DI with which was referred to in the documents analysed. The analysis proceeded from the more general (i.e. government programmes) to the more specific (i.e. council statements/parliamentary debates).

2.1 Government programmes

In the government programmes in 2002-2020, the computer-assisted word count analysis showed that the programmes do not refer directly to any key word associated with DI in general or its models or mechanisms. Nevertheless, ‘EU’ was one of the most mentioned word in the documents, with the same salience level as other policy priorities in the programmes – social affairs, cultural affairs and citizen affairs (Appendix 3). The salience of the EU was fairly constant over the programmes, with a very slight increase in the 2010-2014 programme due to problems with the adoption of the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), which became the reason for the fall of Iveta Radičová’s government, which had been inaugurated in 2010.

In the context of DI, instances are referred to most frequently (see Figure 1). Particular attention is paid to Schengen, Economic and Monetary Union and the Eastern Partnership. However, not in the context of opt-outs but instead in the context of further integration of Slovakia in EU structures. The 2012 programme referred to the Financial Transaction Tax (FTT), which was considered for implementation based on other states’ experiences. Despite the fact that the ESM was a reason behind the fall of the 2010 government, the 2012 programme referred to it only once, when it promised to ratify it. The trend of focusing on concrete instances rather than DI conceptualisation is visible throughout the Slovak membership of the EU.

Figure 1 - The salience of mentioned DI instances mentioned in government programmes



To sum up, the salience of EU issues is constant in all the governments since 2002. The 2016 Slovak presidency did not have a significant impact on the salience of EU issues in the Slovak national debate. Positive shifts towards the EU can be seen in upgrading the EU chapter to the top of the government programme from 2012. However, DI as such was never explicitly mentioned in the government programmes. The government programmes instead refer to concrete instances of DI, yet not in the context of DI but in the context of Slovak obligations, benefits or plans.

2.2 Key speeches by prime ministers and subsequent debates

In the next step, prime minister first speeches in the parliament and the subsequent debates were analysed. The prime minister or his deputy presents the government programme in one of the first sessions of the parliament (National Council of the Slovak Republic). The presentation of the government programme in 2010 was not available. However, a note issued after the debate by former PM Radičová in which she evaluated the programme and the debate was considered an appropriate alternative for the analysis.

DI models or mechanisms in general were never referred to directly in these speeches. A mention of ‘fragmentation’ in the 2016 speech by former deputy PM Pellegrini on behalf of Fico in the context of the rising Eurosceptic and Euro-pessimistic mood as a result of the ongoing refugee crisis can be considered an indirect reference to DI.

Like the government programmes, the first speeches of the PMs show a focus on concrete instances of DI, yet in the context of Slovak obligations and plans in the EU. Therefore, the ESM, the FTT and the fiscal compact were mentioned in the 2012 speech by Fico as stated facts planned in the EU and that Slovakia had to prepare for. The first speeches refer to other instances (Schengen, Economic and Monetary Union and the Common Security and Defence Policy). However, these are referred to in the context of Slovakian accomplishments and as examples of benefits arising from EU membership.

The salience of EU issues during the first speeches by PMs is portrayed with a sine curve (see Appendix 4), with zero references in the recent speech by the new Prime Minister Igor Matovič, who focused predominantly on domestic issues as something separate from the EU. The words ‘people’ and ‘Slovakia’ were the most used in his speech. This clearly reflects his populist attitude and his will to portray himself as the ‘Prime Minister of the people.’

During the debates, DI as such was not addressed. EU-related issues were visible (see Appendix 5). However, the debates were mostly focused on domestic issues and problems concerning gross domestic product (GDP), unemployment and financial affairs. The highest frequency, both relative and absolute, of the EU was during the debate on the 2010 government programme, mainly because of the ongoing financial crisis and the situation in Greece. On this topic there was no clear agreement either in the parliament or in the government, which resulted in the premature fall of the government in 2012. In 2012 and 2016, the EU maintained its salience.

Discussion related to the Slovak presidency of the Council of the EU represents a mild shift towards recognising the fragmentation in the EU and the enormous challenges the EU and its Member States were facing to a greater extent. Fico recognised two categories of states: a group of countries satisfied with the status quo and another one in favour of deep EU reform including reform of EU primary law. The second group can be understood in a more Eurosceptic perspective as willing to give back more competences to the Member States. This can be understood as a reference to DI trends in the EU.

A word count analysis of former PM Fico’s speech in the European Parliament, and former Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Miroslav Lajčák’s presentation of the Slovak vision and presidency priorities was conducted. In both documents it is clear that Slovakia promoted common policies and common solutions to the challenges, and that the future of the EU should have the citizens at its core (Appendix 6). In the DI context, the documents do not directly refer to DI much. There is one reference to DI models (core EU) and eight references to DI instances (Schengen and Eastern partnership). On the

other hand, there might be more indirect references to DI. The terms ‘fragmentation’ and ‘common’ were stressed by both representatives. Moreover, Lajčák used the term ‘united,’ underlying only indirect references to DI.

In the National Council, then PM Fico did not refer to DI frequently. However, he elaborated on the distinction between the two groups of Member States mentioned above (status quo vs. treaty reform). He positioned Slovakia somewhere in between these two groups, but very pragmatically argued that the overall advantages offered by EU membership prevailed over the disadvantages. He repeated that there was a need for the EU to self-reflect to avoid future Brexits and fragmentation. There was no further discussion in the National Council on this matter.

In general, DI was not explicitly a major topic for the Slovak Presidency despite the peak of the refugee crisis. The references were rather indirect, relating to fragmentation, with common solutions being preferred to different speed and different ends.

Next, the author analysed the discussion in the context of the Future of Europe debate. The debate was held in a combination of English and Slovak, so both languages were used in the computer-assisted word count. It showed that despite using two languages, Pellegrini used the same words and phrases in both languages. It is not only the use of the selected words but also the similar frequency with which he used them which is interesting and reflects a high level of consistency and preparedness (see Appendix 7).

From the word count, it is clear that citizens should stand at the centre of the future of Europe. Former PM Pellegrini (after replacing Fico) stressed that Europe is the natural environment for Slovakia and that there is no other alternative for Slovakia but the EU, which assumes Slovakia will continue on the integration path based on joint/common agreements among the Member States. He recalled that Slovakia is one of the most integrated Member States and was prepared to carry the burden of integration.

Although the debate context was connected to the DI topic, Pellegrini did not refer once to any DI models or mechanisms. He did mention Permanent Structured Co-operation (PESCO) as the only DI instance. Pellegrini again articulated more indirect references to DI on fragmentation, unity and social pillar integration.

He also did not respond to a particular question on DI, which arguably shows that the goal of Slovakia is to avoid not only the debate on DI but also DI in general. Pellegrini’s participation and the reaction by the audience were deeply influenced by the murder of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová, which shifted the debate towards the topic of freedom of speech and the rule of law.

At the V4 and Future of Europe conference in November 2016, Fico endorsed the EU project with a rather medium salience of DI using direct and indirect references, such as “do we want more or less Europe?” and “greater integration only by a small group of states weakens the EU internally and externally.”

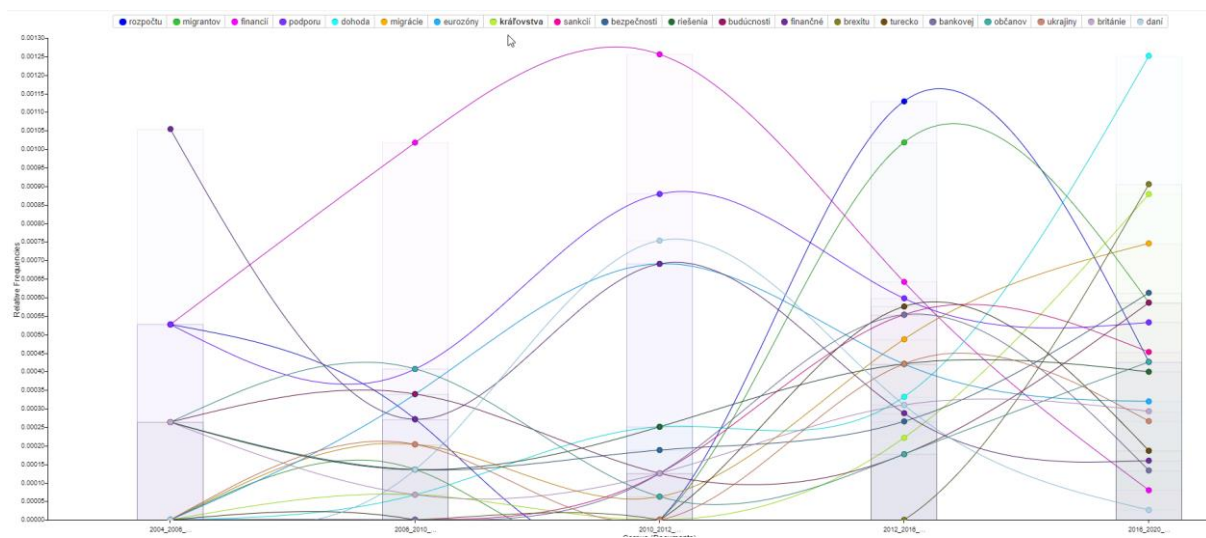
In sum, the Future of Europe debates kept the salience level between low and medium. Fico and Pellegrini used indirect references more often and referred to DI instances rather than models and mechanisms.

2.3 European Council statements

In the fifth group of data, reports on PM statements on European Council meetings in the National Council’s Committee on European Affairs and the subsequent debates were analysed. I provide an overall analysis and also analyse across and within some of the governments. Overall, 69 reports on PM statements on European Council meetings were analysed. Over time, the topics changed depending on the political situation and the level of Slovakia’s integration in the EU (see Figure 2). The 69 documents

analysed are grouped in government periods to emphasise the priorities of particular governments). I identified three crucial topics over time. First, financial and eurozone matters including FTT and ESM were defining issues in 2004-2012, reflecting proposals coming from the EU and the focus on Economic and Monetary Union. During the 2012-2016 government, there was a rise in the salience of the EU budget, migration, Turkey, V4 and Ukraine, mirroring the political environment in the EU in the context of the migration crisis, the annexation of Crimea and the EU-Turkey deal on migration, with the FTT still being highly discussed. Third the 2016-2020 phase is characterised mainly by Brexit and ‘deal,’ reflecting the process of withdrawal, negotiating a deal with the UK and the EU-Turkey deal on migration too. The discussion focused on the search for solutions. A gradual increase can also be observed in the use of the term ‘citizens,’ symbolising the beginning of the debate on a citizen-oriented EU within the Future of Europe debate. Along with the peak of the migration crisis, the European Commission was mentioned more as a crucial stakeholder (Appendices 8-10).

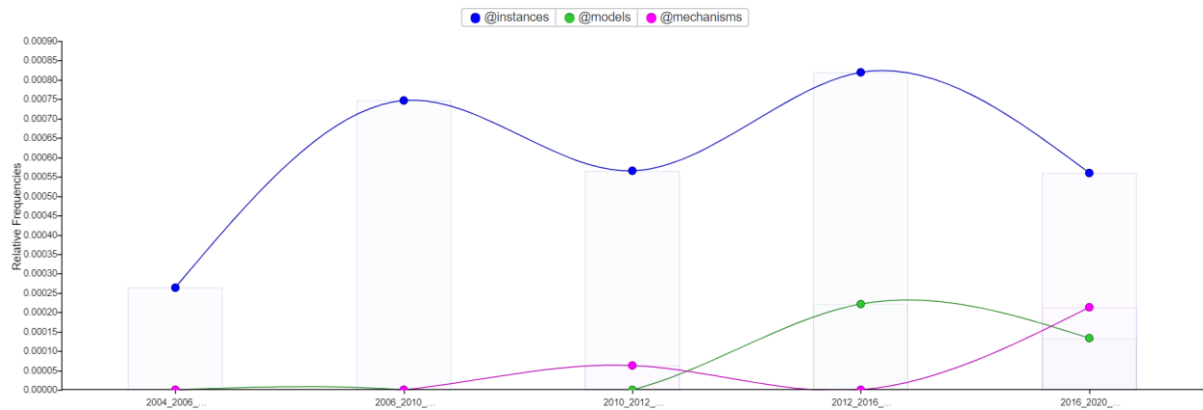
Figure 2 - Saliences over time in the European Council statements



From left to right: budget*, migrants, finances, support, deal/agreement, migration, eurozone, kingdom, sanctions, security, solutions, future, financial, Brexit, Turkey, bank, citizens, Ukraine, Britain, taxes.

