

## Differentiated Integration or Discriminatory Integration? Romania's view on DI in the EU<sup>1</sup>

CLAUDIA BADULESCU

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE, ITALY

claudia.badulescu@eui.eu

### Abstract

*The concept of differentiated integration (DI) provides a way to talk about the accommodation of diversity in the EU. However, DI can also be perceived as a means to discriminate between the more economically advanced, typically older and Western EU Member States, and newer EU Member States. One of the EU countries that perceives DI as both an opportunity for deeper European integration and as a potential source of discrimination among the EU Member States, is Romania. To get a better understanding of successive Romanian governments' approach to DI and of the salience that DI has in that country, this paper undertakes a quantitative and qualitative analysis of official communications and pronouncements made by Romanian decision-makers on the subject of EU integration between 2006-2020. My analysis indicates that there has been a relatively low salience of DI models (i.e. multi-speed and multi-end EU) and DI mechanisms (i.e. enhanced cooperation and opt-outs) but a high salience of DI instances (i.e. differentiated EU policies) in the official discourse emanating from Romanian government sources during this period. The position of successive Romanian governments with regard to DI was strongly in favour of more integration, especially when it comes to the country's accession both to the Schengen area and to the Eurozone; however, successive governments have fervently opposed any type of DI models. This is explained in part by Romania's majority pro-European electorate and decision-makers, and also by the desire of Romanian governments to be seen as existing on an equal footing with other EU Member States within the EU's decision-making processes.*

**Keywords:** Romania, differentiated integration, multi-speed EU, salience, Schengen

### Introduction

The concept of differentiated integration (DI) emerged over time as a solution for accommodating the EU's unity in diversity, given that it allows EU Member States to have various levels of involvement in European policy fields and institutional arrangements. At the same time, DI can also be perceived by some Member States as a driver of a deepening cleavage between the older Member States, that are typically the more economically advanced, and the newer EU Member States. To get a better understanding of how salient DI is for newer and poorer Member States, and of how the governments of these countries position themselves with respect to DI, this contribution will focus on the case of Romania.

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<sup>1</sup> The research leading to this report was conducted within the InDivEU project. The project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 822304. The funders had no role in the study design, data collection or analysis.

Romania's case is of particular interest for understanding the dynamics of European integration at large, and more specifically those pertaining to DI. Although Romania joined the EU in 2007, it is still not a member of the Schengen area or the Eurozone. Through its EU accession agreements, however, Romania is legally obligated to join both areas as soon as the country fulfils the necessary technical requirements and is hence not able to opt-out from these areas of European integration. While Eurozone accession has been delayed because of the country's technical unpreparedness, Romania's accession to the Schengen area has been repeatedly denied by the European Council on political grounds<sup>2</sup>. This has come to be seen by many Romanians as a symbol of the country's status as a 'second-class' Member State in the EU and of the EU's lack of trust in Romania's capacity to protect the EU's external borders.

This study seeks to provide a better understanding of how Romanian decision-makers have perceived DI since Romania's accession to the EU. The empirical analysis follows the research framework guiding this special issue, distinguishing between *polity differentiation*, *policy differentiation* and *mechanisms of differentiation*.

The article proceeds by briefly outlining the theory and methods guiding this case study, before presenting the findings of the empirical analysis and the conclusions. Throughout this article, we argue that leaders in Romania are among the staunchest supporters of deeper and wider European integration and are strongly against any development scenarios that are based on a two-speed or two-tier EU, that would discriminate between Member States based on their capacity for European integration.

## Theory and methods

The EU is a relatively thin governance system that has limited collective resources and capacities and must leverage its Member States' capacities and engagement in order to function effectively as a polity and as a system of public policy. Contemporary studies of European integration share the assumption that DI helps the EU to adjust to the growing heterogeneity of its Member States and to better respond to the contestation of its policies (Schimmelfennig & Schraff 2020).

Among the consequences of DI for the future of Europe, there may be a Europe of 'different speeds' (e.g. two-speed EU; multi-speed EU) and a Europe of 'different end-points' (e.g. two-tier EU; core Europe; Europe of concentric circles or of variable geometry; or Europe à la carte) (Stubb 1996). Depending on the level of economic development, but also on their historical, cultural and political features, EU Member States may have a favourable position towards DI or may radically oppose it.

This article examines the salience of DI and the position that successive Romanian governments took between 2006 and 2020 with respect to DI more generally, as a model of European integration, but also more specifically, with respect to specific mechanisms and instances of DI. To understand Romania's position towards *polity differentiation*, we focused on the 'multi-speed' and 'multi-end' models of DI. With

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<sup>2</sup> The Council's decision to deny Romania's right to join the Schengen area came in stark contrast to the European Commission's comprehensive technical evaluation and recognition of the country's full compliance with the Schengen accession criteria, issued in 2011. See, in particular, the report by the European deputy Carlos Coelho in which the following is indicated: "At this moment, both Romania and Bulgaria have proved that they are sufficiently prepared to apply all the provisions of the Schengen acquis in a satisfactory manner" in 'Report on the draft Council decision on the full application of the provisions of the Schengen acquis in the Republic of Bulgaria and Romania', A7-0185/2011, 04/05/2011

regard to *policy differentiation*, we analysed Romania's position concerning various instances of DI, such as the Schengen area, the Fiscal Compact or the Eurozone. Last but not least, we analysed the salience of two specific *mechanisms of differentiation*, namely 'enhanced co-operation' and 'opt-outs', and the position that Romanian governments took concerning these mechanisms.

