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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 - Latvia

Karlis Bukovskis, Aleksandra Palkova and Ieva Varna

European University Institute

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

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

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

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Abstract

The research investigates the salience and position of the Latvian government and the parliament on the differentiated integration (DI) of the EU. The results attest that differentiated integration (DI) is a very low-salience issue in Latvia. It has occasionally appeared in parliamentary debates and rarely in government programmes. The issue of DI became more prominent in Latvian political debate after 2012. This was largely due to debate on the future of the Economic and Monetary Union and Latvia's preparations for the introduction of the euro. The salience of DI models was highest during political crises in the domestic and global political arenas. Specific instances of DI were more often mentioned than differentiated integration in general, although there was little or no in-depth discussion of the DI instances either. Politicians have rarely discussed DI models, except for the ideas of a European core and a two-speed/multi-speed Europe.

On Latvia's position, one can conclude that Latvia advocates closer EU integration and equal conditions for all the Member States. Differentiated integration is not in Latvia's interests: since Latvia's accession to the EU, the country has positioned itself as wishing to avoid different integration speeds in Europe as it fears that Latvia would be left behind by the western European countries for subjective reasons or following objective criteria. Latvia's outlook on DI in the EU experienced adjustments when the Baltic country joined the eurozone in 2014. In the most recent years Latvian politicians emphasised that the preferred solution was participation by all countries in EU policy initiatives. Meanwhile differentiated integration could be an opportunity to move forward in certain areas. Public discussions in Latvia on DI and the future of Europe in general have lacked depth most of the time, although the most recent couple of years have shown a tendency of their quality to improve.

Keywords

European Union, Latvia, differentiated integration, opt-out.

Summary of Results

I. Salience

The results attest that differentiated integration (DI) is a very low-salience issue in Latvia. It has occasionally appeared in parliamentary debates and rarely in government programmes, which include government action plans, coalition agreements, declarations by each prime minister (PM), prime minister statements on the Latvian presidency of the European Council and annual reports by the minister for foreign affairs on foreign policy and EU matters. In the period analysed, since 2004, when Latvia joined the European Union, the issue of DI became more prominent in Latvian political debate after 2012. This was largely due to debate on the Future of the EU related to the publication of the European Commission's communication 'A Blueprint for a Deep and Genuine Economic and Monetary Union Launching a European Debate' in 2012 and Latvia's preparations for the introduction of the euro. A third stage was tied to Brexit and Future of Europe discussions.

The salience of DI models was highest during political crises in the domestic and global political arenas. For instance, the 2007 Schengen area accession, the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, the 2008 global financial crisis, the communications on the future of the EU and EMU originating from the EU institutions, Latvia's eurozone accession, Brexit and other decisive political challenges highlighted Latvia's position on closer integration in the European Union. Specific instances of DI were more often mentioned than differentiated integration in general, although there was little or no in-depth discussion of the DI instances either. The adoption of the Lisbon Treaty did not significantly impact the salience of DI models, mechanisms or instances. Meanwhile debates on Latvia entering the eurozone, the publication of the 'Roadmap for deepening Europe's Economic and Monetary Union' in December 2017 and most recently the Future of Europe debate after Emmanuel Macron encouraged citizen consultations on tomorrow's Europe resulted in greater debate on DI in the Latvian Parliament.

Politicians have rarely discussed DI models, except for the ideas of a European core and a two-speed/multi-speed Europe. Aspects of differentiated integration, i.e. multi-speed Europe and core Europe, are mentioned in Latvia's political agenda mainly in relation to security and economic challenges. DI terms are technical and are not commonly used in Latvian debates due to the mostly superficial character of discussions concentrating on the DI model-level key words. This fact made it challenging to find debates on DI. Concurrently, the lack of material shows that DI is not a politically salient issue in the country. It should be noted that in the DI subcategories, one of the key words which was used almost as often as core Europe, but which was not mentioned in the methodology instructions, was 'federalism' or 'federalisation.'

In the case of DI instances, there was discussion about PESCO in 2017. However, key terms such as Rome III, Unitary patent, Matrimonial property regimes, Financial Transaction Tax and European Public Prosecutor did not appear in the documents analysed. As for opt-outs, there were no mentions. Regarding instances of opt-out policies (such as Schengen, Economic and Monetary Union, Security and Defence Policy, the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice, the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Social Charter), they have been occasionally mentioned. In the case of inter se agreements, there were no mentions of the Prüm Convention but there were discussions about the European Stability Mechanism, the Fiscal Compact and the Single Resolution Mechanism. When it comes to external integration, the most salient key words were the European Economic Area and the Eastern Partnership, but no references were found to the Customs Union with Turkey or to Euromed.

II. Position

For almost three decades, Latvia's foreign policy has been centred on the country's reintegration with Euro-Atlantic political and economic structures and the neighbouring Nordic and western European countries. The country has followed this course with strict confidence and dedication. Integration in the

European Union, the eurozone, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are just a few of the goals the country has reached to cement its relations with Western partners.

When analysing the data on Latvia's position in the context of EU differentiated integration, one can conclude that Latvia advocates closer EU integration and equal conditions for all the Member States. Differentiated integration is not in Latvia's interests: since Latvia's accession to the EU, the country has positioned itself as wishing to avoid different integration speeds in Europe as it fears that Latvia would be left behind by the western European countries for subjective reasons or following objective criteria. However, it has also strictly followed the geopolitical, economic, and security logic of a small country by clearly stating that, in the case that a multi-speed Europe becomes a reality, Latvia has to be in the EU's core. This was extensively argued by the government when Latvia had public discussions before introducing the euro.

Latvia's outlook on DI in the EU experienced adjustments when the Baltic country joined the eurozone in 2014. Since then and in the context of Brexit, in discussions on completion of EMU and debates on the Future of Europe in general, Latvia's position adjusted to the new reality the country was in and it became more accepting of DI as a possible solution. Membership of the Schengen Area, providing parliamentary support for the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, later ratifying the Lisbon Treaty in a short time, the introduction of the Fiscal Compact and general support for increased economic policy coordination, joining PESCO and supporting the European Public Prosecutor's Office are other examples of Latvia's positive position on deepening the EU and being in its core.

At the same time, as this report shows in detail, DI (and EU issues in general) are treated reactively rather than proactively in Latvia's political agenda. During the period analysed, the government's position in speeches did not turn out to be enthusiastic but it was not sceptical either, demonstrating a neutral position. In general, Latvian politicians emphasised that the preferred solution was participation by all countries in EU policy initiatives. Meanwhile differentiated integration could be an opportunity to move forward in certain areas. Public discussions in Latvia on DI and the future of Europe in general have lacked depth most of the time, although the most recent couple of years have shown a tendency of their quality to improve.

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1. Introduction

This report investigates the salience of differentiated integration (DI) in Latvian government discourse between 1990 and 2019. It also probes into the position of Latvian governments on the issue of DI in selected years (2007-2008, 2012-2015, 2017-2020). The results are based on an analysis of various government documents. The material analysed included government programmes, government action plans, coalition agreements, declarations by each prime minister (PM), speeches by the prime minister, ministers and members of parliament, including from the opposition, prime minister statements on the Latvian presidency of the European Council and annual reports by the Minister for Foreign Affairs to the national parliament (see Appendix 1). Regarding document access, it should be noted that the Council statements by the PM are not publicly available. Shorter descriptions of national positions are available but they cannot be checked against delivery. In other words, PMs do not inform the *Saeima* (Latvian Parliament) after their statements to the European Council. The PM statements indicate the national position concerning matters already examined in parliamentary debates. Moreover, we decided to add a seventh category – annual reports by the Minister for Foreign Affairs to the national parliament – as they outline the Latvian position on the EU in more detail.

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 (see Appendix 2). 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 salience of DI models, DI mechanisms and DI instances is assessed by counting key words in the above-mentioned documents. 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. All the key words were searched for using their Latvian equivalents in the online repository of the parliament of Latvia. Key word searches were conducted using the stem of the word, since the Latvian language can have slight variations in word endings. The main issue in the research was that the Latvian equivalents often came in conjunction with words that do not refer to DI and they are rarely used in political debates. In Latvian rhetoric, key terms such as ‘core of Europe,’ ‘two-speed/multi-speed Europe’ and ‘future of Europe’ are much more popular than the term ‘differentiated’ and the ‘differentiated integration’ combination. Regarding the governments’ positions, the results are based on a manual attitude analysis of parliamentary debates. To this end, parliamentary debates were manually coded as negative, neutral or positive. The second section of the report details the results of the salience analysis. The third section details the results of the position analysis.

2. How salient is DI for Latvian governments?

2.1 Government programmes

Latvian government programmes, including government action plans, coalition agreements and declarations by each PM, were analysed for the time period from 2004 to 2020. These documents were chosen because each of them is part of the government programme and covers a certain spectrum. 24 documents were analysed in total: nine declaration documents, six coalition agreements and nine government action plans.

First, we looked at key words related to **DI Models** (see Appendix 3). The computer-assisted analysis showed that the key words ‘integration,’ ‘enhancing,’ ‘core’ and ‘differentiated’ were mentioned in government programmes, but only mentions related to differentiated integration were selected and included. It should be noted that ‘differentiated’ and ‘integration’ were mentioned the most in 2004 and 2016-2019, which could be explained by the fact that in 2004 Latvia joined EU, in 2012 the European Commission came up with the Blueprint communication, in 2014 Latvia joined the eurozone, in 2015 Latvia held the presidency of the Council of the EU and in 2016 the Brexit referendum took place.

We then looked more specifically at **DI instances** related to enhanced co-operation (PESCO, Rome III, Unitary Patent, Matrimonial property regimes, Financial Transaction Tax, European Public Prosecutor) and opt-out policy fields (Schengen, Economic and Monetary Union, Security and Defence Policy, the Area of freedom, security, and justice, the Charter of Fundamental Rights, the Social Chapter). The computer-assisted analysis showed that **the key words for enhanced co-operation were not mentioned at all**. As for opt-out-related key words, there were mentions of Schengen, Economic and Monetary Union, Security and Defence Policy and the Social Chapter, but not in relation to opt-outs or DI (Appendix 4). The peak for security and defence policy was in 2014-2016 and for Schengen in 2006, which could be explained by fact that in preparation for joining Schengen in 2007, in 2006 Latvia had discussions about meeting the criteria for accession.

Next, we looked more specifically at DI instances related to inter se agreements (Prüm Convention, the European Stability Mechanism, the Fiscal Compact, the Single Resolution Mechanism, the Unified Patent Court) and external integration (the European Economic Area, the Customs union + Turkey, the Eastern Partnership, Euromed). The computer-assisted analysis showed that there were no key word mentions of inter se agreement DI instances (see Appendix 5). As for external integration, the most mentioned key term was Eastern Partnership, for which the peak years were 2014-2016, which could be explained by fact that in 2015 Latvia held the presidency of the Council of the EU and one of its main priorities was the Eastern Partnership and Central Asia. Another widely mentioned key phrase is the European Economic Area, for which the peak years were 2016-2019, which could be explained by the fact that Brexit and EU-wide debates on the future of the EU appeared on the agenda. Turkey was also mentioned, but only in relation to supporting Turkey as a prospective EU member.

Despite the fact that there were some references to DI models and DI instances, conceptual DI key words in government programmes were very rare or non-existent. Hence, we conducted two additional analyses to evaluate the degree to which governments talked about the EU (Appendix 6) and which issues were politically salient (Appendix 7).

When it came to assessing the degree to which governments talked about the EU, the computer-assisted analysis showed that the documents included a comparatively high number of references to the EU. This was especially the case in years when Latvia was making crucial EU-related decisions, i.e. joining the EU in 2004, joining Schengen in 2007, joining the eurozone in 2014, the financial crisis in 2007-2008, the migration crisis in 2015 and Brexit in 2016.

A qualitative analysis (close reading of the documents) of government programmes, including government action plans, coalition agreements and declarations by each PM from 2004 to 2020, confirmed these results. In sum, differentiated integration seems to be a minor issue in Latvia, although

various EU issues are discussed in all the government programmes. Since 2004, government programmes have generally addressed eurozone issues, with some mentioning the Schengen area, the EEA and the Eastern Partnership. **Therefore, Latvian governments seem to pay attention mainly to concrete cases of differentiated integration in which the state is only involved in cases of crisis and necessity.**

2.2 Speeches by Prime Ministers

Speeches by prime ministers, including the first speech after the election of each PM in parliament and the subsequent debates (altogether 9 PMs), were analysed for the time period from 2004 to 2020. 32 documents were analysed in total. The document analysis showed that the key terms ‘integration,’ ‘core’ (*kodola*), ‘future of Europe,’ ‘Eastern Partnership,’ ‘Schengen’ and ‘Economic and Monetary Union’ (*monetārā savienība*) were mentioned in all 32 PM speeches.

Differentiated integration was discussed when Aigars Kalvītis was the prime minister of the country between 2006 and 2007. References to the ‘core’ of Europe in the available Latvian PM speeches were found only for 2005, during Aigars Kalvītis’s ‘Die Stiftung Ordnungspolitik’ speech in Freiburg concerning the Future of Europe. Differentiated integration was most salient in 2015, when Latvia held the presidency of the Council of the EU with PM Laimdota Straujuma, and one of the main priorities was the Eastern Partnership. It should be noted that the key phrase ‘Future of Europe’ appeared in Māris Kučinskis’s speeches in 2018 because of the ongoing debate on the future of the EU captivating public interest throughout the EU.

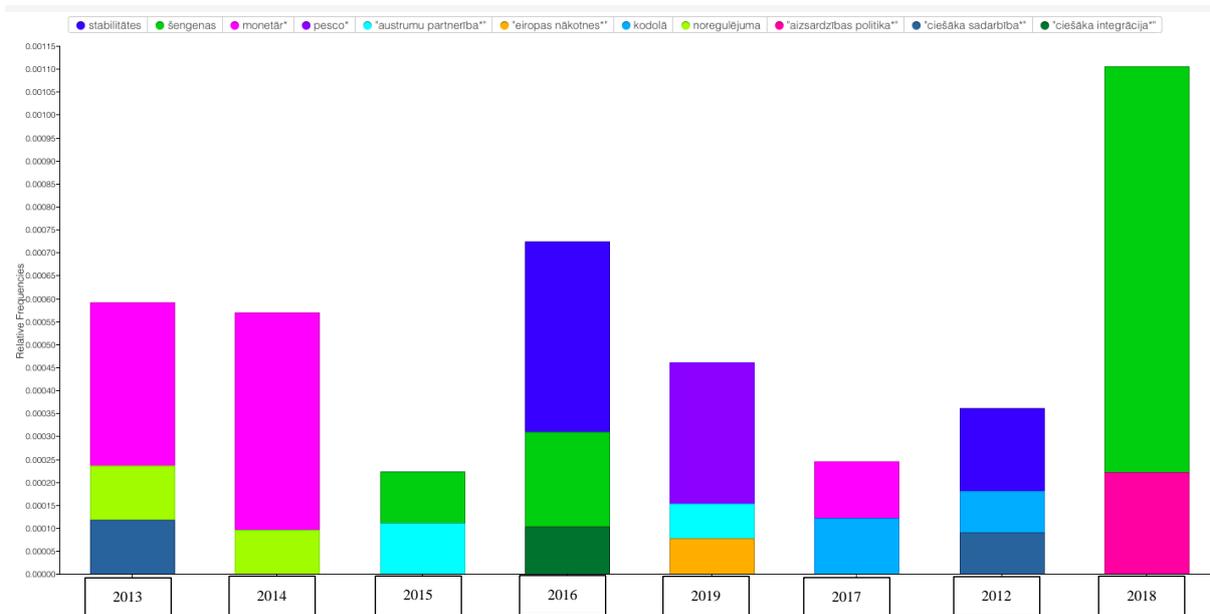
The next step was to analyse the prime minister speeches in the national parliament and the European Council. Latvia’s PM gave only one speech in the European Council and one in the European Parliament, both in 2015. The key terms eastern partnership*, core*, integration*, future of Europe* and monetary union* were the only key terms that appeared, albeit with very low frequencies (see Appendix 8). The key phrase ‘Eastern partnership’ appeared mostly in speeches in the European Council and in the European Parliament, while in the national parliament the PM focused on ‘integration’ and ‘Eastern Partnership.’ This could be explained by the fact that the Eastern Partnership was one of the priorities of the Latvian presidency. As for ‘future of Europe’ and ‘core,’ they were discussed in subsequent debates and opening speeches by the Latvian PM in 2015.

It was noted that the national parliament and ministers looked more closely at policies and national approaches to European integration, while the speech in the European Parliament focused more on the practical objectives of the presidency. The period from 2012 to 2015 showed a greater presence in national debate of discussion on DI than before. The low visibility of DI is also reflected in the fact that concepts have linguistic variability, i.e. the DI terminology is not part of day-to-day political debate, although politicians tended to discuss differentiated integration on specific occasions, in particular the annual foreign and EU policy debate in the national parliament.

2.3 Annual report by the Minister for Foreign Affairs to the national parliament

Eight annual reports by the Minister for Foreign Affairs on the accomplishments of the government and further work with respect to national foreign policy and the European Union in the period from 2012 to 2019 were analysed, as the first report was made in 2012. **Figure 1** provides an overview of the findings regarding DI models, mechanisms and instances. The most salient years were 2013, 2016, 2017 and 2019, and the years featured three different key words. This could be explained by the ongoing discussions on completion of the Banking Union, together with Latvia’s own challenges in monitoring its financial system.

Figure 1 - DI key words in annual reports by the Minister for Foreign Affairs to the national parliament 2012-2019



First, we looked at DI models. The most salient key phrase was differentiated integration (*ciešāka integrācija/ciešāka koordinācija*), which was used in 2014 and in 2015-2019, the Future of Europe (*Eiropas nākotne*), which was used in 2013, and core Europe (*kodolā, valstu kodolā*), which was used in 2012, 2017 and 2018. This could be explained by the fact that Latvia was approaching eurozone membership and public support for it needed to be rallied. The 2017-2018 rise was tied to the ‘White paper on the future of Europe: Five scenarios’ being published and discussed. Hence, we decided to add DI mechanisms (Appendix 10). Then we looked at DI instances. Among enhanced co-operation instances, only PESCO was mentioned. As for opt-out key terms, the most salient were ‘Schengen (*šengenas*),’ ‘Economic and Monetary Union (*monetār*)’ and ‘Security and Defence Policy (*aizsardzības politika*),’ which appeared in 2019. Meanwhile there were no mentions of ‘Area of Freedom, Security and Justice,’ ‘Charter of Fundamental Rights’ or ‘Social Charter’ (Appendix 11). It should be noted that Latvia had no position on opt-outs. It is essential to mention that uses of opt-out key words do not have any relation to opting-out from these policies. Latvia has not discussed opting out. Finally, we looked at specific DI instances related to inter se agreements and external integration. The most salient key terms here were ‘European Stability Mechanism (*Eiropas Stabilitātes mehānisms*),’ ‘Single Resolution Mechanism (*vienots regulējuma mehānisms*)’ and ‘Eastern Partnership (*austrumu partnerība*)’ (Appendix 12). No key words appeared in 2016 and 2017, which could be explained by the fact that changes in the EMU were not the most topical matter and were overtaken by the migration crisis and Brexit.