This period 2016-2020 was also characterised by a debate on DI with a broader scope (see Figure 3). Despite a relatively low salience, the debate referred to models, mechanisms and instances, with the instances referred to being most frequently similar to those in the other types of documents. As for the models, discourse focused on ‘core EU’ and deeper integration. There was a clear rising tendency to prefer the enhanced co-operation mechanism starting with the 2016 Fico government. As for instances, particularly Schengen, PESCO and the Financial Transaction Tax were frequently mentioned. However, the Charter of Fundamental Rights was also mentioned five times, but rather informatively, presenting the implications of the Charter becoming primary law. Last and also least, the unitary patent was debated in the committee too (see Appendix 11).

Figure 3 - The salience of DI models (n=15), mechanisms (n=9) and instances (n=79) during in 2004-2020 in European Council statements (according to governments).



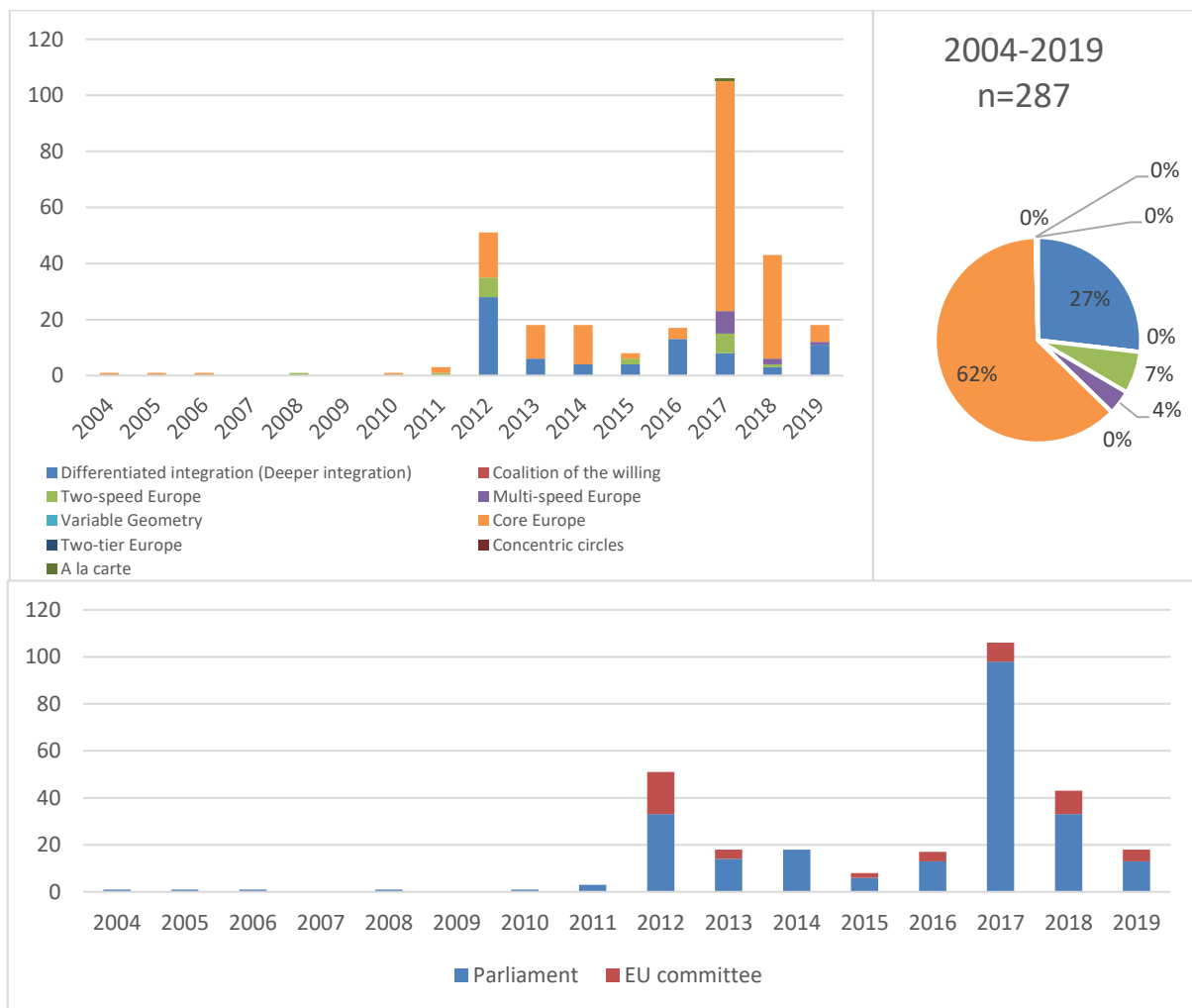
Holistic grading was also used to assess these results. The documents in categories 1-4 (n=21) were analysed. The documents were scored between 0 (no reference to DI) and 2 (direct reference to DI). In addition, the position of the documents was evaluated as either 0 (negative), 1 (neutral) or 2 (positive). The overall salience was 0.64, which represents low-medium salience. This is due to more frequent references to DI instances, especially Schengen and Economic and Monetary Union. These were usually discussed in opt-out discourse. However, in Slovakia this is part of the deeper integration vision, as Slovakia had reached “the maximum level of integration possible” because of its accession to the Schengen area and the adoption of the euro. Some indirect references to DI were also identified referring to fragmentation of the Union and Brexit, stemming from populist and Eurosceptic politicians using the migration crisis for their own power politics. A shift can be identified in the 2020 programme, in which current PM Matovič did not focus on EU issues at all in his speech but completely on domestic issues instead. Only one sentence in his speech was devoted to foreign policy, with the PM referring to Slovakia as a reliable partner for the EU, NATO and other international organisations.

As for position, it was rated 0.79, which is rather neutral. Over time, the PM, his deputies and the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs supported common solutions for a unified Europe, indirectly rejecting the possibility of DI, despite membership of the eurozone and Schengen, which actually represented already existing forms of DI. Especially in 2016, a representative called for resilience by the EU Member States and the EU to prevent further fragmentation as “there is no other alternative for the European continent but the EU.” In the presidency debate in July 2016, former PM Fico recognised the need to reform the EU in the context of the Bratislava summit, underlying the importance of substantive communication of the EU project to the citizens to mitigate the impact of Eurosceptic waves. In general, Slovakia presented itself as a strong supporter of continual integration as planned, and the presidency was seen as the “culmination of our integration journey.” In the National Council he also stressed that “deepening integration is more fruitful.” However, a clearly negative stance on DI was taken in his public speech at the V4 and Future of Europe conference, in which he stated that “integration only by a small group of states is not desired, as it weakens the EU both internally and externally” and that “we do not have the luxury to talk about more or less Europe.” This contrasted with the future position of Slovakia in the DI context outlined in European Council statements and debates in the Committee on European Affairs. The will of Slovakia to belong to the EU’s core and to call for using the enhanced co-operation mechanism signalled a recognition of DI as a reality in the EU. And if that was a reality, then Slovakia should be in the core of the integration.

2.4 Parliamentary and committee debates

The last data set that was analysed in the salience section comprised statements in regular parliamentary debates (n=236) and debates in the parliamentary committee on European Affairs based on the reports on the sessions (n=51). As Figure 4 presents, the DI debate started in 2012 due to the enormous debate on ESM and the future of deeper integration in the EMU. The debate continued to keep a relatively medium level of salience. The peak was in 2017, reflecting the start of the debate in France and Germany too. The crucial time was around the June summit of the EU leaders. After 2017, one can observe a gradual decrease in the salience of DI in parliamentary and committee debates as it lost momentum and there was no further development on the topic. It lost its ‘hot topic’ label. Moreover, in 2018 Fico resigned from the PM post and was replaced by Peter Pellegrini, who has not referred to ‘core EU’ as often as Fico did, which was also recognised by the MPs in the National Council several times, asking the ‘new’ PM what his position on DI was.

Figure 4 - The salience of conceptual key words in parliamentary (NC) and committee (CEA) debates



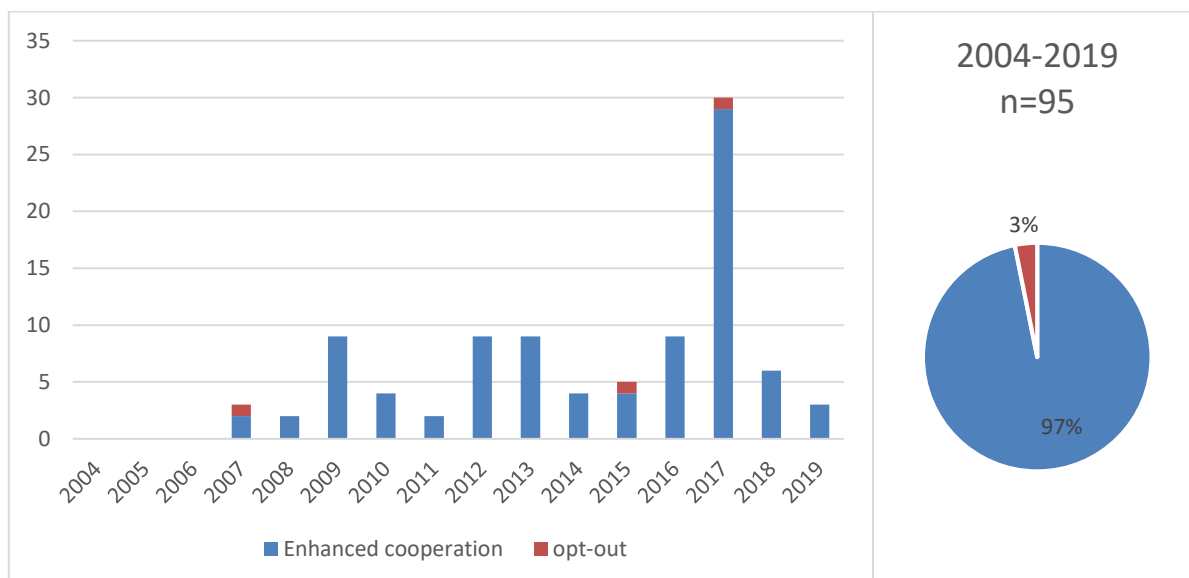
Based on the conceptual breakdown, ‘core Europe,’ ‘deeper integration’ in the context of DI models, ‘two-speed Europe’ and ‘multi-speed Europe’ were identified as the most relevant (Appendix 12). The key phrase ‘à la carte’ was mentioned only once in 2017. The rest of the key words were not domesticated in the Slovak contest at all. The most frequent key phrase was ‘core Europe,’ covering

almost two-thirds of all the references (n=179). Hence this key phrase became part of EU jargon in Slovakia and not much variation in the words can be found. Overall, the peak was in 2017, following the results from the previous documents, with ‘core Europe’ being by far the most frequent DI model, and again in 2018. Nevertheless, in 2012, the most frequent key phrase was ‘deeper integration,’ referring to the EMU and the ESM debate instead. There was also a difference in salience in the National Council (NC) and the Committee on European Affairs (CEA). In the committee, over time ‘deeper integration’ was mentioned more often than ‘the core’ and the peak was in 2012 (Appendix 13). A more substantive debate may be the reason for this difference. The Committee discussed more substantive and informative issues than general directions. Moreover, it can also be caused by the fact that only reports on the committee were available for analysis instead of transcripts.

The analysis also probed into whether debates on differentiated integration occurred in the context of wider debates on the ‘future of Europe’ (FoE). To this end, the frequency of the conceptual DI key words was compared to the frequency of the key phrase ‘future of Europe.’ As with DI, the debate on FoE arose in 2012. Afterwards, there was a relatively low but constant salience of FoE, with a peak in 2017 following the White Paper and the five scenarios of the Future of Europe. However, FoE did not reach the salience level of DI (Appendix 13).

Next, DI mechanisms were analysed (n=95). Figure 5 shows that DI mechanisms were referred to less frequently than DI models and that the mechanism mentioned was almost exclusively enhanced co-operation. ‘Opt-out’ was mentioned only three times, referring to Slovakia having no opt-out policy in the EU integration process. The peak was again in 2017, followed by 2016, 2013 and 2012. This corresponded with the adoption of the Nice Treaty and discussion on the ESM in Slovakia, which triggered a deeper debate on the level of integration in the EU and the appropriate level of integration for Slovakia.