This article is the result of both quantitative and qualitative analyses of government programmes issued between 2005 and 2019, key speeches made by Romanian heads of state and prime ministers between 2006 and 2020, and parliamentary debates held between 2006 and 2020<sup>3</sup>.

## **Polity differentiation: 'Multi-speed Europe' and 'Multi-end Europe'**

At the level of polity differentiation, the paper distinguishes between two models: a 'multi-speed Europe' and a 'multi-end Europe' model (see Introduction to the special issue). The salience of DI models was generally low in Romania until it peaked around the debate on the Commission's White Paper on the Future of Europe in 2017 but has remained relatively low ever since. The following discussion of government programs, presidential and prime ministerial statements, and parliamentary records provides a more detailed discussion of this finding.

In a first step, we analysed Romanian government programmes issued between 2005 and 2019 to gauge the salience of DI with regard to domestic political visions and outlook. The most salient key phrases found in governmental programmes were the 'future of Europe,' and also 'multi-speed,' 'concentric circles' and 'differentiated treatment'. No reference was found for the phrases 'variable geometry,' 'core Europe' or 'two-tier Europe'.

When analysing statements made by Romania's heads of state before and after European Council meetings organised between 2011 and 2020, a much higher salience of key words related to DI models was found compared to that found in other key government speeches. With a majority of references found in 2017, which was directly after the publication of the Commission's White Paper on the *Future of Europe*, the most frequent key words were those pertaining to a Europe of different-speeds (i.e. 'multi-speed Europe' and 'two-speed Europe'). To a much lesser extent, President Iohannis also made reference to different endpoints of DI by using key words such as 'concentric circles', 'core Europe' and even 'second-class country', presenting the idea of a 'two-tier Europe' as something that would be detrimental to Romania's power and image in the EU.

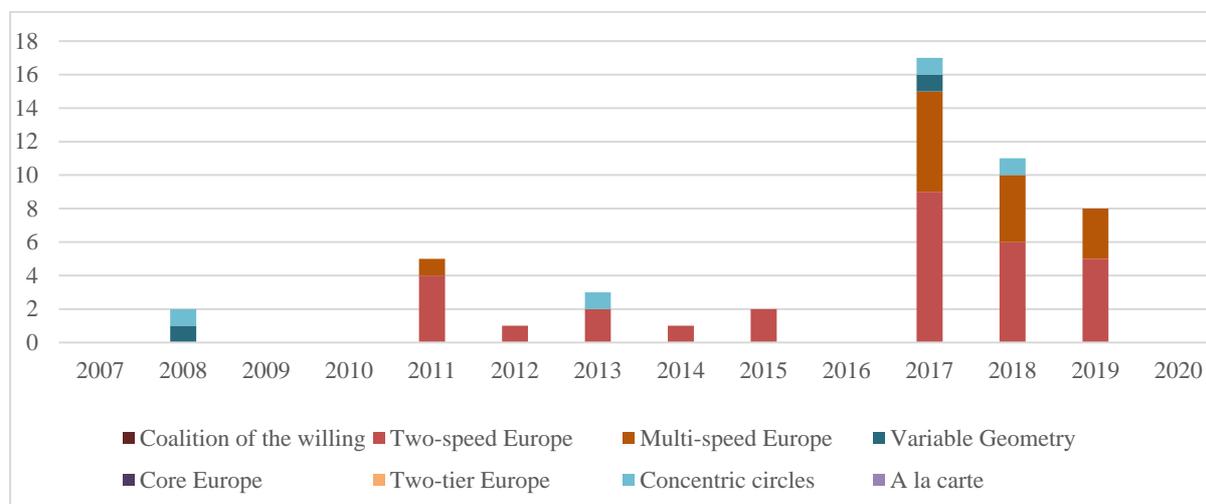
In parliamentary debates, as is charted in Figure 1 below, the first most salient DI model was 'two-speed Europe' (n=30, with a peak in 2017), followed by 'multi-speed Europe' (n=14), while scarce reference was found with respect to 'variable geometry' (n=2) and 'concentric circles' (n=4). No reference was found for 'coalition of the willing,' 'core Europe,' 'two-tier Europe' or 'à la carte' EU. The share of the 'multi-speed' DI model accounts for around 90% of all the references made to DI models in

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<sup>3</sup> The collection of data for the year 2020 covers parliamentary debates held up until 1 April 2020.

parliamentary debates. The peak of DI-related debates was in 2017, with a gradual decrease in 2018 and 2019.

**Figure 1** The salience of DI conceptual key words in parliamentary debates



By counting positive and negative statements made in parliamentary debates about the two models of DI, the research shows that successive governments and opposition parties alike perceive multi-speed and multi-end Europe in a negative light. While in the majority of cases there is a rejection of DI models for normative or substantive reasons, only in very few cases was there uncertainty or neutral observations regarding DI models and their implications for Romania. In even fewer cases did we find a positive perception of DI models with political figures presenting DI models as opportunities for Romania to boost its efforts to be among the top tier of the EU Member States.