2.4 Parliamentary debates

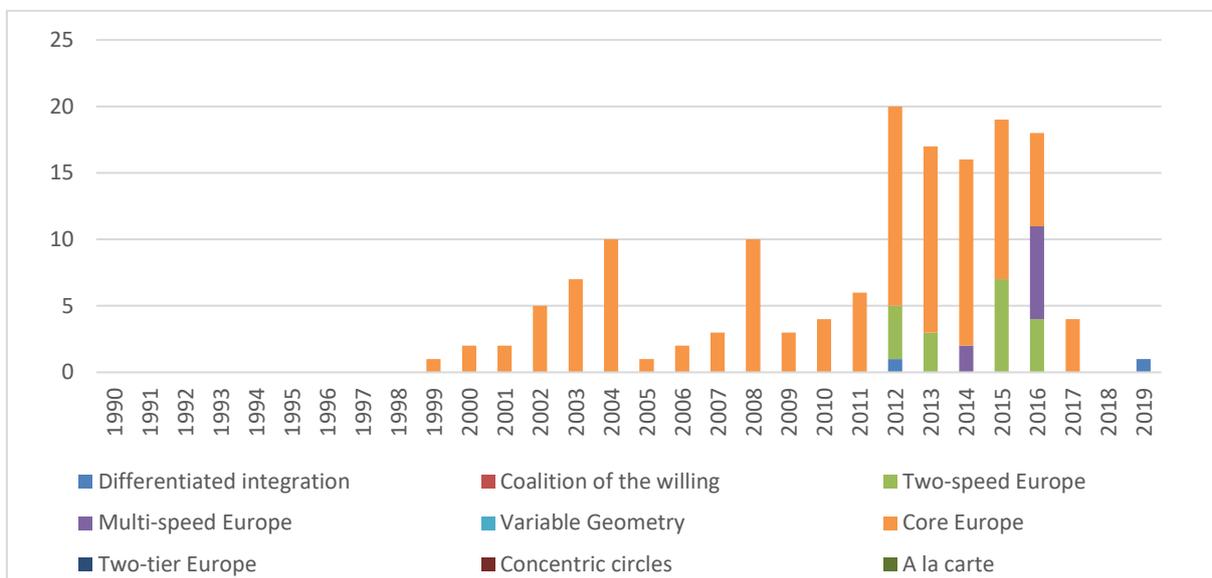
Parliamentary debates were analysed for the time period 1990-2019, and DI key words were searched for related to DI models and DI instances. In Latvia the key term ‘differentiated integration’ was used extremely rarely, while other key words appear more frequently, especially in the 2012-2017 debates.

With regard to **DI models**, the most salient key phrases appeared to be ‘core Europe,’ ‘two-speed Europe’ and ‘multi-speed Europe.’ In the case of **DI instances**, there was a discussion on PESCO. As for inter se agreements, the most discussed key terms were the ‘European Stability Mechanism,’ the ‘Fiscal Compact,’ and the ‘Single Resolution Mechanism.’ Regarding external agreements, the most

salient key words were the ‘European Economic Area’ and the ‘Eastern Partnership.’ At the same time, there were no mentions of ‘Rome III,’ ‘Unitary patent,’ ‘Matrimonial property regimes,’ ‘Financial Transaction Tax,’ ‘European Public Prosecutor’ or the ‘Prüm Convention,’ and neither did ‘Customs Union + Turkey’ or ‘Euromed’ appear in the documents analysed.

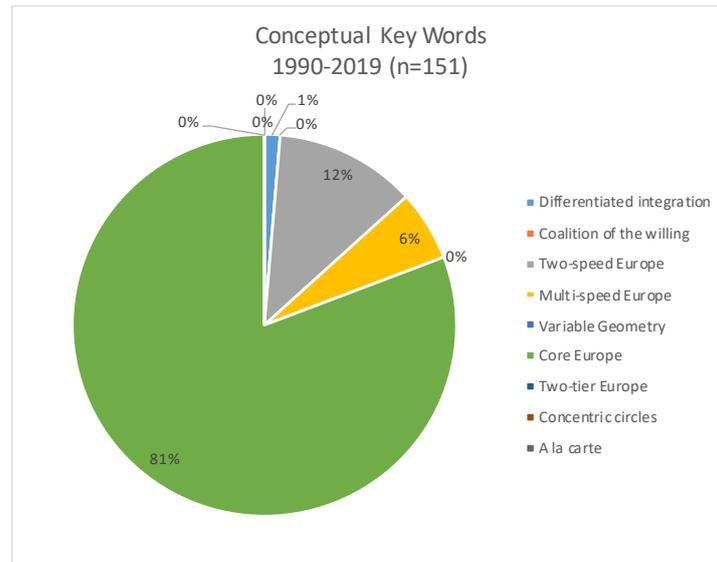
Figure 2 shows that the salience of conceptual key words in parliamentary debates was low throughout the period after 1990, then it increased from 1999 and it culminated in 2004 with Latvia’s accession to the EU. It then dropped again after the accession, which was followed by a sharp rise in 2008, which can be explained by the topicality of the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty and by the financial crisis in Latvia from 2008 to 2010. Between 2012 and 2016, 15 to 20 annual mentions were registered. This could be explained by the following events. In 2012 the European Commission came up with the communication on the Blueprint for the EMU and Latvia started its path towards joining the eurozone, which significantly affected its foreign policy agenda; 2015 was the year of the Latvian presidency of the Council of the EU; and in 2016 the Brexit referendum took place. After 2016, references to conceptual key words dropped again.

Figure 2 - The salience of conceptual key words in parliamentary debates 1990-2019



We then studied the specific key terms for DI more closely. **Figure 3** shows that ‘core Europe,’ ‘two-speed Europe’ and ‘multi-speed Europe’ were the most frequently repeated key phrases, accounting for 99% of all the conceptual key words. The key phrase ‘core Europe’ was by far the most prevalent among all the key phrases. The term ‘differentiated integration’ appeared only twice, once in 2012 and a second time in 2019.

Figure 3 - The salience of conceptual key terms in parliamentary debates – breakdown by key term

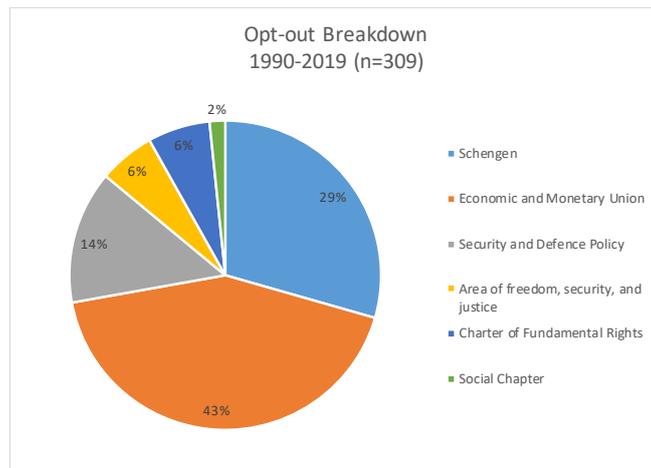


We also investigated whether debates on differentiated integration tended to be embedded in wider debates on the ‘future of Europe’ (FoE). To this end, the frequency of the conceptual DI key words was compared to the frequency of the key phrase ‘future of Europe.’ It was observed that the two sets of key terms did not correspond to each other chronologically. The number of references to FoE was the highest in 2019 (Appendix 14). The reason is that for Latvia discussion on the ‘Future of Europe’ did not peak in 2017 when Juncker's White Paper was released, but two years later when citizen consultations took place in Latvia.

Next, we looked at specific DI mechanisms, namely ‘enhanced co-operation’ and ‘opt-outs.’ In Latvia, the term ‘opt-out’ was not mentioned in parliamentary debates at all, while ‘enhanced co-operation’ appeared in parliamentary debates five times, once in 2019 and four times in 2018. These references can be explained by the fact that Latvia started to discuss PESCO, which is the only key word that appeared related to the enhanced co-operation mechanism. Although enhanced co-operation is a specific term in EU jargon, the Latvian translation ‘*ciešāka sadarbība*’ was used relatively infrequently. In addition, when it was used, ‘*ciešāka sadarbība*’ did not always refer to enhanced co-operation in the EU but to closer co-operation between all international actors, namely states.

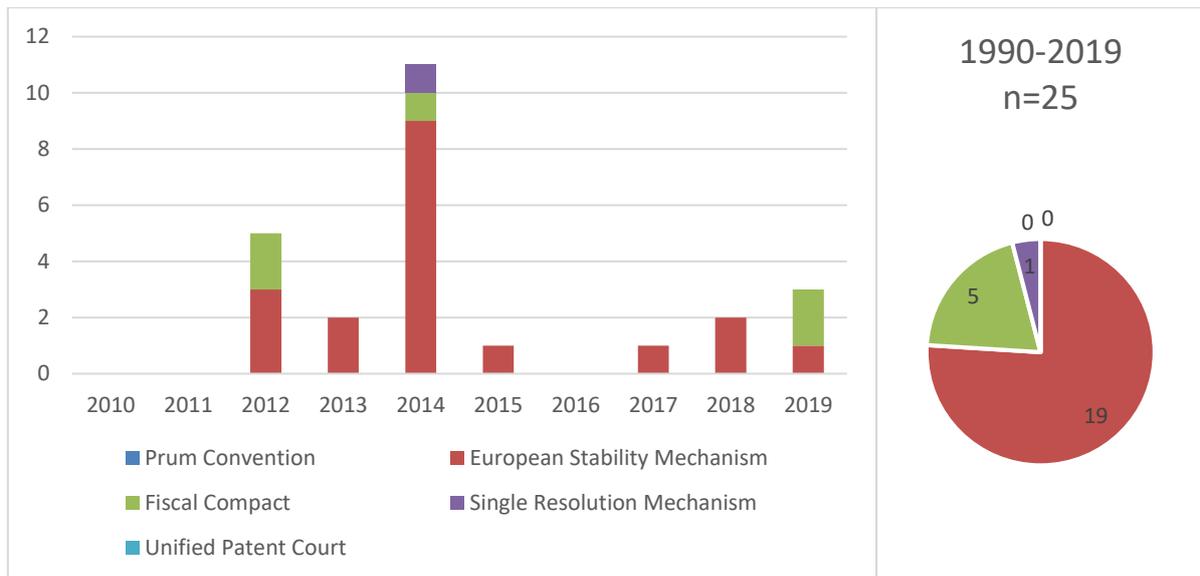
Then we looked at specific DI opt-out instances and at instances of enhanced co-operation. For enhanced co-operation, the only key word that was mentioned in a parliamentary debate was ‘PESCO,’ once in 2019 and four times in 2018. The key words for opt-out policy fields were mentioned much more often, albeit not directly in relation to DI (**Figure 4**).

Figure 4 - Instances of ‘opt-out’ policy fields in parliamentary debates 1990-2020



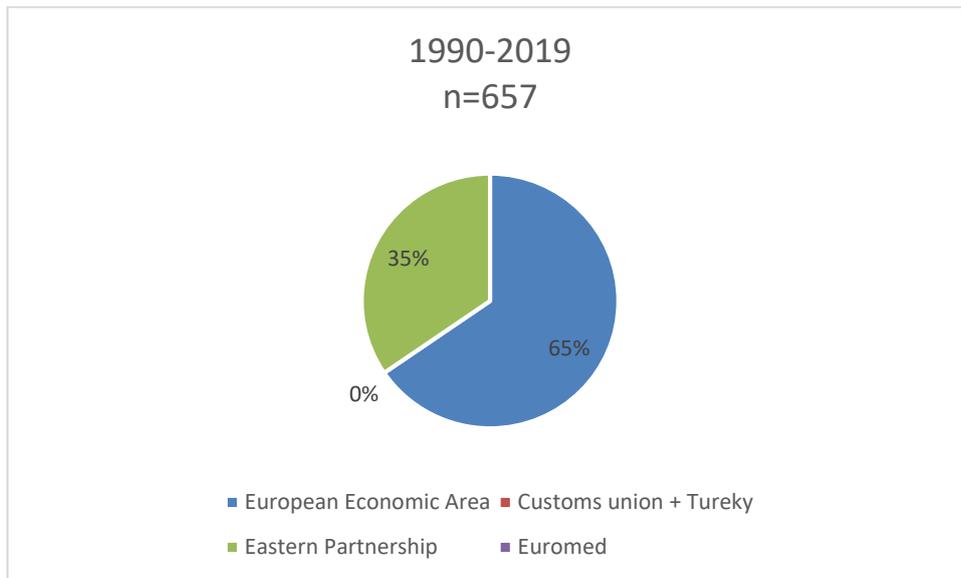
Then we looked for instances of inter se agreements (**Figure 5**). These showed a very low frequency, with the highest values in 2014 (when Latvia joined the euro zone) and 2012 (referring to the ESM). The ‘European Stability Mechanism’ was mentioned 19 times and the ‘Fiscal Compact’ was mentioned five times. None of the inter se agreements were mentioned before 2012.

Figure 5 - DI instances – inter se agreements 1990-2019



Finally, we looked at DI instances of external agreements (**Figure 6**). The ‘European Economic Area (EEA)’ was mentioned 430 times and the ‘Eastern Partnership’ 227 times. By contrast, ‘Euromed’ and ‘Customs Union with Turkey’ were not mentioned. One of the topics discussed was migration from outside the EU/EEA, and in 2016 a law was passed requiring all higher education institutions to charge students coming from outside the EU/EEA tuition fees.

Figure 6 - Breakdown of external association agreements



3. What positions do Latvian governments have on DI?

This section looks at the positions of the governments. To analyse the salience and position of governments regarding DI, five categories were chosen as the guidelines suggested. We decided to add a fifth category to categories 1-4 because the annual report by the Minister for Foreign Affairs to the national parliament also presents the government's position. Then we decided to look at the positions of government (coalition) and opposition parties regarding DI. The analysis was based on parliamentary debates and concentrated on three periods: 1) 2007-2008; 2) 2012-2015; 3) 2017-2020. The first subsection provides a quantitative overview of government, coalition and opposition positions divided into positive, negative and neutral statements about DI. The second subsection contains a qualitative assessment of a range of statements by government and opposition politicians in the three periods. The qualitative analysis is chronologically structured by being divided into the three periods.

3.1 Quantitative overview of government positions

Regarding **DI models**, the document analysis¹ showed that assessments of the DI models were rather *neutral* and characterised by *rather indirect reference to DI*. This could be explained by the fact that **Latvian governments seemed to pay attention mainly to concrete cases of differentiated integration in which the state was involved only in cases of crisis and necessity**. More positive positions were found in the years after 2012, especially after 2015, which could be explained by the fact that in 2014 Latvia joined the euro area and in 2015 Latvia held the Council presidency.

¹ The analysis was based on a close reading of documents and assigning scores to each document regarding DI salience and DI position (holistic grading). For salience: 0 = no reference, 1 = marginal reference, 2 = central reference. For position: 0 = negative, 1 = neutral, 2 = positive. The document categories included were: 1. government programmes, declarations by each PM and coalition agreements, 2. first speeches and the following parliamentary debates, 3. presidency of the Council of the EU speeches and parliamentary debates: a. in the Latvian parliament, b. in the European Parliament, 4. Future of Europe speeches and parliamentary debates and 5. annual reports by the Minister for Foreign Affairs to the national parliament.

Figure 7 - Holistic grading of documents - DI models

Document category	Saliency (score)	Position (score)
Government programmes / coalition agreements/declarations by PM (2004-2020)	0.625	0.846
First speeches by PMs (2004-2019)	0.281	0.777
Annual report by Minister for Foreign Affairs to the national parliament (2012-2019)	1	0.937
EC presidency speech (2015)	0.75	1
FOE speech (2017)	0.666	1.5
FOE citizen speech (2018)	0.1	0
Total per table:	0.493	0.818

Regarding **DI mechanisms**, the position of Latvian governments was *neutral* and characterised by a *low level* of saliency. In 2012 changes started appearing in the context of the sovereign debt and economic crisis and new instruments for economic coordination, e.g. the European Semester and the Fiscal Compact were introduced and discussed. A correlation may be seen between this and the fact that after 2012 discussions related to DI started to become more salient, but the position remained *neutral*. In the period from 2017 to 2020 DI mechanisms were more salient, but the position remained *neutral*.

Figure 8 - Holistic grading of documents - DI mechanisms

Document category	Saliency (score)	Position (score)
Government programmes/coalition agreements/declarations by PM (2004-2020)	0	0
First speeches by PMs (2004-2019)	0.312	0.285
Annual report by Minister for Foreign Affairs to the national parliament (2012-2019)	0.125	0.5
EC presidency speech (2015)	0.5	1
FOE speech (2017)	0.333	1.5
FOE citizen speech (2018)	0.5	1
Total for the table:	0.239	0.961

We then looked at the parliamentary debates to search for the ruling coalition (government) and opposition positions on DI. This analysis was limited to the years 2007-2008, 2012-2015 and 2017-2020.

Regarding **DI models**, the analysis of parliamentary debates showed that assessments of the models were *positive*. Multi-speed Europe was frequently portrayed by governments and the opposition in a positive light. Core Europe was the most discussed topic in parliamentary debates. There was no significant difference in assessments of DI between the ruling coalition (government) parties and opposition parties. Positive connotations of ‘multispeed’ and ‘core Europe,’ especially in the years 2012-2015, could be explained by the fact that Latvia entered the eurozone and also held the presidency of the Council of the EU, so it could be argued that Latvia was ‘joining the EU core.’

Figure 9 - Position on Differentiated integration

(n = 2)	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Government (n=2)	0	0	2
Opposition (n=0)	0	0	0
1990-2001	0	0	0
2002-2006	0	0	0
2007-2008	0	0	0
2009-2011	0	0	0
2012-2015	0	0	1
2016	0	0	0
2017-2020	0	0	1

Figure 10 - Position on multi-speed Europe (two-speed + multi-speed)

(n = 27)	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Government (n=19)	0	5	14
Opposition (n=8)	0	4	4
1990-2001	0	0	0
2002-2006	0	0	0
2007-2008	0	0	0
2009-2011	0	0	0
2012-2015	0	4	12
2016	0	5	6
2017-2020	0	0	0

Figure 11 – Position on multi-end Europe (Core Europe)

(n = 122)	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Government (n=110)	0	10	100
Opposition (n=12)	0	3	9
1990-2001	0	0	5
2002-2006	0	0	25
2007-2008	0	6	4
2009-2011	0	4	9
2012-2015	0	3	55
2016	0	0	7
2017-2020	0	0	4

Regarding **DI mechanisms**, the position of the Latvian governments (ruling coalition) and the opposition stayed more *positive* and was characterised by *medium intensity*. Enhanced co-operation was a salient issue throughout the period from 2017 to 2020. The rise in salience was tied to the ‘White paper on the future of Europe: Five scenarios’ being published and discussed. In 2017-2020 PESCO became the dominant issue.