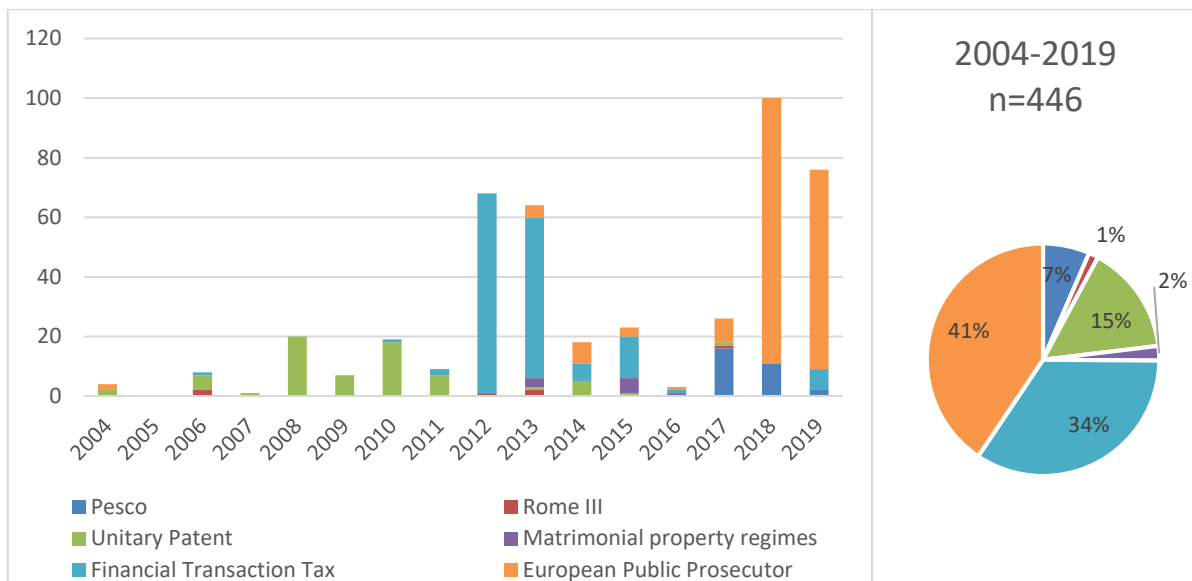
Figure 5 - The salience of DI mechanisms (enhanced cooperation / opt-out) in parliamentary and committee debates



The most quantitatively fruitful part of the analysis related to DI instances. First, the analysis focused on internal instances of enhanced co-operation (see Figure 6). The peak was in 2018, particularly in relation to debates on the European Public Prosecutor. However, it is important to keep in mind that many of the references were informative, as Slovakia was part of this instance and the parliamentary and committee debates focused on clarifying the competences and functioning of the European Public Prosecutor. The

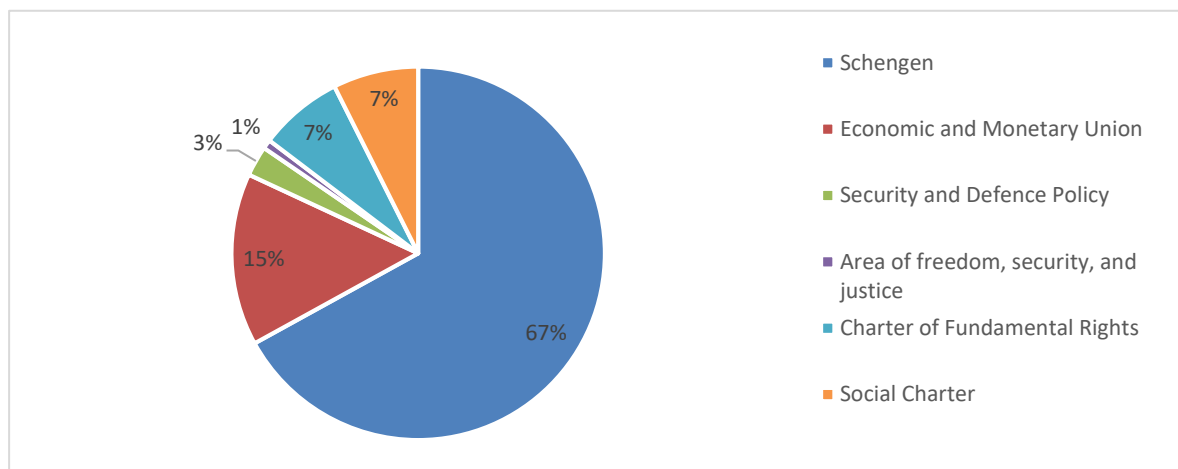
second most relevant instance was the FTT, which was due to a long discussion on this evolving issue. Moreover, the financial aspects of integration have always stood at the centre of Slovak interest and discussion. The Unitary Patent was also discussed several times and the phrase was used several times in one sentence. However, this does not diminish the importance of the topic, since patent policy was more than important in parliamentary debates in general. What is interesting is that PESCO does not have a bigger share in references to security and defence, as PESCO was mentioned together with ‘core EU’ in a sentence to emphasise that security and defence would be one of the crucial areas for future integration. This was likely to be due to the character of this co-operation since security and defence issues were discussed mainly in the Slovak Republic’s Security Council. When comparing the NC and EAS debates, the biggest share, 57%, was reached by the FTT, followed by Unitary Patent.

Figure 6 - The salience of instances of enhanced co-operation in parliamentary and committee debates



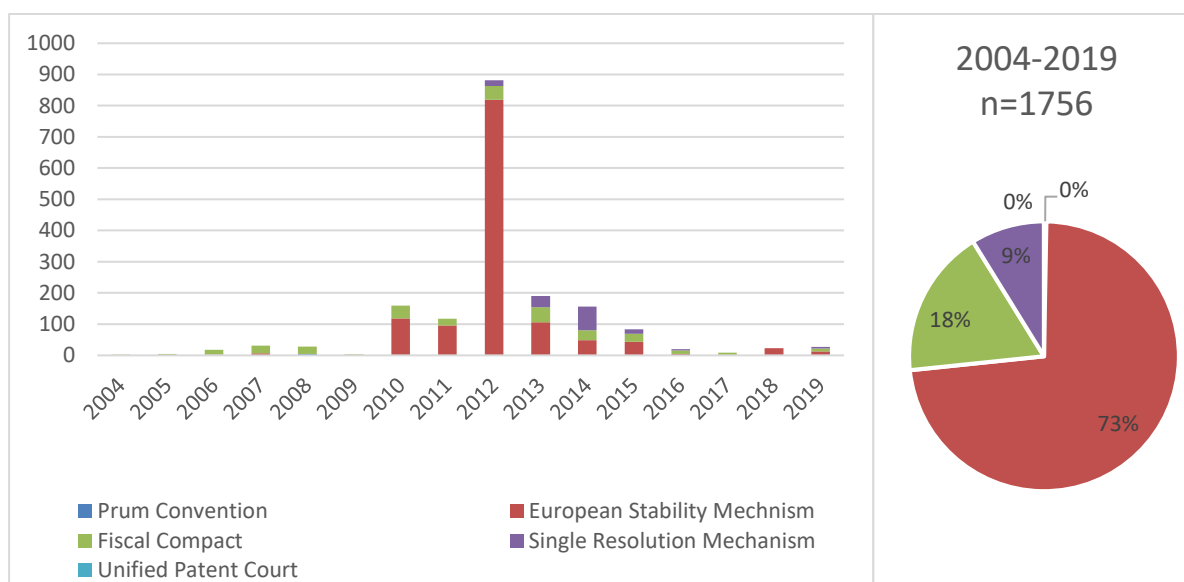
In terms of opt-outs, it is necessary to keep in mind that Slovakia does not have any opt-out from EU policies. Quite the contrary, EU policies are used to underline Slovakia’s deep level of successful integration in EU structures. What was found was a very high absolute number of references (see Figure 7). The key phrase ‘deeper integration’ usually referred to areas such as Schengen and EMU with an opposite meaning to opt-out. Schengen was considered the biggest success in Slovakia’s membership and was presented as one of the biggest advantages of membership also by PM Fico (i.e. during the EP debate on the Slovak presidency). It is also of the utmost importance to explain that references to the Charter of Fundamental Rights’ are very relevant, but it was mostly mentioned in the context of justifying and arguing about the topic. The Charter itself was mostly debated in 2008, which corresponds with the adoption and ratification process of the Lisbon Treaty. The Social Charter, on the other hand, had its salience peak in 2009 when it was being ratified.

Figure 7 - Salience of opt-out policy fields (n=1527) in 2004-2019



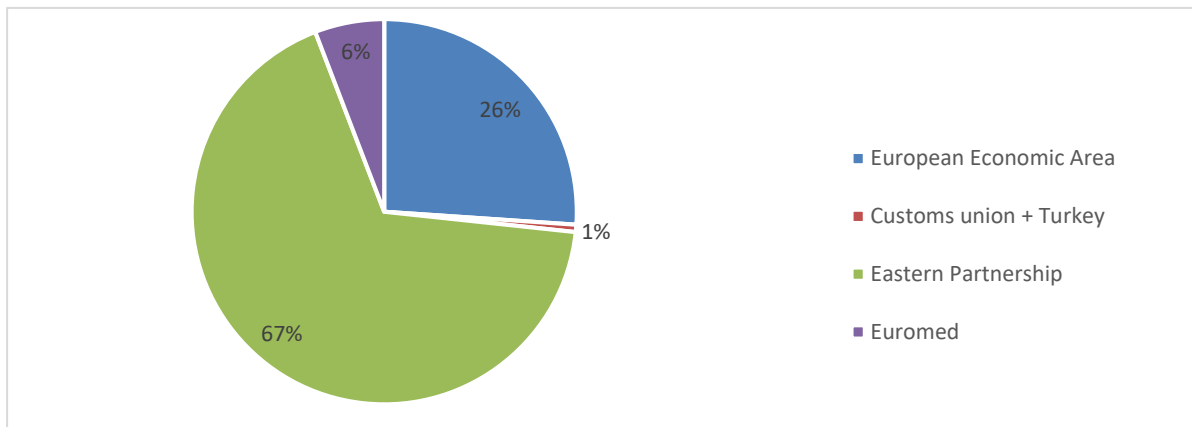
Following opt-outs, inter se agreements were analysed (Figure 8). The absolute number of references was even higher than that of opt-outs in 2004-2019 (n=1756) due to the 2012 government crisis and the subsequent government fall because of the ESM. There were 819 references to the ESM. Afterwards, the crisis was recalled in debates in the context of domestic policy (disagreements within the coalition) and the implications of the ESM. The Fiscal Compact and the Single Resolution Mechanism (SRM) were relevant in this discussion too. The data from the NC and the EAS correspond with each other.

Figure 8 - The salience of instances of inter se agreements in parliamentary and committee debates



The last group of DI instances that this report analyses are external association agreements (n=326). Figure 9 shows that the data correspond with the data from the previous data sets, as the Eastern Partnership was a top European foreign policy priority in Slovakia. The Customs Union was mentioned only twice and EUROMED was mentioned in the context of adopting the convention on air transport.

Figure 9 - Salience of external association agreements (n=326)



To sum up the DI debates in the National Council and the Committee on European Affairs, the ESM and the level of integration wanted were the most salient topics in 2012. A more intensive DI debate arose in 2017 due to the DI debates in Germany and France. In terms of DI models and mechanisms, the analysis showed that ‘core EU’ represented the heart of the debate on DI in Slovakia. This is also revealed by a complementary analysis of press releases (supplemented with transcripts of two statements only available in video format) by the Government office referring to key DI models between 2012 and 2017. If there was debate on DI, then it frequently focused on DI models (see Figure 10), particularly on ‘core EU’ (see Figure 11). As Slovakia does not have any opt-out, opt-outs were not mentioned in the press releases. As for DI instances, PESCO in 2017 reached the same frequency level as the ESM in 2013 (see Figure 12) during the financial crisis.

