

Slovenia: a case of a small, relatively new member country¹

MAJA BUČAR

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA
maja.bucar@fdv.uni-lj.si

BOŠTJAN UDOVIČ

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA
bostjan.udovic@fdv.uni-lj.si

Abstract:

The concept of differentiated integration (DI) is practically invisible in Slovenian politics. The analysis showed that the key words associated with DI are seldom used in parliamentary debates, coalition programmes or prime ministerial speeches. This suggests that the issue of DI is more a topic of academic discussion than of daily politics. While the low salience of DI in Slovenian political debates makes it hard to establish governmental positions in detail, the common thread throughout Slovenian foreign policy from independence in 1991 onwards has been that a strong and united EU is of key importance for Slovenia. The few instances where wording related to DI models was used reflect a concern about a multi-speed Europe, especially a fear that a multi-tier EU would mean fewer opportunities for future Slovenian governments and in general, fewer opportunities for smaller and/or less developed countries.

Keywords: differentiated integration; multi-speed EU; Slovenia

Introduction²

The citizens of the Republic of Slovenia endorsed Slovenia's path to European Union (EU) membership by an overwhelming majority of votes (89.64 %) in a referendum on 23 March 2003. The country joined the EU in 2004, adopted the euro at the beginning of 2007 and joined Schengen by the end of the same year. In 2008, Slovenia chaired the EU Council, a role that it again held in the second half of 2021. This amply demonstrates that the country is highly pro-EU regardless of the political party in the government, as it is widely believed that EU membership is crucial for Slovenia's development and security.

¹ 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. The article is also a result of the research program "Slovenia and its Actors in International Relations and European Integration (P5-01777)".

² The authors wish to acknowledge with thanks the constructive comments of Stefan Telle and an anonymous reviewer on the earlier draft of this paper.

Almost all political parties in the National Assembly (except one: The Slovenian National Party, SNS) support Slovenian membership of the European Union. Nevertheless, there are differences in their perceptions of the European Union: whereas the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) of the current Prime Minister Janša argue that Slovenia should enhance its relations with the Visegrád Group (V4) and other central European countries, the liberal trio (the Party of the Modern Centre, SMC; the List of Marjan Šarec, LMŠ; and the Party of Alenka Bratušek, SAB) emphasise that Slovenia is part of core Europe.³ In geographical terms, the position of the Social Democrats (SD) is not so clear, but together with New Slovenia–Christian Democrats (NSi) they aim for Slovenia to be more proactive in the EU institutions.

Despite this general pro-European outlook, many of the more complex issues related to the EU are not well publicised and therefore public awareness of how the EU functions is relatively low. The ambition of this article is, first, to discover the extent to which Slovenian governments talk about differentiated integration (DI). Secondly, we want to determine what positions they take on DI. Does Slovenian politics support the idea of a ‘Multi-Speed EU’ and if so, which are the national preferences? Which, if any, are the differentiated integration mechanisms (enhanced co-operation, opt-out mechanism) the Slovenian government might prefer? Are these mechanisms applied in Slovenian EU politics?

In this article, we explore the presence of DI discussion in the Slovenian political space, which issues generated the most attention, and especially how DI is understood by Slovenian politicians, be they members of government or members of Parliament. The research confirmed our initial expectation that in Slovenia a debate about differentiated integration (DI) is barely present, and that the mechanisms of DI are not well known. The fact that Slovenian public opinion as well as official politics are committed to the European Union does not mean that today debate on EU issues is common in government bodies or the general public. The article is structured as follows. The next section discusses theory and methods. The article then presents the main findings and observations and concludes with brief discussion of their policy relevance.

Theory and methods

Partly as a consequence of enlargement, but also due to a number of other complex issues which have needed to be addressed by the EU in recent years, theoretical discussion on the concept of differentiated integration has been on the rise (among others, see Stubb 1996, Leuffen et al. 2013, Rittberger et al. 2015, Schimmelfennig & Winzen 2020). As pointed out by Holzinger and Schimmelfennig (2012), there are a number of normative concepts and approaches, providing us with a systematic overview of theorizing on differentiated integration.

The theoretical framework of this article follows that described in the introduction to this issue (Telle et al. 2021), distinguishing between *policy differentiation* and *polity differentiation*. The first one relates in particular to different preferences and capacities of the member states as to the integration (demand-side) and offers option to more reluctant members of not join in all policies, while not preventing others to

³In Slovenia, this usually refers to the countries of Benelux, Germany and France.

move ahead. In the case of *polity differentiation*, the categorization of differentiated integration in terms of time, space, and matter (Stubb 1996) is followed.