Figure 12 -Position on enhanced co-operation

(n = 5)	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Government (n = 5)	0	2	3
Opposition (n = 0)	0	0	0
1990-2001	0	0	0
2002-2006	0	0	0
2007-2008	0	0	0
2009-2011	0	0	0
2012-2015	0	0	0
2016	0	0	0
2017-2020	0	2	3

It can be concluded that the government position (in key documents) remained *neutral* with a positive tendency, but with *low salience*. The parliamentary debates related to DI at the same time had more *positive connotations* and a *higher salience*. This could be explained by the fact that government discussions are not recorded and most of the actual in-depth discussion on the future of the EU took place either between state officials or through adoption of national positions, which are often classified. The positioning on future of the EU issues was most often reactive – debates took place when the issues were officially raised by the EU institutions or Member States.

3.2 Qualitative assessment of government positions

The qualitative analysis confirmed a fairly positive approach to DI. Politicians usually mentioned that DI may sometimes be necessary but Latvia should always strive to ensure that it was in the core and was aware of its national priorities. Latvia's logic of being in the core of the EU is tied to a lack of geopolitical alternatives. The EU allows the small Baltic country to feel safe in a community of friendly developed countries and provides financing and an economic environment for cohesion and growth. Therefore, Latvian governments have seen membership of the EU with a strategic logic and have followed this path with strict dedication.

Latvia's pro-European position did not change over the period from 2004 to 2020. Eurosceptic positions were extremely rare and functionally irrelevant in parliamentary debates, even among the opposition. The Latvian political scenery has not seen prominent and able Eurosceptics, and the government positions have tended to be that deepening the EU is essential but it must be done with a clear purpose and motivation. Politicians who were critical while in opposition often changed their outlook when becoming part of a government coalition or even ministers. Extremely frequent party rebranding and politicians changing political parties are long-standing traditions in Latvia. At the same time, the overall pro-European stance did not change over time.

The three periods examined in this section show that DI debates were often associated with specific processes or crises that were leading to further integration. The future of Europe and differentiated integration were not the most popular topics in Latvia. Meanwhile, **all the governments at some point put forward Latvia's position in support of united common EU integration**. However, the Latvian governments' positions on EU integration and DI were reactive rather than proactive. Politicians tended not to initiate discussions on the future of the EU and related issues as this was considered to be an issue on which Latvia had a low impact as a small country. The periods 2007-2008, 2012-2015 and 2017-2020 were chosen to identify reactions to important issues for Latvia and Latvian debates on documents and issues emerging from the European Commission or political and economic situations in general.

Identifying all the DI models, mechanisms and instances was complicated due to the very low number of documents available for analysis. This was due to several reasons. First, most of the debates did not take place during plenary discussions. Only the annual foreign policy and EU affairs report by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the following debates attracted sufficient media attention, and a significant number of parliamentarians expressed their views on these occasions. Most of the national debates on EU affairs take place within the European Affairs Committee of the parliament, which is the form of parliamentary scrutiny of EU affairs that Latvia has chosen. Unlike plenary debates, these meetings are not recorded and are often closed to the public and media, with only occasional official press releases coming out on topical issues. The positions do not differ from government positions as the chair of the Committee comes from a political party in the ruling coalition.

Second, Latvian public debate, as the further analysis will demonstrate, was characterised more by **discussions on concepts at the level of DI models rather than mechanisms or instances**. Being in the core of Europe and discussing the federalisation of Europe were at the centre of debates. The Latvian debate did not include discussion on opt-outs, and DI instances were rarely mentioned, the most prominent being Economic and Monetary Union. Due to this trend, public debates in Latvia on the EU's future were superficial and did not provide much substance for in-depth debate. A more detailed government position was included in the various national positions, but access to them is traditionally restricted. Additionally, slightly more detailed debates take place in the European Affairs Committee, which reviews the national government positions and is not intended for the general public. Hence, a clear distinction between DI models, mechanisms and instances is hard to find and describe in a coherent manner. The language in the public debate is simply too poor for proper evidence.

Finally, a third reason is that this report on Latvia includes an analysis of and references to the 'Annual Report by the Minister for Foreign Affairs on the accomplishments and further work with respect to national foreign policy and the European Union.' These reports were introduced at the end of 2011 with the first speech being given to the parliament in January 2012. The annual reports triggered the main debates on EU issues in the Latvian parliament. Hence most of the positions by both governments and the opposition can be identified from the reports.

3.2.1 2007-2008 – Accession to the Schengen Area and the Financial Crisis

DI models: Already before its accession to the EU, Latvia was fearing a multi-speed Europe. For instance, during a meeting with the Maltese Prime Minister shortly before accession day on 1 May 2004, Latvian President Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga (non-partisan) agreed with her counterpart that there were no major differences between the parties on the issue of the future of the European Union, including a vision that two-speed Europe would not be the most successful basis for the creation of the new Europe.² The same concept was already outlined in 2003 by President Vīķe-Freiberga when meeting the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, when both sides admitted that the new Europe could not be a two-level or two-speed Europe and it should be a united Europe with participation by both small and large countries.³

The economic and financial crisis in 2008-2010 accelerated the next step in Latvia's deeper integration into 'core Europe' through its willingness to join the eurozone. Latvia never officially objected to eventual membership of the third stage of Economic and Monetary Union. The economic growth during the post-accession period and pro-cyclical policies were enough to put inflation under

² Valsts prezidentes tikšanās ar Maltas premjerministru Edvardu Adami (Meeting of the President of the State with the Prime Minister of Malta Edward Adami), Riga: The President of the Republic of Latvia, 17.02.2004
<https://www.president.lv/lv/jaunumi/zinas/valsts-prezidentes-tiksanas-ar-maltas-premjerministru-edvardu-adami-902#gsc.tab=0>

³ Valsts prezidente tiekas ar Čehijas premjerministru (State President meets Czech Prime Minister), LETA News Agency, 17.09.2003, www.leta.lv

control and to meet the Maastricht criteria already in 2008. The government position included membership of the eurozone as a target from 2005 and 2006, with the country joining the ERM II in 2005. However, it took several more years of financial crisis to actually satisfy the criteria to join the eurozone.

Meanwhile, Latvia maintained its support for EU integration. On 2 June 2005, the Latvian Parliament ratified the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe with 71 votes in favour, 5 votes against and 6 abstentions only a day after it was rejected by French voters in a referendum. The Latvian parliament debates included no substantive discussions on the Treaty. Instead, they concentrated on the importance of the Treaty for both the EU and Latvia. Some political groups expressed concerns and suggested waiting for the other EU countries to ratify the treaty. Meanwhile, Minister for Foreign Affairs Artis Pabriks (People's Party, Society for Political Change, Unity, Development/For!, in the EP Group of the European People's Party) emphasised that ratification had to happen on that day because:

"I don't want us to wait for the others to decide in our place how it is right and how it isn't. Let us decide today and now, and then we will talk at the European Council, what to do with others who are unable to decide!"⁴

On 10 April 2008, the Latvian parliament debated the Lisbon Treaty before the first reading, with predominantly high praise for the document and its importance to the European Union and Latvia as part of it. Vaira Paegle (People's Party, Civic Union, Unity) incorporated the overall feeling by stating:

"So, honourable colleagues, let us improve our political integration in the European Union by supporting the draft law ratifying the Treaty of Lisbon at the first reading."⁵

Only one member of parliament, not belonging to any political party at that point, openly spoke against ratification of the treaty. Already on 8 May 2008 the Latvian Parliament ratified the Lisbon Treaty without further debate on the second (final) reading.⁶ 70 of the 74 participating members of parliament voted in favour, one abstained and three were against. The ratification of the Lisbon Treaty did not cause much public discussion. The small country had just joined the EU after a prolonged period of accession conditionality and domestic transformation. Discussions about the future of the EU after the country's representatives had participated in the Convention on the Future of Europe were not regarded as necessary due to the complexity of the EU and the simplistic nature of the overall national debate on EU institutional issues. Most of the speeches emphasised the historical importance of the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty for Latvia and the Latvian Parliament.

DI instances: The choice of the years 2007-2008 is related to Latvia's accession to the Schengen Area and the severe financial crisis that affected the country from 2008. The Schengen Area was the first important step after Latvia's accession to the EU and was seen as a symbol of Latvia's acceptance in the Euro-Atlantic community of developed countries. Differentiated integration for Latvia has never only been an issue of institutional and policy integration within the EU. **For Latvia, integration in the EU structures is not about delegating sovereignty as much as it is about being accepted as an equal member among the Western countries.** Being given borderless freedom of travel was a very tangible right to acquire. Hence, the Schengen Area was de facto seen as a moment of recognition of Latvia becoming part of 'core Europe' after the 2004 enlargement.

⁴ "Es negribu, ka mēs gaidām, ka citi izlemj mūsu vietā, kā ir pareizi un kā - nav. Izlemsim paši šodien un tūlīt, un pēc tam Eiropas Padomē runāsim, ko darīt ar pārējiem, kas nav spējīgi izlemīt!" Latvijas Republikas 8.Saeimas pavasara sesijas devītā sēde (The ninth meeting during the spring session of the 8th Saeima of the Republic of Latvia), 02.06.2005, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/transcripts/view/903>

⁵ "Tātad, cienījamie kolēģi, pilnveidosim savu politisko integrāciju Eiropas Savienībā, atbalstot pirmajā lasījumā likumprojektu par Lisabonas līgumu!" Latvijas Republikas 9.Saeimas pavasara sesijas trešā sēde (The third meeting during the spring session of the 9th Saeima of the Republic of Latvia), 10.04.2008, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/transcripts/view/1648>

⁶ See Appendix 13 (Excerpt from the Parliamentary ratification of the Lisbon Treaty).

At the time, Latvian President Valdis Zatlers (non-partisan, Zatler's Reform Party) indicated that this was the most tangible event happening to every person since Latvia's accession to the EU in 2004.⁷ At the beginning of 2008, a month after Latvia's acceptance in the Schengen Area, the speaker of the Latvian parliament, Gundars Daudze (For Latvia and Ventspils, Union of Greens and Farmers), showed Latvia's commitment to the Schengen area, stating that "Latvia has become the external border of the European Union and therefore it is important for us to provide its full functioning (...)." ⁸ The importance of the Schengen Area to Latvia being part of 'core Europe' was reinforced several years later by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Edgars Rinkēvičs (Zatlers' Reform Party, Reform Party, Unity, New Unity), when discussing the introduction of border protection among Schengen area countries due to the migration crisis:

"(...) Latvia's task to guarantee our own security and prosperity is to maintain its membership in the core of the European Union. Having said that, I would like to draw attention to the Schengen system. Control of the European Union's external borders is essential for the existence of the Schengen system."⁹

The lack of substantial debates both in the national parliament and among the general public were characteristic of the moment in Latvia's history when accelerated economic growth due to EU funds (cohesion funds and CAP subsidies in particular) and private foreign investment in the form of foreign bank loans rapidly increased individuals' economic activity. Moreover, the learning curve on EU issues had just started and the greatest achievement in approaching the 'core' of the EU was the accession to the Schengen area. No substantial discussions took place and no elaborate government positions were publicised at that point. The multiple coalitions in the period followed a strict pro-EU policy led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The opposition did not express anti-EU positions either, due to the complexity of the issue and low public demand for the topic to be discussed in elections or parliamentary debates.

3.2.2 2012-2015 – The European Commission Blueprint communication, the eurozone accession and Latvia's first presidency of the Council of the EU

The governments' positions

DI models: Latvia's positioning on DI acquired prominence after the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty and a growing understanding of the 'enhanced co-operation' principle. The economic and financial crisis brought several new factors to the table that required the Latvian government to finally come up with a coherent position on issues related to the future of the EU. The European Commission's communication 'A Blueprint for a Deep and Genuine Economic and Monetary Union. Launching a European Debate' in 2012 triggered Latvia to establish its national position addressing the country's stance on the proposals for deepening the EMU in a detailed and explicit manner.¹⁰ Latvia ratified the Fiscal Compact

⁷ Latvija pievienojas Šengenas līguma zonai (Latvia joins the Schengen Treaty area), Cesis: Cesis City Council, 21.12.2007, <http://cesis.pilseta24.lv/zina?slug=latvija-pievienojas-sengenas-liguma-zonai-1497666>

⁸ "Latvija ir kļuvusi par Eiropas Savienības ārējo robežu, tādēļ mums ir svarīgi nodrošināt pilnvērtīgu tās funkcionēšanu, (...)" Saeimas priekšsēdētājs tikās ar Eiropas Savienības veselības un patērētāju aizsardzības komisāru (Saeima Speaker met with European Union Health and Consumer Protection Commissioner), Rīga: Saeima, 31.01.2008, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/aktualitates/tiksanas-un-vizites/10084?phrase=Šengena>

⁹ "(...) Latvijas uzdevums mūsu pašu drošības un labklājības garantēšanai ir saglabāt savu dalību Eiropas Savienības kodolā. To sakot, es vēlos vērst uzmanību uz Šengenas sistēmu. Šengenas sistēmas pastāvēšanai būtiska ir Eiropas Savienības ārējo robežu kontrole." Latvijas Republikas 12.Saeimas ziemas sesijas trešā (ārkārtas) sēde (Third (extraordinary) meeting during the winter session of the 12th Saeima of the Republic of Latvia), 26.01.2016, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/transcripts/view/340>

¹⁰ Eiropas Ekonomiskā un monetārā savienība (European Economic and Monetary Union), Rīga: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 08.07.2015, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/arpolitika/eiropas-savieniba-arpolitika/es-jautajumi-arlietu-ministrijas-kompetence/visparejo-lietu-padome/eiropas-ekonomiska-un-monetara-savieniba>

on 31 May 2012 without extensive debate in the parliament, due to the fact that the country had already been introducing severe austerity measures since 2009 and had adopted its own Fiscal Discipline Law mirroring the Fiscal Compact requirements. As the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Edgars Rinkēvičs, stated in 2012:

“First of all, Latvia wants to be the centre of co-operation in the European Union. Whether we will be in this centre of co-operation depends on how quickly we move towards raising the level of well-being of our citizens, how effectively we strengthen further national security, how successfully we develop co-operation with the Baltic States, our strategic partners and neighbours. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will do everything necessary to ensure that Latvia's interests are taken into account. Therefore, I hope that the Saeima [The parliament of the Republic of Latvia] will support Latvia being at the core of European co-operation, also supporting the new agreement on fiscal discipline – an agreement that does not contain anything that the Latvian government would not implement now. I am convinced that Latvia will join the single, strengthened and secure European currency in accordance with our plans. I would like to emphasise clearly that **being in the core of European integration** does not mean restricting sovereignty, succumbing to the vision of another country. It is our clear desire, together with our allies, to be active in deciding the future of the European Union.”¹¹

This and most of the other positions regarding the EU, differentiated integration and related issues were concentrated around the annual reports by the Minister for Foreign Affairs in the national parliament on foreign policy and EU issues and the following debates that take place in January. The 2012 report clearly stated the overarching philosophy of the small Baltic country:

“It is in Latvia's interest to support the EU's ongoing process of change aimed at stabilising the euro area and overcoming financial challenges. It is in Latvia's interest to be in the core of future EU integration, i.e. **Latvia should participate in every form of EU current and future co-operation.**”

On a rare occasion when the speaker of the parliament gave a speech that touched on EU issues among other things, in November 2012 Solvita Āboltiņa (Unity) re-emphasised this position of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, stating:

“There are big issues on the negotiating table: the Banking Union, the revision of the EU Treaties, a two-speed Europe and even a federation of sovereign states. **Undoubtedly, not all the proposals are in Latvia's interest, but the viability of the European Union is definitely in Latvia's interest.** Therefore, Latvia must be particularly active in the forthcoming discussions on the future of the European Union.”

Besides the Minister for Foreign Affairs and occasionally the Prime Minister, it was usually the Latvian members of the European Parliament who tended to lead their respective national parties' debates on EU issues.¹² They were also the most often interviewed on EU issues by the Latvian mass media. In

¹¹ “Pirmkārt, Latvija vēlas būt Eiropas Savienības sadarbības centrā. No tā, vai mēs būsīm šajā sadarbības centrā, ir atkarīgs, cik ātri virzīsimies uz iedzīvotāju labklājības līmeņa paaugstināšanu, cik efektīvi nostiprināsim tālāko valsts drošību, cik veiksmīgi attīstīsim sadarbību ar Baltijas valstīm, mūsu stratēģiskajiem partneriem un kaimiņiem. Ārlietu ministrija darīs visu nepieciešamo, lai Latvijas intereses tiktu ņemtas vērā. Tādēļ ceru, ka Saeima atbalstīs Latvijas atrašanos Eiropas sadarbības kodolā, atbalstot arī jauno līgumu par fiskālo disciplīnu – līgumu, kurā nav nekā tāda, ko Latvijas valdība neīstenotu jau tagad. Esmu pārliecināts, ka Latvija pievienosies vienotai, nostiprinātai un drošai Eiropas valūtai saskaņā ar valdības izvirzītajiem plāniem. Vēlos skaidri uzsvērt, ka atrašanās Eiropas integrācijas kodolā nenozīmē suverenitātes ierobežošanu, pakļaušanos kādas citas valsts redzējumam. Tā ir skaidra mūsu vēlme kopā ar saviem sabiedrotajiem būt aktīviem Eiropas Savienības nākotnes likteņa lēmējiem.” Latvijas Republikas 12.Saeimas ziemas sesijas trešā (ārkārtas) sēde (Third (extraordinary) meeting during the winter session of the 12th Saeima of the Republic of Latvia), 26.01.2016, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/transcripts/view/340>

¹² These are mainly Roberts Zīle (For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK, National Alliance “All For Latvia! – For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK,” in the EP Union for Europe of the Nations, European Conservatives and Reformists); Sandra Kalniete (New Era Party, Civic Union, Unity, New Unity, in the EP Group of the European People's Party); Inese Vaidere (For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK, Civic Union, Unity, New Unity, in the EP Group of the European People's Party); Arturs Krišjānis Kariņš (New Era Party, Unity, New Unity, in the EP Group of the European People's Party); Ivars

2012 Krišjānis Kariņš, when still a member of the European Parliament, stressed the importance of eurozone accession, stating:

“Two-speed Europe becomes a reality and Latvia is not in the core at the moment. Europe in reality at the moment is starting to divide itself into the eurozone countries and non-eurozone Member States. (...) And we are already in the second group.”¹³

The importance of a united Europe was clearly stated in all the reports in the period from 2012 to 2015. This was strongly tied to the eurozone accession, but also repeatedly demonstrated that the “EU is an association of nation states,” i.e. an intergovernmentalist ideology. This is an interesting factor that demonstrates that Latvian governments consequently saw the EU institutions as instruments for co-operation and the EU as the best form of collaboration rather than a supranational institution-led common project. When it came to DI instances, on the contrary, the government position shows support for deepening integration and a clear EU federalist ideology. The 2013 report clearly indicated all the discrepancies, but it bravely started with:

“Latvia still sees the European Union as a voluntary association of nation states based on solidarity and shared values. Latvia will continue to support the deepening of integration between all the Member States of the European Union, seeking not to form different groups of degrees of integration and avoiding the formation of ‘multi-speed’ Europe, which could lead to divisions between the countries of the European Union, with negative political, economic and financial inconsistency for the whole continent. At the same time, if there is a move towards closer integration between individual Member States, Latvia wants to be in the core of the countries of closer integration.”¹⁴

The 2014 report already indicates a slight departure from the previously strict position on the future of Europe and the Economic and Monetary Union as the core of the EU. The new tone is linked with the country having accessed the eurozone:

“A harmonious development of a united EU, involving all the Member States as much as possible in the process, is in the interests of Latvia. (...) Latvia will actively participate in the further process of EU integration, building on the current framework of agreements and using them to the maximum possible extent. (...) The year 2013 was crucial for a deeper integration of Latvia in European structures. First of all, this concerns Latvia’s joining the euro area. Latvia has strengthened co-operation between the EU countries in the kernel.”¹⁵

This quotation clearly indicates a growing precaution towards deepening the EU. The position was that the existing legal framework needed to be followed and fully exercised before making any changes to

Godmanis (Latvian Popular Front, Latvian Way, Latvia's First Party/Latvian Way, in the EP Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe); and Artis Pabriks.