Figure 10 - The salience of DI models, mechanisms and instances in selected press releases 2012-2017

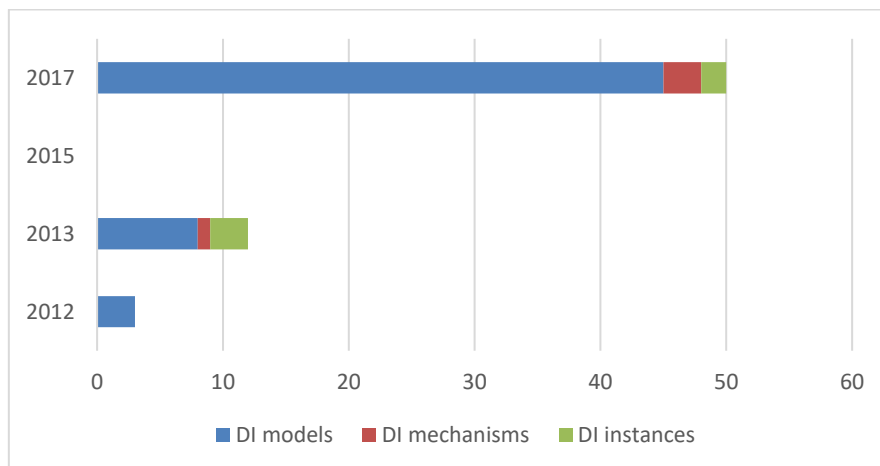


Figure 11 - The salience of DI models in press releases 2012-2017

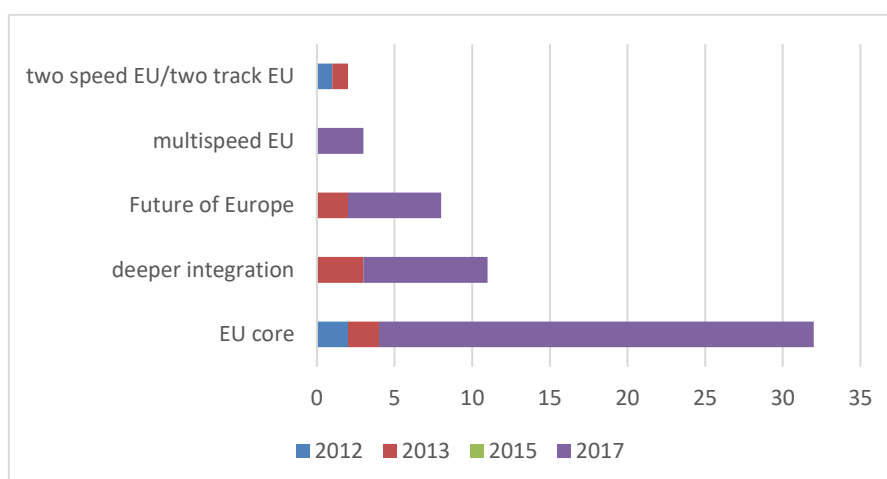
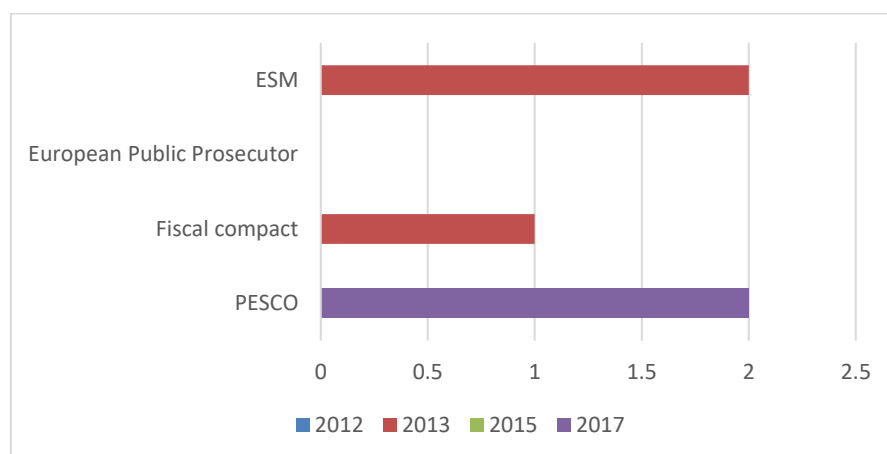


Figure 12 - The salience of DI instances in selected press releases 2012-2017



3. Government positions on DI

This section presents the positions on DI of the different Slovak governments and parliaments. It is based on an analysis of parliamentary debates and debates in the Committee on European Affairs. The section is divided into two subsections. The first subsection provides a quantitative overview of the distribution of positive, neutral and negative statements regarding DI models (core EU, two-speed Europe, multi-speed Europe) and DI mechanisms (enhanced co-operation). Not only were government and opposition party members involved but also the president, state secretaries and EU commissioners, who do not have (or at least did not have at the time) any party affiliation. The second subsection outlines the government's positions on DI based on a qualitative assessment of selected statements (with bold highlights added by the author of the report). The qualitative section is structured chronologically to assess the impact of context on the respective governments' positions.

3.1 Quantitative analysis

The quantitative analysis showed several main results:

1. It was mostly the government parties, especially the PM, which referred to DI models or mechanisms. Other ministers, except the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs (MFEA), did

not refer to DI models and mechanisms very often. It is necessary to bear in mind that, as former PM, Fico was at the centre of the government and the position of other ministers stemmed from his position.

2. In 2017, there was a shift in the government’s position on DI models and mechanisms, which generally became very positive, in the sense that if there was to be differentiated integration within the EU Slovakia wanted to further integrate in the deepest way possible. If a statement was labelled as neutral, it was mostly a piece of information or a question asking government officials (the PM and the MFEA) about Slovakia’s position in the context of DI models and mechanisms. Moreover, most of the statements analysed were from 2017, which corresponds with Peter Pellegrini not referring to DI models and mechanisms as often as Fico did in 2017.
3. In the opposition, the party which was against any kind of deeper integration and the vision of Slovakia belonging to the core was the Kotleba party – People’s Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS), which is categorised as an extremist right-wing party. The nature of this party lies in its anti-EU and anti-NATO attitudes. Along with ĽSNS, some MPs from the Sme Rodina party (We are family) also tended to be more Eurosceptic and did not support the government’s vision of Slovakia belonging to the EU core.

Figure 13 - Deeper Europe

(n = 24)	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Government (n =20)	0	8	11
Opposition (n =4)	0	3	1
2008	0	0	0
2012	0	7	7
2017-2020	0	5	3

Figure 14 – Position on multi-speed Europe (two-speed and multispeed)

(n = 23)	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Government (n=14)	1	10	3
Opposition (n=9)	2	7	0
2008	0	1	0
2012	0	5	1
2017-2020	3	12	2

Figure 15 – Position on multi-end Europe (core EU)

(n = 96)	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Government (n=44)	0	20	26
Opposition (n=52)	12	32	6
2008 (n=0)	0	0	0
2012 (n=13)	1	7	7
2017-2020 (n=74)	11	45	25

Figure 16 - Position on enhanced co-operation

(n = 28)	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Government (n =28)	0	16	12
Opposition (n=0)	0	0	0
2008	0	1	0
2012	0	2	6
2017-2020	0	13	6

3.2 Qualitative analysis

The qualitative analysis confirms that Slovakia has been traditionally pro-integration. What was stressed in all the document categories in the context of EU-related issues were the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, and respect for EU law, not only by the Member States but also by the EU institutions themselves. This formulation symbolises the position of the government, which was willing to assume all the duties linked to EU membership but at the same time expected the EU and its institutions to respect the boundaries of their competences. Alongside this, the strengthening of the position of the national parliaments was strongly supported across the political spectrum. As was outlined in the previous section, a continual support for further integration was present over time and across governments. Until 2017, the government kept the one-speed Europe stance. After realising that there were already two speeds within the EU, it used discourse on the core EU, which was generally met with support, with the exception of Kotleba-People’s Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS) and the We are Family party (Sme rodina), which tended to call the EU “the Brussels dictatorship,” and which were sometimes joined by Fico himself (especially during the migration crisis). Slovakia supported the enhanced co-operation mechanism. It joined the initiatives for both the European Prosecutor and PESCO.

3.2.1 2008 – the Lisbon Treaty and EMU: a unified approach

Slovakia did not have any serious reservations about the Lisbon treaty, as the country planned to enter the Schengen area and to adopt the euro. Miroslav Číž argued that “the Lisbon Treaty in this form is definitely a contribution to the European integration process. It clearly gives space for further discussion and consideration of the extent of the integration process, **whether the process will speed up or slow down**” (Miroslav Číž, SMER, 30.1.2008). In the parliament, the former Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Ján Kubiš (without party affiliation) stated that the Lisbon treaty was a successful project that would “satisfy those who want deeper integration as well as those who do not want the EU to become a superstate due to the **mechanism of enhanced co-operation**” (Kubiš, 30.1.2008). He also stressed that there were several “brake mechanisms” in the treaty to protect national policies if there were reservations by a Member State. Subsequently, the reactions to the ratification were very positive. The former parliament speaker, Pavol Paška (SMER), perceived the “Lisbon treaty to be necessary to achieve the common goal of the Union” and stressed the possibility of further enlargement (Pavol Paška, SMER, 29.1.2008). Both governing and opposition party MPs were generally in favour of the Lisbon treaty and supported further integration in the EU. However, former MEP Anna Belousová from the opposition party SNS several times reminded the Committee on European Affairs that there was no deep discussion on the Lisbon Treaty in Slovakia despite the urgent need for such discussion for citizens to understand its benefits. The former chairman of the Committee on European Affairs repeatedly emphasised that it was a good signal for the country’s European partners that “Slovakia would be among the first Member States to ratify the Lisbon treaty” (Milan Urbáni, HZDS, 15.1.2008). Several opposition MPs conditioned the ratification on adoption of the press law and other domestic issues that the SMER-HZDS-SNS coalition did not favour. However, this attitude was rejected by Fico (then PM) and MFEA Ján Kubiš, who stated that Lisbon had become “the hostage of other internal state issues” and believed the MPs in the National Council would be responsible in the vote (Ján Kubiš, 26.3.2008).

This meant separating domestic political conflicts and disagreement from the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, which provided space for further integration – a process Slovakia favoured.

Based on the plan to enter the eurozone, MPs were also discussing the application to join EMU and were closely scrutinising whether Slovakia would meet the deadline. In December, the chairman of the committee celebrated the adoption of the euro on 1 January 2009 and considered it a “huge success for Slovakia and a historical moment” (Urbáni, 9.12.2008).

In general, the period before the financial crisis was characterised by a rather passive approach to EU policies and followed the path initiated by Dzurinda’s second government. From the beginning, Slovakia implemented a no opt-out approach to the EU integration process and this was the alpha-omega principle of Slovakia’s EU membership. The Slovak integration path needs to be understood in specific context of ‘a return to Europe’ (after the semi-authoritarian government of Vladimír Mečiar) and becoming European (especially in terms of standard of living). This became a strong feature of the Slovak approach towards the EU integration also in coming years as Slovakia did not have a serious reservation to the EU’s proposals with only two exceptions – the ESM and migrant quotas.

3.2.2 2012 – Financial crisis, the fall of the government and ESM

There were several key points in Slovak membership in the EU. After its accession to Schengen and the eurozone, one of the most significant points in Slovak history was the fall of the government in 2012 due to disagreement in the coalition on the ESM. Former PM Radičová merged the vote on the ESM with a non-confidence vote. The Freedom and Solidarity party (SaS) voted against the ESM, which resulted in the fall of the government. SaS’s position was mainly for economic and financial reasons, opposing the value- and solidarity-based EU policy in favour of a strict liberal economic perspective. SaS had been traditionally more protective of Slovak economic interests and was perceived as a soft Eurosceptic party.

The government’s position

After the inauguration of the new single-party government with Fico (SMER) as PM, the debate on the ESM continued. However, in its programme SMER promised that the ESM would pass in the National Council. The SMER MPs also realised that the “ESM was not perfect, but it was the lesser evil” (Ľubomír Petrák, SMER, 14.6.2012). The majority of MPs stressed that it was important to save the euro and to act like a responsible partner. The government party saw the ESM and the Fiscal Compact as part of the solution to the financial crisis. The ESM was successfully passed in the National Council. The unity with which the government acted in 2012 was held against the former coalition parties several years after the fall of the 2010 government.

When it came to more general debate on DI, former PM Fico favoured the future of Slovakia in a strong European Union. He considered it “right to integrate deeper, right to be in the core of discussion with decisive players in the EU and eurozone” (Robert Fico, SMER, 2.8.2012). On the other hand, he realised that it was completely legitimate to ask how much [power and competences] Slovakia wanted to give up in favour of deeper integration (Robert Fico, SMER, 19.9.2012). Former MFEA Miroslav Lajčák (without party affiliation) was more pragmatic and explanatory, and stated:

“We shall not speculate and think that we can choose the raisins from the cake and not carry any burden. We shall not expect anyone to bake the cake for us. **We got into the core EU, into the European integration core and now is the time for us to act accordingly.** [...] We are in the most exclusive club and we want to stay there. We will not waste energy on ideas about how many speeds there will be or how the future EU might be. We want to have the highest speed” (Miroslav Lajčák, 19.9.2012).