We distinguished two different models of polity differentiation. On the one hand, the ‘multi-speed EU’ model depicts DI as a temporary phenomenon and implies that all Member States (MSs) will ultimately reach the same level of integration. We started with the assumption that the concept of differentiated integration, which enables different dynamics of cooperation to member countries, is less acceptable to the so called new Member States, which during the period of their accession already had to prove that they are capable of adopting the full range of EU policies. Yet, the complexity of EU rules has already had practical consequences for both older and newer members: here we are thinking in particular of the monetary union and Schengen – while some Member States decided against these policies and opted not to adopt the euro, others simply have not met the criteria yet. As Slovene ambition from day one was to fully embrace all EU policies as quickly as possible, ideas of deeper integration were supported. This would suggest that the Slovenian stance would not favour DI in any form.

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’ policies to adjust its own level of integration to national preferences and capacities, with the end result being the co-existence of multiple overlapping regimes of integration. This so called “multi-end” model may in principle be more acceptable from the integration policy efficiency perspective, but the question remains as to whether membership or lack thereof in a particular circle is a free choice of the Member State or a selective policy of the “core” countries towards those presumably less capable.

For the analysis of the salience of DI, we counted keywords (Appendix 1) in repositories of parliamentary debates. The suggested keywords were translated and adapted to the Slovenian language and jargon that is usually employed when discussing European affairs. Therefore, some Slovenian equivalents are not simply translated, but logically adapted to the political discourse in the country.⁴ A major source was provided by the research group involved in the CLARIN project (European Research Infrastructure for Language Resources and Technology), a part of the EU infrastructure ESFRI.⁵ The relevant data is in the siParl corpus, a database included in CLARIN⁶.

In addition, for the years in which we identified a peak in the salience of DI, the authors looked at the original documents in the database. This way, the context in which a particular DI model was addressed could be identified, and instances of a different use of a specific term eliminated.⁷ This proved to be fruitful since the mere counting of the results in parliamentary debates only seldom included the keywords identified as search variables. The authors did not focus only on key words/catchwords, but also on

⁴ Here, the authors wish to thank to Tomaž Erjavec, from the Slovenian CLARIN team, for his valuable assistance and guidance.

⁵ European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures. See more at <https://www.clarin.eu/content/clarin-in-a-nutshell>.

⁶ CLARIN corpus comprises over 10 thousand sessions of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia in the period from 1990 to 2018, which covers one million speeches or 200 million words. (Pančur et al. 2020).

⁷ For example, the term “differentiated integration” was used during the parliamentary debate on the principles of involving children with special needs in the education system. This was then eliminated from our analysis.

the context that in some cases revealed the level of commitment and the attitude of Slovenia (through its politicians) to EU integration.

For analysis of the government attitude towards DI, the authors identified and analysed documents where EU issues were expected to be discussed. The selection included the last three coalition agreements (period 2014–2022)⁸, the three speeches of the Prime Ministers (PMs) after their election in the National Assembly (2014, 2018, 2020)⁹, the speech of the PM Janez Janša addressing the European Parliament during the Slovenian Presidency of the European Council in 2008, and the transcript of the public debate at the National Assembly dedicated to the presentation of the *White Paper on the future of the Europe*¹⁰ by the European Commission, held on 15 June 2017. Also, different sessions of the Parliamentary Committees, where debates included some of the identified DI keywords, were analysed.

The timeframe of the analysis is 1992–2018, even though Slovenia joined the EU only in 2004. This timeframe was selected as already during the political debates on Slovenian independence, the fact that the country wanted to adhere to the EU (at the time, the EEC) was very much present. It was therefore expected that Slovenia would put much effort into presenting itself as a suitable potential EU member. Our expectation was that some of the key words linked to the EU would be present even in the pre-accession period.

Polity differentiation

The analysis of prime ministerial speeches in the national parliament on the occasion of addressing the parliament after taking office, or in the European Parliament when taking over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, showed no use of DI-related key words.

With Slovenia taking over the presidency of the EU Council in 2008, Prime Minister Janez Janša addressed the European Parliament on 16 January 2008, presenting the priorities of its EU Council presidency as the first new Member State to hold the office. Yet, in his speech, the Prime Minister did not use any of the phrases associated with DI.