¹³ “Divu ātrumu Eiropa kļūst par realitāti; Latvija patlaban kodolā neatrodas. (...) Eiropa reāli šobrīd sāk sadalīties starp eirozonas valstīm un neeurozonas valstīm. [...] Mēs jau esam otrajā grupā,” Kariņš: Divu ātrumu Eiropa kļūst par realitāti; Latvija patlaban kodolā neatrodas (Kariņš: Two-speed Europe is becoming a reality; Latvia is not currently in the core), Rīga: Puaro, 19.10.2012, <http://old.puaro.lv/lv/puaro/karins-divu-atrumu-eiropa-klust-par-realitatilatvija-patlaban-kodola-neatrodas>

¹⁴ “Latvija joprojām redz Eiropas Savienību kā brīvprātīgu nacionālu valstu apvienību, balstītu uz solidaritāti un kopīgām vērtībām. Latvija turpinās atbalstīt integrācijas padziļināšanu visu Eiropas Savienības dalībvalstu starpā, cenšoties neveidot dažādas integrācijas pakāpes grupas un izvairoties no „daudzātrumu” Eiropas veidošanās, kas varētu radīt šķēšanos Eiropas Savienības valstu starpā, ar negatīvām politiskām, ekonomiskām un finanšu konsekvencēm visam kontinentam. Vienlaicīgi, ja notiek virzība uz ciešāku integrāciju atsevišķu dalībvalstu starpā, tad Latvija vēlas būt ciešākas integrācijas valstu kodolā.” Annual Report by the Minister for Foreign Affairs on activities performed and planned in national foreign policy and European Union matters, Rīga: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2013, pp. 18-19.

¹⁵ “Latvijas interesēs ir harmoniska vienotas ES attīstība, šajā procesā iespējami iekļaujot visas dalībvalstis. (...) Latvija aktīvi piedalīsies tālākajā ES integrācijas procesā, uzsverot, ka maksimāli jāizmanto pašreizējo līgumu ietvars. (...) 2013. gads ir bijis izšķirošs Latvijas dziļākai integrācijai Eiropas struktūrās. Tas, pirmkārt, attiecas uz Latvijas uzņemšanu eirozonā. Latvija ir nostiprinājusies ES valstu sadarbības kodolā.” Annual Report by the Minister for Foreign Affairs on activities performed and planned in national foreign policy and European Union matters, Rīga: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2014, pp. 4-5.

it. Meanwhile, Latvia continually repeated a need for the EMU to be socially and economically inclusive, hence resonating new fears of being institutionally integrated in the core while being regarded as second-tier country from the point of view of economic development and social protection. This was even included in the 2015 report, which mostly dealt with the issues that Latvia would address during its presidency of the Council of the EU:

“Work on the development of the European Economic and Monetary Union will continue, including by emphasising the importance of social dialogue in promoting inclusive economic growth.”¹⁶

DI instances: Occasionally the government indicated topical issues on the EU agenda related to the future of the EU, including a vivid description of deeper integration projects and DI instances that the country had supported:

“Latvia, in line with its vision of the need to contribute to crisis management, supported stronger economic governance, including stronger fiscal discipline in the European Union. Latvia joined the EuroPlus Pact, facilitated amendments to the Treaty of Lisbon so that the euro area could establish the European Stability Mechanism, and supported efforts to find a solution to the financial crisis in the EU by actively engaging in discussions and consultations on closer economic integration of the euro area.”¹⁷

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also indicated that this work had been done in close co-operation with the Prime Minister of Latvia and emphasised its support for further enhanced co-operation (without naming it as such) on economic governance:

“We will defend the interests of Latvia in the process of drafting an intergovernmental agreement determining fiscal discipline. As part of the European Semester, the MFA will call on the European Commission to assess in substance the national reform programmes to achieve the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy.”¹⁸

In the following years during debates on EU integration in economic and fiscal governance issues, the Latvian positions became more detailed, referring to the European Commission Blueprint communication and other topical introductions to the EU system:

“Latvia considers that the Banking Union should include three elements: a single supervision of credit institutions, a European Deposit Guarantee Fund and a Single Resolution Mechanism. The short-term priority in the EMU development process is to complete and implement the new economic governance framework, and also to ensure the establishment and functioning of the Single Monitoring Mechanism and then the Resolution Mechanism. Latvia wants to see a stable and strong European Monetary Union after joining the single European currency, which would contribute to bridging the socio-economic gap between the EU Member States and regions.”¹⁹

¹⁶ “Tiks turpināts jau iesāktais darbs pie Eiropas Ekonomiskās un monetārās savienības pilnveidošanas, t. sk. akcentējot sociālā dialoga nozīmi iekļaujošas ekonomiskās izaugsmes veicināšanā.” Annual Report by the Minister for Foreign Affairs on activities performed and planned in national foreign policy and European Union matters, Riga: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2015, p. 7.

¹⁷ “Latvija atbilstoši savam redzējumam par nepieciešamību sniegt savu ieguldījumu krīzes pārvarēšanā atbalstīja stingrāku ekonomikas pārvaldi, t. sk. stingrāku fiskālo disciplīnu Eiropas Savienībā. Latvija pievienojās „EuroPlus” paktam, virzīja grozījumus Lisabonas līgumā, lai eirozona varētu izveidot Eiropas Stabilitātes mehānismu, kā arī atbalstīja centienus rast risinājumu finanšu krīzei ES, aktīvi iesaistoties diskusijās un konsultācijās par ciešāku eirozonas ekonomisko integrāciju.” Annual Report by the Minister for Foreign Affairs on activities performed and planned in national foreign policy and European Union matters, Riga: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2012, p. 5.

¹⁸ “ĀM aizstāvēs Latvijas intereses stingrāku fiskālo disciplīnu nosakoša starpvaldību līguma sagatavošanas procesā. Eiropas semestra ietvaros ĀM aicinās EK pēc būtības izvērtēt nacionālās reformu programmas stratēģijas Eiropa 2020 mērķu sasniegšanai.” Annual Report by the Minister for Foreign Affairs on activities performed and planned in national foreign policy and European Union matters, Riga: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2012, p. 20.

¹⁹ “Latvija uzskata, ka Banku savienībai ir jāiekļauj trīs elementi – vienota kredītiestāžu uzraudzība, Eiropas noguldījumu garantiju fonds un vienots noregulējuma mehānisms. Īstermiņa prioritāte EMS pilnveides procesā ir pabeigt un ieviest jauno ekonomikas pārvaldības regulējumu, kā arī nodrošināt vienotā uzraudzības mehānisma un pēc tam arī noregulējuma mehānisma izveidi un darbību. Latvija, pievienojoties vienotai Eiropas valūtai, vēlas redzēt stabilu un spēcīgu Eiropas

Interestingly, Latvian governments saw their achievements as part of the stabilisation and improvement of the situation in the EU in general, for instance praising the signing of the ‘Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in Economic and Monetary Union’ in the 2013 report. Hence, Latvia aimed to be a positive and trustworthy member of the EU and saw its actions as advancing the EU. The 2014 report stated:

“Our foreign policy task in 2014 will be to strengthen our position in the eurozone, ensuring the protection of national interests and proving ourselves to be a reliable and constructive partner.”²⁰

2012 was thus the watershed moment when debates on the future of the EU gained prominence in Latvia too. Eight years had passed since the country’s EU accession and the country was stepping on the path to eurozone membership and starting to prepare for its first presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2015.

The opposition’s position

As mentioned, the opposition did not advocate for Latvia to exit from the European Union. Instead, it tended to criticise the government’s approach to European integration as insufficient and resulting in Latvia being a second-tier country. It expressed doubts about whether Latvia was in the core of Europe and able to influence its development. Opposition politicians generally called for a clear Latvian stance on the future of Europe and DI. Opposition remarks did not go beyond conceptualisation at the level of DI models. There were fears that if DI became more common it would mean that the country should give up more sovereignty to the EU. For instance, Boriss Cilevičs (Latvian Popular Front, People’s Harmony Party, Harmony Centre, Social Democratic Party ‘Harmony’) explained:

“So, if we want to be in the core ... I understand that we want to be in the group of Member States of the European Union with the highest degree of integration. At the same time, we say that we do not want to relinquish our sovereignty, but that cannot be the case. If we want deeper European integration it means relinquishing more sovereignty. It is important for us to be aware of this very clearly, what we are prepared to give away. Any international treaty is a deliberate renunciation of some sovereignty. Because it's beneficial. It is the essence of the European Union!”²¹

Andrejs Elksniņš (Social Democratic Party ‘Harmony’) in the opposition, while debating the law on the introduction of the euro in Latvia in December 2012, underlined the importance of preserving both the Latvian and the European identities and stated:

“Unfortunately, the discussion has only progressed to the economic nature of the introduction of the euro, while at the same time neglecting issues such as the future of the European Union, the degree of federalisation of EU Member States and the European Union as a future arrangement.”²²

Monetāro Savienību, kuras pilnveides rezultātā tiku veicināta sociāli ekonomisko atšķirību izlīdzināšana starp ES dalībvalstīm un reģioniem.” Annual Report by the Minister for Foreign Affairs on activities performed and planned in national foreign policy and European Union matters, Riga: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2013, p. 8.

²⁰ “2014. gadā mūsu ārpolitiskais uzdevums būs nostiprināt savas pozīcijas eirozonā, nodrošinot valsts interešu aizstāvēšanu un pierādot sevi kā uzticamu un konstruktīvu partneri.” Annual Report by the Minister for Foreign Affairs on activities performed and planned in national foreign policy and European Union matters, Riga: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2014, p. 4.

²¹ “Tātad, ja mēs gribam būt kodolā... es sapratu tā, ka mēs gribam būt tajā Eiropas Savienības dalībvalstu grupā, kur ir visaugstākā integrācijas pakāpe. Tajā pašā laikā mēs apgalvojam, ka mēs negribam atteikties no savas suverenitātes, bet tā tas nevar būt. Ja mēs gribam dziļāku Eiropas integrāciju, tad tas nozīmē atteikšanos no suverenitātes lielākās daļas. Tas ir svarīgi, lai mēs to apzinātos ļoti skaidri, ko mēs esam gatavi atdot. Jebkurš starptautisks līgums ir apzināta atteikšanās no daļas savas suverenitātes. Tāpēc, ka tas ir izdevīgi. Tā ir tā Eiropas Savienības būtība!” Latvijas Republikas 11. Saeimas ziemas sesijas ceturtnā sēde (The fourth meeting during the winter session of the 11th Saeima of the Republic of Latvia), Riga: Saeima, 26.01.2012, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/transcripts/view/104>

²² “Dienzēl diskusija uz šo brīdi ir ievirzījusies tikai gultnē par eiro ieviešanas ekonomisko raksturu, vienlaicīgi atstājot novārtā tādas jautājumus kā Eiropas Savienības turpmākā nākotne, Eiropas Savienības dalībvalstu un Eiropas Savienības kā nākotnes veidojuma federalizācijas pakāpe.” Latvijas Republikas 11. Saeimas rudens sesijas septiņpadsmitā sēde (The

Dana Reizniece-Ozola (For Latvia and Ventspils, Union of Greens and Farmers) referred to DI in the context of the austerity measures that Latvia had implemented and critically stated:

“We are talking about a two-speed Europe. We are talking about an economic breakthrough, which is also the main priority in the National Development Plan at the moment, but at the same time we are at odds because we will not be able to ensure this development with austerity alone.”²³

Curiously, years later in 2016, member of parliament Juris Viļums (New Democrats, Society for Political Change, Civil Union, Unity, Zatler’s Reform Party, Reform Party, Latvian Association of Regions) similarly used DI as an argument to emphasise the importance of his local constituency and its economic discrepancies with the capital: “There is often talk of a two-speed Europe. But also in Latvia, unfortunately, there are at least two, maybe several speeds.”²⁴

2013 was a year of major debate on the introduction of the euro in Latvia before the actual introduction in 2014, which was characterised by initially low public support. Speeches by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Edgars Rinkēvičs, continued to contain references to core Europe and to define membership of the eurozone as an essential choice for the country. However, while the government kept emphasising that eurozone accession meant joining core Europe, some more sceptical positions appeared among the opposition, for instance Andrejs Elksniņš stated:

“Everyone is talking about a two-speed Europe – fast and slow lanes. Although the European Union is based on the single market, not a single currency, the only thing the Latvian people hear every day is ‘You can't choose! You can't decide!’ And this is what the people elected by the people of Latvia say! The Europe Treaty [sic!] obliges the Member States to lay the foundations for ever-closer union among the peoples of Europe, but in this duty we lose our national identity. (...) The eurozone crisis has rewritten the rules for fiscal coordination and the banking union. We are disappointed in the EU, we have lost our countrymen. There have been no regrets from ministers regarding the negative experience of Latvia's development within the European Union. Euro-glorification, the absurd divine status of the euro imposed by the ruling coalition, will now be grafted onto the citizens for their own, the taxpayer's, money.”²⁵

In 2014, Vladimirs Reskājs (Harmony, Harmony Centre, For Latvia's Development) in the opposition criticised the government for a lack of serious debates on the future of the EU:

“One of the main problems is that we have still not been able to clearly define and consistently and effectively defend the national interests of our country in the European Union. In Latvia, the last serious discussions on European and integration policy were before joining the European Union. There are currently no answers to questions about whether we are for or against federalism, what

seventeenth meeting during the autumn session of the 11th Saeima of the Republic of Latvia), Riga: Saeima, 13.12.2012, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/transcripts/view/149>

²³ “Mēs runājam par divu ātrumu Eiropu. Mēs runājam par ekonomisko izrāvienu, kas mums ir arī Nacionālā attīstības plāna galvenā prioritāte šobrīd, bet vienlaikus nonākam pretrunās, jo ar taupību vien mēs šo attīstību nodrošināt nevarēsim.” Latvijas Republikas 11.Saeimas pavasara sesijas astotā sēde (The eighth meeting during the spring session of the 11th Saeima of the Republic of Latvia), Riga: Saeima, 31.05.2012, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/transcripts/view/122>

²⁴ “Bieži tiek runāts par divu ātrumu Eiropu. Bet arī Latvijā ziemā ir vismaz divi, varbūt arī vairāki ātrumi.” Latvijas Republikas 12.Saeimas ziemas sesijas septītā (ārkārtas) sēde (The seventh (extraordinary) meeting during the winter session of the 12th Saeima of the Republic of Latvia), Riga: Latvijas Vēstnesis, 11.02.2016, <https://www.vestnesis.lv/op/2016/34.2>

²⁵ “Visi runā par divu ātrumu Eiropu - par ātrām un lēnām joslām. Lai arī Eiropas Savienības pamats ir vienotais tirgus, nevis vienota valūta, ikdienā vienīgais, ko dzird Latvijas tauta, ir: „Jūs nevarat izvēlēties! Jūs nevarat lemt!” Un to saka cilvēki, kurus Latvijas tauta ir ievēlējusi! Eiropas līgums uzliek dalībvalstīm pienākumu likt pamatus aizvien ciešākai savienībai starp Eiropas tautām, bet šajā pienākumā mēs zaudējam savu nacionālo identitāti. (...) Eurozonas krīze pārrakstījusi noteikumus par fiskālo koordināciju un banku savienību. Mēs esam vīlušies Eiropas Savienībā, esam zaudējuši savus tautiešus. Nav manīta ne mazākā nožēla no ministru puses par Latvijas attīstības negatīvo pieredzi Eiropas Savienības ietvaros. Eiroglorificēšana, eiro absurda dievišķais statuss, kas tiek uzspiests no valdošajiem, nu jau tiks potēts iedzīvotājiem par viņu pašu, nodokļu maksātāju, naudu.” Latvijas Republikas 11.Saeimas ziemas sesijas trešā sēde (The third meeting during the winter session of the 11th Saeima of the Republic of Latvia), 24.01.2013, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/transcripts/view/153>

the position is on a Europe of different speeds, energy, migration and so on. But without clear answers to these questions, the national interest will be very difficult to defend.”²⁶

Some opposition representatives, like Sergejs Potapkins (Harmony Centre, Harmony), for instance, went even further, advocating a need for unified social standards at the EU level to avoid Latvia being a second-tier country in the EU:

“We are in favour of a united and strong Europe, but we cannot support European policy the way it exists today. We are convinced that austerity policy leads to solidification of inequality within Europe and to an even greater split into a two-speed Europe. Our aim is to implement uniform social standards at the European level. And it is also foreign policy, because this issue is particularly important for Latvia as the poorest country in the eurozone. It must also be the aim of our foreign policy to provide a minimum pension, social benefits and unemployment benefit at the European level and to link it to a minimum subsistence level.”²⁷

Latvia’s first presidency of the Council of the EU was an important moment not only in the history of Latvia’s membership of the EU but also in Latvia’s overall history. Hence, several references to the European Union, including DI, were made in the context of Latvia proving itself to be a capable ‘core Europe’ country from the political and administrative points of view.

