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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 – Estonia

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EUI Working Paper **RSCAS** 2020/92

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ISSN 1028-3625

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Published in December 2020 by the European University Institute.
Badia Fiesolana, via dei Roccettini 9
I – 50014 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)
Italy

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

Abstract

This paper studies the salience of and government positions towards differentiated integration (DI) in the European Union in Estonian politics. As the keyword analysis reveals, conceptual debates over DI occur very rarely in Estonia and are usually invoked by specific events, such as ratifying the Lisbon Treaty, joining the eurozone or holding the European Council presidency. On the level of specific DI instances, the salience was much higher, often reflecting the importance of certain policies in Estonian foreign policy agenda or a high level of internal polarization over some specific DI policy. Regarding government's position towards DI, there has been a notable improvement over the years. In the first years after joining the EU in 2004, Estonian politicians very clearly negative towards DI, mostly due to apparent fear of remaining into the slower less integrated group of countries. After joining the eurozone in 2011, the government made a swift change in their position and started showing much more optimism towards certain forms of DI. This rather positive position remained mostly unaltered throughout the last decade, although the government politicians have always emphasised that their first preference is for an EU that moves on together with all the Member States.

Keywords

Differentiated integration; European Union; Estonia

Summary of Results

I. Saliency

The analysis reveals that at the conceptual level differentiated integration (DI) is a very low-saliency issue in Estonian politics. During the 2004-2020 time period, the conceptual key words referring to DI models were almost completely absent from government coalition agreements, PM first speeches, EC presidency speeches and government annual EU policy statements. In parliamentary debates, DI models were mentioned slightly fewer than 100 times during the 16-year period. Conceptual debates on DI occurred in 2006-2008 with regard to the EU Constitution and the Lisbon Treaty and in 2017 when Estonia for the first time held the European Council presidency. The highest peak in the saliency of DI conceptual key words, however, occurred in 2011, when Estonia joined the eurozone and the Prime Minister invoked a debate by laying out the government's new position on DI.

Specific DI instances, on the other hand, occasionally gained very high saliency in political statements and debates. In some cases, this high saliency reflected the importance of certain policies in Estonian foreign policy priorities. The best example of such a DI policy is the Eastern Partnership, which was often mentioned in both specific EU-related speeches/debates and in parliamentary debates, as due to its geopolitical position Estonia prioritised this initiative very highly. In other instances, the high saliency reflected strong internal polarisation over a specific DI policy. This was most prominently the case regarding the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), which was the most salient DI key phrase during the period studied, with almost 2000 mentions in parliamentary debates.

II. Position

The position of Estonian governments regarding DI went through a notable transformation over the time period studied. After joining the EU in 2004, Estonia soon started debating the EU Constitution and Lisbon treaty. Analysis of these debates reveals a highly negative attitude to DI, partly based on conceptual/ideological opposition but probably even more due to fear of remaining in the slower peripheral group of countries. After emerging rapidly from the economic crisis and adopting the euro currency in 2011, this attitude changed and the then PM A. Ansip took the position that the emergence of a core Europe was not necessarily a bad development for Estonia, and that Estonia could and should be part of this core. When the hitherto opposition Centre Party took the PM position in 2016, it did not invoke any noticeable change in this position. However, while expressing this more positive position regarding DI, government politicians have always emphasised that their first preference is for an EU that moves on together with all the Member States. Furthermore, they tend to blur the difference between multiple speeds and multiple endpoints, advocating for 'temporary' cores that are open to those that want to join later.

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1. Introduction

This report investigates the salience of differentiated integration (DI) in Estonian government discourse between 1990 and 2020. It also probes into the position of Estonian governments on the issue of DI in selected peak-salience years (2006-2008, 2011-2012, 2017-2020).

The report distinguishes three levels of abstraction in government discourse on DI. **First**, two different models of DI are distinguished at the conceptual level. On the one hand, the ‘multi-speed EU’ model depicts DI as a temporary phenomenon and implies that all 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 cooperation 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 cooperation allows a MS to integrate more than other MSs while ‘opt-outs’ allow a Member State to integrate less than other MSs. **Finally**, the analysis looks at various instances of differentiated policies and policy fields. A total of twenty-one instances are included in the analysis. They are grouped in four different categories: (a) instances of enhanced cooperation; (b) instances of opt-out policy fields; (c) instances of inter se agreements; and (d) instances of external agreements. Inter se agreements are agreements which EU Member States conclude outside the framework of the European Union. External agreements are agreements between the EU and non-EU states.

The results are based on an analysis of various government documents (Appendix 1). A diverse range of documents were analysed for this country report. **First**, I retrieved all the government coalition agreements since 2003, which is the year Estonia held its EU accession referendum. Government coalitions in Estonia have often collapsed in the middle of a parliamentary term leading to the formation of a new government and a new coalition agreement. Therefore, although the period studied covers five parliamentary terms (the fifth one has been ongoing since 2019), the number of coalition agreements analysed is eight. **Second**, I retrieved the first speeches (and the following debates) by the PM candidates in the parliament. After the government coalition has been agreed on after an election, the presumptive PM will introduce the coalition agreement before the parliament and ask for a mandate to form the government. The speech is followed by a debate and a vote, where the candidate must obtain (and always has) the support of a parliamentary majority. Therefore, eight PM speeches corresponding to the coalition agreements were also analysed. **Third**, the analysis includes the first European Council presidency (July-Dec 2017) speech (and the following debate) in the Estonian and the European parliaments. **Fourth**, I analysed the ‘Future of Europe’ speech by the Estonian PM in the European Parliament.¹ A **fifth** type of documents analysed are the annual statements in the parliament on the government’s EU policy since 2004. The speeches are held at the end of the year (November or December) and usually shortly before the EU Supreme Council. However, there is no tradition in Estonian politics of giving specific pre- and post-council statements that are stored in a repository. **Finally**, I retrieved the full plenary parliamentary² debates in which any of the DI conceptual key words were mentioned.

The salience of DI models, DI mechanisms and DI instances is assessed by counting key words in the above-mentioned documents (Appendix 2). The assumption is that the more a government talks

¹ I did not find any find that there was a PM speech during the citizen consultations, which in Estonia were done online and attracted a very small number of participants.

² Parliamentary committee debates are not released to the public in Estonia.

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. Regarding the government's position, the results are based on a manual attitude analysis of parliamentary debates. To this end, references to DI key words in parliamentary debates were manually coded as negative, neutral or positive.

To translate all the terms from English to Estonian, I mostly relied on the Linguee dictionary,³ which contains many translations of different EU documents. Additionally, I consulted the EU Vocabularies website⁴ and also browsed the Estonian media to find references to specific terms. For example, the term 'enhanced cooperation' is often translated differently into Estonian, with at least three common expressions to translate the word 'enhanced.' Therefore, I tried different translations of the key words to capture as many of the actual mentions as possible. In some cases, the original English phrase was used in debates (e.g. 'opt-out') and I also recorded these search hits.

The second section of the report details the results of the salience analysis. The third section details the results of the position analysis.

2. The salience of DI

In the first phase of the analysis, all the previously listed key words were counted in the documents from categories 1 to 5 (see Appendix 1). As the number of DI key words used in these documents was generally very low, I divided the documents into three groups:

- a) Documents that mainly relate to the domestic politics of the country: government coalition agreements (category 1) and first speeches (and the following debates) by the PM in the parliament (category 2). Altogether, these amount to 16 documents, 8 for each category.
- b) Documents that directly relate to EU politics: EC presidency speeches (and the following debates) by the PM in the national and European parliaments (category 3), the 'Future of Europe' speech (and the following debate) by the PM in the European Parliament (category 4) and Prime Ministers' annual presentations on the government's EU policy since 2004 (category 5). In sum, 19 directly EU-related documents were analysed.
- c) The third group consists of the minutes of all full plenary debates in the Estonian parliament between 2004 and 2020.

2.1 DI in domestic political discourse

None of the key words relating to DI models or mechanisms were used in the government coalition agreements and the PM first speeches in the parliament. The terms 'Europe' and 'European Union' (or EU) are, however, mentioned quite often in the programmes and speeches. Europe and the EU are mentioned in all the documents regarding many different policies. The key words are especially salient in the foreign policy sections of the coalition agreements and in 2015 – the agreement with the highest number (74) of Europe/EU references – even a whole section was named "Foreign and European Union policy." In the 2019 coalition agreement, the references to Europe/the EU drop to the lowest number of mentions (12), although the length of the document is similar to that of the 2015 agreement. This could be explained by changes in the government composition: in 2016, the long rule of the pro-European right-liberal Reform Party ended and the centre-left Centre Party took the PM position. After 2019, it formed a new coalition with the right-conservative Pro Patria Union and the right-populist and highly Eurosceptic EKRE. Although the other two parties in the coalition do not show notable signs of Euroscepticism, they had to find common ground with EKRE and it appears that EU topics were mostly

³ <https://www.linguee.com/>

⁴ <https://op.europa.eu/et/web/eu-vocabularies>

ignored. In addition, it is clearly stated in the document that the government sees the EU as a union of independent states, not as a federation (p. 4). While the government coalition tried to avoid the EU topic, the opposition MPs vigorously brought it up in the debate following the speech by the PM candidate in the parliament. Europe/the EU was mentioned 7 times during the PM candidate's speech and 29 times in the following debate.