Our qualitative analysis included also the three prime minister's speeches delivered at the inauguration of their mandates. Most of the addresses focused on domestic issues, with the EU barely mentioned. Even though each of the prime ministers represented

⁸ Coalition Agreement Cerar et al., Koalicijski Sporazum o Sodelovanju v Vladi Republike Slovenije za Mandatno Obdobje 2014–2018. September 2014. https://www.strankasmc.si/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/KOALICIJSKI%20SPORAZUM_PARAFIRAN_201400903.pdf; Coalition Agreement Šarec et al., Koalicijski Sporazum o Sodelovanju v Vladi Republike Slovenije za Mandatno Obdobje 2018–2022. August 2018. <https://www.strankalms.si/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Koalicijski-sporazum-o-sodelovanju-v-Vladi-Republike-Slovenije-za-mandatno-obdobje-2018%E2%80%932022.pdf>; Coalition Agreement Janša et al. Koalicijsko Pogodbo o Sodelovanju v Vladi Republike Slovenije 2020–2022. <https://siol.net/galleries/gallery-231927/?image=1>.

⁹ Speech by designated PM (prior to the election) Miro Cerar (2014). <http://www.dz-rs.si/wps/portal/Home/deloDZ/seje/evidenca?mandat=VII&type=sz&uid=21C8F2C86F5604FDC1257D43004A87D0>; Speech by designated PM (prior to the election) Marjan Šarec (2018) <https://www.strankalms.si/nagovor-kandidata-za-predsednika-vlade-rs-marjana-sarca-na-5-izredni-seji-dz/>; Speech by the designated PM (prior to the election) Janez Janša (2020). <https://www.sds.si/novica/janez-jansa-slovenija-s-svojimi-potenciali-zmore-bistveno-vec-od-tega-kar-se-trenutno>.

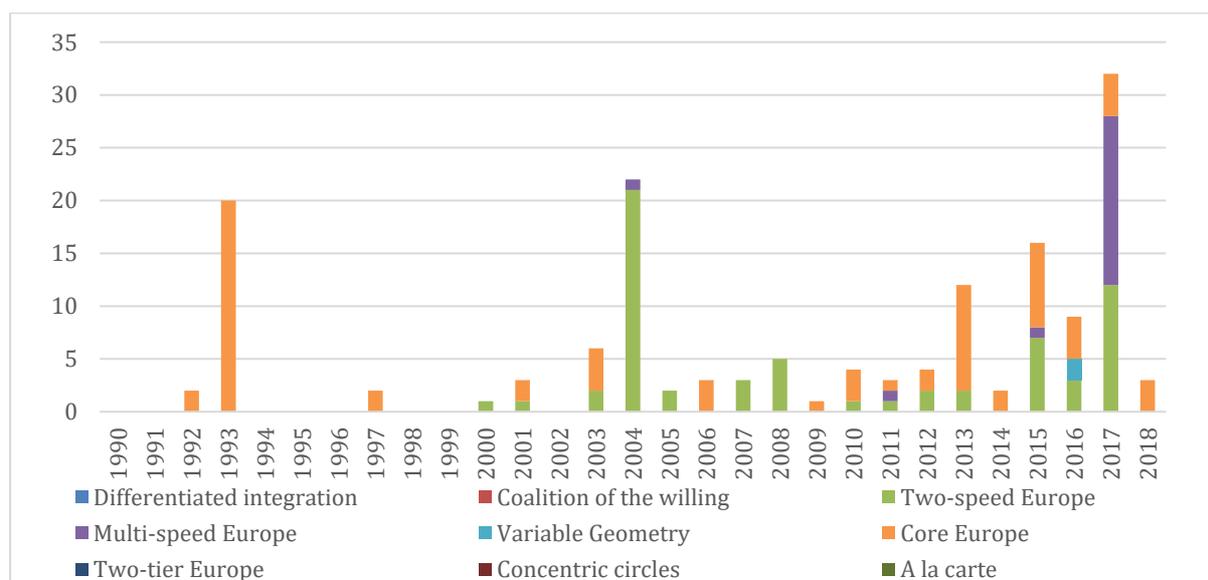
¹⁰ See https://ec.europa.eu/info/future-europe/white-paper-future-europe/white-paper-future-europe-five-scenarios_en.

different political positions, the attitude to the EU did not differ much between them. Once again, there was only a single reference to DI: a two-tier EU was commented on by one of the PMs, and a belief that Slovenia should strive towards staying in the core of the EU was stated.

Three coalition agreements were analysed: the government of Miro Cerar, which was a coalition of three parties and was in office from 2014 to 2018; the government of Marjan Šarec, a minority coalition of five parties, which stepped down at the beginning of 2020; and the current government of Janez Janša, a coalition of four parties expected to be in power until mid- 2022. The documents confirm speculation that DI and even general discussion on the future of the EU and the role of Slovenia within it attracted only limited attention from the government and political parties. What we found is that in the analysed documents, discussions seldom moved beyond standard phrases on the need to strengthen the EU and Slovenian active cooperation.