3.2.3 2017-2020 – the Future of Europe and Brexit

The government’s position

DI models: After the Brexit vote and with sharpening of discussion on the future of Europe in the Union in general, Latvia also continued to discuss DI more actively. The government’s position on Brexit was to keep the United Kingdom as close to the EU as possible while recognising the democratic will expressed by its citizens. The first uncertainties were addressed by Edgars Rinkēvičs, explaining Latvia’s official view:

“Theresa May has highlighted the terms of the withdrawal. Latvia respects this position, but it is clear that negotiations on the model of economic relations will be difficult. It is in our interest to establish good relations in the future. The fate of Latvian nationals in Britain and co-operation in the fields of foreign affairs, the economy and defence are important for us.”²⁸

In 2017, in the context of Jean-Claude Juncker’s five scenarios, with an understanding that differentiated integration was an existing phenomenon and would continue to be, the Latvian government started

²⁶ “Viena no galvenajām problēmām ir tāda, ka mēs vēl joprojām neesam spējuši skaidri definēt, kā arī konsekventi un efektīvi aizstāvēt mūsu valsts nacionālās intereses Eiropas Savienībā. Latvijā pēdējās nopietnās diskusijas par Eiropas un integrācijas politiku bija pirms iestāšanās Eiropas Savienībā. Šobrīd trūkst atbilžu uz jautājumiem, vai mēs esam „par” vai „pret” federālismu, kāda ir nostāja jautājumos par dažādu ātrumu Eiropu, enerģētiku, migrāciju un tā tālāk. Taču bez skaidrām atbildēm uz šiem jautājumiem nacionālās intereses būs ļoti grūti aizstāvēt.” Latvijas Republikas 11.Saeimas ziemas sesijas ceturtnā sēde (The fourth meeting during the winter session of the 11th Saeima of the Republic of Latvia), Rīga: Saeima, 23.01.2014, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/transcripts/view/221>

²⁷ “Mēs esam par vienotu un stipru Eiropu, bet mēs nevaram atbalstīt Eiropas politiku tādā veidā, kādā tā eksistē šodien. Mēs esam pārliecināti, ka taupīšanas politika ved pie nevienlīdzības stiprināšanas Eiropas iekšienē un pie vēl lielākas sadalīšanās divu ātrumu Eiropā. Mūsu mērķis ir vienotu sociālo standartu īstenošana visas Eiropas līmenī. Un tā arī ir ārpolitika, jo šis jautājums ir īpaši svarīgs Latvijai kā nabadzīgākajai valstij eirozonā. Arī tam jābūt mūsu ārpolitikas mērķim -nodrošināt minimālo pensiju, sociālo pabalstu un bezdarba pabalstu Eiropas līmenī un saistīt to ar iztikas minimumu.” Latvijas Republikas 11.Saeimas ziemas sesijas ceturtnā sēde (The fourth meeting during the winter session of the 11th Saeima of the Republic of Latvia), Rīga: Saeima, 23.01.2014, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/transcripts/view/221>

²⁸ “Terēza Meja ir iezīmējusi izstāšanās nosacījumus. Latvija respektē šo pozīciju, taču skaidrs, ka sarunas par ekonomisko attiecību modeli būs grūtas. Mūsu interesēs ir veidot labas attiecības nākotnē. Mums ir svarīgas Latvijas valstspiederīgo liktenis Lielbritānijā, sadarbība ārlietu, ekonomikas un aizsardzības jomās.” Latvijas Republikas 12.Saeimas ziemas sesijas trešā sēde (The third meeting during the winter session of the 12th Saeima of the Republic of Latvia), Rīga: Saeima, 26.01.2017, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/transcripts/view/397>

building more detailed citizen consultations on their preferences for the shape of the Economic and Monetary Union. The results of the debates concluded, among other things:

“Discussions in Riga also concluded that, while continuing the path of integration in the EU and the eurozone, Latvia has yet to reconsider many issues and do its homework. It was pointed out that the convergence process has not yet been completed and therefore Latvia needs to continue its progress. The views expressed in the regions were also consistent with those expressed by the participants in the discussions in Riga: that Latvia should not move away from the euro area because it is the core of the EU.”²⁹

In this period, Latvia was in the core of Europe and it acknowledged that multiple speeds were emerging in Europe. Debates on DI continued and more concrete DI instances were gradually introduced, as the following quotations will demonstrate. In a foreign policy debate in 2018, the chair of the European Affairs Committee, Lolita Čigāne (Unity), indicated:

“As has already been said, we want to be in the core of the European Union, and we need to participate in shaping the future of the European Union.”³⁰

Meanwhile, some other fellow coalition members like Rihards Kols (National Alliance “All For Latvia!” – “For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK”) criticised the minister for Foreign affairs for accepting multi-speed Europe too quickly, thus resembling the previous Latvian foreign policy stance of avoiding differentiated integration in the EU for fear of being left behind:

“A multi-speed model of Europe, establishing this mythical core and peripheral system, on which the founding countries of the European Union mostly insist, will create an even greater gap between the Member States and further distance European citizens from the European project. (...) When we voted in 2003 to join the European Union, we voted in favour of one European project – with equality and equivalence of fundamental principles. A multi-speed Europe is not in the interests of Latvia or the European Union. And this idea needs to be stopped at its root. (...) By creating new borders and political structures within Europe, such as an investment programme exclusively for eurozone countries, a common eurozone budget or a finance minister’s post, Europe is actually being broken. (...) One must be aware that Europe has developed in different stages and in different formats. At no time has the development of the countries of the European Union been the same, starting with accession and integration processes and ending with the development of mutual co-operation.”³¹

A fellow party member of his, Edvīns Šnore (National Alliance “All For Latvia!” – “For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK”), who was also in the 2019 ruling coalition, ridiculed Latvia’s track record in the core of the EU with reference to the migration issue:

²⁹ “Diskusijās Rīgā arī tika secināts, ka turpinot integrācijas ceļu ES un eirozonā, Latvijai pašai vēl jāpārdomā daudzi jautājumi un jāpaveic neizpildītie mājasdarbi. Tika norādīts, ka konverģences process vēl nav pabeigts un tādēļ Latvijai ir jāturpina iesāktā virzība. Arī reģionos paustais viedoklis saskanēja ar Rīgas diskusiju dalībnieku pausto, ka Latvija nedrīkst attālināties no eirozonas kā no ES kodola.” Latvijas intereses Ekonomikas un monetārās savienības pabeigšanā (Latvia’s interest in completion of the Economic and Monetary Union), Riga: Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Latvia, 04.11.2016, https://www.fm.gov.lv/lv/sadalas/es_un_es_budzets/ekonomikas_un_monetaras_savienibas_nakotne/

³⁰ “Kā jau teikts, mēs gribam būt Eiropas Savienības kodolā, un mums ir jāpiedalās Eiropas Savienības nākotnes veidošanā.” Latvijas Republikas 12.Saeimas ziemas sesijas trešā sēde (The third meeting during the winter session of the 12th Saeima of the Republic of Latvia), Riga: Saeima, 25.01.2018, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/transcripts/view/461>

³¹ “Vairāku ātrumu Eiropas modelis, iedibinot šo mītiskā kodola un perifērijas sistēmu, uz kuru pārsvarā uzstāj Eiropas Savienības dibinātājvalstis, radīs vēl lielāku plaisu starp dalībvalstīm un vēl vairāk attālinās Eiropas pilsoņus no Eiropas projekta. (...) Kad mēs 2003.gadā nobalsojām par iestāšanos Eiropas Savienībā, mēs balsojām par vienu Eiropas projektu - par vienlīdzības un līdzvērtības pamatprincipiem. Vairāku ātrumu Eiropa neatbilst ne Latvijas, ne Eiropas Savienības interesēm. Un šī ideja ir jāaptur pašā tās sākņē. (...) Radot jaunas robežas un politiskas struktūras Eiropas iekšienē, piemēram, investīciju programmu tikai eirozonas valstīm, kopēju eirozonas budžetu vai finanšu ministra posteni, Eiropa faktiski tiek šķelta. (...) Ir jāapzinās, ka Eiropa ir attīstījusies dažādos posmos un dažādos formātos. Nevienai Eiropas Savienības valstij attīstība nav bijusi vienāda, sākot ar iestāšanās un integrācijas procesiem un beidzot ar savstarpējās sadarbības veidošanu.” Latvijas Republikas 12.Saeimas ziemas sesijas trešā sēde (The third meeting during the winter session of the 12th Saeima of the Republic of Latvia), Riga: Saeima, 25.01.2018, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/transcripts/view/461>

“The Foreign Affairs Report states that Latvia wants to be in the core of Europe, namely that it wants to decide and be responsible not only for its own but also for the fate of Europe as a whole. Four years ago, Latvia did not take this opportunity and did not find the courage to say that Brussels was mistaken. With our voice in the Justice and Home Affairs Council, we helped then impose migrants on those countries in the European Union that opposed it.”³²

Interestingly, the feeling of smaller countries, especially the Baltic countries, of being left behind as second-tier countries was also visible in some statements by Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš:

“The Baltic and the Benelux countries could and should work together much more at the European level. Being all small countries, we could achieve much more if we put common proposals on the table and were a counterbalance to the big Member States at the European table.”³³

The understanding that DI would be here to stay came not only from the Latvian population and experts but also from members of the European Parliament, stating that “(...) pragmatically the main scenario will be multi-speed Europe (...)”³⁴ and the Governor of the Bank of Latvia, who when talking about the next Multiannual Financial Framework saw the country as a second-tier country:

“It is not likely that these funds will be cut off suddenly, but the funds will go down. It is very likely that this reduction will also be linked to the implementation of the two-speed European project. If the first-speed Europe wants to implement certain things, but Latvia does not implement them in the future, it may be possible to link it together with the structural funds.”³⁵

The realisation that Latvia was participating in a multi-speed Europe was also coming from other members of the European Parliament (MEP), including Sandra Kalniete, who represented the coalition ruling party in the Latvian national parliament: “We have to be in the core of the EU, (...) because the core will form around a number of poles, one of which will be the euro, where Latvia already is. Other ‘collaborative axes’ will be security co-operation and defence co-operation.”³⁶ The same view was expressed by another MEP from Latvia, Inese Vaidere, who explained that “there is already a two-speed Europe, and regardless of what EU development scenario will be selected, a safe Europe with safe borders is very important for Latvia; with solidarity in security and protection of the external borders and economic assistance to reach Europe's average level.”³⁷

³² “Ārlietu ziņojumā ir rakstīts, ka Latvija grib būt Eiropas kodolā, proti, grib lemt un būt atbildīga ne tikai par savu, bet arī visas Eiropas likteni. Pirms četriem gadiem Latvija šo iespēju neizmantoja un neatrada drosmi pateikt, ka Brisele kļūdās. Ar savu balsi Tieslietu un iekšlietu padomē mēs toreiz palīdzējām uzspiest migrantus tām Eiropas Savienības valstīm, kuras tam pretojās.” Latvijas Republikas 13. Saeimas ziemas sesijas ceturrtā sēde (The fourth meeting during the winter session of the 13th Saeima of the Republic of Latvia), Riga: Saeima, 24.01.2019, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/transcripts/view/515>

³³ Future of Europe debate with Latvian Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš, Brussels: The European Parliament, 17.04.2019, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/agenda/briefing/2019-04-15/3/future-of-europe-debate-with-latvian-prime-minister-krisjanis-karins>

³⁴ Zīle: “Brexit” nākotnes scenāriji un daudzgadu budžets ir galvenie ES izaicinājumi tuvākajā nākotnē (Zīle: Brexit future scenarios and multiannual budget are the main challenges for the EU in the near future), Riga: News Agency LETA, 18.06.2017, <http://www.leta.lv/es/item/8A0A8C68-F5AE-4066-8286-4816003C5719/jaunumi:news/>

³⁵ “Visdrīzāk šie līdzekļi netiks pēkšņi nogriezti, bet fondi ies mazumā. Ļoti iespējams, ka šis samazinājums būs arī saistīts ar divu ātrumu Eiropas projekta īstenošanu. Ja viena ātruma Eiropa gribēs īstenot kādas konkrētas lietas, bet Latvija nākotnē tās neīsteno, tad, iespējams, ka to var sasaitīt kopā ar struktūrfondiem.” Rimšēvičs: Latvijas ekonomikai šis un arī nākamais gads būs labāks nekā iepriekšējais (Rimšēvičs: This and next year will be better for the Latvian economy than the previous year, Riga: News Agency LETA/Apollo.lv, 21.03.2017, <https://www.apollo.lv/5987199/latvijas-ekonomikai-sis-un-ari-nakamais-gads-bus-labaks-neka-iespriejais-prognoze-rimsevics>

³⁶ “Mums ir jābūt ES kodolā, (...) jo kodols veidosies ap vairākiem poliēm, viens no kuriem būs eiro, kur Latvija jau ir. Citi “sadarbības poli” būs sadarbība drošības jomā un aizsardzībā.” Kalniete mudina Latviju smagi strādāt, lai būtu ES kodolā; Zīle par šādu iespēju skeptisks (Kalniete encourages Latvia to work hard to be at the core of Europe; Zīle is sceptical about it), Riga: News Agency LETA/Apollo.lv, 27.03.2017, <https://www.apollo.lv/5987787/kalniete-mudina-latviju-smagi-stradat-lai-butu-es-kodola-zile-par-sadu-iespeju-skeptisks>

³⁷ Vaidere: Lai ES valstis ar zemāku līmeni attīstītos straujāk, svarīga ir solidaritāte (Vaidere: Solidarity is important for the development of lower-level EU countries), Riga: News Agency LETA/tvnet.lv, 14.10.2017,

The years 2018 and 2019 saw a resurgence of public discussions on the future of Europe, with participation by both the general public and government representatives. The general tendency was that the Latvian population was satisfied with membership of the EU and wished it to become stronger and more integrated. In public debates organised by Latvia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Providus think tank, citizens also expressed an understanding of differentiated integration being an issue:

“A very prominent concern raised by the citizens: a perceived lack of fairness and equity in Europe. Among the topics raised by citizens were the following: some EU Member States get away with breaking common regulations while Latvia is diligently trying to fully meet its obligations; a lack of fair competition in agriculture and business (larger Member States having an advantage); a second rate-status of Latvia regarding its impact on EU decision-making.”³⁸

It can be concluded that, in general, DI is not an essential topic in Latvia, but all the governments at some point put forward Latvia's position in support of unified integration, focusing on concepts such as ‘core Europe’ and federalisation. Putting Latvia in the core was seen as important not only institutionally but also from the point of view of economic development and political influence. An emphasis on catching up at the economic and social development levels was visible in the positions of both Latvian MEPs and the population.

In 2020, the Latvian government started recognising its institutional and political position and became more self-aware and active regarding EU policies. As Minister for Foreign Affairs Edgars Rinkēvičs stated,

“Latvia has been in the European Union for more than fifteen years. Now we are sufficiently experienced and able not only to follow the European Union's policies but also able to influence them in accordance with the interests of Latvia.”³⁹

DI mechanisms: The term ‘enhanced co-operation’ became more visible after 2017, when Latvia started to recognise the realities of the European Union:

“At present, there is an increasing chance that a European Union of multiple integration speeds is growing its roots, which would allow for closer co-operation between those countries that are prepared to do so. Latvia must be in the core of the European Union, not in its periphery. In order to ensure closer integration, Latvia supports the focus on enhanced co-operation in the areas of defence, internal security, energy, transport and strengthening the eurozone and bringing the standard of living closer to the European Union (cohesion policy).”⁴⁰

It is clearly visible that Latvia saw the existence of multi-speed Europe as a reality in the modern EU, and recognised the enhanced co-operation DI mechanism as a tool to further address the strategic need for the country to be in the core of the EU. This recognition was in spite of the continual tendency to emphasise the ‘nation state aspect’ in decision-making:

<https://www.diena.lv/raksts/viedokli/pasaule/vaidere-lai-es-valstis-ar-zemaku-limeni-attistitos-straujuk-svariga-ir-solidaritate-14182706>

³⁸ Report on citizens' consultations on Europe in Latvia, Riga: Providus, 26.11.2018, [http://providus.lv/article_files/3509/original/Latvia_Citizens_Consultations_Report_3_\(1\).pdf?1543230124](http://providus.lv/article_files/3509/original/Latvia_Citizens_Consultations_Report_3_(1).pdf?1543230124)

³⁹ “*Latvija Eiropas Savienībā ir jau vairāk nekā piecpadsmit gadus. Ir pienācis brīdis, kad esam pietiekami pieredzējuši un varoši ne tikai sekot Eiropas Savienības politikām, bet spēt tās ietekmēt atbilstoši Latvijas interesēm.*” Latvijas Republikas ārlietu ministra Edgara Rinkēviča uzruna Saeimas ārpolitikas debatēs 2020. gada 23. janvārī (Address of Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics in the Saeima foreign policy debate on 23 May 2020), Riga: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 23.01.2020, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/aktualitates/zinas/65324-latvijas-republikas-arlietu-ministra-edgara-rinkevica-uzruna-saeimas-arpolitikas-debates-2020-gada-23-janvari>

⁴⁰ “*Šobrīd aizvien vairāk iezīmējas iespēja nostiprināties vairāku integrācijas līmeņu Eiropas Savienībai, kas ļautu ciešāk sadarboties tām valstīm, kas ir gatavas to darīt. Latvijai jābūt Eiropas Savienība kodolā, nevis tās perifērijā. Lai īstenotu ciešāku integrāciju, Latvija atbalsta koncentrēšanos uz ciešāku sadarbību aizsardzības, iekšējās drošības, enerģētikas un transporta jomās, eirozonas stiprināšanu un dzīves līmeņa tuvināšanu Eiropas Savienībā (kohēzijas politika).*” Annual Report by the Minister for Foreign Affairs on activities performed and planned in national foreign policy and European Union matters, Riga: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2017, p. 5.

“Therefore, Latvia stands for the European Union as a strong union of nation states, which both works closely in areas which are in the interests of its Member States and of the Union as a whole, and effectively defends its interests on a global scale.”⁴¹

This was strongly underlined by Minister for Foreign Affairs Edgars Rinkēvičs:

“In the discussion on the future of the European Union, Latvia's position is clear: countries wishing to do more should be given the opportunity to develop closer co-operation. It is important for such co-operation to be open to all the Member States. It is in Latvia's interest to be in the core of Europe.”⁴²

This was supported by other party politicians like Marija Golubeva (Development/For!) the following year:

“We support the goal in the Minister's report: Latvia should be in the core of the European Union. We are already in this core, marked by our membership of the eurozone and Schengen. And this core will also form part of enhanced security and defence co-operation.”⁴³

DI instances: In Latvian political debate in 2017-2020 there was only a minor increase in debating DI instances. Politicians still took a very reactive position that stemmed from issues raised on the EU political and legislative agenda. There was no significant shift in the position that Latvia needed to continue belonging to the core of the EU while cautiously supporting its deepening.