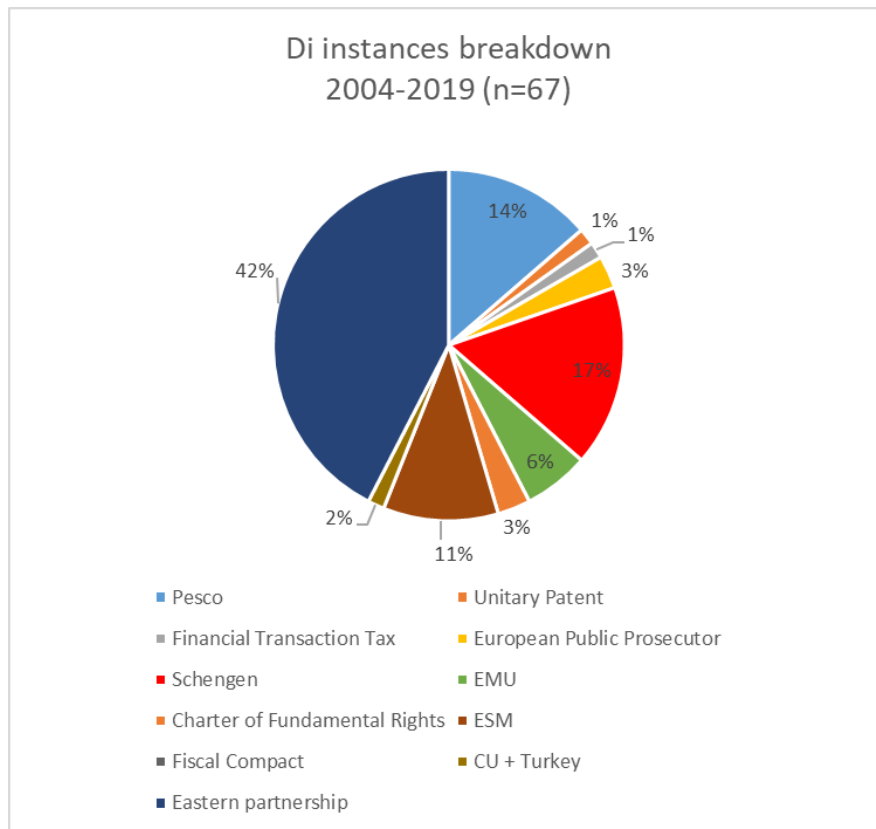
Looking at specific DI instances in government coalition agreements, PM speeches and the following debates, the number of search hits is also low, but certain patterns can be seen. A total of 56% of the 18 DI instances were references to the Eastern Partnership – a policy that Estonian governments have always prioritised (Appendix 3). Since 2011, the Eastern Partnership has been mentioned in every coalition agreement, always emphasising the fact that Estonia supports a strengthening and broadening of this policy. Schengen is mentioned five times, but all the references date back to the year 2005, when Estonia was preparing to enter the free movement area and working on aligning its legislation with Schengen requirements. Common Security and Defence Policy is mentioned twice in coalition agreements and EMU came up once during a debate after a PM's first speech. No other DI instances are mentioned in the previously mentioned documents.

2.2 DI in European politics discourse

Moving on to documents that directly relate to EU politics (categories 3 to 5 in Appendix 1), DI models and mechanisms are mentioned on a few occasions, albeit very rarely. Altogether, there are six references to DI models and four to DI mechanisms. The two key phrases that are mentioned multiple times are 'core Europe' and 'enhanced cooperation.' 'Core Europe' is mentioned twice in the EC presidency speech by the Estonian PM and also came up in the PM's annual EU policy presentations. The four references to 'enhanced cooperation' all occur in the annual presentations. Additionally, 'multispeed Europe' is mentioned once during the debate following the PM's FoE speech in the European Parliament and 'Europe à la carte' during the annual presentation in 2011. Appendix 4 summarises the 10 references to DI models and mechanisms in EU-related documents.

Subsequently, I counted references to DI instances in the previously described EU-related documents (categories 3 to 5). Altogether, 67 search hits were recorded, and the results presented in Figure 3 give a good overview of the Estonian government's priorities with regard to EU policies. Similarly to coalition agreements and PM first speeches, the 'Eastern Partnership' is clearly the most salient key phrase, amounting to 42% of the total of 67 DI instance references. The term came up 14 times already in the speech and debate on the priorities of Estonia's EC presidency term and is mentioned in the PM's presidency speech in both the national and the European Parliament. This clearly demonstrates the importance of this policy for Estonian governments, both in internal parliamentary discussions and in external communication at the EU level. The second key word that receives a double-digit number of mentions is 'Schengen,' which Estonia together with the other 2004 accession wave countries joined in 2007. This was a very important and highly anticipated development for many Estonians, as it made it much easier to work/travel abroad and was another step toward achieving higher integration in the European community while distancing Estonia from the Russian sphere of influence – something that Estonian governments have prioritised since regaining independence in 1991. The third most mentioned key word regarding DI instances is Pesco, with 9 references (14%), reflecting the fact that Estonia as a former Soviet Union country on the eastern border of the EU has always advocated for more defence co-operation among the European countries. The European Stability Mechanism is mentioned 7 times, all of them in PM annual statements on the government's EU policy in the Estonian parliament. ESM was an issue that caused very heated debates in the Estonian parliament and will be discussed more later in this report when the salience of the key words in parliamentary debates is analysed. Finally, Figure 3 indicates that a few other DI instances were mentioned once or twice in these 19 documents.

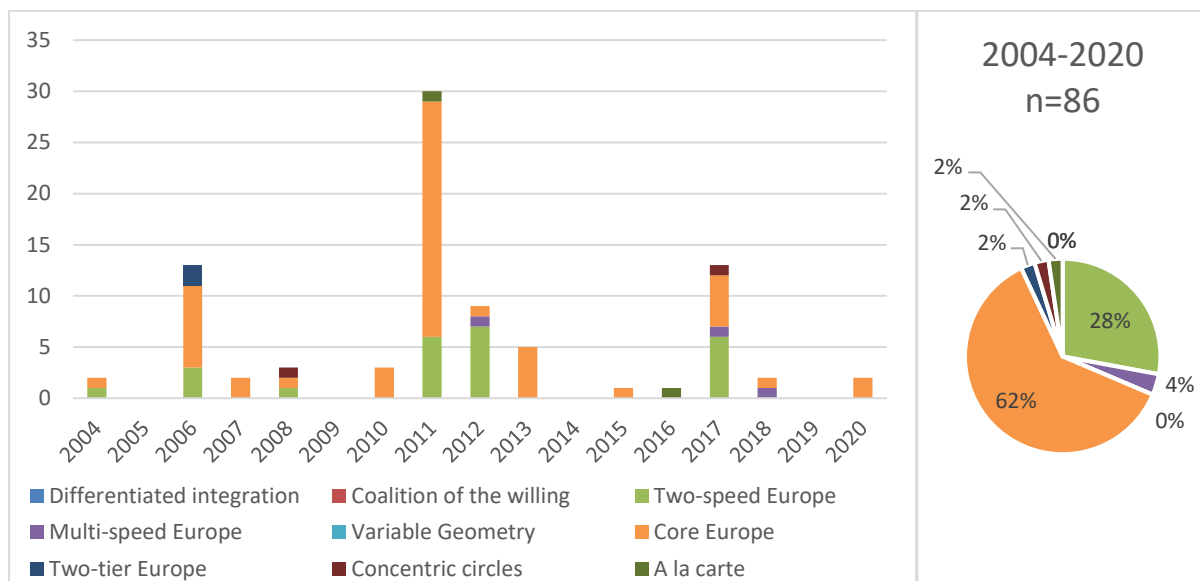
Figure 1 - DI instances in EU-related speeches and debates (document categories 3 to 5)



2.3 Parliamentary debates

Next, the analysis focuses on (full plenary) parliamentary debates in the Estonian single-chamber parliament. All three sets of key words were searched for separately for the time period 2004 to 2020. I begin by analysing the references to the conceptual key words pertaining to DI models. As Figure 2 illustrates, DI is not often discussed at the conceptual level in the Estonian parliament. In the whole 16-year time period, 86 search hits for DI models were recorded, and only in three individual years do we see double-digit numbers of references to the key words. The peaks in salience occur at the beginning (2006), in the middle (2011) and at the end (2017) of the period studied. The first peak in 2006 resulted from debates on ratifying the EU Constitution in the Estonian parliament, while the 2017 peak can be linked to the Future of Europe debates. The highest peak in the whole period (2011), however, does not seem to be so directly connected to external motivators but appears to relate to certain post-economic-crisis attitudes. More precisely, the 2011 peak is due to one foreign policy debate in which the then PM of Estonia, A. Ansip, raised the idea that the emergence of a certain core in the EU was not necessarily a bad thing and Estonia should strive to be included in this group of countries that wants to move on faster and further. This statement went against the established perception in Estonian politics according to which Estonia is somewhat in the periphery of the EU and is bound to be left out of ‘core Europe.’ Therefore, it invoked a lively debate in which the term ‘core Europe’ or ‘EU core(s)’ was mentioned over 20 times. This debate will be analysed more thoroughly in the qualitative analysis of the government’s DI position.