Moreover, differentiated integration was not a common topic in Slovenian parliamentary debates. The analysis of sessions in the National Assembly did not result in any entries for ‘differentiated integration.’¹¹ As such, there were just three moments in the last 25 years in which conceptual key words related to DI were used more frequently in parliamentary debates (Figure 1). These were the years 1993, 2004 and 2017. What can be seen from these debates is that the concept of different speeds in the EU was always associated with the position of Slovenia. As such, speakers almost never discussed the relevance of possible differentiation for the European future, but mostly only the Slovenian position on these potential developments, urging the country to try to stay with the most dynamic group of countries. In general, a substantial debate about the future of Europe was non-existent. Speakers only referred to the ‘future of Europe’ as something that should be debated and should evolve, but in fact this was just a euphemism for positioning Slovenia in core Europe.

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



¹¹ This can be explained by the fact that in the Slovenian language politicians do not use the term ‘diferencirana integracija/ diferencirano povezovanje’ but instead the term ‘level of integration.’ The search therefore included this term as well. However, even so the results are quite scarce: only two instances were recorded.

Looking at the distribution of the conceptual key words, we found that ‘core Europe,’ ‘two-speed Europe’ and ‘multi-speed Europe’ were the key phrases most used in parliamentary debates, with ‘core Europe’ and ‘two-speed Europe’ representing more than 80% of all the key phrases.

The multi-speed Europe model

The terms ‘two-speed Europe’ and ‘multi-speed Europe’ were debated mostly in the 3rd and 7th terms of the National Assembly. Whereas the 3rd term marked the last phase of Slovenia’s accession to the EU, the 7th term followed the 2015 migration crisis and the period when the five scenarios for the future of the EU were presented.

The analysis done using CLARIN showed that from 1992 to 2018 ‘two-speed Europe’ was used 63 times in debates in the National Assembly. Two more substantial peaks were identified in the legislative terms 2000–2004 and 2014–2018. What is interesting is that prior to Slovenian membership of the EU, and again a decade later, Slovenian politicians and decision-makers used the term ‘two speed Europe’ for differently intensified integration. However, in all the interventions Slovenia ‘wanted’ to be part of the countries in the “first-speed” or the core Europe. All the parties agreed that Slovenia should avoid being a part of a ‘second-speed’ Europe. There was a consensus in the National Assembly that Slovenia should accelerate its adoption of various EU regulations and policies, so as to be an integral part of core Europe.

In the Slovenian case, ‘two-speed Europe’ is also used as a synonym for three-, four- or multi-speed Europe. Therefore, the key phrase ‘multi-speed Europe’ was found in few debates in the National Assembly. Of 19 entries, 17 were in the last legislative period (2014–2018). This relatively high number of hits can be attributed to the fact that there was a special session of the Parliamentary Committee on European Affairs discussing the White Paper in June 2017.¹² In this session, ‘multi-speed Europe’ was mentioned six times by a scholar from the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Ljubljana in his speech, seven times by centre-right party members of parliament (MPs) and three times by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. ‘Multi-speed Europe’ was mostly linked to a negative perception, suggesting that development of the EU in this direction is not to be supported.

In sum, with regard to **two-speed or multi-speed EU**, we can detect a negative connotation associated with these developments, and particularly concern as to whether the new Member States like Slovenia would be able to participate fully in what was considered a more privileged first-tier group of countries.

The multi-end Europe model

On the other hand, debate on ‘core Europe’ was relevant mostly in the 1st term of the National Assembly (1992–1996) when Slovenia started its path towards EU integration, and during the 7th term (2014–2018) when the PM decided that Slovenia should be part of the ‘core countries’ and personally relied on the three Benelux Prime Ministers to support Slovenia in this attempt. This means that the Slovenian

¹² This is presented in detail in the next section.

government coordinated its activities at the EU level with the three Benelux countries.¹³

Maybe the most explicit reference to DI was found in the coalition agreement in August 2018, where it states:

“The strategic interest of Slovenia is to be in the core of the EU, which will guarantee equal conditions for development. Slovenia will advocate for a further deepening of the European Monetary Union, a strengthening of the Common Foreign and Security Policy with its upgrading to a common defence policy, along with respect for the Schengen system and the protection of the EU external borders.”