“Latvia supports a targeted use of the opportunities provided by current EU treaties. Latvia will be in favour of respecting the existing legal framework. (...) Latvia will support deepening and strengthening the co-operation between Member States in order to promote growth and prosperity in the EU. In this area, the primary interests of Latvia are further convergence between EU Member States; improvement of the internal market, including the creation of a digital and energy market; deepening of the Economic and Monetary Union, including the Banking Union; and the development of modern, comprehensive and balanced international agreements with important partners.”⁴⁴

The same thought and approach continued also in the 2018 report:

“Latvia should be at the core of EU integration, which can be achieved by Latvia supporting the deepening of defence co-operation, strengthening the EU's internal security, energy, transport, strengthening the euro area and cohesion policy. (...) There is therefore a policy that promotes the necessary EU reforms, particularly in the areas of socio-economic integration, global

⁴¹ “Tādēļ Latvija iestājas par Eiropas Savienību kā spēcīgu nacionālu valstu savienību, kura gan cieši sadarbojas jomās, kas ir tās dalībvalstu un visas savienības interesēs, gan efektīvi aizstāv savas intereses globālā mērogā.” Annual Report by the Minister for Foreign Affairs on activities performed and planned in national foreign policy and European Union matters, Riga: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2017, p. 5.

⁴² “Diskusijā par Eiropas Savienības nākotni Latvijas nostāja ir skaidra: valstīm, kas vēlas darīt vairāk, jādod iespēja veidot ciešāku sadarbību. Ir svarīgi, ka šāda sadarbība ir atvērta visām dalībvalstīm. Latvijas interesēs ir būt Eiropas kodolā.” Latvijas Republikas 12.Saeimas ziemas sesijas trešā sēde (The third meeting during the winter session of the 12th Saeima of the Republic of Latvia), Riga: Saeima, 25.01.2018, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/transcripts/view/461>

⁴³ “Mēs atbalstām ministra ziņojumā iekļauto mērķi - Latvijai būt Eiropas Savienības kodolā. Mēs jau esam šajā kodolā, kuru iezīmē mūsu dalība eirozonā un Šengenā. Un šis kodols veidosies arī ciešākas drošības un aizsardzības sadarbībā.” Latvijas Republikas 13. Saeimas ziemas sesijas ceturrtā sēde (The fourth meeting during the winter session of the 13th Saeima of the Republic of Latvia), Riga: Saeima, 24.01.2019, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/transcripts/view/515>

⁴⁴ “Latvija atbalsta to iespēju mērķtiecīgu izmantošanu, ko sniedz pašreizējie ES līgumi. Latvija iestāties par esoša normatīvā ietvara respektēšanu. (...) Latvija atbalstīs dalībvalstu sadarbības padziļināšanu un nostiprināšanu, lai veicinātu izaugsmi un labklājību ES. Šajā jomā Latvijas prioritārās intereses ir turpmāka konverģence starp ES dalībvalstīm; iekšējā tirgus pilnveide, ieskaitot digitālā un enerģijas tirgus izveidi; Ekonomikas un monetārās savienības, tostarp Banku savienības padziļināšana; kā arī modernu, visaptverošu un līdzsvarotu starptautisko līgumu ar nozīmīgiem partneriem izstrāde.” Annual Report by the Minister for Foreign Affairs on activities performed and planned in national foreign policy and European Union matters, Riga: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2016, p. 10.

competitiveness, security and defence and the development of the Monetary Union, at present and in the future.”⁴⁵

The government positions on EU affairs listed in the reports in the most recent years demonstrate Latvia’s approach to the latest initiatives, like PESCO:

“Europe needs to become more united and able to protect itself, without at the same time backing up and undermining the importance of the transatlantic link. (...) It is in Latvia's interest for there to be inclusive and cohesive co-operation between Member States at the EU level, so Latvia advocates strong Permanent European Structured Co-operation in the field of Defence (PESCO). (...) Latvia supports this, stressing the need to strengthen the European Union's use of combat groups.”⁴⁶

Again in 2019, Minister for Foreign Affairs Edgars Rinkēvičs indicated:

“The European Union must continue to be united in a diversity based on the existence of strong and national states. (...) We must build a strong European Union defence identity that complements and does not conflict with NATO's capabilities. That is why we support strengthening Europe's defence capabilities but reject the idea of a European army that would substitute NATO functions. We need a strong and united European foreign policy.”⁴⁷

The same was true for many other issues, with Latvia clearly demonstrating support, especially for deepening Economic and Monetary Union, including the completion of the Banking Union. In the 2019 report, Latvia went even further and suggested several specific positions on the future of the EU, including the fight against money laundering, which in recent years had again become a very topical issue for the country:

“Latvia sees a need to strengthen the European Union in a number of directions: the single market and its digitalisation, introducing climate-neutral policies and the green economy, defence and foreign policy, complementing NATO's capabilities with the capabilities of the European Union, and promoting the European Union's global influence and balancing other European players. Latvia stresses the need to fight against money laundering in a centralised way at the European Union level.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ “Latvijai jābūt ES integrācijas kodolā, ko var panākt, Latvijai atbalstot aizsardzības sadarbības padziļināšanu, ES iekšējās drošības, enerģētikas, transporta jomas, eirozonas stiprināšanu un kohēzijas politiku. (...) Tādēļ šobrīd un arī nākotnē ir īstenojama politika, kas sekmē nepieciešamās ES reformas, īpaši sociāli-ekonomiskās integrācijas, globālās konkurētspējas, drošības un aizsardzības un Monetārās Savienības attīstības jomās.” Annual Report by the Minister for Foreign Affairs on activities performed and planned in national foreign policy and European Union matters, Riga: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2018, p. 4.

⁴⁶ “Eiropai ir jāklūst vienotā un spējīgākai sevi aizsargāt, tomēr vienlaikus nedublējot un nemazinot transatlantiskās saites nozīmi. (...) Latvijas interesēs ir iekļaujoša un saliedēta dalībvalstu sadarbība ES līmenī, tādēļ Latvija iestājas par spēcīgu Pastāvīgo Eiropas strukturēto sadarbību Aizsardzības jomā (PESCO). (...) Latvija to atbalsta, uzsverot, ka ir nepieciešams stiprināt Eiropas Savienības kaujas grupu pielietojamību.” Annual Report by the Minister for Foreign Affairs on activities performed and planned in national foreign policy and European Union matters, Riga: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2017, p. 7.

⁴⁷ “Eiropas Savienībai ir arī turpmāk jābūt vienotai daudzveidībā, kas balstās uz spēcīgu un nacionālu valstu pastāvēšanu. (...) Mums ir jāveido spēcīga Eiropas Savienības aizsardzības identitāte, kas papildina NATO spējas un nav pretrunā ar tām. Tieši tāpēc mēs atbalstām Eiropas aizsardzības spēju stiprināšanu, taču noraidām ideju par Eiropas armiju, kas dublētu NATO funkcijas. Mums ir nepieciešama spēcīga un vienota Eiropas ārpolitika.” - Latvijas Republikas 13. Saeimas ziemas sesijas ceturtnā sēde (The fourth meeting during the winter session of the 13th Saeima of the Republic of Latvia), Riga: Saeima, 24.01.2019, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/transcripts/view/515>

⁴⁸ “Latvija saskata nepieciešamību stiprināt Eiropas Savienību vairākos virzienos: vienotais tirgus un tā digitalizācija, klimata neitrālas politikas ieviešana un zaļā ekonomika, aizsardzība un ārpolitika, papildinot NATO spējas ar Eiropas Savienības spējām, kā arī veicinot Eiropas Savienības ietekmi pasaulē un līdzsvarojot citus Eiropas spēlētājus. Latvija uzsver nepieciešamību centralizēti – Eiropas Savienības līmenī – cīnīties pret noziedzīgi iegūtu līdzekļu legalizāciju.” Annual Report by the Minister for Foreign Affairs on activities performed and planned in national foreign policy and European Union matters, Riga: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2019, p. 6.

Meanwhile, for the first time the Latvian government also demonstrated opposition to some of the DI instances in the EU. This showed an increasing self-awareness and boldness of the small country in its EU policies. This happened on issues related to migration, social policies and switching to qualified majority voting on Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP):

“The position of Latvia on the reform of the Common European Asylum System stems from the conviction that solidarity measures cannot be automatic and that mechanisms for redeploying asylum seekers should be based on a voluntary principle.”⁴⁹

Similar dislike was expressed towards integration on social issues, as common social benefit standards were considered unaffordable by the Latvian state and potentially impeding its labour competitiveness:

“Latvia will oppose any attempts to change the procedures for granting social payments which may have a negative impact on Latvian nationals.”⁵⁰

A critical outlook can also be observed regarding changes in the Common Foreign and Security Policy voting system that could damage Latvia’s ability to safeguard its views on essential foreign policy issues, like relations between the EU and the Russian Federation, for instance:

“The use of the qualified majority vote in the external relations and security of the European Union has been discussed recently. (...) Latvia does not share this view, but supports the need to improve the efficiency of decision-making by proposing a modified ‘all minus one’ decision-making mechanism (principle of constructive abstention).”⁵¹

The opposition’s position

Generally, the opposition in the Latvian parliament was pro-EU-oriented, with slight variations between federalist and intergovernmentalist positions. The country’s membership of the EU was not traditionally disputed, and Euroscepticism was not manifested in calls to exit the EU or to introduce opt-outs. As the following examples will demonstrate, the opposition was more critical about Latvia’s ability to defend its interests in the EU and its use of the EU to advance the living standards of the Latvian population, and it occasionally called for extreme federalist or unitarist positions without deeper explanation or continuation of the debate.

For instance, Andrejs Mamikins (Social Democratic Party ‘Harmony,’ Latvian Russian Union, in the EP Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats), a member of the European Parliament representing an opposition party at the national level, went even further, stating that the European Union should be a superstate where Latvia would only have its flag and anthem.⁵² In the same interview he also emphasised the existence of a French- and German-built and led multi-speed Europe, with the eurozone at its core.

⁴⁹ “Latvijas nostāja kopējās Eiropas patvēruma sistēmas reformas jautājumā izriet no pārliecības, ka solidaritātes pasākumi nevar būt automātiski un patvēruma meklētāju pārdales mehānismiem ir jābūt balstītiem uz brīvprātības principu.” Annual Report by the Minister for Foreign Affairs on activities performed and planned in national foreign policy and European Union matters, Riga: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2017, p. 10.

⁵⁰ “Latvija iestāsies pret jebkādiem mēģinājumiem mainīt sociālo maksājumu piešķiršanas kārtību, kas var negatīvi ietekmēt Latvijas valstspiederīgos.” Annual Report by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Minister for Foreign Affairs on activities performed and planned in national foreign policy and European Union matters, Riga: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2017, p. 8.

⁵¹ “Pēdējā laikā tiek apspriesta kvalificētā vairākuma balsojuma izmantošana Eiropas Savienības ārējās attiecībās un drošības jomā. (...) Latvija nepievienojas šādām uzskatam, taču atbalsta nepieciešamību uzlabot lēmumu pieņemšanas efektivitāti, piedāvājot modificētu lēmumu pieņemšanas mehānismu “visi mīnus viens” (konstruktīvās atturēšanās princips).” Annual Report by the Minister for Foreign Affairs on activities performed and planned in national foreign policy and European Union matters, Riga: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2019, p. 8.

⁵² Mamikins: ES jākļūst par federālu supervalsti, Latvijai atstājot tikai karogu un himnu (Mamikins: EU should become a federal superstate, leaving Latvia only the flag and anthem), Riga: News Agency LETA/tvnet.lv, 05.05.2018, <https://www.tvnet.lv/4526746/mamikins-es-jaklust-par-federalu-supervalsti-latvijai-atstajot-tikai-karogu-un-himnu>

Some members of the parliamentary opposition called for enhanced co-operation between the Baltic states alone, like Juris Viļums:

“It is important to develop enhanced co-operation in the area of culture, since it will make it easier to reach common understanding also in sectors which have more economic content and are intensive (defence, healthcare, different economic directions such as infrastructure, start-ups and so on, and so on).”⁵³

Others in the opposition, like Didzis Šmits (KPV LV), in recent years have called for a revision of the Lisbon Treaty or even a return to the pre-Lisbon situation due to the current EU setting not being beneficial for the Member States:

“However, the text in reports contains mentions of deeper integration... the core... and many things that, in my opinion, run against the notion of a European Union of national states. If we are going to get deeper into integration, it means increasingly abandoning a national state for the benefit of something towards a federation. (...) Maybe sometimes we have to step back to the Treaty of Amsterdam or Nice. To those that we originally joined. In any event, such a debate must be conducted. I think it is time to **start a debate about Europe needing a new treaty**, a treaty that really respects national states and their societies. Such a treaty that in perspective ... in future the British could join again, because I don't see security in Europe without Britain.”⁵⁴

As one could observe, Latvian debates on the future of the EU and DI were very general, often emotional and focused only on the basic principles. They almost never went into deeper discussions of specific DI instances or even DI mechanisms and remained at the DI model level. This was brought up in 2019 by government representatives, with the Minister for Foreign Affairs Edgars Rinkēvičs calling for a more nuanced debate in the parliament:

“(...) I completely agree that we need perhaps wider bigger discussions on the future of the European Union. (...) This is a total of the ninth [debate], next year will be the tenth. But, you see, the discussion of the report is mostly about everything. And it is also legitimate, because the range of issues is very different. And it is worth talking about the future of the European Union, of course, it is also worth talking about serious changes. (...) And so I would also be very happy to hear from the members of the Saeima (...) what we would like to include in the debate on the future of Europe, so that it is really an interaction process.”⁵⁵

⁵³ “(...) ir svarīgi šādu ciešāku sadarbību veidot kultūras jomā, jo tad būs vieglāk panākt kopīgu sapratni arī saturiski un ekonomiski ietilpīgākās nozarēs (aizsardzībā, veselības aprūpē, dažādos tautsaimniecības virzienos, tādos kā infrastruktūra, jaunuzņēmumi un tā tālāk, un tā joprojām).” Latvijas Republikas ārlietu ministra Edgara Rinkēviča uzruna Saeimas ārpolitikas debatēs 2020. gada 23. janvārī (Address by Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics in the Saeima foreign policy debate on 23 May 2020), Riga: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 23.01.2020, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/aktualitates/zinas/65324-latvijas-republikas-arlietu-ministra-edgara-rinkevica-uzruna-saeimas-arpolitikas-debates-2020-gada-23-janvari>

⁵⁴ “Taču tālāk tekstā ir dziļāka integrācija... kodoli... un daudzas tādas lietas, kas, manuprāt, nokļūst pretrunā ar nacionālu valstu Eiropas Savienību. Ja mēs taisāties vēl dziļāk integrēties, tas nozīmē arvien vairāk atteikties no nacionālas valsts par labu kaut kam uz federācijas pusi.” (...) Varbūt kaut kad ir jāpakāpjas soli atpakaļ uz Amsterdamas vai Nicas līgumu. Tādos, kādos mēs iestājāties... Katrā ziņā šādas debātes ir jāveic. Manuprāt, ir laiks sākt debātes par to, ka Eiropai ir nepieciešams jauns līgums - tāds līgums, kas tiešām respektētu nacionālās valstis un to sabiedrības. Tāds līgums, ka perspektīvā... nākotnē briti atkal varētu pievienoties, jo es neredzu drošības ziņā Eiropu bez Lielbritānijas.” Latvijas Republikas 13. Saeimas ziemas sesijas ceturrtā sēde (The fourth meeting during the winter session of the 13th Saeima of the Republic of Latvia), Riga: Saeima, 24.01.2019, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/transcripts/view/515>

⁵⁵ “(...) es pilnīgi piekrītu, ka mums ir nepieciešams varbūt plašāks, lielāks diskusiju apjoms par Eiropas Savienības nākotni. (...) Šīs ir kopumā devītās [debātes], nākamgad būs desmitās. Bet, jūs redzat, ziņojuma apspriešana pārsvarā notiek tā - viss par visu. Un tas ir arī leģitīmi, jo jautājumu loks ir ļoti dažāds. Un par Eiropas Savienības nākotni, protams, ir vērts runāt, ir vērts runāt arī par nopietnām izmaiņām. (...) Un tāpēc es arī ļoti labprāt dzirdētu no Saeimas deputātiem (...), ko mēs gribētu virzīt diskusijās par Eiropas nākotni, lai tas tiešām būtu mijiedarbības process.” Latvijas Republikas 13. Saeimas ziemas sesijas ceturrtā sēde (The fourth meeting during the winter session of the 13th Saeima of the Republic of Latvia), Riga: Saeima, 24.01.2019, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/transcripts/view/515>

Curiously, the 2019 report and related debates in January 2020 did not contain significant improvement of the depth or quality of discussion but even regressed by mentioning the future of the EU only in passing. Even more curiously, it was the 2019 debate, a year earlier, that contained the most detailed account of and views expressed on DI mechanisms in a parliamentary debate in years. Two opinions came from opposition representatives. First, from the former Minister of Finance of the Republic of Latvia, Dana Reizniece-Ozola:

“We need to develop the Economic and Monetary Union in such a way that the restrictions on monetary union (...) are offset by other instruments. (...) A fiscal union based on two cornerstones is needed – a much greater centralisation of fiscal and economic policy and a common euro area budget. Once again, more centralisation and more solidarity. If we are against, the alternative is a weakening of the structure of the European Union due to public discontent and Euroscepticism, and during the next crisis we will see that the structure may simply fail – other countries may follow Britain.”⁵⁶

Another opposition representative, Igors Pimenovs (For Human Rights in a United Latvia, New Centre, Harmony Centre, Harmony), meanwhile criticised the Fiscal Compact almost a decade after it was adopted:

“(...) the fiscal compact can also be harmful and even destructive for those that are not developed countries, (...) because the fiscal compact reduces the ability to apply an active fiscal policy. I am well aware that it is difficult to achieve the repeal of this pact (...) It is imperative to control Member States' deficits in the framework of the flexibility mechanism, which has been allowed in the existing Stability and Growth Pact. (...) Instead of structural deficits, the size of expenditure should be used. (...) The Stability and Growth Pact needs to extend the flexibility to the programmes of the European Union Funds for a withdrawal of co-financing from Member States' deficit calculation.”⁵⁷

4. Conclusion

To conclude, it is evident that the Prime Minister only spoke minimally about DI. Most of the debates were centred around the annual reports by the Minister for Foreign Affairs to the parliament. Traditionally, only a select number of parliamentarians express their views and only the Minister for Foreign Affairs leads discussion on the future of the EU as it falls under the responsibility of the Latvian MFA under Latvian legislation. In the three periods observed there was a slight increase in the number, volume and depth of Latvian debates on the future of the EU and DI, both in the government and in the parliament.