Figure 2 - Salience of conceptual key words in parliamentary debates



As the breakdown of DI models indicates, two key phrases clearly stand out in terms of salience. The most used key phrase by far is ‘core Europe’ in its different forms, amounting to over 60% of all the search hits. The second term that comes up in debates more often is ‘two-speed Europe,’ whereas other key words are mentioned only in very few instances or not at all. Additionally, the term ‘differentiated integration’ itself was never mentioned in the debates. It can only be found in some official EU documents in Estonian. Examining the three peak years – 2006, 2011 and 2017 – reveals that in the first two years ‘core Europe’ was overwhelmingly the most used key phrase (Appendix 5). In 2017, however, two-speed Europe is mentioned six times, while ‘core Europe’ was referred to on five occasions, indicating that the term ‘two-speed Europe’ has become somewhat more visible in debates over time.

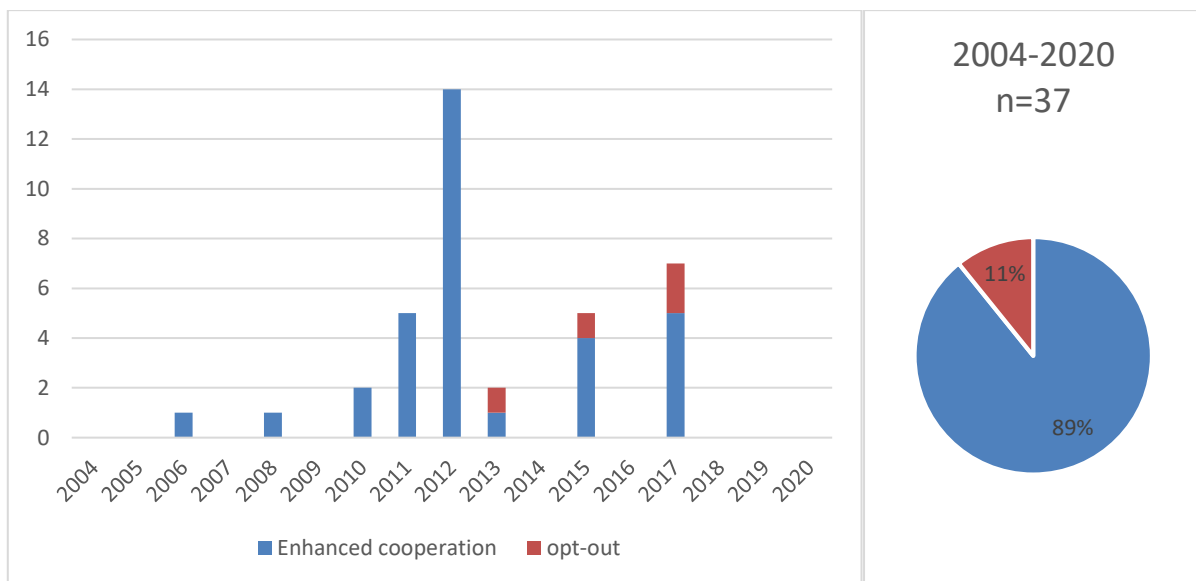
Although at the theoretical level ‘core Europe’ should refer to a multi-end Europe, while two-speed Europe indicates different paces of integration among Member States, in the actual debates this theoretical distinction seems to be blurred. When talking about core Europe, Estonian politicians often emphasise that they mean it as a temporary situation and eventually all the Member States should follow up (this phenomenon will also be discussed later in the qualitative analysis). Therefore, although the numbers indicate that different EU endpoints are discussed more than different speeds, it appears that the politicians in reality think and talk about a core Europe in terms of a different pace of integration.

This report also looks at the salience of conceptual key words related to the term ‘Future of Europe’ (Appendix 6). This reveals a rough correspondence regarding the peaks, at least for 2006 and 2017, which were the years when the FoE was mentioned most. As for 2011, the high salience of conceptual key words is not matched with the FoE. However, the FoE was mentioned over 20 times in 2012. As stated earlier, the high salience of key words in 2011 was mostly due to one specific debate on the concept of core Europe. In conjunction with the FoE, it appears that the salience of DI and the future of the European Union topics was generally higher in 2011-2012, which is likely to be connected with the financial crisis in several EU countries that followed the economic crisis. Topics like unity and solidarity came up more during that time, as countries had to pledge their own taxpayers’ money to bail out other states.

Subsequently, the analysis moves from DI models to DI mechanisms, i.e. the salience of the terms ‘enhanced cooperation’ and ‘opt out.’ As Figure 3 demonstrates, DI mechanisms were mentioned very rarely in Estonian parliamentary debates. Altogether, just 37 search hits were recorded for the period 2004 to 2020. The only notable peak year was 2012, when DI mechanisms were mentioned 14 times, mostly in the context of the proposed financial transaction tax.

As explained earlier, there is no established translation for ‘opt out’ in Estonian. In a few instances, the original English term was used in parliamentary debates, but this is a rather rare occurrence. It is possible that some specific opt outs (e.g. some countries opting out from entering the eurozone) were mentioned on some occasions, but it was not possible to systematically count these instances. Therefore, ‘enhanced’ cooperation is clearly a more salient key word, with 33 references to it and opt-out being mentioned only four times. Although the lack of an established translation might lead to somewhat unreliable results, it is quite likely that enhanced cooperation was discussed more in the Estonian context as Estonia has never seriously considered opting out of EU policies and the low salience of this key word is, therefore, not unexpected. Additionally, in the highest peak year, 2012, all 14 DI mechanism references were related to enhanced cooperation. Therefore, the peak years will not be presented in separate figures.

Figure 3 - Salience of DI mechanisms in parliamentary debates



Next, the analysis focuses on specific DI instances. First, enhanced cooperation was divided into six instances (see the right-hand panel of Figure 4). There were no references to enhanced cooperation instances before 2011, but after then six policies were mentioned on 159 occasions. As the left-hand panel of Figure 9 demonstrates, there were two peak years when enhanced cooperation instances were mentioned much more often: 2012 and 2017. The 2012 peak was mostly due to the financial transaction tax, which often came up in debates on moving on with EU integration in the post-crisis context. In 2017, a wider set of instances were more often mentioned, which is to be expected as several of these policies were only implemented around that time. The financial transaction tax was overall the most salient enhanced cooperation policy and in 2012 it was mentioned 70 times. The Unitary Patent, the European Public Prosecutor, Pesco and Rome III were mentioned on 15-30 occasions each, whereas matrimonial property regimes were referred to only twice. This high salience of the financial transaction tax could be considered somewhat surprising as Estonia was never a country that took a very strong position regarding the proposed policy and it did not appear to be a very important topic in public debates, or as the then PM T. Rõivas put it in 2014, “Our position is and has always been constructive. We are not the ones who have been driving this process overtly enthusiastically, but we are also not the ones blocking it” (Debate on the EU policy of the Estonian government, 04.11.2014 in the Estonian parliament).