He also said that Slovakia would certainly be more integrated after the crisis ended – in the Banking Union and Monetary Union, in a way that respected national boundaries. At the same time, PM Fico

stated that **“we are not able to (economically) exist without the EU and we have to stick with the core EU really hard”** (Fico, 17.10.2012). Fico reminded the National Council that Germany was Slovakia’s key economic partner and that without Germany the Slovak economy would not flourish. Therefore, Slovakia needed to stick with the eurozone core (Germany and France). As for concrete instances, the Financial Transaction Tax was discussed relatively frequently. The former Minister of Finance, Peter Kažimír (SMER), presented enhanced co-operation in the area of the FTT in the context of deeper integration and emphasised the crucial role of the FTT in future integration. On the other hand, he defensively added that this enhanced co-operation did not mean more than the plan to prepare this initiative (Peter Kažimír, SMER, 18.10.2012). This formulation is interesting and can be found across SMER MP statements over time. On the one hand, they realised the somewhat obligatory character of enhanced co-operation; on the other hand, they presented it as something that was far in the future so the other MPs should not worry about it.

The clear path of deeper EU integration did not come, however, with everybody on board, especially when respecting the will of individual Member States.

The opposition’s position

In the opposition, SaS continued to have reservations about the ESM and stated that “the EU was going to save the banks that do not need an injection of capital” (Jozef Kollár, SaS, 14.6.2012). In July, Kollár argued against the ESM, using the argument of the referral to the German Constitutional Court filed by German MPs who claimed that their rights were violated. Hence, he claimed, Slovakia should not follow Germany everywhere, not even to the EU core (Jozef Kollár, SaS, 3.7.2012). Along with SaS, MPs from the OĽANO party were also critical of the adoption of the ESM. Jozef Viskupič argued that there was no need for Slovakia to participate in the ESM. He also argued that the argument to strengthen Slovakia’s position in a two-speed Europe was insufficient. The crucial matter was whether it was beneficial for the country, as the ESM represented a significant portion of finance in budgetary terms (Jozef Viskupič, OĽANO, 21.6.2012). The debate centred on taking responsibility for the irresponsible behaviour of other Member States. If this responsibility did not come with influence, it was argued, it was not a good business for Slovakia (Radoslav Prochádzka, KDH, 22.6.2012). Other opposition parties were in favour of the ESM and in favour of deeper integration. SaS and OĽANO (which was formed by MPs that left SaS) maintained a reserved approach to further EU integration. SaS preferred economic integration, which would allow Slovakia to catch up with the western European countries in terms of wages, standards of living and services. Later, cultural and societal issues became important too, especially during the refugee/migration crisis.

3.2.3 2013-2016 – the migration crisis, the presidency and fragmentation

In 2013, the debate on the ESM calmed down and in general it was a stable year without too much discussion involving DI. This mainly dealt with the implications and benefits arising from membership of core EU. Then MFEA Miroslav Lajčák, reflecting on 2012, stated that “due to its membership of the narrowest core, Slovakia was part of the discussion on the future of the EU, presenting the position based on the balance between solidarity and responsibility” (Miroslav Lajčák, 21.3.2013). He underlined that membership of the eurozone was crucial for the country, and therefore Slovakia “stays in the very core of EU integration” (Miroslav Lajčák, 29.5.2013). In a debate on the 2014 EP election Former Minister of the Interior Robert Kaliňák (SMER) reminded the National Council what lay behind this core EU membership: the euro. He stressed that EU policies and mechanisms such as the ESM and the Fiscal Compact had shown to be effective and had improved the performance of the Slovak economy (Robert Kaliňák, SMER, 15.5.2014). He, and also Tomáš Borec (SMER), former Minister of Justice, used discourse on the ‘core,’ which made Slovakia present at the high table where the important decisions were made (Robert Kaliňák, SMER, 15.5.2014; Tomáš Borec, SMER, 25.6.2014). Moreover, Robert Kaliňák emphasised that for Slovakia it was necessary to have close partners at this table,

referring to the Visegrad countries. This alliance turned out to be quite extraordinary in the following years of the refugee/migration crisis.

After the start of the refugee (migration) crisis, a major debate arose in Slovakia about defending the country, its culture and values, and its women against violence, rape and torture on the part of migrants. This was met with popularity among the public, since these topics were easily understood, and the general public could relate to them more easily than to the functioning and important role of the EU institutions. As in the United Kingdom (UK), this debate gave rise to a growth in Eurosceptic or even anti-EU parties and politicians, including ĽSNS and Sme rodina, which later presented negative attitudes to the government's position on belonging to the EU core and even initiated a 'Slovakexit' campaign.

The political spectrum in Slovakia started to change due to the search for more votes, as the general election was coming in 2016. When it realised the popularity of anti-migrant discourse, the SMER and the SaS joined Kotleba in its anti-migrant and euro-critical discourse and moved from the mainstream towards the more populist part of the spectrum. Usually, the chairman of SaS and the former Slovak MEP (since 2020 Minister of Economy) Richard Sulík would not be on the same page as Fico on political issues, but this time Sulík openly supported Fico during his presidency speech in the EP for standing against the migration quotas in the EU. Fico was very critical of the EU having the vote in the Council by qualified majority rather than in the European Council, where decisions have to be unanimous. Among experts and the media, usually traditional politicians including Sulík and Fico were criticised for jumping on Kotleba's discourse, as they legitimised Kotleba's extreme positions all over the country. The election resulted in Kotleba being elected into the Parliament and Fico's third government, with Sulík being the leader of the opposition. After the election, migration gradually lost prominence in the domestic debate. In the meantime, the Slovak Presidency was organised and successfully finalised. During the presentation of its priorities and addressing the European Parliament, Fico underlined the importance of a unified approach against the fragmentation trends within the EU. He stressed that the solution to the migration crisis needed to be a common one, preferring the mechanism of effective solidarity, with each country deciding how it wanted to help to manage the crisis and not being forced by the centre in Brussels to accept migrants and allow them to stay in the country. It is important to note that Fico had been playing a two-level game all through the migration crisis – being very critical of the EU, calling the EU a "Brussels dictatorship" and accusing George Soros of running a campaign against him at the domestic level while being more pragmatic at the EU level, providing a rather critical position but without further reference to conspiracies. In the DI context, Fico endorsed the Bratislava summit conclusions on the future of the EU, communicating the benefits arising from EU membership better to the people. In this case, power ambitions prevailed over the long-term pro-European position for a short period of time.

From the above, it is obvious that Fico understood 'core EU' more in economic and financial terms than in societal and cultural terms. His position during the peak of the migration crisis was later recalled in the parliament by several MPs, journalists and experts, who highlighted that he privileged his domestic political ambitions at the expense of building a more European-oriented society.

3.2.4 2017-2020 – the rise and fall of the core EU debate

The crucial period in the DI analysis was 2017-2020, when debate on deeper integration and the core EU spread through the parliament and the media. Both government and opposition MPs actively participated in the debate. This period was influenced by the presence in the parliament of Kotleba and ĽSNS on the far right of the political spectrum, and some of the Sme Rodina MPs shared similar pro-nationalist attitudes blaming the EU (and NATO) for a loss of Slovak sovereignty.

The government's position

The position of the government was at first somewhat mild following the statements on the EU presidency and the Future of Europe debate, preventing further fragmentation. The priority had always

been to have a one-speed EU for all. On the other hand, Fico declared a very strong position on Slovakia being in the EU core. The PM's statements were inconsistent and confusing, triggering not only the opposition but also coalition MPs to constantly ask questions about Slovakia's position on DI.

In March and April 2017, Fico (SMER) gave statements that promoted enhanced co-operation and also criticised it. In March, he stuck with enhanced co-operation being a more suitable mechanism than a multi-speed EU (Fico, 8.3.2017). He further continued on 23 March 2020 with one of his crucial presentations to the National Council. First, he stated that **“Slovakia will keep promoting the consensus principle of all 27 Member States and the mechanism of enhanced co-operation can only be a supporting one, it cannot become a way of EU functioning”** as then there would be more than two speeds in the EU, which already existed due to the eurozone, and that “we cannot afford.” On the other hand, he also said that **enhanced co-operation would probably be the model that would become the future model of the EU**. He continued that **“if a group of states want to go faster than the others, this group should be allowed to do so and that is what enhanced co-operation is for.”** He concluded with a cautious approach when saying that, **on the one hand, Slovakia wanted to belong to the EU core but, on the other hand, he realised that national specificities and national parliaments should not be undermined**. Among other things, he also mentioned that the EU was a “vital space” for Slovakia and that his government would only take steps that ensured that Slovakia would never be expelled from the EU integration core (Fico, 23.3.2017). In April, he added that there was already a two-speed EU because of the eurozone, and enhanced co-operation would be the third speed (Fico, 8.4.2017). Therefore, Slovakia “must stay on the EU integration path” (Fico, 6.4.2017). In June, the PM chose to go with Germany and France. He mentioned several times that **“integration suits us”** (Fico, 15.6.2017 & 7.9.2017), referring to better economic performance. Another popular phrase that Fico used was “we don't have an alternative or solution, **it is our vital duty to be in the core**” (Fico, 15.6.2017). He compared the integration process to a train, and said it was Slovakia's choice to “catch it. It is a historical chance for us” (Fico, 7.9.2017).

The conflict between the core and enhanced co-operation was caught by MPs asking the State Secretary to explain it. Former State Secretary (since 2020 MFEA) Ivan Korčok (without party affiliation) explained that **“there is no conflict between Slovak precautions about enhanced co-operation and the readiness for the EU core, as membership of the core rests on membership of the eurozone and Schengen”** (Korčok, 22.3.2017). The former Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Lajčák, stated in the parliament that a multi-speed Europe was one of the scenarios: “it is neither a problem, nor a threat” to Slovakia, but it had to be inclusive and open. He called for cautiousness that **“enhanced co-operation/deeper integration is not a universal solution to the Union's problems. Slovakia is and should remain in the EU core and leaving it would be a meaningless step back”** (Lajčák, 6.4.2017). Later, in 2018, he explained that **“we want the EU to be united, but not at the price of inertia. If it is not possible, the EU might divide into countries pursuing greater co-operation and those which do not. The creation of this core EU is not Slovakia's preferred choice, as the primary interest is common progress. However, if such a core is created, Slovakia shall be part of it”** (Lajčák, 11.4.2018).

From these statements, three key points arise. First, if there was a chance to have a one-speed Europe with the countries coming to a common conclusion, Fico would take it. But bearing in mind his pragmatic nature, he realised there were already great differences in integration levels, mainly due to the existence of the eurozone. So, having to choose the speed and the end point, he would go for the fastest speed and the deepest core.

Second, it is not clear what Fico's position on enhanced co-operation was. He thought that enhanced co-operation would be the guiding principle for the future functioning of the EU. On the one hand, he claimed that not too much significance should be given to enhanced co-operation as some of states would not make it in this mechanism. On the other hand, he argued that countries which wanted to pursue deeper integration should be allowed to do so. Considering Fico's statements on Slovakia's position in the core, these conflicting views might be explained by Fico's high level of pragmatic

thinking. Using the Slovak perspective on the integration process, he realised that the more Member States integrated more deeply, even with a slower pace, the more it would benefit the Slovak economy. If enhanced co-operation was the guiding mechanism for the future functioning of the EU, more countries might refuse to participate and so reduce the scope of EU integration to a smaller group, which was not the desired result for Slovakia. Therefore, the more states participated in deeper integration, the better for Slovakia. However, if there was a choice between no deeper integration and enhanced co-operation, Fico would prefer the latter.