The Prime Minister, Marjan Šarec, in his address on 17 August 2018 explicitly used the term ‘two-tier Europe’:

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

Recent developments: Future of Europe and Slovenia’s Council Presidency

We were also interested in whether debates on differentiated integration took place in the context of wider debates on the ‘future of Europe’ (FoE). To this end, the frequency of the conceptual key words was compared to the frequency of the key phrase ‘future of Europe.’ In the Slovenian case, the period in which their co-occurrence was mostly relevant was 2000–2004. This was the case first because Slovenia was joining the EU, and second because the Convention on the future of Europe was ongoing. The debates in that period were mostly linked to the ‘future (of Slovenia) in Europe.’ Speakers used ‘future of Europe’ to debate Slovenia’s accession rather than issues actually related to the future of the EU. The period 2005–2008 is mostly linked to the ratification of the Constitution of the EU (and later the Lisbon Treaty) and to the then forthcoming (2008) Slovenian presidency of the Council of the EU. 2017 was the next peak of the key phrase ‘future of Europe.’ This can be attributed mostly to the presentation of the *White Paper on the future of Europe* in the Parliamentary Committee of European Affairs (OZEU) and also to public discussion of the five scenarios. Even this dedicated discussion showed that the terms identified as relating to DI were not commonly used. In the discussion, only a few academics and politicians participated. Their positions can be grouped into the following categories:

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

¹³ ‘Core Europe’ is untranslatable in Slovenian. This is why in Slovenian EU jargon the synonym ‘Benelux (+ Germany + France)’ is used.

inequality among the member countries and gives an even stronger voice to the larger members.

Much more critical towards the EU is the current Prime Minister Janez Janša. In his inaugural address on 13 March 2020 he spoke in particular about the tasks facing Slovenia with regard to the forthcoming presidency of the EU Council.¹⁴ According to his opinion, one cannot expect there to be equality in the EU:

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

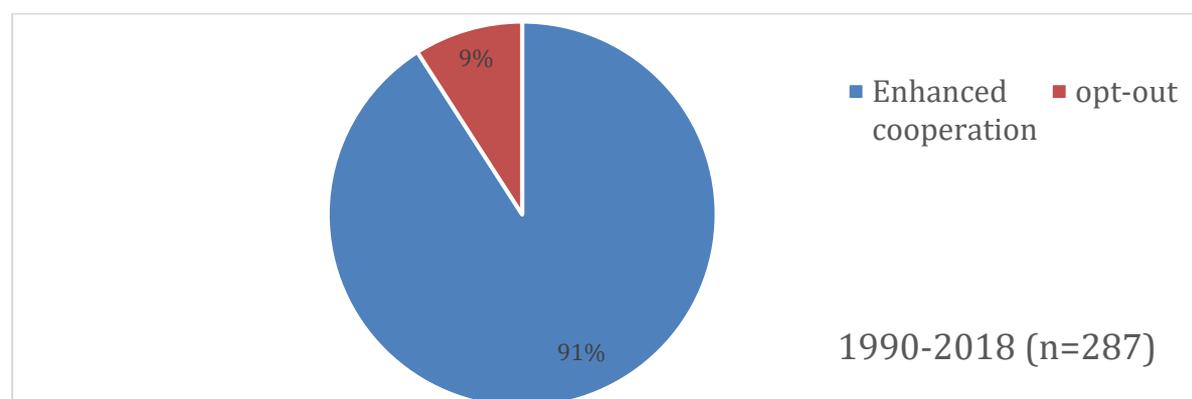
Janša cited his experience during the Council presidency, recalling that if a proposal came from a smaller country, the Council administration often found a number of legal obstacles to its implementation. However, once one of the larger countries sponsored the proposal, the legal counterarguments evaporated.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

We can conclude that the attitude towards DI by various Slovenian governments is negative, since there is a feeling that such developments may leave smaller, economically and politically weaker countries out of some important decision-making processes. Yet, especially in academic circles, hardly anyone shares the belief that Slovenian political ambition to belong to the core is realistic. The key reason for such doubts is the lack of capacity to play an important role.

Policy differentiation and the mechanisms of differentiation

The analysis now moves from polity differentiation to a discussion of policy differentiation and the two main instruments: enhanced cooperation and opt-outs. Neither term was used much in parliamentary discussions: especially the term “opt-out” was hardly ever used (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 Frequency of enhanced cooperation and opt-outs in parliamentary debates