Figure 4 – Salience of instances of enhanced cooperation in parliamentary debates

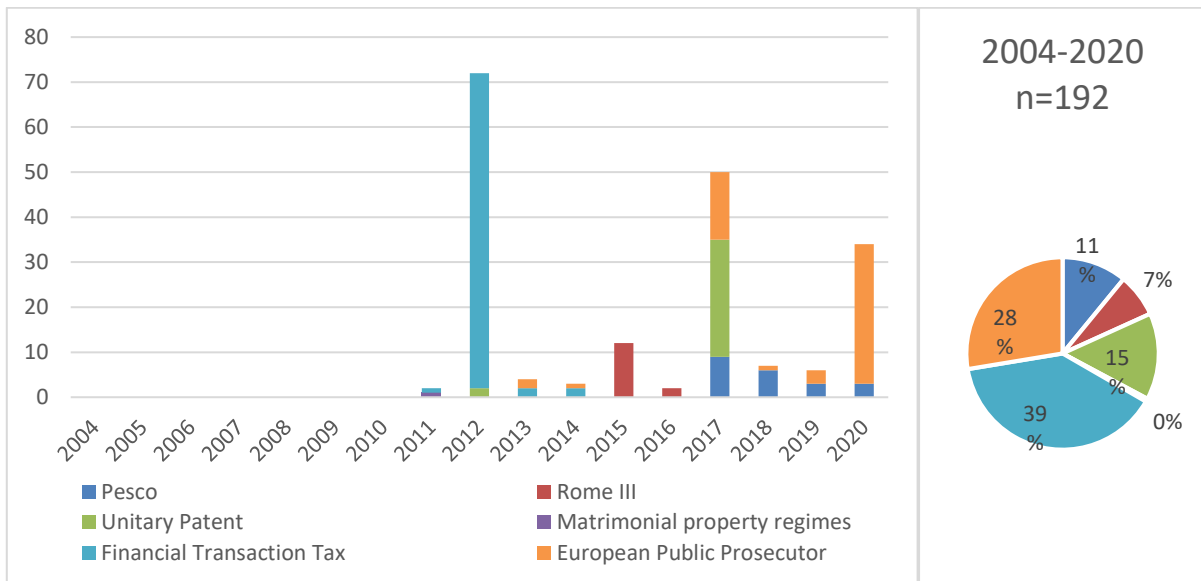
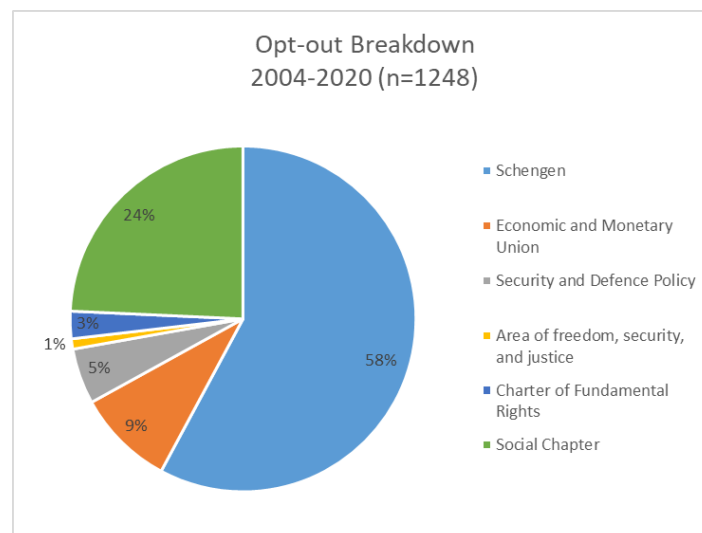


Figure 5 presents a breakdown of DI instances that can be classified as opt-out policy fields. The number of search hits is over 1200. However, it should be noted that these references were very rarely actually related to opt-out themes. We see that ‘Schengen’ is by far the most salient key word and was mentioned over 700 times, often in the context of aligning Estonian legislation with the Schengen area or other rather technical types of issues. The ‘social chapter’ is the second most salient key phrase with circa 300 mentions. The third and fourth most salient opt-out policy fields were Security and Defence Policy and Economic and Monetary Union. These instances were in a few cases actually discussed in terms of an opt-out (but not regarding Estonia itself opting out, but just referring to other countries having used the opt-out clause).

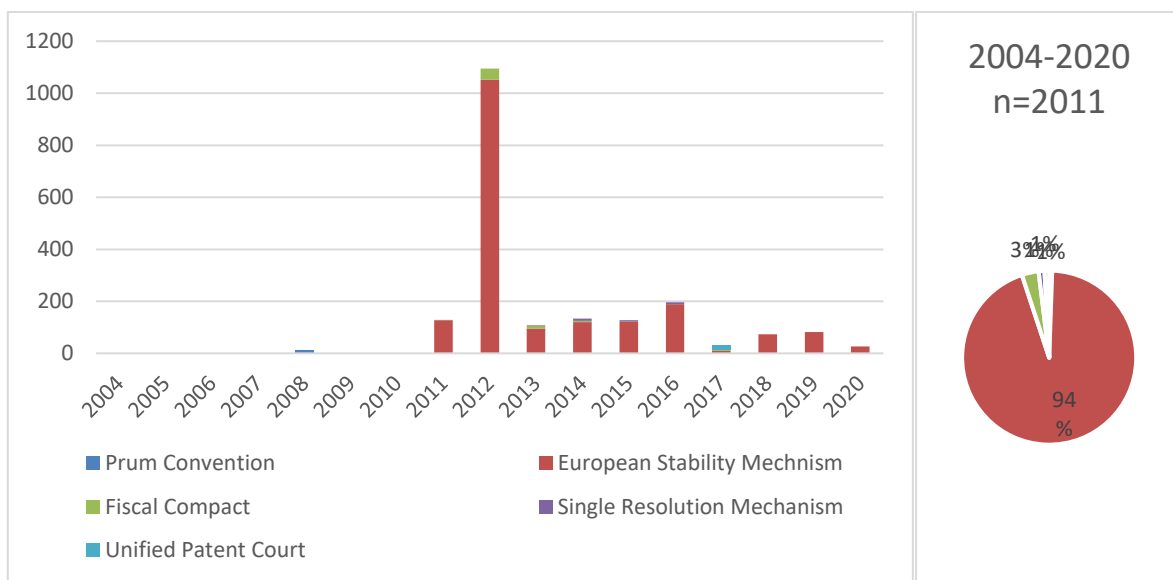
Figure 5 - Salience of opt-out policy fields in parliamentary debates



Finally, the analysis moves to external DI instances. First, five inter se agreements were included in the analysis and the results of the key word counts are presented on Figure 6. These demonstrate that inter se agreements were discussed/mentioned quite often in the Estonian parliament, with almost 2000 search hits in the period of 2004-2020 (the first references occurred in 2008). A closer look reveals that these

numbers are strongly driven by one year (2012) and one agreement – the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), which accounted for 94% of all the references to inter se agreements. In the peak year of 2012, ESM was mentioned 1052 times and the Fiscal Compact 43 times. As Estonia has always been among the EU Member States with the strongest fiscal discipline and the lowest levels of public debt, the Fiscal Compact did not bring about any dramatic changes to the already established fiscal policies of the government. ESM, however, gained much attention among the general public and the opposition used the occasion to invoke heated debates on the agreement in the parliament. In 2012, the largest opposition party, the left-leaning Centre Party, voted against ratification of the ESM. Having for years blamed the right-wing Estonian government for neglecting social welfare policies, it now used ESM in that framework: how can we have money to help Greece if we have so many poor people in Estonia? This also aligned well with public opinion, as Estonia at the time was still a poorer country than Greece in terms of GDP per capita. Therefore, it was difficult to convince the people that Estonia should be bailing out Greece. In 2015, the right-populist EKRE entered the parliament for the first time and it also used the annual reports on Estonia’s involvement in ESM to voice its outrage. Therefore, while the government had hoped to quickly and quietly slide over the ESM issue (in August 2012 it was quickly ratified, skipping some standard parliamentary procedures), the opposition on the left and later the (populist) right did not allow this to happen and made ESM the most salient DI-related term in Estonian politics.

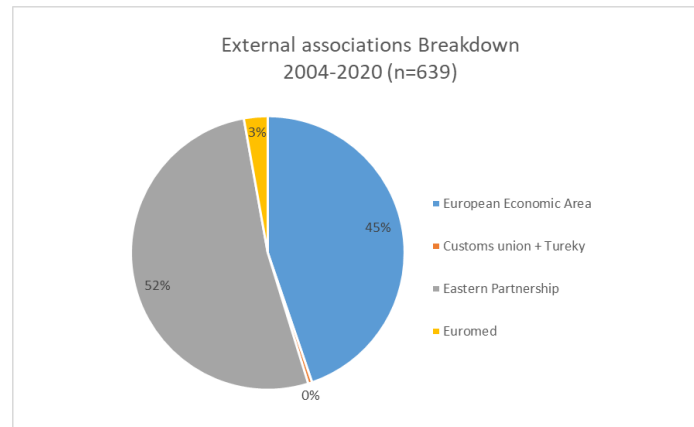
Figure 6 - Salience of inter se agreements in parliamentary debates



In addition to inter se agreements among EU Member States, four external association agreements that involved non-EU countries were also analysed for this report. The results presented in Figure 7 reveal that two of these agreements – the Eastern Partnership and the European Economic Area – were rather salient in Estonian parliamentary debates, with the former gathering slightly over 300 references and the latter slightly fewer. The very high salience of the Eastern Partnership confirms what was already hinted at previously in the overview of government statements: the Eastern Partnership was a very important priority for Estonia. As a country on the eastern frontier of the EU and NATO, Estonia is highly interested in integrating the countries east of the EU border more with the west rather than leaving them in Russia’s sphere of influence. The debates that involved the Eastern Partnership clearly indicate that Estonia wanted to play an important role regarding this policy. For example, it was mentioned in the debates that Estonia had created an Eastern Partnership Centre with permanent workers to assist the Eastern Partnership countries on any possible issues, and when Estonia held the EU presidency in 2017 it invoked a strong debate on why the Eastern Partnership programme’s high meeting took place in

Brussels and not in Estonia. The European Economic Area, on the other hand, was mostly mentioned in more technical contexts and without much emphasis on the agreement itself.