A central shift is visible in the following: during the first period (2007-2008), Latvia did not want to see a multi-speed Europe emerging; during the second period (2012-2015), Latvia needed to be in the

⁵⁶ “Mums ir jāpilnveido Ekonomiskā un monetārā savienība tā, lai monetārās savienības ierobežojumus (...) kompensētu ar citiem instrumentiem. (...) ir nepieciešama fiskālā savienība, kura balstīta uz diviem stūrakmeņiem - daudz lielāku fiskālās un ekonomiskās politikas centralizāciju un kopēju eirozonas budžetu. Atkārtoju vēlreiz - lielāka centralizācija un lielāka solidaritāte. Ja esam pret, alternatīva ir Eiropas Savienības konstrukcijas vājināšanās sabiedrības neapmierinātības un eiroseptiķisma dēļ, un kādas nākamās krīzes laikā mēs redzēsim, ka konstrukcija var vienkārši neizturēt - Lielbritānijai var sekot arī citas valstis.” Latvijas Republikas 13. Saeimas ziemas sesijas ceturrtā sēde (The fourth meeting during the winter session of the 13th Saeima of the Republic of Latvia), Riga: Saeima, 24.01.2019, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/transcripts/view/515>

⁵⁷ “(...) fiskālais kompakts var būt arī kaitīgs un pat graužojs valstīm, kuras nav attīstītas valstis (...), jo fiskālais kompakts samazina iespējas piemērot aktīvu fiskālo politiku. Es labi saprotu, ka grūti panākt šā pakta atcelšanu (...) Ir noteikti jākontrolē dalībvalstu budžeta deficīts saistībā ar elastīguma mehānismu, kurš ir pieļauts jau spēkā esošajā Stabilitātes un izaugsmes paktā. (...) Strukturālā deficīta vietā ir jāizmanto izdevumu lielums. (...) Stabilitātes un izaugsmes paktam elastīgums ir jāpaplašina līdz Eiropas Savienības fondu programmu līdzfinansēšanas izņemšanai no dalībvalstu budžeta deficīta aprēķina.” Latvijas Republikas 13. Saeimas ziemas sesijas ceturrtā sēde (The fourth meeting during the winter session of the 13th Saeima of the Republic of Latvia), Riga: Saeima, 24.01.2019, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/transcripts/view/515>

core as a multi-speed Europe was emerging; during the third period (2017-2020), Latvia needed to further advance enhanced co-operation proposals as a multi-speed Europe was a reality and Latvia needed to remain in the core.

Increasing self-awareness and confidence was clearly visible in Latvian debates on DI. The evolution of the debates demonstrates that not only being in the core of Europe was the ultimate political goal but also that enhanced co-operation became a ‘normal option.’ Meanwhile, the overarching approach to the EU as a collection of nation states still remained. As was summed up in January 2020 by Minister for Foreign Affairs Edgars Rinkēvičs,

“Speaking of what Latvia's vision of the European Union is, I would like to say, already several in the Saeima have talked about this vision in turn, and this is the answer to those who ask about a federated or confederated state. We have always underlined that Latvia sees the European Union as a union of strong nation states. We do not see this now in any way, either as a federation or as a confederation, but we certainly see that we can play an active part in advancing and shaping our European Union policies.”⁵⁸

⁵⁸ “Runājot par to, kas ir Latvijas redzējums par Eiropas Savienību, es gribētu teikt tā - jau vairākas Saeimas pēc kārtas mēs esam runājuši par šo redzējumu, un tas ir atbilde tiem, kas jautā par federatīvu vai konfederatīvu valsti. Mēs vienmēr esam pasvītājuši, ka Latvija redz Eiropas Savienību kā spēcīgu, nacionālu valstu savienību. Mēs neredzam to šobrīd nekādā veidā ne kā federāciju, ne kā konfederāciju, bet mēs pilnīgi noteikti redzam, ka mēs varam aktīvi piedalīties mūsu Eiropas Savienības politikas virzīšanā un veidošanā.” Latvijas Republikas 13. Saeimas ziemas sesijas trešā sēde (The third meeting during the winter session of the 13th Saeima of the Republic of Latvia), Rīga: Saeima, 23.01.2020, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/transcripts/view/2034>

Appendices

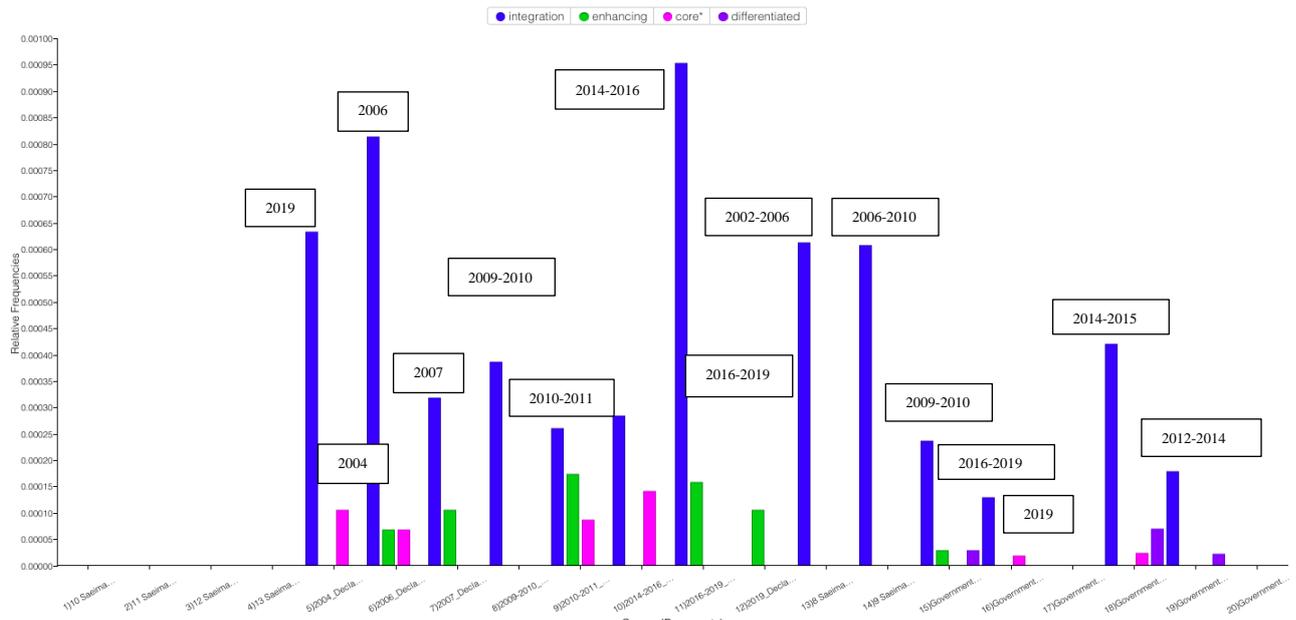
Appendix 1 Overview of the documents analysed

	Category of document	Time period	Details
1	government programmes, declarations by each PM and coalition agreements	2004-2020	2004x2 (same programme with a different PM), 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2014, 2016, 2019
2	First speeches and parliamentary debates	2004-2020	The first speech after the election of each PM in parliament and the subsequent debates (9 PMs).
3	Presidency of the council of the EU speeches and parliamentary debate a. in the Latvian Parliament b. in the European Parliament	2004-2020	2011,2013,2014,2015,2016 (Latvian Parliament) 2015 (European Parliament)
4	Future of Europe speeches and parliamentary debate a. in the European Parliament b. for citizen consultation	2017-2020	- PM speech in the European Parliament on the 'Future of Europe' - citizen consultation in 2018 – 23 public debates in different Latvian regions
5	Prime Minister European Council statements	2004-2020	The PM statements are not publicly available. Shorter descriptions of national positions are available, but they cannot be checked against delivery.
6	Parliamentary debates	1990-2019	Documents with one of the following key terms: Future of Europe, Enhanced co-operation, Two-speed Europe, Multi-speed Europe, Core Europe, Two-tier Europe, Schengen, Economic and Monetary Union, Eastern Partnership, EEA
7	Annual report by the Minister for Foreign Affairs to the National parliament	2011-2019	States the Latvian position on the EU in more detail

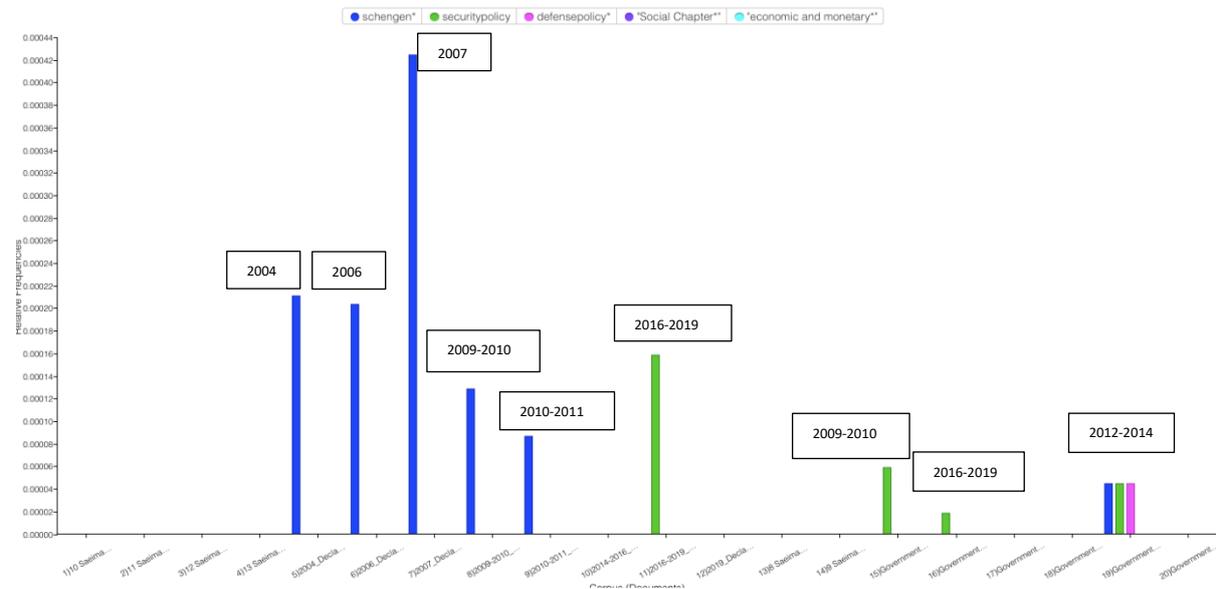
Appendix 2. Translations of the key words utilised

Key word	Latvian Translation	Notes
Differentiated integration	Diferencēta integrācija	
Future of Europe	Eiropas nākotne	
DI Models: Different Speed		
Coalition of the willing	Gribīgo koalīcija, gribas koalīcija	Not mentioned
Two-speed Europe	Divu ātrumu Eiropa	
Multi-speed Europe	Vairāku ātrumu Eiropa	Also 'Daudzu ātrumu Eiropa'
DI Models: Different Endpoints		
Variable geometry		Not mentioned
Core Europe	Eiropas kodols	
Two-tier Europe	Divlīmeņu Eiropa/ divu līmeņu Eiropa	Not mentioned
Concentric circles	Koncentriskie apļi	Not mentioned
à la carte	à la carte	Not mentioned
DI Mechanisms		
Enhanced co-operation	Ciešāka sadarbība	
Opt-out	Optauts	Not mentioned
DI Instances – Enhanced co-operation		
Pesco	Pesco	
Rome III	Rome III	Not mentioned
Unitary patent	Vienotais patents/Vienotā spēka Eiropas patents	Not mentioned
Matrimonial property regimes	Laulāto mantisko attiecību režīmi	Not mentioned
Financial Transaction Tax	Finanšu darījumu nodoklis	Not mentioned
European Public Prosecutor	Eiropas prokurors	Not mentioned
DI Instances – Opt-out		
Schengen	Šengena	
Economic and Monetary Union	Ekonomikas un monetārā savienība	
Security and Defence Policy	Drošības un aizsardzības politika	
Area of Freedom, Security and Justice	Brīvības, drošības un tiesiskuma telpa	
Charter of Fundamental Rights	Pamattiesību harta	
Social Charter	Sociālā harta	
DI instances – inter se agreements		
Prüm Convention	Prīmes līgums/konvencija	Not mentioned
European Stability Mechanism	Eiropas stabilitātes mehānisms	
Fiscal Compact	Fiskālais kompakts	
Single Resolution Mechanism	Vienotais noregulējuma mehānisms	
Unified Patent Court	Vienotā patentu tiesa	Not mentioned
DI Instances – external integration		
European Economic Area	Eiropas Ekonomikas zona	
Customs Union + Turkey	Muitas savienība + Turcija	Not mentioned
Eastern Partnership	Austrumu partnerība	
Euromed	Euromed	Not mentioned

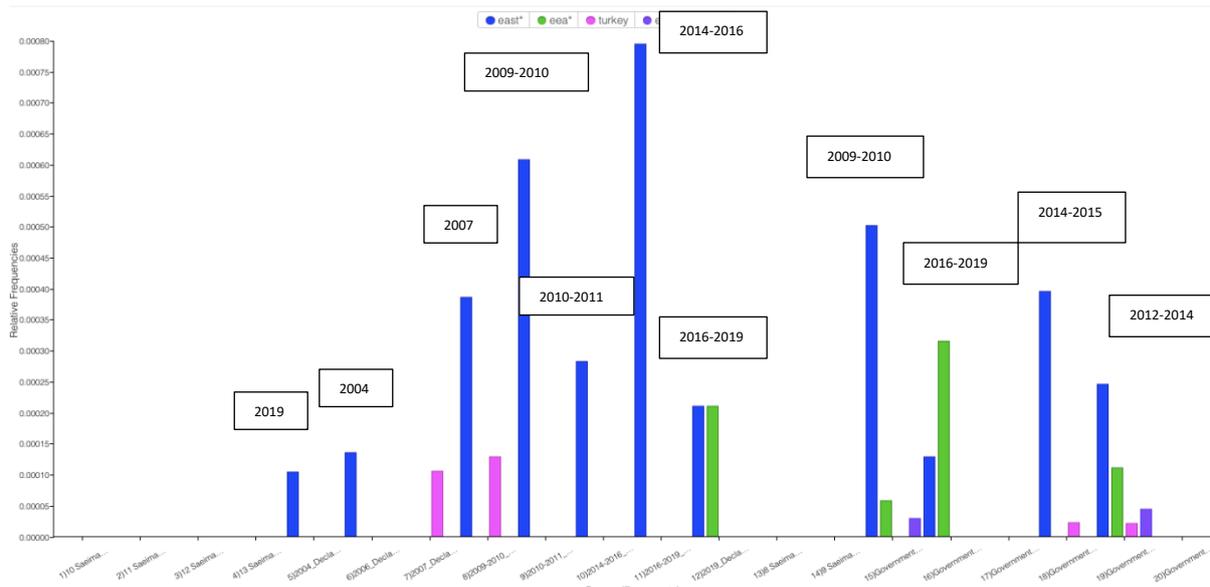
Appendix 3 DI and DI model key words in government programmes



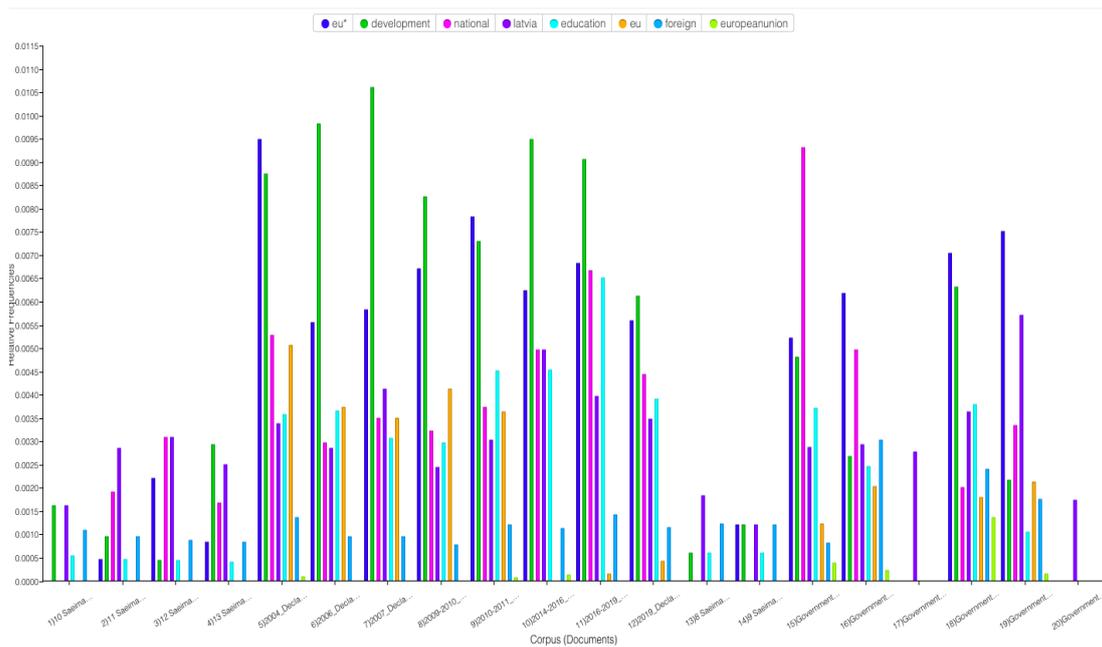
Appendix 4 DI instances (enhanced co-operation and opt-outs) in government programmes



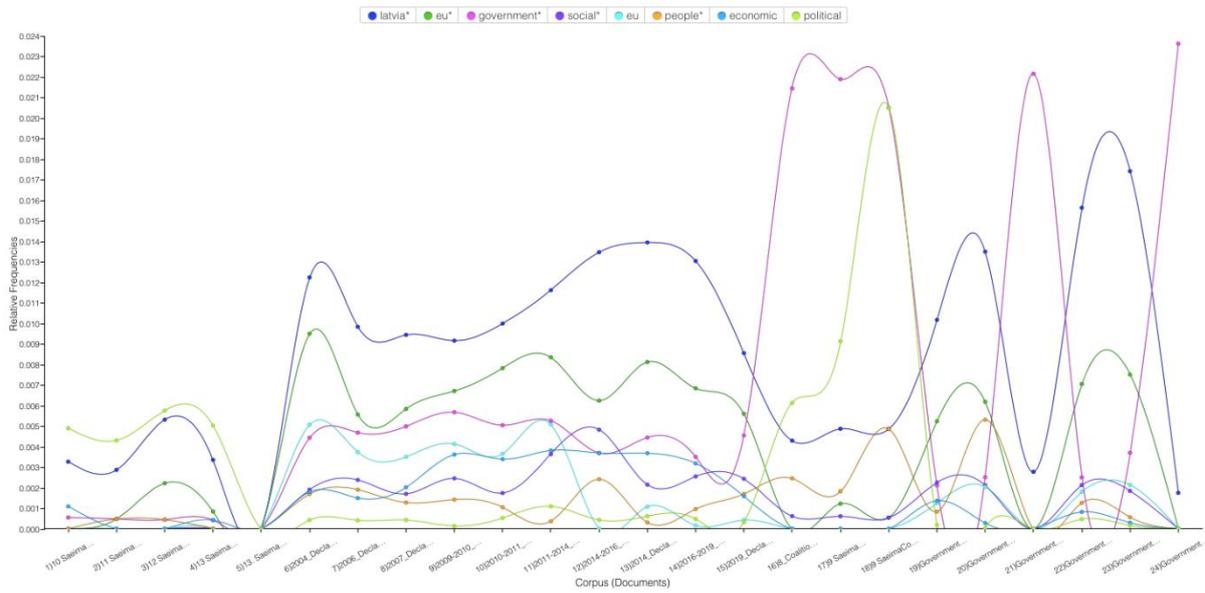
Appendix 5 DI instances (inter se agreements and external agreements) in government programmes