Thirdly, differentiation between DI models and mechanisms was blurred. Fico did not differentiate between them, as he labelled enhanced co-operation both a model and a mechanism. In this respect, the terms might have been used interchangeably, representing DI in general rather than a concrete model or mechanism. Unlike the PM, former MFEA Miroslav Lajčák and State Secretary Ivan Korčok realised the difference and their statements seemed to be more precise and explanatory. Lajčák clarified the Slovak position the most. His statement showed that the debate centred on whether Slovakia wanted to proceed with integration alongside Germany and France in the one-speed core (countries in the core would go with one speed, not multiple speeds – this especially related to EMU countries, which all desired to be in the core), or wanted to be in the periphery and allow every country to further integrate at its own pace. Among these choices, the core was chosen as the priority, not only because of the above mentioned reasons, but also because of the fear of being left out from the EU as it happened during 1993-1998. Subsequently, the position on this choice was very positive on the government side. The core was mostly presented by the government as consisting of the eurozone countries, those without opt-outs from Schengen and those participating in PESCO and willing to continue with economic and fiscal integration. It was also presented as bringing more benefits for Slovakia, as was already shown by membership of the eurozone and Schengen.

In the context of DI, the role of the V4 is an interesting one. The group's position diverged from the EU core on migration issues, with Hungary and Poland being criticised due to their rule of law situation. These positions did not correspond to the Slovak position on the EU core. There were questions about this double-faced politics. MP Martin Fedor (MOST-HÍD) warned against preferring the V4 to the EU (Martin Fedor, MOST-HÍD. 16.5.2017). Fico's position was that "the V4 cannot replace our European ambitions to be in the European integration core. However, the V4 has proved several times to be an effective tool to promote its common interests in the European Council" (Robert Fico, SMER, 23.3.2017).

The position of other political representatives of government parties was also positive. MEP Monika Flašíková-Beňová (SMER) said "it is very important for us to stay in the core, in the core EU, where we already are. We are a member of EMU, Schengen, and this brings us benefits. Slovakia is a successful member of the EU and I, as a MEP and a Slovak national, am proud of it" (Monika Flašíková-Beňová, SMER, 31.3.2017). MP Martin Fedor, who changed parliamentary club in favour of the government party MOST-HÍD, agreed that "**we need to hold ourselves on to the core of integration processes**" as the Slovak economy was highly interconnected with the European one (Martin Fedor, MOST-HÍD, 15.5.2018). Similarly, František Šebej (MOST-HÍD) argued "it is good that Slovakia will be at the negotiation table and that no matter what direction we take it is important to be in the core of it. The periphery is a risky place, the periphery of the EU is not a place for courageous self-determination and integrity, the periphery is a place where anything [bad] can happen" (František Šebej, MOST-HÍD, 16.5.2017).

In general, the government position was to be in the core and be involved in deeper integration in the areas Slovakia was interested in – especially the economic and fiscal area.

The opposition's position

A broad political spectrum, including Slovak MEPs from opposition parties (i.e. Branislav Škripek – OĽANO, Eduard Kukan – SDKÚ, later without party affiliation, and Miroslav Mikolášik – KDH)

welcomed the core EU scenario. Former MEP Miroslav Mikolášik stated that **“we want to continue in the most developed, maybe the highest-speed part of Europe, if a multi-speed Europe is formed”** (Miroslav Milolášik, 31.3.2017). During her speech to the National Council, former MEP Anna Záborská (KDH) recalled the question of what it means to be in the core and that politicians should communicate it also to the public (Anna Záborská, KDH, 31.3.2017).

Unlike the previous MEPs at that time, Richard Sulík (SaS) followed up by outlining all five scenarios and briefly commenting on two of them in a rather critical way. Regarding a two-speed Europe, he stated that it would mean **“even more integration, even more of what does not actually work, tax harmonisation, loss of sovereignty or consent to quotas.”** He also saw the EU as beneficial and recognised its role, but mostly in the area of the internal market and cross-border co-operation, not political union. He further questioned what instrument Slovakia would use to catch up with the rest of Europe if everything was harmonised – the minimum wage, taxes, social systems ... (Richard Sulík, SaS, 31.3.2017). Richard Sulík preferred the second scenario called **“doing less more efficiently,”** especially because it would be expected to give some competences back from Brussels to the Member States.

The opposition MPs were divided in their priorities. Martin Poliačik (SaS, 7.9.2017) also stressed that the core was the place for Slovakia and that Slovakia was already there: **“We cannot be more in the EU core than we are now.”** He therefore questioned PM Fico stressing that Slovakia *should* be in the core when it was already there.

Some of the MPs from OĽANO, SaS and the Sme rodina party tended to connect the vision of the core to the standard of living of ordinary people, reminding the government of domestic political issues. This did not mean a negative position on the core but should instead be understood as a critique of Fico’s government, which had repeatedly talked about the EU core but had not dealt with domestic problems. Ján Budaj (OĽANO) connected the EU core with polite democratic politicians and said that such politeness should also be endorsed by Fico’s government (Ján Budaj, OĽANO, 17.5.2017). Zuzana Zimenová (SaS) reminded PM Fico that economic performance was mainly seen at the state level, not in individual citizens’ lives. She also stressed that it was time to also improve levels of education, social and health care and services in Slovakia, since these levels were in no comparison with the levels in the other countries in the core (Zuzana Zimenová, SaS, 13.6.2017). Boris Kollár (Sme Rodina) also used the example of socially and economically marginalised people not being taken care of by the government while the PM was repeating how well Slovakia was doing economically and how Slovakia aimed for the EU core (Boris Kollár, Sme Rodina, 14.9.2017). Similarly, Milan Krajniak (Sme Rodina) stated that PM Fico was not leading the country to the EU core but rather to the **“third world and Africa.”** He stressed that Fico’s government made Slovakia a **“socially unfair state”** (Milan Krajniak, Sme Rodina, 14.9.2017).

The right-wing ĽSNS stressed the traditional state characteristic – state sovereignty. Milan Mazurek argued that **“we will lose all personal freedoms, state sovereignty, and we shall not talk about Slovakia as an independent state with its own culture and Christian traditions. All will be dictated by Brussels”** (Milan Mazurek, ĽSNS, 30.11.2017). Rastislav Schlosár (ĽSNS) explained that belonging to the core meant to be part of the united states of Europe as a federal state, where no nation states would exist and everything would be decided by a foreign power (Rastislav Schlosár, ĽSNS, 14.2.2018). Moreover, MPs Natália Grausová and Stanislav Drobný pointed out that the decision on whether Slovakia should be in the EU core had to be made by the people in a referendum, as neither the PM nor the National Council had a mandate for such a decision (Natália Grausová, ĽSNS, 14.9.2017; Stanislav Drobný, ĽSNS, 16.6.2017). Natália Grausová also called the core EU a **“shady” “seedy” “rotten” “stinky” one.** She considered it a treason, as membership of the core would mean higher taxes for Slovak people and more **“African migrants that live on our taxes”** (Natália Grausová, 14.9.2017).

Overall, DI became salient in 2017 after the publication of the five scenarios. Before that, debates mostly concerned DI instances and did not focus on general discussion of DI. Former PM Fico recalled

that his government would prefer uniform integration, but after several meetings of the European Council he changed his rhetoric and admitted a multi-speed Europe was the reality. In this context, he provided several confusing statements on enhanced co-operation and its conformity with the vision of Slovakia being in the EU core. He used the Slovak perspective on the mechanism from the integration point of view, on the one hand criticising it as it might limit the amount and scope of further EU integration and on the other hand arguing that if there was no other form of integration than enhanced co-operation the participating countries willing to integrate more deeply should be allowed to proceed.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Overview of the documents analysed¹

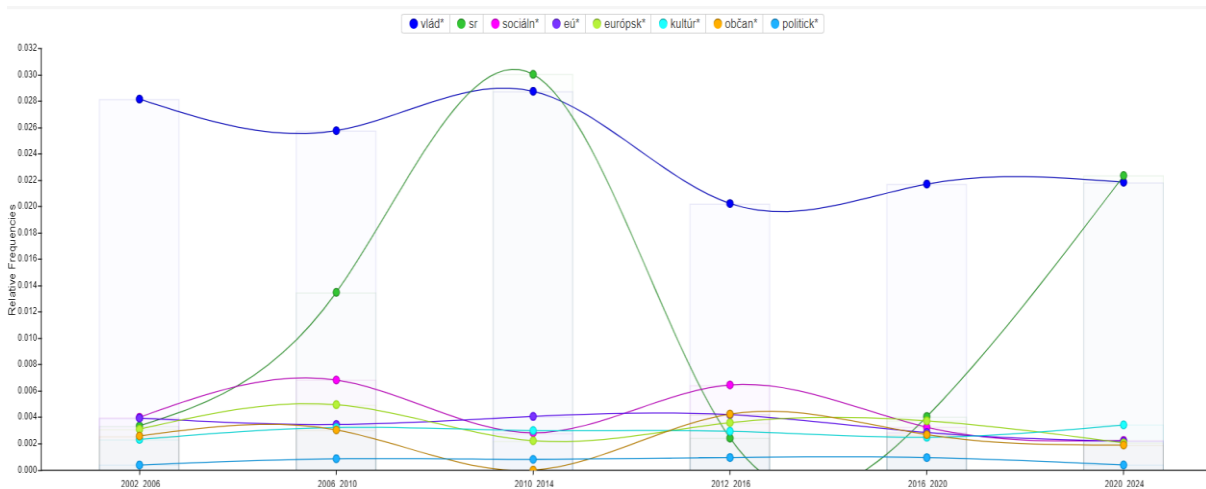
	Category of document	Time period	Details
1	Government programmes	2002-2020	2002, 2006, 2010, 2012, 2016, 2020
2	First speeches and parliamentary debates	2006-2016	2006 – Miroslav Číž on behalf of PM Robert Fico 2010 – final speech by PM Iveta Radičová 2012 – Robert Fico 2016 – Peter Pellegrini on behalf of PM Robert Fico 2020 – Igor Matovič The first speech after the election of each PM in parliament and the subsequent debates were generally used. However, for 2010 a final speech was used instead due to unavailability of the first speech in the repository. The 2020 debate was not included since the new government was inaugurated during the Covid-19 crisis and the debate's focus was on the crisis situation.
3	European Council Presidency speeches and parliamentary debates a) In the Slovak Parliament b) In the European Parliament c) Presentation of the SK presidency in Brussels	2004-2020	8 September 2016 (PM Robert Fico in the Slovak parliament – not a separate speech but part of the discussion) 6 July 2016 (PM Robert Fico in the European Parliament) 1 June 2016 (presentation of priorities by Miroslav Lajčák, former Minister of Foreign and European Affairs)
4	Future of Europe speech in the EP and parliamentary debates	2017-2020	PM speech in the European Parliament on the 'Future of Europe' on 12 March 2019 PM speech at the V4 and Future of Europe conference on 22 November 2016 (as no PM speech during the 2017-2020 FoE debates was accessible)
5	Prime Minister European Council Statements	2004-2020	All the reports on pre-Council statements by the PM in the parliamentary committee on European affairs (including special meetings): 4x2005, 3x2006, 2x2007, 4x2008, 4x2009, 4x2010, 8x2011, 6x2012, 6x2013, 4x2014, 8x2015, 3x2016, 5x2017, 3x2018, 6x2019
6	Parliamentary and committee debates	2004–2020	Documents with one of the following key words: deeper integration, multi-speed Europe, two-speed Europe, core Europe, enhanced co-operation, opt-out
7	Government press releases	2012-2017	Documents with one of following key words: deeper integration, multi-speed Europe, two-speed Europe, core Europe, enhanced co-operation, opt-out, PESCO

¹ In category 2, the debate after the first speech of recent PM Igor Matovič was not included since it took place at the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis and the debate focused almost entirely on the crisis along with domestic political issues (especially corruption). In category 6, only reports on the meetings of the parliamentary committee on European Affairs were available in the repository of the Slovak National Council (Slovak Parliament). Category 7 was added to include press releases from the government office to cover other events or occasions in which the PM or other ministers dealt with DI.