Figure 7 - Salience of external association agreements in parliamentary debates



3. Government positions on DI

This section analyses the positions of Estonian governments on DI in three time periods: 2006-2008, 2011-2012 and 2017-2020.⁵ The analysis is almost entirely based on parliamentary debate data, but the few instances when any DI key word was mentioned in the other previously examined documents are also included in the sample. The section is divided into two parts. The first part presents a quantitative summary of DI positions, whereas the second consists of a chronologically sequenced qualitative in-depth analysis.

3.1 Quantitative overview of government positions

A summary of the government positions on DI models is presented in Figure 8. For both models, I used the two most salient key phrases, although for each model one term was clearly more salient ('two-speed Europe' for different speeds and 'core Europe' for different endpoints). Figure 8 reveals several important distinctions regarding the key words, time periods and government/opposition statuses of the parties.

First, during the earliest time period analysed (2006-2008), the attitude to DI was clearly the most negative. This pessimistic view for a then very new EU Member State seems to have been driven by a fear of being left behind in the process of integration against its own will. During the 2010s this fear dissolved and attitudes became more positive, as Estonia started seeing itself as one of the countries that could move on faster and join the core of Europe.

Second, there are notable differences between positions regarding specific key words. Despite a certain increase in acceptance over time, the terms 'two/multi-speed Europe' (and 'two-tier Europe,' which was only used on two occasions in 2006) still invoked predominantly negative/neutral statements and only a very few positive ones. 'Core Europe,' however, was possibly interpreted somewhat differently by Estonian politicians compared to the definition used in this report (this will be discussed in more detail in the next sub-section), and with the country gaining confidence after emerging quickly from the economic crisis the concept of core Europe and Estonia being part of it was embraced more.

⁵ I have slightly expanded the proposed time margins in order to increase the number of observations and capture the most crucial conceptual DI debates. This sample of years covers almost all of the DI model and mechanism keywords that were recorded in the previous part of the analysis.

Nevertheless, most statements regarding ‘core Europe’ did not contain a clear position and were coded as neutral.

Third, government coalition politicians were the only ones taking positive positions on DI models. In addition, due to their positions they were more likely to be encouraged to take a clear position in some public presentations, while the opposition was instead in an inquiring role and – therefore – made many neutral statements. These observations will be analysed in more detail in the next sub-section, which concentrates on a qualitative analysis.

Figure 8 - Government positions on DI models

| Multi-speed Europe (two-speed + multi-speed) | | | |
|---|----------|---------|----------|
| N=27 | Negative | Neutral | Positive |
| Government | 7 | 1 | 4 |
| Opposition | 6 | 9 | 0 |
| 2006-2008 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| 2011-2012 | 5 | 7 | 2 |
| 2017-2020 | 6 | 1 | 2 |
| Multi-end Europe (core Europe + two-tier Europe) | | | |
| N=45 | Negative | Neutral | Positive |
| Government | 3 | 20 | 7 |
| Opposition | 3 | 12 | 0 |
| 2006-2008 | 6 | 7 | 0 |
| 2011-2012 | 0 | 20 | 4 |
| 2017-2020 | 0 | 5 | 3 |

Regarding DI mechanisms, the analysis concentrates solely on enhanced cooperation. As was explained earlier, ‘opt-out’ does not have an established translation in Estonian and only four instances of this term being used were captured in the analysis of parliamentary debates. These statements were entirely descriptive and did not contain any positive/negative evaluation.

As Figure 9 illustrates, enhanced cooperation was mentioned mostly in a positive or neutral way and only on three occasions had a negative connotation.⁶ Most of the statements occurred when high-level government politicians were introducing/discussing specific policies. In 2011-2012, the majority of the statements were neutral, as enhanced cooperation was most often mentioned when discussing the financial transaction tax, about which the Estonian government – as was mentioned earlier in this report – was rather indifferent. In the latest time period (2017-2020), enhanced cooperation was mentioned with regard to the unified patent, the European prosecutor and PESCO, all in positive statements by Estonian government politicians. Therefore, enhanced cooperation was usually not discussed at the abstract level, as DI models were. The results clearly indicate that in these more specific instances the Estonian government was somewhat positive about enhanced cooperation among a number of interested Member States and was willing to go along with it without many reservations.

⁶ It should also be noted that two of the three negative statements were attributed to ESM as enhanced cooperation, although it is actually not an enhanced cooperation policy.

Figure 9 - Government positions on enhanced cooperation

| N=26 | Negative | Neutral | Positive |
|------------|----------|---------|----------|
| Government | 1 | 11 | 11 |
| Opposition | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 2006-2008 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 2011-2012 | 2 | 10 | 7 |
| 2017-2020 | 0 | 1 | 4 |

3.2 Qualitative assessment of government positions

This sub-section focuses on a qualitative analysis of governments' position on DI. I analysed the three previously defined time periods in chronological order to capture potential changes over time. Quotes from prominent Estonian politicians are used to illustrate the trends and patterns identified. The quotes are translated into English with the original Estonian transcription provided in footnotes.

3.2.1 2006-2008 – The insecurities of the new Member State

Estonia joined the EU in 2004 and a year later the right-liberal pro-European Reform Party took the prime minister position in the Estonian government and stayed at the helm until 2016, switching between different coalition partners. From 2005 to 2007 it governed with the Centre Party, which had taken an anti-EU position in 2003 when Estonia held an accession referendum. After the March 2007 general election, the Reform Party formed a coalition with the right-conservative Pro Patria Union and the Social Democratic Party. In these first years of EU membership, the Centre Party accepted the new situation and somewhat avoided EU topics, making no DI-related statements. In 2006-2008, all the statements that reflected clear positions were made by politicians of either the Reform Party, Pro Patria or the Social Democrats. Although the last two of these were in the opposition in 2006 and then entered the government in 2007, their attitudes did not noticeably change, so no clear coalition-opposition divide was evident during the period.

During this period, DI models were discussed in the Estonian parliament mostly with regard to the ratification of the EU Constitutional Treaty and the subsequent Lisbon Treaty. The most strong and clear positional statements on DI were made in 2006 during the EU Constitution ratification debates (February 2006 and May 2006) and a Future of Europe debate that was held April 2006, between the first and second reading of the Constitutional Treaty. The EU constitution received overwhelming support in the Estonian parliament with only 1 MP voting against it. When the new constitution plan failed at the EU level, Estonia also supported the subsequent Lisbon treaty almost unanimously. It was clear that Estonia was willing to strengthen EU integration and did not support any form of differentiated integration.

Two distinct – although not mutually exclusive – positions on DI can be detected in these debates: first, a clear rejection of a core Europe or a two-speed/two-tier Europe at a conceptual level; second, a pragmatic attitude evaluating DI from an Estonian perspective and perceiving it as a threat to national interests.

Regarding the first position, a good example of this sentiment is a statement by Kristiina Ojuland in April 2006. Ojuland, a prominent Reform Party politician who at the time was chairman of the EU Affairs Committee in the Estonian parliament, stated:

“Verhofstadt proposes to create a so-called smaller commission within the EU Commission that would be composed of the commissioners dealing with so-called socio-economic issues. We find that we should not create new borders inside the EU. **Creating a core and a peripheral Europe** raises some justified questions. What is then the aim of the EU? Should we also concentrate more on club activity and create, for example, a Baltic-Nordic club or a North European Union with the Baltic and the Nordic states, and also the United Kingdom and Ireland? Such theories of the

European Union have already been proposed before. But they all have one bad characteristic: they do not unite; they divide. We joined the EU with the idea of co-operating, not dividing” (Chairman of the European Union Affairs Committee of the Estonian Parliament Kristiina Ojuland, Reform Party, 06.04.2006 in the Estonian Parliament).⁷

Ivari Padar, then chairman of the opposition Social Democratic Party who in 2007 became the Finance Minister of Estonia, adds to this sentiment when voicing his support for the ratification of the EU Constitution in May 2006:

“The idea of a **core Europe** that has been offered as an alternative [to the EU Constitution] is definitely less acceptable to us, as it creates a **two-speed Europe** and gives many more chances for the emergence of, for example, multiple European Union foreign policies, energy policies or security policies. Just as we deplore the existence of so-called two Estonias,⁸ we should also not be fine with two Europes. The more Europe is integrated, the more it fulfils the aims set at its creation, i.e. to bring about peaceful co-existence and provide security and joy of life for its nations via a common market” (MP and Chairman of the Social Democratic Party Ivari Padar, 09.05.2006 in the Estonian Parliament).⁹

The second type of statements look at DI more narrowly from the Estonian perspective. These statements show Estonia’s insecurities during its first years as an EU member. It seems that the main fear was not so much the emergence of a two-speed/two-tier Europe as such, but rather that Estonia would remain among the countries that were left behind.