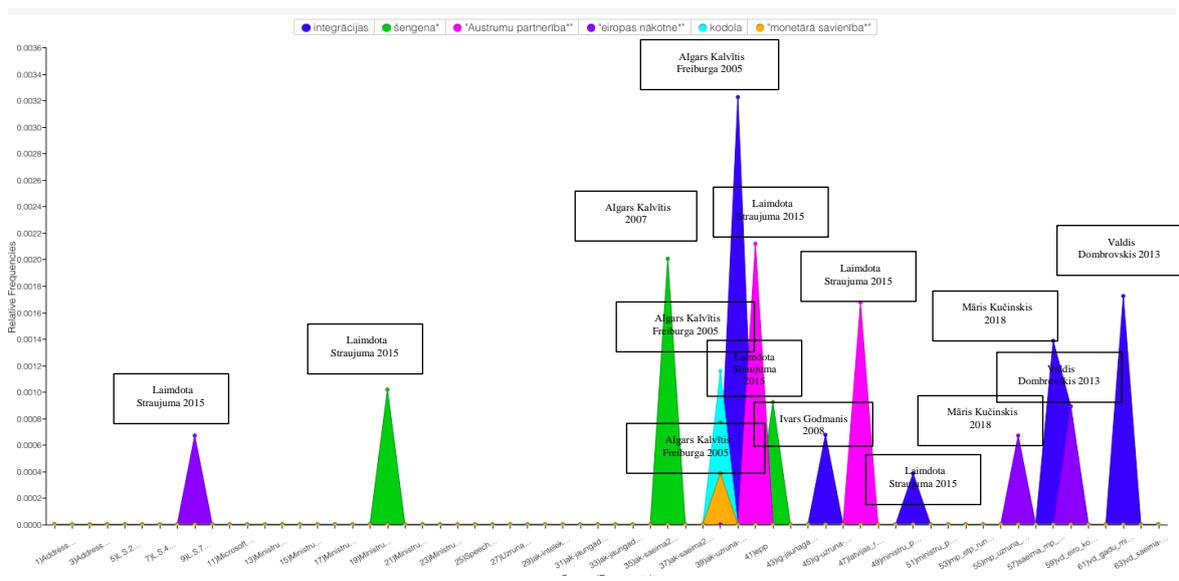
Appendix 6 EU-related issues in government programmes (relative word frequencies)



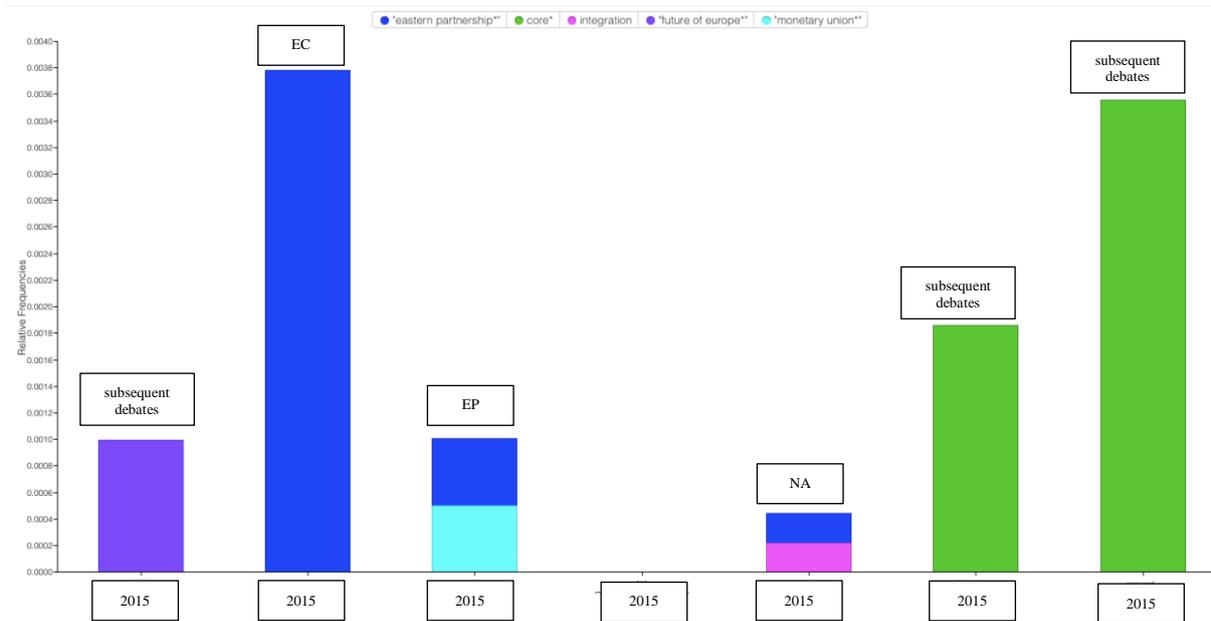
Appendix 7 EU-related issues in government programmes (relative word frequencies)



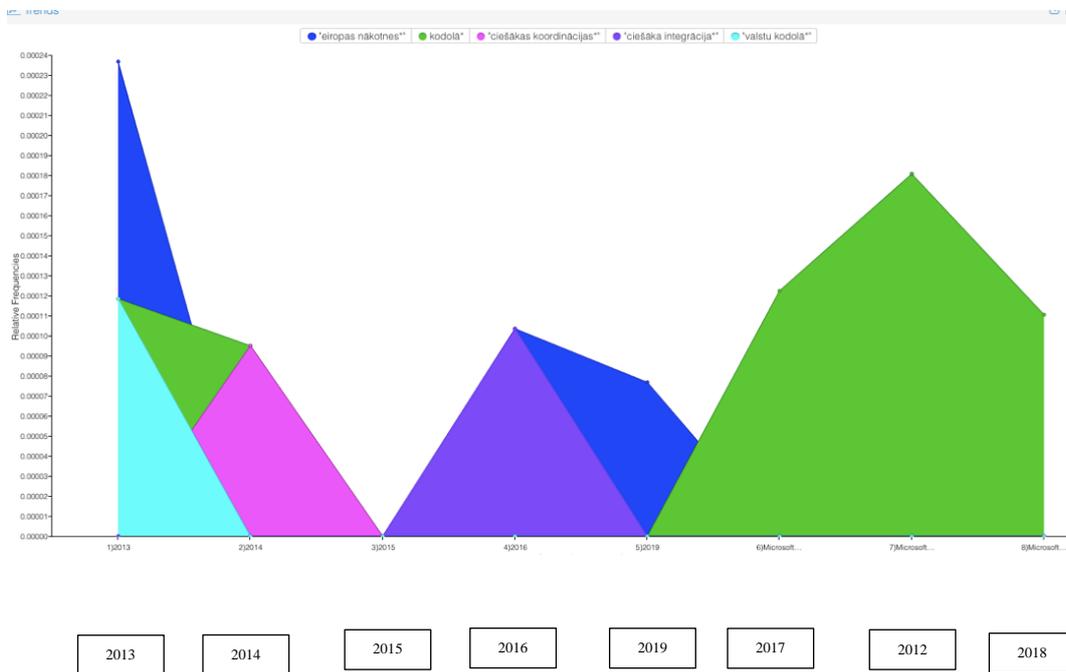
Appendix 8 DI models, DI mechanisms and DI instances in speeches by prime ministers



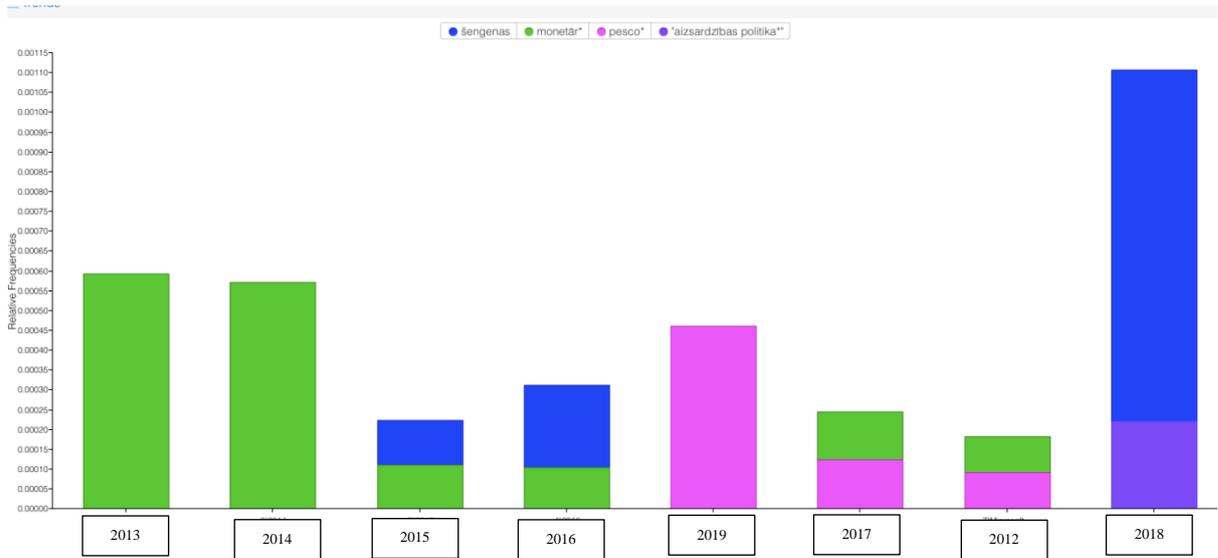
Appendix 9 DI models, DI mechanisms and DI instances in speeches by the Latvian PM in the European Parliament, European Council and national parliament and the subsequent debates in 2015



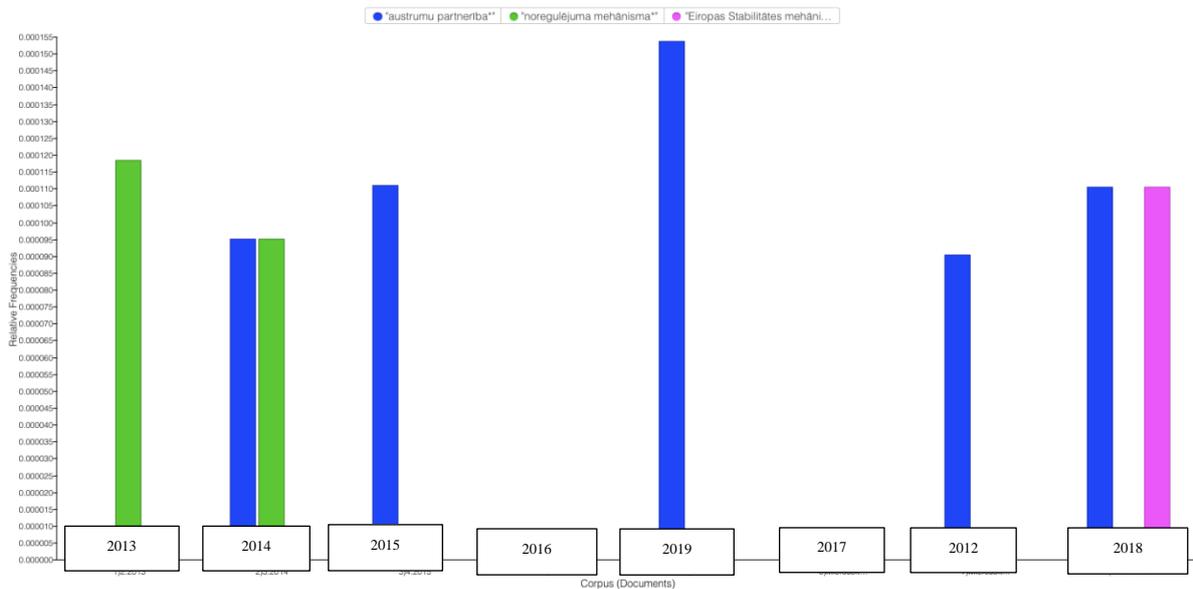
Appendix 10 DI models and DI mechanisms in the annual report by the Minister for Foreign Affairs to the national parliament 2012-2019



Appendix 11 DI instances – enhanced co-operation and opt-outs in the annual report by the Minister for Foreign Affairs to the national parliament 2012-2019



Appendix 12 DI instances – inter se agreements and external integration in the annual report by the Minister for Foreign Affairs to the national parliament 2012-2019



Appendix 13 Excerpt from the parliamentary ratification of the Lisbon Treaty

Likumprojekts „Par Lisabonas līgumu, ar ko groza Līgumu par Eiropas Savienību un Eiropas Kopienas dibināšanas līgumu”.

Cienījamie kolēģi, lūdzu uzmanību! Šis ir patiešām nopietns moments. Saskaņā ar Satversmes 68.pantu, lai mēs varētu izskatīt šo jautājumu, Saeimas sēdē ir jāpiedalās vismaz divām trešdaļām Saeimas deputātu. Tas nozīmē, ka mums visiem ir jāreģistrējas, lai pārliecinātos, ka Saeimas sēdē ir kvorums. Šī reģistrācija notiek nevis tā, kā tas ir Saeimas sēdes noslēgumā vai tad, kad tiek izsludināts pārtraukums. Šajā gadījumā balsošanas kartes paliek balsošanas iekārtā, un pēc signāla, kad iedegas uzraksts „Reģistrācija”, ir jānospiež šī poga. Uz to, ka jūs esat reģistrējušies, norāda tas, ka vienlaikus iedegas trīs gaismas diodes. Lūdzu zvanu reģistrācijai! Lūdzu reģistrācijas režīmu! Lūdzu rezultātu! Ir reģistrējušies 82 deputāti. Tātad vairāk par divām trešdaļām deputātu ir zālē.

Ārlietu komisijas vārdā - deputāts Andris Bērziņš.

A.Bērziņš (LPP/LC frakcija).

Godājamais Saeimas Prezidi! Godājamie kolēģi! Strādāsim ar dokumentu, kura reģistrācijas numurs ir 643/Lp9, - ar likumprojektu „Par Lisabonas līgumu, ar ko groza Līgumu par Eiropas Savienību un Eiropas Kopienas dibināšanas līgumu”.

Godājamie kolēģi, mums šis dokuments ir jāskata otrajā lasījumā. Jāteic, ka atbildīgā komisija par šo likumprojektu nav saņēmusi nevienu priekšlikumu vai papildinājumu. Komisija vienbalsīgi ir pieņēmusi lēmumu virzīt šo dokumentu izskatīšanai otrajā, galīgajā, lasījumā.

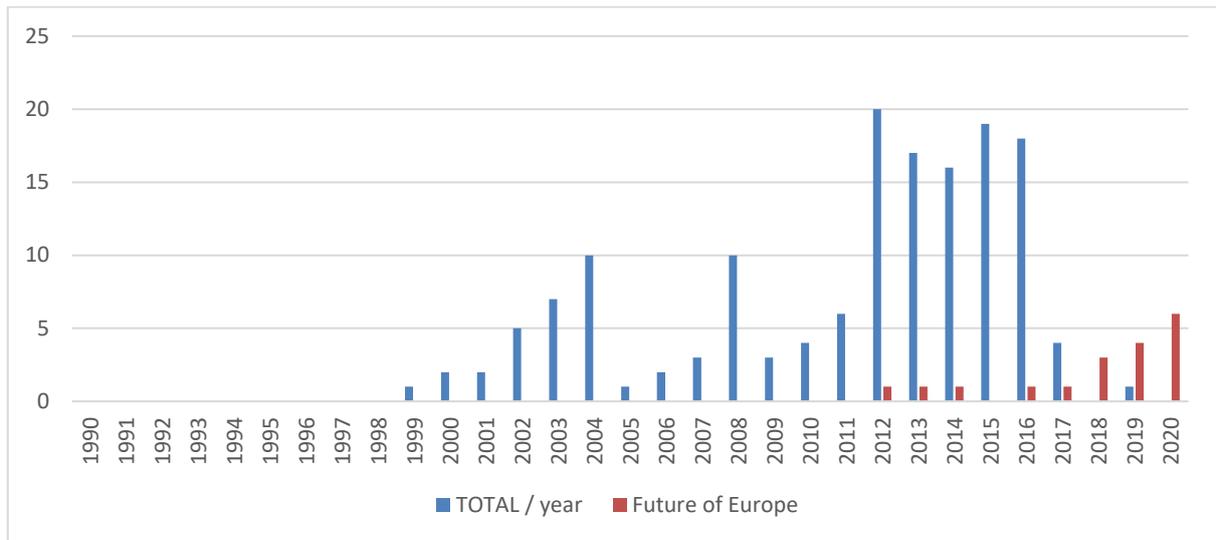
Kolēģi! Es gribu pateikt... piebilst vienu lietu. Šodien ir ļoti simboliska diena. Šodien ir Eiropas diena, tāpēc būtu ļoti labi, ja mēs šajā Eiropas dienā nobalsotu „par” Eiropu, par to, ka Latvija atzīst jau grozīto Lisabonas līgumu, kas būs pamats tam, lai Latvija un arī pati Eiropas Savienība turpmāk būtu strukturētāka, stabilāka, dinamiskāka un konkurētspējīgāka starp pārējiem lielajiem globālajiem spēlētājiem pasaules tirgū.

Aicinu balsot „par”.

Sēdes vadītājs. Paldies.

Lūdzu zvanu! Balsosim par likumprojekta „Par Lisabonas līgumu, ar ko groza Līgumu par Eiropas Savienību un Eiropas Kopienas dibināšanas līgumu” pieņemšanu otrajā, galīgajā, lasījumā! Lūdzu balsošanas režīmu! Lūdzu rezultātu! Par - 70, pret - 3, atturas - 1. Likums pieņemts.

Appendix 14 Frequency of conceptual DI key words vs. ‘future of Europe’ in parliamentary debates



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Author contacts:

Karlis Bukovskis

Latvian Institute of International Affairs (LIIA)

Room 38

Pils street 21

LV-1050, Riga

Republic of Latvia

Email: karlis.bukovskis@liia.lv

Aleksandra Palkova

Latvian Institute of International Affairs (LIIA)

Email: aleksandra.palkova@liia.lv

Ieva Varna

Latvian Institute of International Affairs (LIIA)

Email: ieva.varna@tv3.lv



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