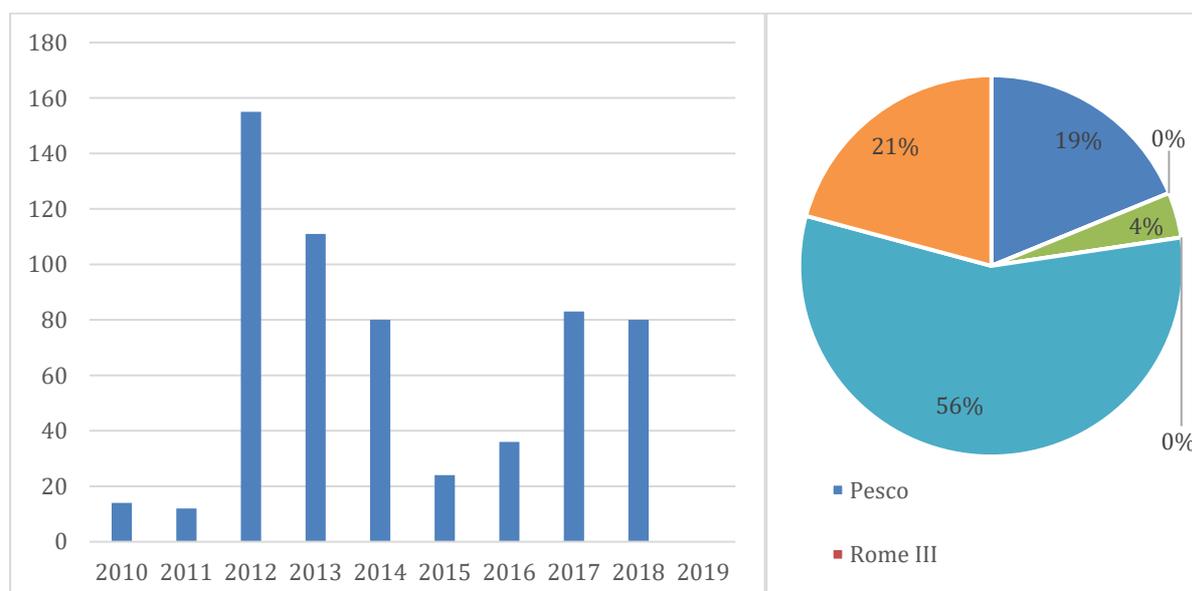
The key DI mechanism phrases did not appear in parliamentary debates before the year 2000. In 2007, opt-outs were mentioned 18 times, representing 70% of all

¹⁴The first Slovenian presidency in the first semester of 2008 was during the period of his government as well.

mentions of opt-outs over the last 25 years. The term ‘enhanced co-operation’ was by far the most frequent in Slovenian parliamentary debates.

Looking at which policies with enhanced cooperation are discussed (Figure 3), we find that the financial transaction tax¹⁵ was an issue in 2012, 2013 and 2014, while the situation reversed in 2017 when the issues of the European public prosecutor¹⁶ and PESCO¹⁷ became more visible. For 2018, the high numbers can only be attributed to PESCO. The Unitary Patent was mentioned for the first time in 2012 and reached a peak in 2016. After that, there were no more entries in parliamentary debates. Mentions of the Unitary Patent represented 4% of the total references to DI instances. Finally, other instances of enhanced co-operation, such as Rome III, were not mentioned in parliamentary debates. Overall, enhanced cooperation policies were most frequently discussed between 2012 and 2014 and in 2017 and 2018 (Figure 3). The first period was when Slovenia was dealing with a relatively harsh economic crisis. At that time, debates were mostly linked to issues related to the crisis and especially to its resolution. In 2017 and 2018, the debate on enhanced co-operation was linked to Juncker’s five scenarios and to co-operation with ‘core Europe’ countries.

Figure 3 Breakdown of enhanced cooperation policies, 1990–2018 (n= 597)



International agreements among EU Member States are a third mechanism through which differentiation takes place. Figure 4 shows that references to these so-called inter-se agreements reached the highest frequency in 2017. This was mostly on account of the debate on the Single Resolution Mechanism (SRM) in Slovenia. These debates were mostly linked to the issue of the bailout of Slovenian banks in 2013. Due to the economic and financial crisis, the Bratušek government made a commitment to the European Commission that Slovenia would privatise all banks that were still state-

¹⁵ “The objective of the Financial Transaction Tax (FTT) is to ensure that the financial sector makes a fair contribution to national tax revenues. It is also intended to discourage transactions that do not enhance the efficient allocation of resources by the financial markets” (Karaboycheva 2021).