Foreign Minister Urmas Paet, who was introducing the constitution treaty and advocating for the parliament to approve it, gave the following opinion regarding DI:

“The wave of pessimism last year after not reaching an agreement on the financial perspective and after the constitutional referendums failed strengthened the statements of politicians who started to say that for the European Union to function efficiently in the future it would be smart to make it **two-tiered. It is definitely not in Estonia’s interest that something like that should happen. We do not want to see such developments. Reaching an agreement on a constitutional treaty and its implementation would reduce all these talks and possibilities**” (Foreign Minister Urmas Paet, Reform Party, 08.02.2006 in the Estonian Parliament).¹⁰

Two years later when debating the Lisbon treaty, Marko Mihkelson (then Chairman of the EU Affairs Committee of the parliament) from the right-conservative Pro Patria Union, which had joined the government coalition a year earlier, conveyed a similar message to Foreign Minister Urmas Paet, maybe even more explicitly:

⁷ In the original language: “Verhofstadt teeb ettepaneku luua Euroopa Komisjoni sees nn sotsiaal-majanduslike küsimustega tegelevatest volinikest koosnev nn väiksem komisjon. Leiame, et me ei tohi luua uusi piire Euroopa Liidu sisse. Tuumiku ja perifeerse Euroopa Liidu loomine tekitab põhjendatud küsimused: mis eesmärk siis Euroopa Liidul on, kas peaksime rohkem klubitegevusega tegelema, looma näiteks Balti-Põhjamaade klubi või Põhja-Euroopa liidu, kuhu võiks kuuluda lisaks Balti- ja Põhjamaadele ka Ühendkuningriigi ja Iirimaa? Selliseid teooriaid Euroopa Liidust on varemgi välja pakutud. Kuid neil on üks halb omadus: nad ei ühenda, vaid lahutavad. Meie astusime Euroopa Liidu liikmeks selle mõttega, et teha koostööd, mitte aga ajada kiilu.”

⁸ This is a reference to an often used concept in Estonian public discussion that there are two Estonias (the rich and the poor or the Estonians and the Russian Estonia).

⁹ In the original language: “Alternatiivina pakutav tuum-Euroopa idee on kindlasti meile märksa vähem vastuvõetav, jagab Euroopa kahekiiruseliseks ja annab märksa suuremaid võimalusi kas või näiteks mitme Euroopa Liidu välispoliitika, energiapolitiitika ja julgeolekupoliitika tekkeks. Niisamuti kui me taunime n-ö kahe Eesti olemasolu, ei tohiks meile sobida ka kaks Euroopat. Mida rohkem on Euroopa integreeritud, seda rohkem ta täidab tema loomisel seatud eesmärgi, s.o tuua rahumeelse koostöötegemise ja ühisturu kaudu oma rahvastele turvatunnet ja elurõõmu.”

¹⁰ In the original language: “Kindlasti see pessimismi laine, mis eelmise aasta keskel oli, pärast seda, kui finantsperspektiiv ei suudetud kokku leppida ja kukkusid läbi referendumid põhiseaduse lepingu teemal, tugevdas nende poliitikute sõnavõtte, kes hakkasid rääkima, et Euroopa Liidu edasiseks efektiivseks toimetamiseks oleks nutikas teha ta kahetasandiliseks. Ei ole kindlasti Eesti huvides, et midagi sellist juhtuks. Seda me kindlasti nendes arengutes näha ei taha. Kokkuleppele jõudmine põhiseaduse lepingus ja selle rakendamine kõiki neid jutte ja võimalusi kindlasti vähendaks.”

“There is no reasonable alternative to the European Union reform treaty. The almost 10-year debate on internal reform would probably not survive another setback and it is not ruled out that when the Lisbon treaty fails, some Member States might use the opportunity for **enhanced cooperation**. **In that case, Estonia would face the threat of being left out of the core**” (Chairman of European Union Affairs Committee of the Estonian Parliament Marko Mihkelson, Pro Patria Union, 11.06.2008 in the Estonian Parliament).¹¹

To sum up, during the period 2006-2008, the position on DI among Estonian politicians was clearly negative. This rejection seemed to be motivated by both a conceptual/ideological opposition to DI, but also – and probably even more – by a fear of remaining in the group of countries in the ‘low speed’ group and being marginalised as a country in the periphery of the union.

3.2.2 2011-2012 – A paradigm shift

In 2011-2012, the main EU- and, more specifically, DI-related debates in the Estonian parliament were revolving around the economic and financial crisis, and potential EU policies to tackle the difficult situation. In Estonia, this period marked a clear positive shift in attitudes to DI that was related to the country’s growing confidence and especially that of the leading Reform Party led by PM Andrus Ansip. Although Estonia was hit hard by the crisis in 2008-2009, the country managed to avoid an excessive budget deficit and recovered rather quickly. Moreover, before the crisis Estonia was not able to join the eurozone due to its excessive inflation rate but the crisis ‘solved’ this problem. Estonia officially became part of the eurozone on 1 January 2011, and two months later the Reform Party won the general election again, renewing its coalition government with the Pro Patria Union (the Social Democrats were removed from the government at the peak of the economic crisis in 2009).

In this context, PM Ansip made a statement during his annual overview of government EU policy that explicitly marked this position shift:

“It is clear that our preference on enhancing cooperation and amending the treaties is to move on within the whole European Union framework with all the Member States, because there are things that just work best with all 27 states – for example the common market. On the other hand, one state’s inability or unwillingness to go along with changes should not impede others from moving on. **A more strongly integrated core that would be open for the others to join later does not mean a threat to Europe but increases its strength**” (Prime Minister Andrus Ansip, Reform Party, 15.11.2011 in the Estonian Parliament).¹²

This statement was noticed by opposition Social Democratic Party (the second biggest opposition party after Centre) MPs, who asked for clarifications, emphasising that if there is a core (Europe) there is also something that remains outside the core. Their attitude seemed sceptical, although they did not take a clear stance. Answering the questions, Ansip defended his statement, but he emphasised two elements that somewhat softened his ‘core Europe’ stance. First, he was playing around with the concept of core and using it in the plural: several cores, depending on the specific policy, not just one core. Second, he re-emphasised that the core(s) should not be closed to others which want to join later. These points can be illustrated by the following excerpts from his answers:

“When we are talking about the **core**, talking about **enhanced cooperation**, then we are not talking about forming some closed clubs, but we are talking about a core that wants to move on faster but

¹¹ In the original language: “Euroopa Liidu reformileppel puudub mõistlik alternatiiv. Ligi kümme aastat peetud vaidlused sisereformi üle ilmselt teist lööki nii kergelt üle ei elaks ja pole välistatud, et Lissaboni leppe ebaõnnestumise korral võivad mõned liikmesmaat kasutada võimalust tihendatud koostööks. Sellisel juhul oleks Eestil oht jääda tuumikust eemale.”

¹² In the original language: “On selge, et meie eelistus koostöö süvendamisel ja lepingute muutmisel on liikuda edasi kogu Euroopa Liidu raamistikus, koos kõikide liikmesriikidega, sest on asju, mis lihtsalt töötavad 27-kesi kõige paremini – näiteks siseturg. Samas ei tohiks ühe riigi suutmatus või tahtmatus muutustega kaasa minna takistada teiste edasilikumist. Tugevamalt lõimunud tuumik, mis oleks avatud hilisematele liitujatele, ei tähenda Euroopale mitte ohtu, vaid suurendab selle tugevust.”

which is open to everyone who wants to join, just as the eurozone is open to everyone. I do not think it is reasonable to form some permanent closed blocs within the European Union and I also do not see a big threat that this will happen. [...] We are not talking about one organisational **core**, but there will probably be **several cores** in different areas. And one, in my opinion very good, cooperation **core** is right here in the Baltic Sea region” (Prime Minister Andrus Ansip, Reform Party, 15.11.2011 in the Estonian Parliament).¹³

Therefore, it appears that when Ansip was talking about core Europe, he was actually embracing the idea of different speeds rather than different endpoints, as he would want all the Member States to eventually follow up.

This debate continued in 2012, again in the parliamentary session in which the PM first gives a statement regarding the government’s EU policy and then a debate ensues. Meanwhile, Estonia had ratified the ESM treaty, which invoked a strong backlash from the opposition, especially the biggest opposition force, the Centre Party. However, the Centre Party did not take a clear position at the conceptual level and the debate on DI models took place mostly among the government parties, especially the Reform Party and the Social Democrats, which now took a more clear stance against PM Ansip’s new approach to DI.