Appendix 2 Translations of the key words used

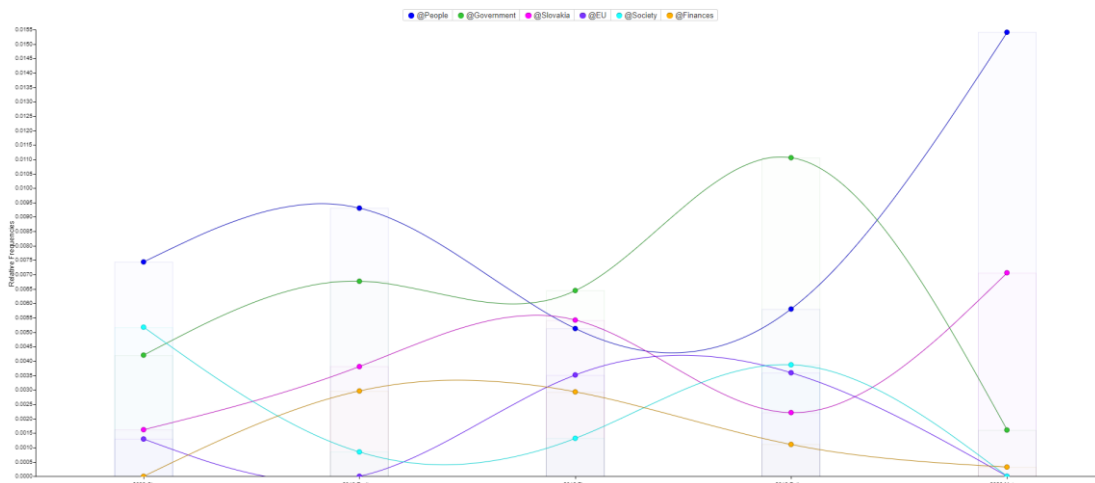
Key word	Slovak translation	Notes
Differentiated integration	Diferencovaná integrácia	Always referred to as 'deepening integration/co-operation' or 'deeper integration'
Future of Europe	Budúcnosť Európy	Sometimes 'EU's future'
DI Models: Different Speed		
Coalition of the willing	Koalícia ochotných	
Two-speed Europe	Dvojrýchlostná Európa	Sometimes 'two speed EU' or 'two-rail EU'
Multi-speed Europe	Viacrýchlostná Európa	Sometimes used as 'multi-rail Europe' or 'multi-rail EU'
DI Models: Different Endpoints		
Variable geometry	Variabilná geometria	
Core Europe	Jadro Európy	Usually referred to as 'core EU' or 'integration core'
Two-tier Europe	dvojstupňová Európa	
Concentric circles	Koncentračné kružnice	
à la carte	à la carte	
DI Mechanisms		
Enhanced co-operation	Posilnená spolupráca	Sometimes used as 'deeper co-operation' (analysed based on the context in which it was used)
opt-out	Opt-out	Does not have an established translation
DI Instances – Enhanced co-operation		
Pesco	PESCO/Stála štruktúrovaná spolupráca	
Rome III	Rím III/Rozhodné právo v manželských veciach	
Unitary patent	Jednotný patent	Also referred to as 'European patent'
Matrimonial property regimes	Majetkové režimy manželov/manželské režimy	Also referred to as 'matrimonial regimes'
Financial Transaction Tax	Daň z finančných transakcií/FTT	
European Public Prosecutor	Európsky verejný prokurátor	Usually referred to as 'European prosecutor' or 'European Prosecutor's Office'
DI Instances – Opt-out		
Schengen	Schengen	
Economic and Monetary Union	Hospodárska a menová únia	
Security and Defence Policy	Bezpečnostná a obranná politika/CSDP	
Area of Freedom, Security and Justice	Priestor slobody, bezpečnosti a spravodlivosti	
Charter of Fundamental Rights	Charta základných práv	
Social Charter	Sociálna charta	
DI instances – inter se agreements		
Prüm Convention	Prümská dohoda	
European Stability Mechanism	Európsky mechanizmus pre stabilitu/Európsky stabilizačný mechanizmus/euroval	Also 'ESM' is used, usually referred to as 'euroval'
Fiscal Compact	Fiškálny kompakť	Also referred to as 'fiscal deal' or 'revised Pact on stability and growth' or 'Pact on Euro' or 'Fiscal Pact'
Single Resolution Mechanism	Jednotný rezolučný mechanizmus/SRM	Often referred to in terms of concrete mechanisms, i.e. 'resolution fund' or 'resolution schemes'
Unified Patent Court	Jednotný patentový súd/JPS	
DI Instances – external integration		
European Economic Area	Európsky hospodársky priestor	
Customs Union + Turkey	Colná únia a Turecko	
Eastern Partnership	Východné partnerstvo	
Euromed	Euromed; Euro-stredomorské partnerstvo	

Appendix 3 The salience of EU-related issues in government programmes (relative word frequencies)

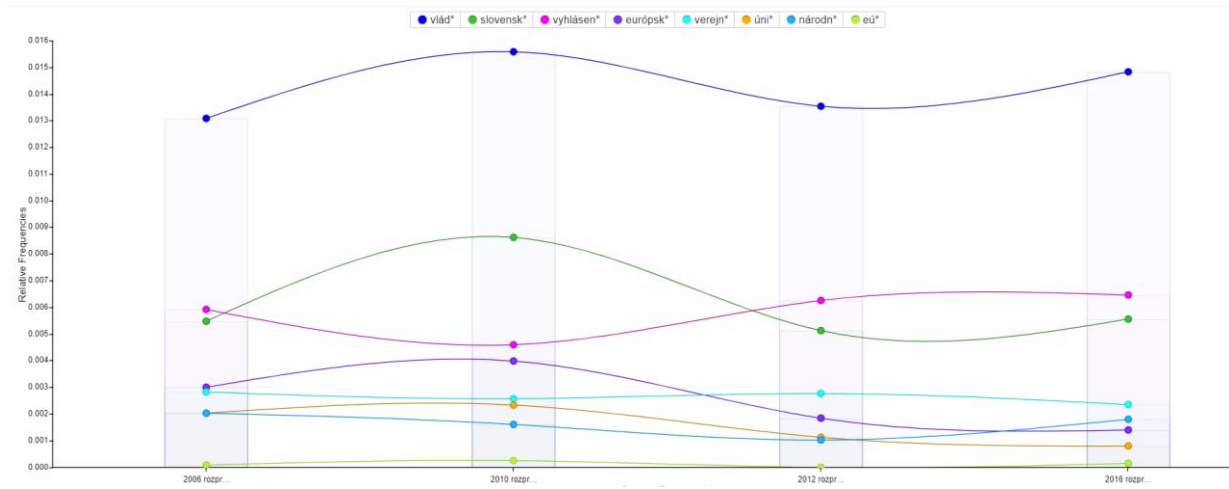


From left to right: government*, SR (Slovak republic), social, European, culture*, citizen*, political

Appendix 4 The salience of EU issues in PM first speeches in the National Council

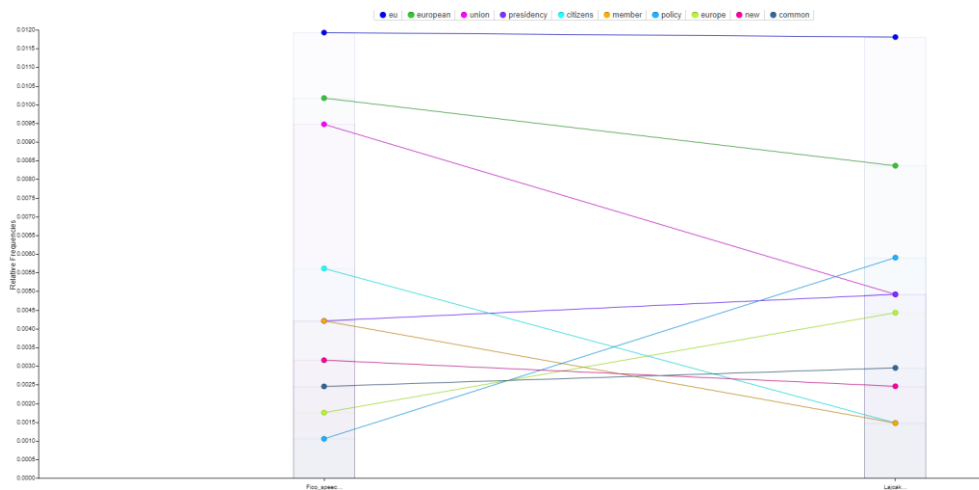


Appendix 5 The salience of EU-related issues in debates following PM first speeches

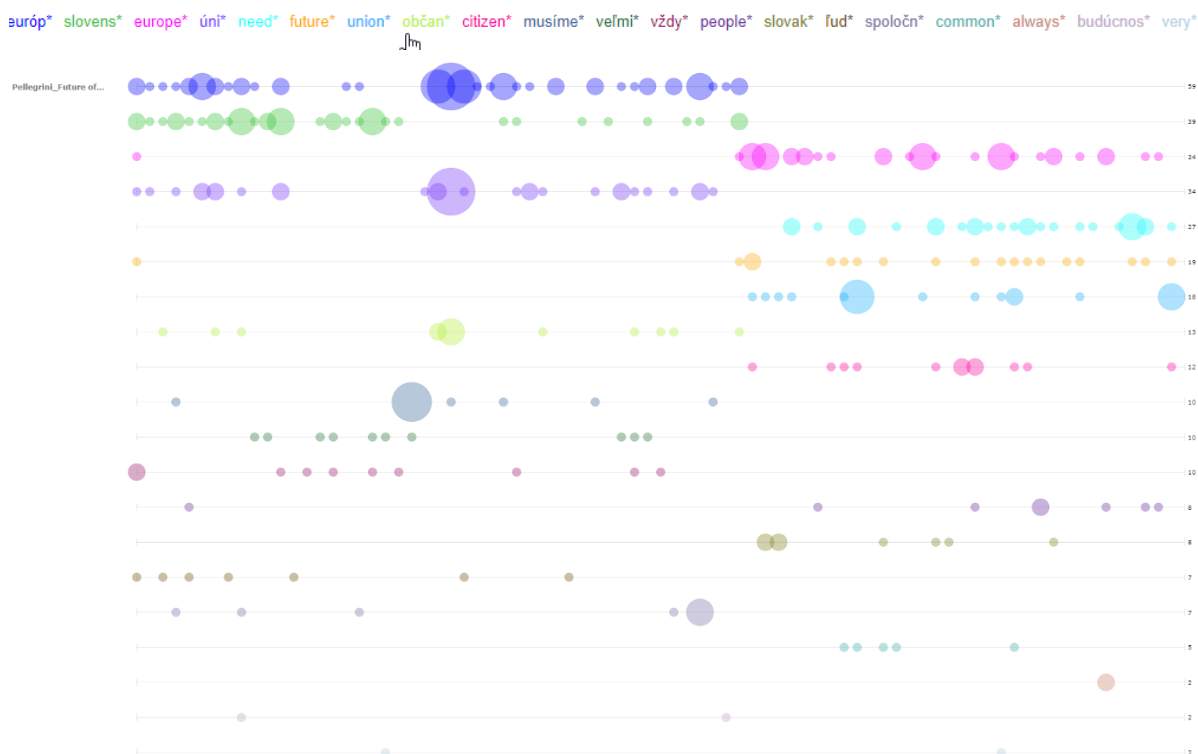


From left to right: government, Slovak*, statement, Europe*, public, union, national, EU

Appendix 6 The salience of EU issues in the Slovak Council presidency

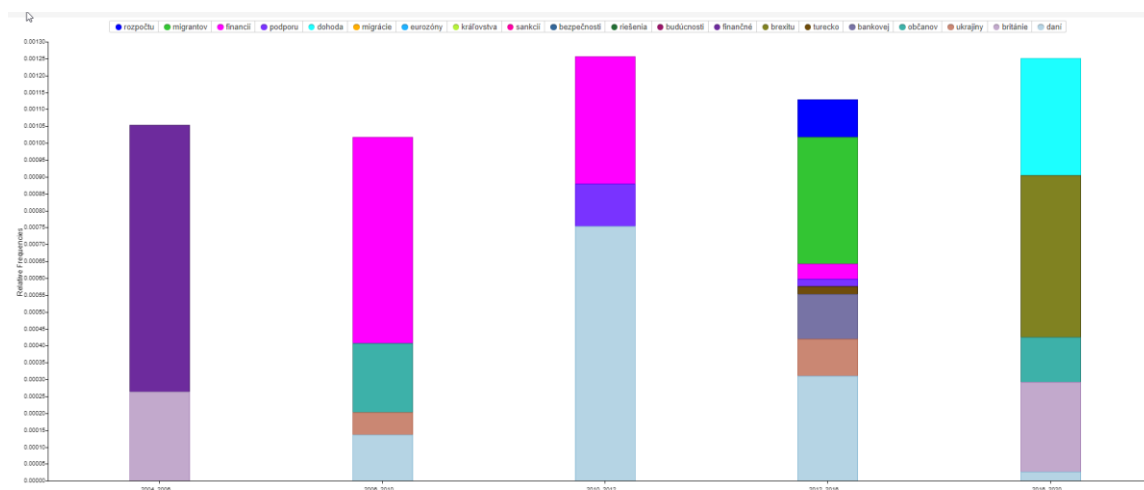


Appendix 7 The salience of the most frequent key words in Slovak and English in the debate on the Future of Europe