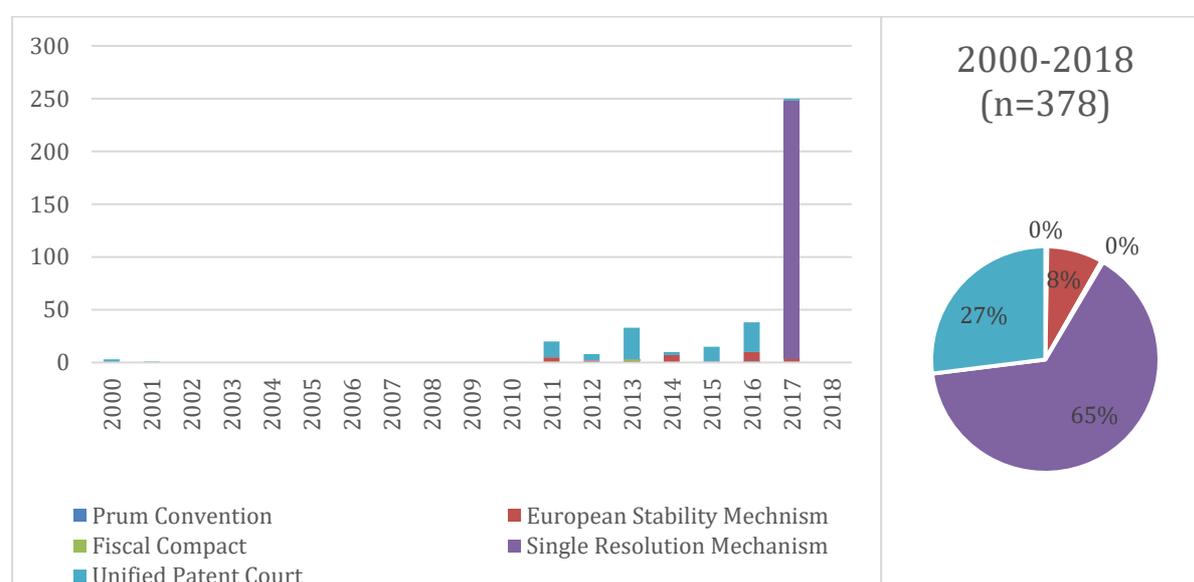
¹⁶ The European Public Prosecutor Office is an independent Union body competent to fight crimes against the Union budget (see https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/cross-border-cases/judicial-cooperation/networks-and-bodies-supporting-judicial-cooperation/european-public-prosecutors-office_en).

¹⁷ PESCO stays for a Permanent Structured Cooperation, part of the EU security and defence policy, formed in 2017. See more at <https://pesco.europa.eu/>.

owned by 2018. As the next Cerar's government (2014–2018) accelerated the process of bank privatisation in 2017, this was also reflected in parliamentary debates. Therefore, the SRM was mentioned several times in the context of Slovenian bank privatisation, and it de facto had little to do with the attitude towards inter-se agreements. Thus, the debate was more related to its unfairness and conditionality regarding Slovenian economic policy.

The other two inter-se agreements important in parliamentary debates were the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) and the Unitary Patent Court. However, in relative terms, the latter was more relevant for parliamentarians, with 102 entries found for it and only 30 for the ESM. The Prüm Convention¹⁸ was mentioned only once (by the Minister of the Interior, who called it the Prüm Treaty). Similarly, the fiscal compact was mentioned once by the Minister of Finance.

Figure 4 *The salience inter se agreements in parliamentary debates*



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

¹⁸ Prüm Convention deals with the “cross-border cooperation, particularly in combating terrorism, cross-border crime and illegal migration” (see at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32008D0615&rid=4>).

Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis has shown that differentiated integration and the related instruments are not a topic which receives much attention in Slovenia. In spite of the importance the issue of differentiated integration bears for small, relatively less developed countries, surprisingly little attention is being paid to the issue by the government or by the citizens. At most, the discussion focuses on the position of Slovenia within the EU of different “speeds”.

The government’s position on DI can barely be identified from the few references made to DI. In fact, the analysis has shown that, overall, the government position on European issues is not as clear and is surprisingly absent from Slovenian politics. If on one hand we see concern about not belonging to the “core”, we are surprised by the limited understanding of the DI and lack of engagement in the discussions on DI. One would expect a more pro-active stance in the light of the fact that Slovenia has been a full member of the European Union since 2004 and joined the Union with significant public support. Discussion of the EU and the Slovenian position within it is absent in government documents such as coalition agreements and inaugural speeches by prime ministers. In each of these texts, we could identify a single, or at most two, paragraphs related to the EU. In addition, the DI issue is only mentioned indirectly – at most, the position identified in these documents is that Slovenia should maintain its stance in favour of close integration of the Member States, strengthening the EU, and with active participation by Slovenia in all EU policies.

The findings suggest that the complexity of the EU and its politics are not at the forefront of domestic political discussion. One of the possible explanations might be that Slovenia is still a relatively young state, and so much political attention is devoted to the internal issues of building institutions, policies and government practice within the country. The other reason may be that the voters have been satisfied with the fact that Slovenia has successfully joined the EU, the euro and Schengen, and that all of these make us feel sufficiently “European”. Developments beyond this may not be of significant interest to the public and are often poorly understood even by those who should know better, meaning the members of the national parliament. This is reflected in our research where the debates have shown limited knowledge of the topics related to specific DI mechanisms, which are therefore not discussed.