The reluctance to accept a multi-speed Europe could be explained by a fear among Romanians of being left behind on the EU's periphery, which – among other things – may be reminiscent of the Iron Curtain and how it once divided Europe. In this regard, President Iohannis insisted during a European Council meeting in March 2017 that a multi-speed Europe “*could even lead to the splitting up of the European Union,*” as it would be “*more likely to amplify dissent between the Member States rather than leading to close co-operation.*”<sup>4</sup> Among the greatest risks perceived by Iohannis was that of separating Europe in two, with industrialised countries fearing the loss of jobs to eastern European workers and with eastern European countries fearing the loss of their citizens to western European countries and being left behind in the European decision-making process:

“The greatest danger I see is a return to the geometry of the Iron Curtain, which would be deadly for the Union, because if we accept the concept – if we had accepted – Europe with two speeds, sooner or later the second speed would have been in the east and then it would certainly have returned some deep fears of eastern Europeans, the fear of being left behind. As in the west, certainly, slowly but surely, many Europeans are afraid that someone will take their jobs, that someone will come and push them aside in their own country. We are not

<sup>4</sup> Original quote in Romanian: “ar putea chiar să ducă la scindarea Uniunii Europene”; “și una, și alta, sunt mai degrabă de natură să amplifice o disensiune între statele membre, în loc să ducă la o colaborare aprofundată.” Klaus Iohannis, Head of State (PNL), Press Conference, European Council informal meeting in Rome, 25.03.2017.

allowed to let the Union reach a state where Europeans, instead of being optimistic and confident in their project, start to fear the European project”<sup>5</sup> (Klaus Iohannis, Head of State (PNL), Press Conference, European Council informal meeting in Rome, 25.03.2017).

From the way in which President Iohannis spoke during the press conference in March 2017, we see that he perceived the discussion on a two-speed Europe as being closed, as something already belonging to the past (i.e. “*if we had accepted,*” “*would have been*”). However, seeking to obtain domestic support for the Commission’s White Paper on the *Future of Europe*, Jean-Claude Juncker, then President of the European Commission, made an address on 11 May 2017 in the Romanian Parliament on the subject of the Future of Europe and on the potential of a multi-speed Europe, claiming that:

“[...] we can move forward together, even if we go at different paces. A multi-speed Europe already exists. This is enshrined in the Treaties. This is what we call enhanced co-operation. The debate on a multi-speed Europe [...] is, in fact, a non-debate. The real debate is on the necessary co-operation between our nations”<sup>6</sup> (Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, Romanian Parliament, 11.05.2017).

Juncker’s speech initiated a heated debate in the Romanian parliament, with political figures on all sides rebuffing the idea of any differentiated integration that would result in varying degrees of power across the EU Member States. Therefore, in response to Juncker’s speech, the government’s representatives took a rather moderate position regarding Member States’ preferences for European integration, but radically opposed the prospects of any differentiation that could entail prioritising the preferences of certain more powerful countries in the European decision-making processes over any other:

“Today [...] we are offered routes to the future which involve various speeds. So be it, if the common policies are to be carried out horizontally according to **geometries that may vary**, as at the beginning of the Community. Some states may decide to explore together deeper integration in a particular economic or social field, integration that other states may consider inappropriate or feel unprepared for. However, **it is inconceivable**, if we take seriously the spirit that set in motion the European construction, **for the Member States to be divided into groups vertically on the political decision. Some on stage, others in the lodge and the last in the**

<sup>5</sup> Original quote in Romanian: “Am prezentat din punctul meu de vedere pericolele unei Europe cu două viteze, unde pericolul cel mai mare pe care-l văd este revenirea la geometria Cortinei de Fier, care ar fi mortală pentru Uniune, fiindcă, dacă acceptăm conceptul - încă o dată, dacă am accepta - a ieșit din discurs, dar că să vă răspund la întrebare, dacă am fi acceptat Europa cu două viteze, mai devreme sau mai târziu, viteza a doua ar fi fost în Est, și atunci cu siguranță ar fi revenit niște temeri profunde ale est-europenilor, temerea de a fi lăsați în urmă. Cum în Vest, cu certitudine, încet, dar sigur, foarte mulți europeni se tem că le ia cineva locurile de muncă, că vine cineva și îi împinge la ei în țară deoparte. Or nici una, nici alta nu au voie să se întâmple și nu avem voie să lăsăm Uniunea să ajungă într-o stare în care europenii, în loc să fie optimiști și încrezători în proiectul lor, să înceapă să se teamă de proiectul european și, sigur, am adus mai multe argumente.” Klaus Iohannis, Head of State (PNL), Press Conference, European Council meeting, 25.03.2017.

<sup>6</sup> Original quote in Romanian: “[...] putem să avansăm împreună, chiar dacă mergem în ritmuri diferite. Europa cu mai multe viteze există deja. Acest aspect este prevăzut în Tratat. Este ceea ce numim cooperarea consolidată. Dezbateră privind Europa cu mai multe viteze [...] este, de fapt, o nondezbateră. Dezbateră reală este cea privind cooperarea necesară între națiunile noastre.” Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, Romanian Parliament, 11.05.2017.