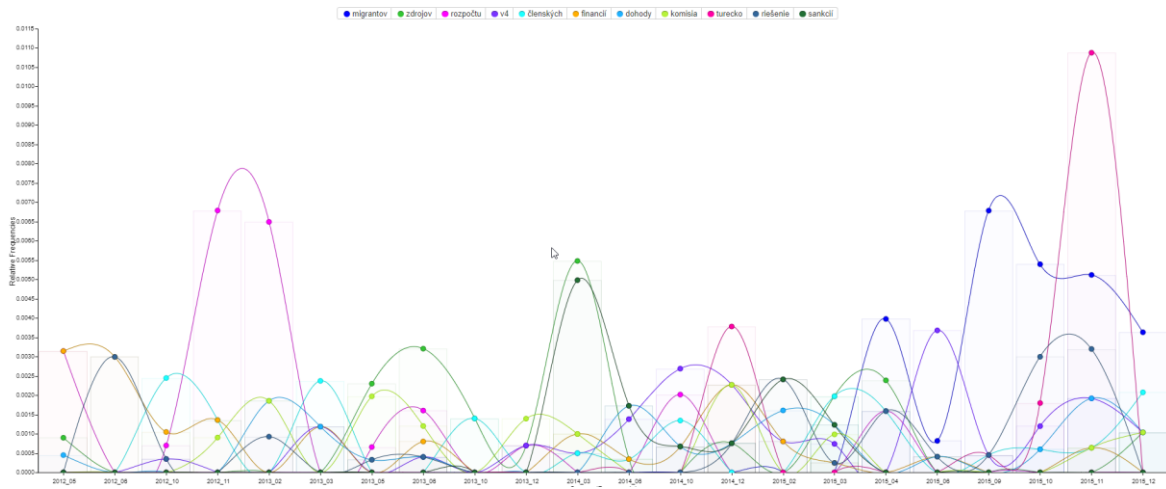


From left to right: Európ* – europe*; slovensk* - Slovak*; úni* - union; musíme – need; budúcnos* - future; občan* - citizen*; veľmi – very; vždy – always; ľud* - people; spoločn* - common;

Appendix 8 The salience over time in European Council statements (stack bars)

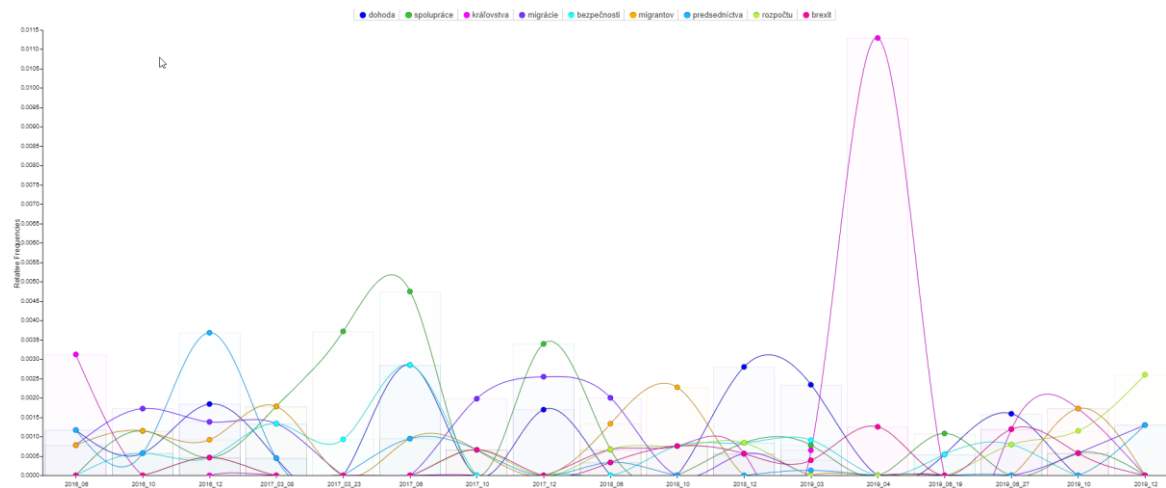


Appendix 9 The salience in European Council statements in 2012-2016



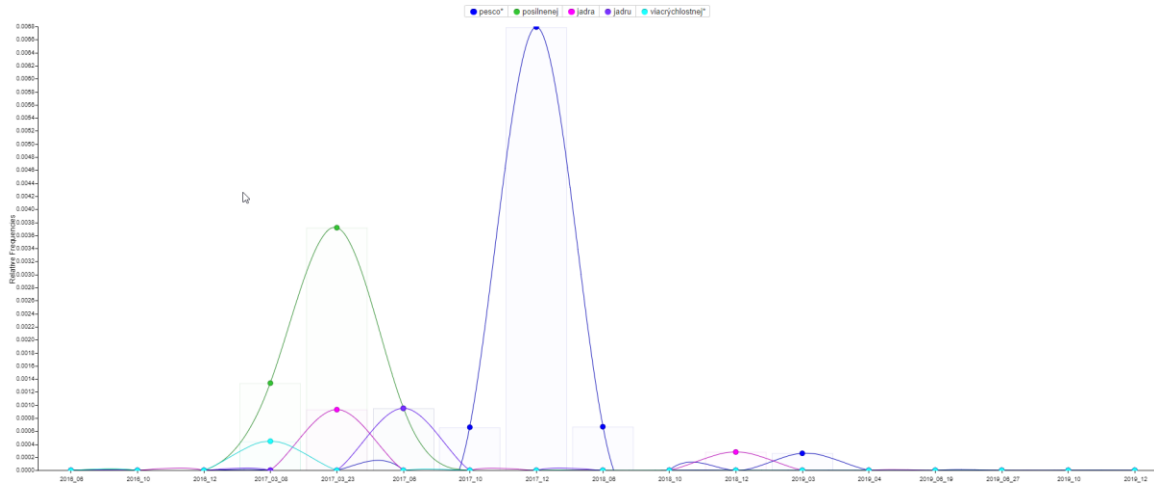
From left to right: migrants, resources, budget, V4, member, finances, deal/agreement, Commission, Turkey, solutions, sanctions

Appendix 10 The salience in European Council statements in 2016-2020



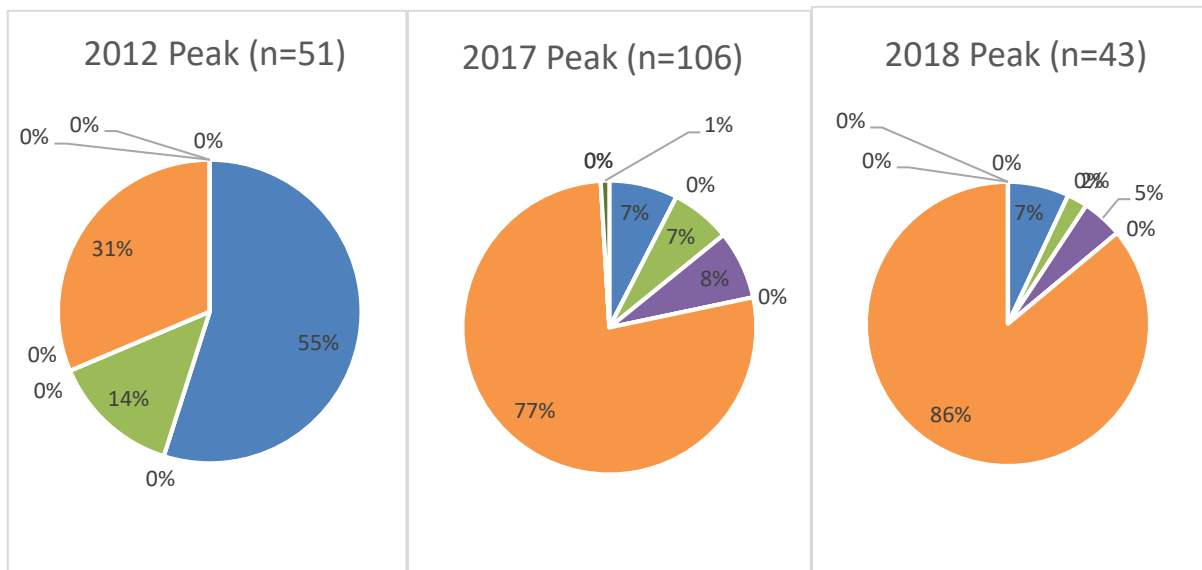
From left to right: deal/agreement, co-operation, Kingdom, migration, security, migrants, presidency, budget, Brexit

Appendix 11 The salience of relevant DI models, mechanisms and instances in 2016-2020 in European Council statements

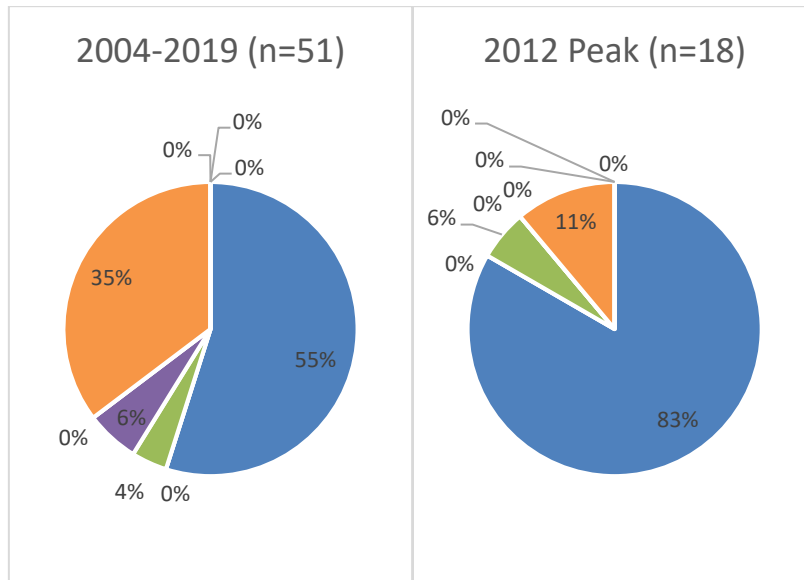


From left to right: PESCO, enhanced, core, core, multispeed

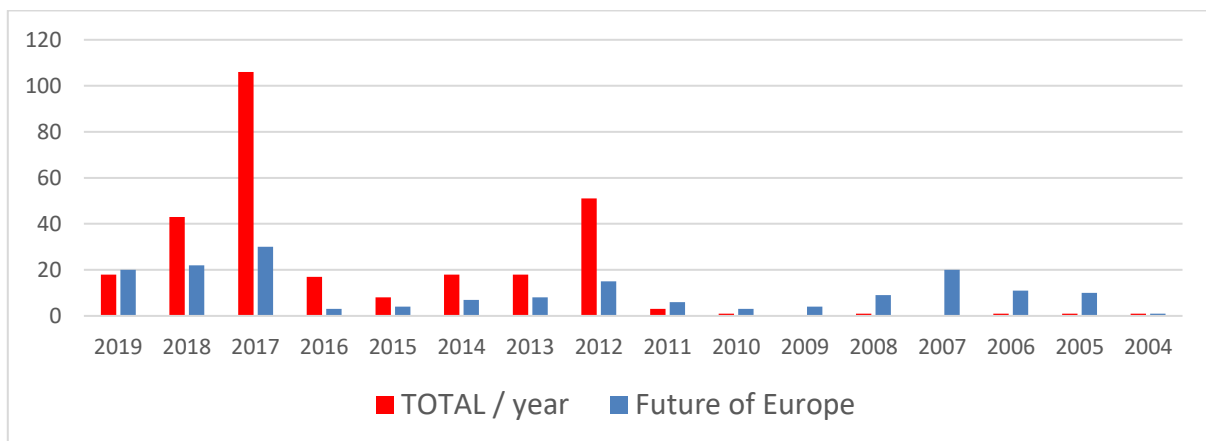
Appendix 12a The salience of conceptual key words in parliamentary and committee debates



Appendix 12b The salience of conceptual key words – Committee on European Affairs



Appendix 13 The salience of conceptual key words in parliamentary debates – relative to the FoE debate



Author contacts:

Kristína Janková

Comenius University in Bratislava

Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences

Institute of European Studies and International Relations

Mlynské luhy 4

82105 Bratislava

Slovakia

Email: Kristina.jankova@fses.uniba.sk



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.