The question is who should be interested in raising the level of awareness on the topics related to the future of the EU. It seems the political parties in Slovenia do not see discussions on the EU as arenas where political points among the voters can be scored. In a small member country, the primary focus is on domestic issues, and only on those effects of DI which may relate to the national interest. This means that we cannot expect the government to invest in popularisation of the EU, at least not beyond very basic information. Could one expect the European Commission to play a more pro-active role? The Commission is engaged in various forms of communications, from elementary school to promotion of special events like the Conference on the Future of Europe. The intricate dilemmas of DI, where any relevant discussion requires a substantial amount of knowledge on the functioning of the EU, seem to be absent in Slovenia.

References

- Erjavec, T. & Pančur, A. (2020). The siParl corpus of Slovenian parliamentary proceedings. In D. Fišer, M. Eskevich & F. de Jong (Eds.). *Proceedings of the Workshop on Creating, Using and Linking of Parliamentary Corpora with Other Types of Political Discourse (ParlaCLARIN II)* (pp. 28-34). Paris: European Language Resources Association.
- Holzinger, K. & Schimmelfennig, F. (2012). Differentiated Integration in the European Union. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 19(2), 292-305.
- Karaboycheva, M. (2021). *Financial Transaction Tax*.
<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-deeper-and-fairer-internal-market-with-a-strengthened-industrial-base-taxation/file-financial-transaction-tax>.
- Leuffen, D., Rittberger, B. & Schimmelfennig, F. (2013). *Differentiated Integration: Explaining Variation in the European Union*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pančur, A., Erjavec, T., Ojsteršek, M., Šorn, M. & Blaj Hribar, N. (2020). *About Clarin SiPARL2.0*. <https://www.clarin.si/repository/xmlui/handle/11356/1300>.
- Rittberger, B. & Schimmelfennig, F. (2015). Kontinuität Und Divergenz. Die Eurokrise Und Die Entwicklung Europäischer Integration in Der Europaforschung. *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 56(3), 389-405.
- Schimmelfennig, F. & Winzen, T. (2020). *Ever Looser Union? Differentiated European Integration*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stubb, A. (1996). A Categorization of Differentiated Integration. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 34(2), 283-295.
- Telle, S., Brunazzo, M. & Doidge, M. (2021). Introduction. The Member States and Differentiated Integration in the European Union. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of European Studies*, 13(3).

Appendix 1

Keywords of DI

Keyword	Slovenian translation	Notes
Differentiated integration	Diferencirana integracija, diferencirano povezovanje	
Coalition of the willing	Koalicija voljnih	The keyword is in Slovenia linked only to the Iraqi war.
Two-speed Europe	EU/Evropa dveh hitrosti	
Multi-speed Europe	EU/Evropa več(ih) hitrosti	
Variable geometry	Variabilna geometrija, variabilno povezovanje	
Core Europe	Države Beneluksa (+Nemčija+Francija)	Usually core Europe in Slovenian is “Benelux countries” (države Beneluksa) or expanded with Germany and France (+Nemčija+Francija)
Two-tier Europe	Dvotirna Evropa/EU	
Concentric circles	Koncentrični krogi	In 2011 the Slovenian MFA presented the strategy that would base Slovenian FP on concentric circles. These entries were not taken into consideration.
à la carte	à la carte	
Future of Europe	Prihodnost Evrope/EU	
Enhanced cooperation	Okrepljeno sodelovanje	
opt-out	opt-out	Does not have an established translation
Pesco	PESCO or PESKO	
Rome III	Rome III	
Unitary patent	Enotni patent	
Matrimonial property regimes	n.a.	
Financial Transaction Tax	Davek na finančne transakcije	
European Public Prosecutor	Javni tožilec EU, Evropski javni tožilec	
Schengen	Schengen, Šengen	
Economic and Monetary Union	Ekonomska in monetarna unija, EMU	
Charter of Fundamental Rights	Listina temeljnih pravic	
Prüm Convention	Prumska pogodba	
European Stability Mechanism	ESM, Evropski stabilnostni mehanizem	
Fiscal Compact	Fiskalni pakt	
Single Resolution Mechanism	Enotni finančni mehanizem	
Unified Patent Court	Enotni patent	

European Economic Area	EGS, Evropsko gospodarsko/ekonomsko območje, EEA
Customs Union + Turkey	Carinska unija + Turčija
Eastern Partnership	Vzhodno partnerstvo
Euromed	Euromed