**periphery. It is unacceptable for the dynamics of convergence, no matter how slow, to be replaced by a process of prioritising decision-making and development**<sup>7</sup> (Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu, President of the Upper House (ALDE), Romanian Parliament, 11.05.2017).

The same negative position against DI models continued in 2018 and 2019, and is reflected in various statements made in the parliament or at the European level by the Romanian Head of State, Klaus Iohannis, and by the former PM, Viorica Dăncilă:

**“Ideas such as a multi-speed Europe or a Europe of concentric circles are not options**, as we wish to preserve the unified and indivisible nature of the European Union, which makes it valuable and credible in its relations with the rest of the world” (Klaus Iohannis, Head of State (PNL), European Parliament, 23.10.2018).

“Romania has consistently promoted the importance of keeping the European Union united, without any divisions between the east and the west, between the southern and the northern parts of Europe, between older Member States and newer ones, or with various speeds of European integration. We want the initiatives to consolidate the European construction to be based on a positive, inclusive, consensual and citizen-oriented agenda” (Klaus Iohannis, Head of State (PNL), European Summit of Regions and Cities, 15.03.2019).

“I believe that this feeling of recognition of the significance that the European Union has for citizens needs to be constantly cultivated through concrete results. **Our project must not promote a multi-speed Europe or a Europe of concentric circles.** Romania will continue to promote the common goal of strengthening the European project and it will at the same time pursue the completion of its integration. I am referring here, of course, to the **full integration of our country in the Schengen Area**, within which we are already acting as a de facto member” (Viorica Dăncilă, Prime Minister (PSD), European Parliament, 18.07.2019).

We can thus see that the negative perception of DI models can also be explained by the Romanian government’s desire to be on an equal footing with older EU Member States in the decision-making processes. Given the country’s communist past and continuous struggle to catch-up with the Western European countries, any sort of European integration through different speeds or different endpoints is strongly opposed, as it is perceived as a sign of European discrimination that would leave Romania in a ‘second-tier’ Europe.

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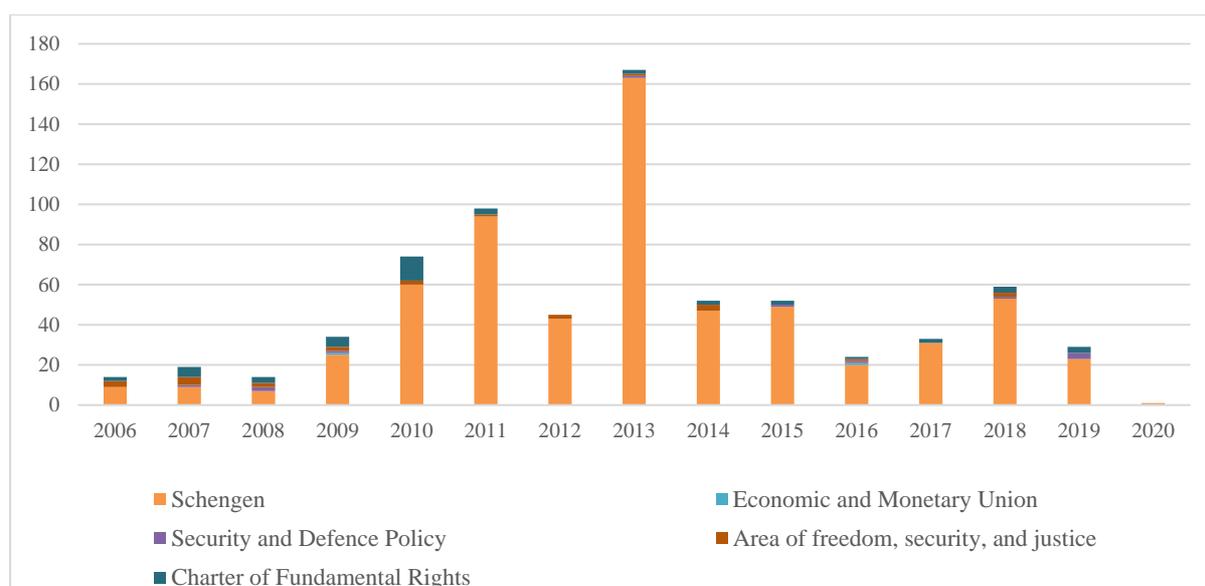
<sup>7</sup> Original quote in Romanian: “Astăzi [...] ni se propun rute către viitor, ce comportă mai multe viteze. Fie, dacă este vorba ca politicile comune să fie desfășurate pe orizontală, după geometrii ce pot varia, ca la începuturile Comunității. Unele state pot decide să exploreze împreună o integrare mai profundă într-un anume domeniu economic ori social, integrare pe care alte state o pot considera inoportună sau pentru care nu se simt pregătite. Este însă de neconceput, dacă luăm în serios spiritul care a pus în mișcare construcția europeană, ca statele membre să fie distribuite în grupuri pe verticala deciziei politice. Unele pe scenă, altele în lojă și ultimele la periferie. Este inacceptabil ca dinamica convergenței, oricât de lentă ar fi încă, să fie înlocuită de un proces de ierarhizare a capacității de decizie și a nivelului de dezvoltare.” Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu, President of the Upper House (ALDE), Romanian Parliament, 11.05.2017.