PM Ansip made the following statement in this discussion:

“Already since the time when Estonia was planning to join the European Union, we have been following the debates on a **two-speed Europe** and later also participated in them. Now we see that some Member States, mostly eurozone countries, are ready to cooperate more, are ready for **enhanced cooperation**. Other countries, however, either intuitively or knowingly want to isolate, to detach from the others. [...] Estonia is definitely among those which want to plan Europe’s common future. We are ready for **enhanced cooperation** with those which want to cooperate more, and of course **we want to see the European Union also in the future as united, not in two groups which are moving on at different speeds**. [...] On the other hand, it is not justified to wish that those which want to move on faster must always wait for those which are impeding it. [...] ... we want to move in cooperation with those which want to do **enhanced cooperation**. However, our interest is also in the European Union remaining united with its current 27 and in the future 28 Member States” (Prime Minister Andrus Ansip, Reform Party, 09.10.2012 in the Estonian Parliament).¹⁴

The junior coalition partner, the Pro Patria Union, added to this. While in 2008 prominent Pro Patria MP Marko Mihkelson had seen DI as a threat to Estonian national interests, by 2012 the threat had turned into an opportunity:

“I agree with prime minister Ansip that Estonia **should be among the leaders in enhancing European cooperation to ensure that our national interests are considered**. The Pro Patria

¹³ In the original language: “Kui me aga räägime tuumikust, räägime süvendatud koostööst, siis me ei räägi mingisuguste suletud klubide moodustamisest, vaid me räägime ikkagi sellisest kiiremini edasi liikuda soovivast tuumikust, mis on avatud kõigile liitujatele, nagu ka eurosoon on avatud kõigile liitujatele. Ma ei pea mõistlikuks mingite püsivate suletud blokkide tekkimist Euroopa Liidu sees ja ma ei näe selleks ka väga suurt ohtu. [...] Jutt ei käi ju mitte ühest organisatsioonilises mõttes tuumikust, vaid neid tuumikuid eri elualadel, eri valdkondades saab ilmselt olema mitu. Ja minu meelest üks väga hea koostöötuumik on just siinsamas Läänemere piirkonnas.”

¹⁴ In the original language: “Juba sellest ajast peale, kui Eesti kavandas Euroopa Liitu astumist, oleme jälginud debatte kahekiiruselise Euroopa Liidu üle ja hiljem neis ka osalenud. Praegu me näeme, et mitmed riigid, enamasti eurosooni maad, on valmis tegema rohkemal määral koostööd, on valmis süvendatud koostööks, teised riigid aga kas intuiitiivselt või teadlikult püüavad isoleeruda, eralduda teistest. [...] Eesti kuulub kindlasti nende hulka, kes tahavad kavandada Euroopa Liidu ühist tulevikku. Me oleme valmis süvendatud koostööks nendega, kes soovivad enamal määral koostööd teha, ja loomulikult tahame näha Euroopa Liitu tulevikuski ühtsena, mitte kahe rühmana, kes erineva kiirusega edasi liiguvad. [...] Samas ei ole õigustatud tahta seda, et need, kes soovivad kiiremini edasi liikuda, peaksid kogu aeg ootama nende järel, kes edasilikumist takistavad. [...] ...meie sooviksime minna koostöös edasi nendega, kes tahavad süvendatud koostööd teha. Ent kindlasti on meie huvi ka selles, et Euroopa Liit säiliks ühtsena oma praeguse 27 liikmega ja tulevikus 28 liikmesriigiga.”

Union is strongly of the opinion that Estonia should be the designer of the new changing European Union. We now have a unique opportunity, because never before have we been so close to the **European core** and never before has our opinion had as much weight as it has now. This is a very strong capital that we must invest in the best possible way” (MP Marko Mihkelson, Pro Patria Union, 09.10.2012 in the Estonian Parliament).¹⁵

Marianne Mikko from the Social Democratic Party took notice and countered this new position of the Estonian government:

“The Social Democrats have noticed an interesting development. It is about a **‘two-speed’** European Union. Until it joined the eurozone, Estonia was unequivocally a vocal opponent of a European Union with **multiple development speeds. But today we heard that two-speed Europe has received a beautiful formulation – leading cooperation enhancement.** To ensure our national interests, Estonia must be among the leaders. I quote the Prime Minister: ‘Otherwise we have only one choice: to drag along or be left behind.’ This sounds as threatening as the words of Hugo Chávez: ‘Either with us or death!’” (MP Marianne Mikko, Social Democratic Party, 09.10.2012 in the Estonian Parliament).¹⁶

The statement by Mikko perfectly summarises the developments in 2011-2012 regarding the government’s position on DI models. The right-liberal/right-conservative coalition was feeling triumphant after overcoming the economic crisis and being the first Baltic country to join the eurozone. Now, DI was seen as an opportunity rather than a threat, as it had been 5-6 years before.

3.2.3 2017-2020 – A new government; a similar stance

In 2016, the Reform Party, which had led the government from 2005 to 2016, was pushed into opposition after a mid-term government break-up and the Centre Party (in opposition since 2007) took the PM position, forming a coalition with the same two parties that had governed with Reform since the 2015 general election: the Social Democrats and the Pro Patria Union. This marked a very dramatic change in Estonian internal politics and due to its previous anti-EU stance and reputation as a ‘Russian party’ there were some fears that the Centre Party would bring a more anti-western/anti-EU position to the Estonian government. Moreover, Estonia was about to step into the spotlight, as the country had its first EC presidency term, which due to Brexit was moved from 2018 to the second half of 2017. The change, however, was at least initially not very notable. Regarding DI, the new Prime Minister Jüri Ratas expressed a similar position to that which the Reform Party had introduced in 2011-2012.

In May 2017, Prime Minister Ratas was in the parliament discussing the priorities of the Estonian EC presidency. He made the following statement regarding DI:

“Also the Rome declaration, which addresses the European Union’s future, states clearly that **Member States can – if necessary – move forward at different speeds or intensities**, but this must take place within the framework of the foundational Treaties. Every Member State can always join the cooperation. We support this approach and wish to be among those which choose cooperation. I emphasise: which choose cooperation, but not secession. Decisiveness, also as 27 countries, is the most important factor to avoid fractionalisation. The European Union cannot be a

¹⁵ In the original language: “Ma olen nõus peaminister Andrus Ansipiga, et Eesti peaks olema Euroopa koostöö süvendamise eestvedajate hulgas, et omakorda tagada meie rahvuslike huvide järgimine. Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit on kindlalt arvamusel, et Eesti peab olema uue ja muutuva Euroopa Liidu kujundaja, mitte aga kujundatav. Meil on praegu unikaalne võimalus, sest mitte kunagi varem pole me olnud nii lähedal Euroopa tuumikule ning mitte kunagi varem pole meie sõnal olnud selline kaal nagu nüüd. See on väga kõva kapital, mida tuleb osata investeerida parimal viisil.”

¹⁶ In the original language: “Sotsiaaldemokraadid panid tähele ühte huvitavat arengut. See puudutab "kahekiiruselist" Euroopa Liitu. Kuni euroalaga liitumiseni oli Eesti ühemõtteliselt erineva arengukiirusega Euroopa Liidu kõvahäälnel vastane. Ent täna kuulsime, kuidas kahekiiruseline Euroopa on saanud ilusa formuleeringu – koostöö süvendamise eestvedamine. Rahvuslike huvide järgimise pärast peab Eesti olema eestvedajate hulgas. Tsiteerin peaministrit: "Vastasel juhul jääb meil üle ainult üks valik: kas kaasa lohiseda või maha jääda." See kõlab niisama ähvardavalt nagu Hugo Chávezi sõnad "Kas meiega või surm!"

political project the speed of development of which is dictated by the country that is least interested in development” (Prime Minister Jüri Ratas, Centre Party, 15.05.2017 in the Estonian Parliament).¹⁷

“I think that during the last 13 years that we have been part of the European Union Estonia has always been among the **core countries** that wish to move on with Europe and to move on fast and which wish to keep the European Union. Talking about Estonia’s latest decisions, it can be mentioned that last week the government **decided to join the European Prosecutor and the week before that Estonia decided to join PESCO to enhance defence cooperation**. I think this is the example in the best way that Estonia has given with its everyday activities and its internal politics” (Prime Minister Jüri Ratas, Centre Party, 16.05.2017 in the Estonian Parliament).¹⁸

We see that these statements are actually very similar to what PM Ansip had said in 2011-2012: Estonia prefers a united EU but is willing to be among the ones that move on faster and want to be part of the core. In a more specific statement, Ratas – during the same May 2017 debates – said that he did not support a two-speed EU internal market and Estonia aimed to reduce fractionalisation of the internal market. This was the only negative statement about DI by government coalition politicians in 2017.