## Policy differentiation

While references to *DI models* were made mainly in the national parliament and on the fringes of European Council meetings, references to *DI instances* such as with respect to Schengen, EMU and Brexit were highly salient across all the arenas for government communication considered in this paper.

As we can see in Figure 2, most references to DI instances were made with respect to Schengen and to the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). The salience of Schengen and EMU are, in the case of Romania, an expression of a preference for more integration rather than for any ‘opt-outs,’ given Romania’s legal obligations to join the Schengen area and the eurozone. The peak in salience registered for ‘Schengen’ in 2013 and the lower peaks registered in 2011 and 2010 are most likely to be related to Romania’s protracted accession to Schengen. We can also observe that between 2014-2019 the salience of Schengen decreased considerably, pointing perhaps, on the one hand, to the country’s frustration at seeking accession to Schengen in the face of a political opposition by other Member States and, on the other hand, to the country’s reaction to the refugee crisis and to the impact that potential Schengen membership would have on the country’s capacity to control the EU’s external borders.

**Figure 2** *The salience of DI instances (opt-outs) in parliamentary debates*

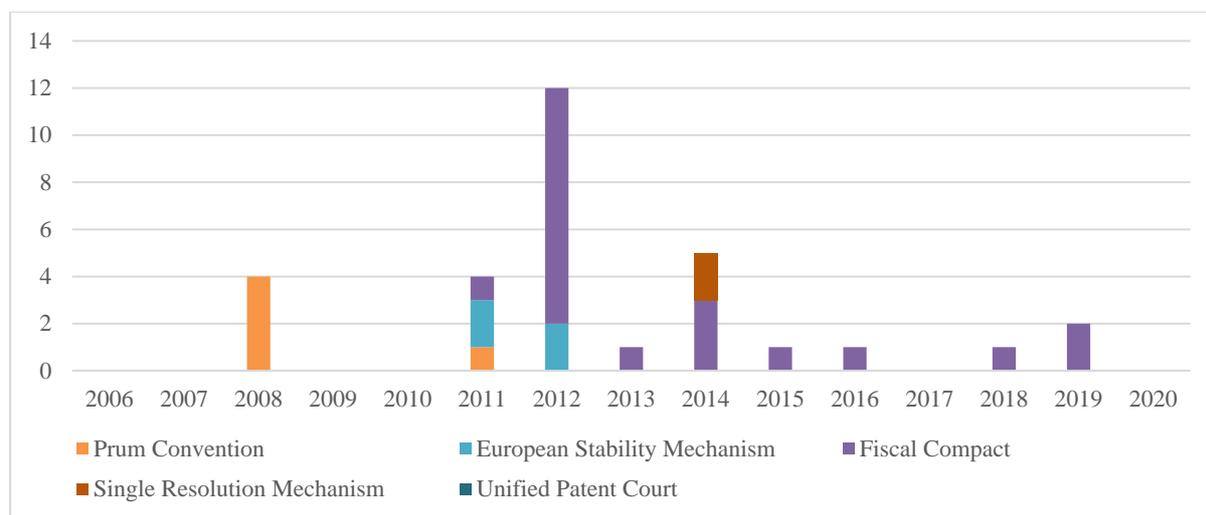


Highly salient were also references to areas of more co-operation both within the EU and with non-EU countries, including with eastern European countries seeking closer ties with the EU, southern neighbourhood countries and international partners such as the UN or NATO. Particular attention was afforded to the prospects of enhancing the stability of EMU and the internal security of the EU, including in the fields of cyber-security, illegal migration, strategic communication, misinformation and fake news. All such references had the general aim of enhancing the unity and sustainability of the European project. The focus on enhancing the EU’s internal and external security was linked to a rather high salience of Permanent Structured Co-operation in Defence (‘PESCO’) in 2017 and in 2018, given that the European Council first activated PESCO in December 2017. Reference was also made several times to the European Public Prosecutor (EPP): in 2017, when Romania formalised its participation in this new

enhanced co-operation initiative, and in 2019, when the former Chief Prosecutor of Romania, Laura Codruta Kövesi, became the first person appointed to this new role.

Differentiation does not happen only inside the EU. It also happens between the EU and non-Member States (via association agreements) and among EU members but outside the EU framework (via *inter se* agreements). *Inter se* agreements are international agreements reached among EU Member States which allow them to circumvent the institutional constraints of the community method. Analysing the salience of five *inter se* agreements (see Figure 3), we found no reference to the ‘Unified Patent Court’ and rather scarce references to the ‘European Stability Mechanism’ and the ‘Single Resolution Mechanism’. The ‘Prüm Convention’ was relatively salient in 2008, when Romania ratified the agreement. The most salient instance was the ‘Fiscal Compact’, with a peak in 2012, when the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union was signed by the EU Member States, with the exception of the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom. Although the Treaty was not binding for states that were not members of the eurozone, Romania chose to opt-in and to ratify the Fiscal Compact nonetheless.

**Figure 3** *The salience of inter-se agreements in parliamentary debates*



The qualitative analysis of the documents reconfirms that “*Romania clearly maintains its position on deepening the Union, with all its successful policies and projects, especially the Internal Market, the Schengen Area and the eurozone,*” as PM Grindeanu stated in March 2017, when he also reaffirmed “*Romania's support for a consolidated, unitary and inclusive Europe.*”<sup>8</sup>

However, since 2011 Romania has been caught in an indeterminate state between having fulfilled the technical requirements<sup>9</sup> and becoming a fully-fledged member of the Schengen area. Hence, the country’s protracted accession to Schengen has come to be seen by Romanians as a symbol of European differential treatment and distrust in

<sup>8</sup> Original quote in Romanian: “România își menține clar poziția privind aprofundarea Uniunii, cu toate politicile și proiectele sale de succes, mai ales Piața Internă, Spațiul Schengen și zona Euro. Reconfirm susținerea României față de o Europă consolidată, unitară și inclusivă.” Sorin Grindeanu, PM (PSD), Meeting of the Party of European Socialists - Brussels, 09.03.2017.

<sup>9</sup>See, in particular, the report by the European deputy Carlos Coelho ‘Report on the draft Council decision on the full application of the provisions of the Schengen acquis in the Republic of Bulgaria and Romania’, A7-0185/2011, 04/05/2011.

the country's capacity to protect the EU's external borders. In spite of the breach of trust in EU decision-making processes that has been brought about by the politicised enlargement of Schengen – Romania has been consistently keen to opt-in to the Schengen zone.

The government programme proposed by PM Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu in 2012 set out the objectives of joining Schengen and the Eurozone as the top government priorities in the sphere of European affairs. With respect to Schengen, Ungureanu aimed to accelerate the accession process by improving political dialogue with the states that were blocking Romania's accession so as to join the area by the end of 2012. With respect to the Eurozone, the Ungureanu government aimed to sign and ratify the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in Economic and Monetary Union – the Fiscal Compact Treaty – even though the country was not a member of the Eurozone. As part of the Copenhagen criteria, to which Romania had subscribed since 2003, the country had committed itself to adopting the single European currency when economically prepared to do so. Thus, while Schengen and the EMU can be seen as opt-out DI instances, we see that, for Romanian governments at least, they were instances that allowed for advanced co-operation and integration with the country's European partners.

Ungureanu also made clear reference to his government's objectives to join Schengen and to ratify the Fiscal Compact in his first speech after being nominated as PM in the National Parliament:

“Many of my efforts will be directed towards relaunching cross-party dialogue, especially when we have issues of national interest: the **Co-operation and Verification Mechanism, accession to the Schengen area and the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union**”<sup>10</sup> (Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu, Prime Minister (Independent), Romanian Parliament, 09.02.2012).

Similarly, then Head of State Traian Băsescu, during an address to the national parliament, stressed the importance of the country's accession to both the Eurozone and the Schengen area, and of the ratification of the Fiscal Compact:

“**A major objective of Romania is to enter the euro area [...].** You have to understand how important it is for the Romanian economy to become a Member State of the euro area. [...] The objective in the next period must be to reanalyse and increase the performance of the state economy. [...] I think that **the treaty [the Fiscal Compact] is a step forward, a step that Romania does not have the right to take halfway. We need to contribute to European consolidation [...]**”<sup>11</sup> (Traian Băsescu, Head of State (PDL), Romanian Parliament, 07.03.2012).

<sup>10</sup> Original quote in Romanian: “O mare parte dintre eforturile mele se vor îndrepta spre relansarea dialogului transpartinic, mai ales atunci când vom avea în față subiecte de interes național, mecanismul de cooperare și verificare, aderarea la spațiul Schengen sau tratatul pentru stabilitate, coordonare și guvernare în Uniunea Economică și Monetară.” Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu, Prime Minister (Independent), Romanian Parliament, 09.02.2012.

<sup>11</sup> Original quote in Romanian: “Un obiectiv major al României este intrarea în zona euro [...]. Trebuie să înțelegem cât de important pentru economia românească este să devenim stat membru al zonei euro. [...] Obiectivul în perioada imediat următoare trebuie să fie reanalizarea și creșterea performanțelor economiei de stat.

Romania's protracted accessions to Schengen and to the Eurozone have often been perceived by Romanian decision-makers as a sign of a de-facto multi-speed Europe but also as a symbol of the discrimination that the country is subject to in the EU:

“Schengen accession remains a goal to be pursued, seen in its correct dimension, as a symbol of Romania's non-discrimination in the EU. [...]”<sup>12</sup> (Government Programme, PSD, 2017 & 2018).

Moreover, the government programmes issued by the PSD in 2017 and 2018, and the programme issued by the PNL in 2019 included accession to the Schengen area and to the eurozone among their main objectives:

“We will be able to **ensure the premises for Romania's accession to the eurozone** in a reasonable time, with **deeper integration in the EU** being achieved against a background of a competitive and solid economic and social foundation”<sup>13</sup> (Government Programme, PSD, 2018).

“Joining the eurozone, as soon as possible, on the basis of sound criteria and a realistically set timetable, is an essential step for Romania's economic development. Romania's rapid accession to the Schengen space is another key objective. It is vital for all citizens to be able to move freely and work anywhere in the community area”<sup>14</sup> (Government Programme, PNL, 2019).

We can see from the analysis of political debates in the Romanian Parliament, and also from the various statements by the President and the PM, that Romanian decision-makers are *against* policy differentiation when discussing Romania's involuntary exclusion from the Eurozone and Schengen. However, they are *in favour* of policy differentiation when it means that Romania would accede to the ‘top-tier’ of core EU countries.

## **Mechanisms of differentiation: ‘Opt-outs’ and ‘Enhanced cooperation’**

Moving on to the analysis of the salience of DI mechanisms, we found that relatively little reference was made to ‘enhanced co-operation’ and ‘opt-out’ in the government programmes, governmental speeches or parliamentary debates analysed for this study. However, in the statements made by Romanian heads of state before and after European Council meetings, references to ‘enhanced co-operation’ were highly salient, with the Head of State using it interchangeably to refer both to the EU's Treaty mechanism for differentiated integration and to support more integration and co-

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[...] Cred că tratatul este un pas înainte, un pas pe care România nu are dreptul să-l facă pe jumătate. Trebuie să contribuim la consolidarea europeană.” Traian Băsescu, Head of State (PDL), Romanian Parliament, 07.03.2012

<sup>12</sup> Original quote in Romanian: “Aderarea la Schengen rămâne un obiectiv de urmărit, văzut în dimensiunea sa corectă, ca simbol al nediscriminării românilor în UE. [...] Vom putea asigura astfel premisele aderării României la Zona Euro într-un termen rezonabil, integrarea mai adâncă în UE realizându-se pe fondul unei fundații economico-socială competitivă și solidă.” Government Programme, PSD, 2017 & 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Original quote in Romanian: “Vom putea asigura astfel premisele aderării României la Zona Euro într-un termen rezonabil, integrarea mai adâncă în UE realizându-se pe fondul unei fundații economico- socială competitivă și solidă”. Government Programme, PSD, 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Original quote in Romanian: “Aderarea la Zona Euro, cât mai curând posibil, în baza unor criterii temeinice și a unui calendar stabilit în mod realist, este un pas esențial pentru dezvoltarea economică a României. Aderarea rapidă a României la Spațiul Schengen este un alt obiectiv esențial. Este vital ca toți cetățenii să se poată deplasa liber și să poată munci oriunde în spațiul comunitar.” Government Programme, PNL, 2019.

operation in various areas connected to European integration (n=121, with peaks in 2017 and 2018).

One of the key findings of our qualitative analysis is that, while in theory ‘opt-out’ instances of DI indicate a preference for less integration, in Romania the discussions are focused on ways to end involuntary opt-outs. Moreover, our analysis indicates that Romanian leaders seem to perceive the Treaty mechanism of ‘enhanced cooperation’ as an integration mechanism that provides room for all the European states to act together eventually, as the door remains open for Member States to join enhanced cooperation programmes and activities whenever they are prepared to do so. Successive Romanian governments’ support for enhanced cooperation can thus be seen as a preference for ‘more cooperation’ or for ‘doing much more together’ – as framed by the Commission in its White Paper on the Future of Europe, rather than meaning ‘moving ahead in small groups’, as foreseen in the Treaty on European Union. Hence, a high number of positive remarks were made in favour of consolidating the European project, enhancing co-operation with the EU and enhancing Romania’s role in the EU by both government and opposition members. The results therefore point to the strong pro-European stance held by Romanian governments and opposition figures alike.

With reference to the Future of Europe debate, the government programmes issued by the PSD in 2017 and 2018 sought to reinforce Romania’s position on the European stage, aiming to “*connect to the new formulas of **enhanced co-operation** which will be outlined at the EU level and to actively participate in the debates on the **future of Europe***”<sup>15</sup> (Government Programme, PSD, 2017 & 2018). The PSD government hence indicated Romania’s support for enhanced co-operation in the EU, together with the country’s support for the consolidation of the European project, thus expressing a preference for the fifth scenario – “doing much more together” – in the Commission’s White Paper on the Future of Europe. On the fringe of the European Council’s informal meeting held in Malta in February 2017, Romanian President Klaus Iohannis emphasised that with respect to the future of Europe Romania prioritised “*the consolidation and deepening of the European project.*”<sup>16</sup> After the Commission published its White Paper in March 2017, Iohannis provided clarification of the understanding and expectations that the Romanian government had with respect to the Treaty mechanism for enhanced co-operation:

“I would like to emphasise that the mention in the final text of the Rome Declaration of the concept of enhanced co-operation is made strictly within the limits of the provisions of the current Treaty on European Union, with the aim of all states acting together. In addition, the text of the Declaration states that the door remains open for Member States wishing to join these forms of enhanced co-operation later. We certainly do not want to take steps back from what we have achieved so far. It is important for the Union to constantly evolve in order to strengthen those policies that ensure the foundation and effectiveness of the Union. I am referring here to the internal market with its four fundamental freedoms, to cohesion policy, to enlargement policy and to

<sup>15</sup> Original quote in Romanian: “Principalul obiectiv al României, în aceste condiții, va trebui să fie acela de racordare la noile formule de cooperare consolidată, care se vor contura la nivelul UE, și de participare activă la dezbaterile privind viitorul Europei, în paralel cu o politică externă activă, care să țină cont și de mutațiile din lumea euro-atlantică.” (PSD, 2018: p.14; PSD, 2017: p.5).

<sup>16</sup> Original quote in Romanian: “Poziția României privind viitorul Europei are în vedere în mod prioritar consolidarea și aprofundarea proiectului european.” Klaus Iohannis, Head of State (PNL), 03.02.2017.

neighbourhood policy”<sup>17</sup> (Klaus Iohannis, Head of State (PNL), Press Conference, European Council informal meeting in Rome, 25.03.2017).

The preference for enhanced cooperation reflects not only the government’s positive perception regarding EU integration, but also high domestic demand for more integration, particularly with regard to the Schengen area and the Eurozone – two of the most tangible areas of European integration. The higher the degree of integration in the EU, the higher the perceived Romanian political influence in the EU would be, and the greater Romania’s access to the benefits of a fully-fledged EU membership.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The conceptual distinction between polity DI, policy DI, and mechanisms of DI helped us to gain a very precise understanding of the positions of Romanian governments and allowed us to go beyond the ‘black box’ of the generic DI concept. Indeed, through this paper, we found evidence that Romanian politicians view polity DI negatively, because Romania is involuntarily excluded from two key policies, i.e. Schengen and Eurozone. Correspondingly, they view ‘opt-outs’ negatively, but ‘enhanced cooperation’ positively because it allows Romania to catch up with the EU core. In other words, political leaders in Romania are staunch supporters of deeper European integration and are strongly against any development scenarios that would divide Member States into different camps.

The findings of this paper indicate that Romania is strictly against DI at a conceptual level, opposing both a ‘different speeds EU’ and a ‘different end-points EU’. Any such two-speed or two-tier Europe is seen as something that would be detrimental to Romania’s power and image in the EU. The strong opposition to DI models is explained in part by Romania’s fear of being left behind in a ‘second-tier’ Europe, given its communist past and the country’s struggle to catch up with the more developed Western European countries.

This analysis also points to the fact that, if DI was unavoidable, Romania would seek to undertake the necessary measures to join ‘core’ Europe, as it is arguably doing presently with respect to its accession to the Schengen area and to the Eurozone. Joining the Eurozone and the Schengen area seems to be a common goal for both the current government and the opposition, and deeper integration in these two areas has consistently been considered a priority by Romanian decision-makers since the country’s accession to the EU in 2007.

Hence, notwithstanding the series of crises that has hit the EU over recent years, the challenges to European integration did not result in any notable preference for opt-outs from the processes of European integration among Romania’s political leaders. Conversely, Romanian governments and the opposition alike continuously stress the need for deeper integration with the country’s European partners. However, this ought

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<sup>17</sup>Original quote in Romanian: “Doresc să subliniez faptul că menționarea, în textul final al Declarației de la Roma, a conceptului de cooperare consolidată este făcută strict în limitele prevederilor actualului Tratat al Uniunii, obiectivul fiind ca toate statele să acționeze împreună. În plus, textul Declarației menționează că ușa rămâne deschisă pentru statele membre care doresc să se alăture mai târziu acestor forme de cooperare consolidată. Cu siguranță, nu dorim pași înapoi de la ceea ce am realizat până acum. Este important ca Uniunea să evolueze permanent în sensul consolidării acelor politici care asigură fundamentul și eficiența Uniunii. Mă refer aici la Piața Internă cu cele patru libertăți fundamentale, la politica de coeziune, la politica de extindere și la politica de vecinătate.” Klaus Iohannis, Head of State (PNL), Press Conference, European Council informal meeting in Rome, 25.03.2017.

to be on an equal footing, undifferentiated by concentric circles or different speeds, so as to prevent the Union from falling apart.

It is important to note that this pro-European position seems to be independent of context and political ideology, as Romanian decision-makers from across the political spectrum share the general aim of strengthening the European project and of supporting its evolution towards ever-closer union.

The government's support for enhanced co-operation can be understood at least in part as a preference for 'more co-operation' or for 'doing much more together,' as was framed by the European Commission in the White paper on the Future of Europe, rather than being taken to mean 'moving ahead in small groups' as foreseen in the TEU. Given that this analysis indicates that DI models were virtually absent from the Romanian political sphere before 2017, it seems that the Commission taking the initiative to debate the future of Europe was the main trigger for the peaks registered on this topic in 2017 in the Romanian political sphere.

Finally, we conclude by arguing that what explains Romanian politicians' position towards DI is, on the one hand, domestic politics and the pro-European electorate, and on the other hand, the country's integration experience and the expectations of the effect that DI would have on the future of European integration. In this regard, any sort of European integration involving different speeds or different shapes is perceived as a sign of discrimination that would leave Romania on Europe's periphery, while any sort of enhanced co-operation is seen as a chance for Romania to boost its power and influence at the European level.

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