Despite the Prime Minister clearly stating that Estonia would continue on the same course regarding its EU policy, the Reform Party, which was now in the opposition, still tried to push a narrative that the Centre Party was driving Estonia away from the ‘core of Europe.’ This sentiment was exemplified by a statement by former PM (2014-2016) Taavi Rõivas from the Reform Party:

“People in the Eurobarometer survey have said that Estonia’s voice in European Union matters has become unbearably weak. The Reform Party is of the opinion that this must not remain like that and Estonia must once again become one of the **core decision-makers of the European Union**” (MP Taavi Rõivas, Reform Party, 11.12.2018 in the Estonian Parliament).¹⁹

The only party that expressed explicitly negative positions on DI during the 2017-2020 period was the new Free Party, which entered the parliament in 2015 with 9% of the vote (and then no longer reached the threshold in 2019). In a foreign policy debate in 2017, its MP Monika Haukanõmm stated:

“This wish to move in different directions and with different speeds has invoked an opinion that maybe we do need a so-called **two-speed Europe** in order to avoid stagnation. Those which want to develop, but if someone does not want, it is his choice. More and more it appears that such a **two-speed Europe** maybe already is the reality, because one-speedness and actually also unity is lacking. Such statements have strengthened. Also Angela Merkel referred to that last week. I think this is a dangerous development” (MP Monika Haukanõmm, Free Party, 09.02.2017 in the Estonian Parliament).²⁰

¹⁷ In the original language: “Ka eespool viidatud Euroopa Liidu tulevikku käsitlev Rooma deklaratsioon ütleb selgelt, et liikmesriigid võivad vajaduse korral edasi liikuda eri kiiruse või intensiivsusega, aga see peab toimuma aluslepingute raames. Koostööga saab iga liikmesriik alati liituda. Me toetame seda lähenemist ning soovime olla nende hulgas, kes valivad koostöö. Ma rõhutan: kes valivad koostöö, mitte eraldumise. Otsustavus ka 27 riigina on kõige olulisem tegur, et vältida killustumist. Euroopa Liit ei saa olla poliitiline projekt, mille arengu kiirust dikteerib arengust kõige vähem huvitatud riik.”

¹⁸ In the original language: “Ma arvan, et Eesti on alati olnud nende viimase 13 aasta jooksul, kui me oleme Euroopa Liitu kuulunud, nende tuumikriikide seas, kes soovivad Euroopaga edasi liikuda ja kiirelt edasi liikuda ning kes soovivad Euroopa Liitu hoida. Rääkides Eesti viimastest otsustest, võib mainida, et eelmisel nädalal otsustas valitsus Euroopa Prokuratuuriga ühinemise ja üle-eelmisel nädalal otsustas Eesti ühineda PESCO-ga, et tõhustada kaitsekoostööd. Ma arvan, et see on see kõige paremas mõttes hea eeskuju, mida Eesti on andnud oma igapäevase tegevuse ja ka oma sisepoliitikaga”

¹⁹ In the original language: “Inimesed on Eurobaromeetri küsitluses öelnud, et Eesti hääl on Euroopa Liidu asjades jäänud talumatult nõrgaks. Reformierakond on seisukohal, et see ei tohi nii jääda ning Eesti peab taas saama Euroopa Liidu otsustajate tuumikusse. Edu meile selleks! Elagu Euroopa! Elagu Eesti!” (2018)

²⁰ In the original language: “See soov liikuda erinevas suunas ja erineva kiirusega on põhjustanud arvamuse, et äkki me vajamegi hoopis nn kahekiiruselist Euroopat, et vältida stagneerumist. Kes tahab, see areneb, aga kui keegi seda ei taha, siis see on tema valik. Järjest enam aga tundub, et selline kahekiiruseline Euroopa vist ongi reaalsus, sest ühekiiruselisust ja tegelikult ka ühtsust hakkab nagu nappima. Sellised sõnavõtud on järjest kõvemaks läinud. Samuti viitas eelmisel nädalal sellele Angela Merkel. Mina pean seda ohtlikuks arenguks.”

In sum, both the quantitative and qualitative analyses demonstrate that Estonia has clearly warmed up to the concept of differentiated integration over time. While in the 2000s it was automatically assumed that if a two-speed/core Europe emerged Estonia would be in the slower/peripheral group, this attitude changed during the 2010s. Since then, there seems to be a belief that Estonia can be part of the most integrated core and the Estonian government is usually quite enthusiastic about moving on with enhanced cooperation.

Finally, it is important to add that in 2019 the Reform Party won the election as the biggest opposition force but the Centre Party responded with a rather unexpected move and formed a coalition with the Pro Patria Union and the right-populist and strongly Eurosceptic Estonian Conservative People's party (EKRE). The consequences of this shift on the Estonian position regarding DI are yet to be seen, as so far I have not been able to detect any DI related statements by EKRE politicians in which a clear stance is taken. The coming years will show if and how Estonia's EU and DI positions will shift with the vocal Eurosceptic party being part of the government coalition.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Summary of the documents analysed by category

| | Category of document | Time period | Details |
|---|--|---------------------------------|---|
| 1 | Government coalition agreements | 2003-2020 | Years: 2003, 2005, 2007, 2011, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2019 |
| 2 | PM first speeches in the parliament (and the following debates) | 2003-2020 | Years: 2003, 2005, 2007, 2011, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2019 |
| 3 | European Council presidency speeches (and parliamentary debates) | 2017 | |
| | a. in the national Parliament | | The speech and debate in the national parliament: 16 May 2017 |
| | b. in the European Parliament | | The speech and debate in the European Parliament: 5 July 2017* |
| 4 | Future of Europe speech and parliamentary debate | 2018 | The PM speech and debate on the 'Future of Europe' in the European Parliament: 3 October 2018 |
| 5 | Prime Minister annual presentations on government EU policy | 2004-2020 | One speech every year during the stated period (the 2020 speech has not taken place yet) |
| 6 | Full plenary parliamentary debates | 2006-2008; 2011-2012; 2017-2020 | The debate transcripts were retrieved if any of the conceptual key words or DI mechanisms were mentioned in the debate. |

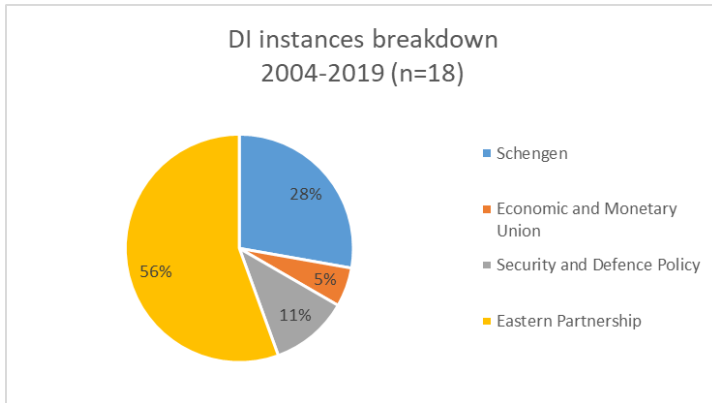
* In the case of debates in the EP, only questions/statements by Estonian politicians are included in the key word count and government position analysis.

Appendix 2 Overview of key words and translations

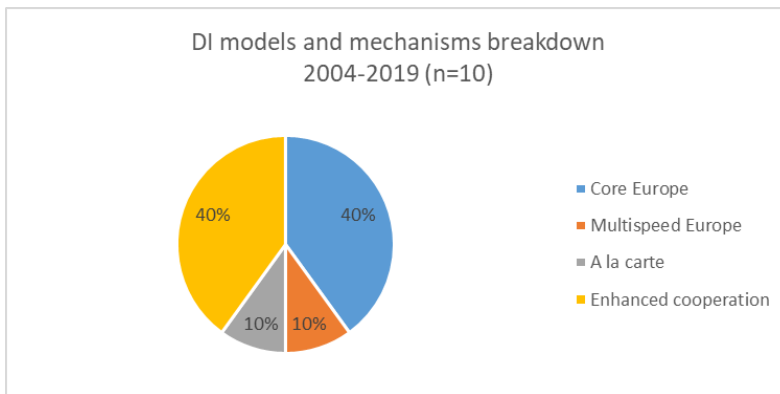
| Key word | Translation | Notes |
|--|---|---|
| Differentiated integration | Diferentseeritud integratsioon | |
| Future of Europe | Euroopa tulevik/Euroopa Liidu tulevik | Occasions when 'European Union/EU future' was mentioned were also counted. |
| DI Models: Different Speeds Coalition of the willing | Tahtekoalitsioon, vabatahtlik koalitsioon | |
| Two-speed Europe Multi-speed Europe | Kahekiiruseline Euroopa Mitmekiiruseline Euroopa | |
| DI Models: Different Endpoints Variable geometry Core Europe/European core | Muutuv geomeetria Tuumik-Euroopa, tuum-Euroopa, Euroopa tuumik, Euroopa Liidu tuumik | Several different are expressions used. I also counted the instances when in a specific sentence just the word 'core' was mentioned but the context of the whole sentence and |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| | | paragraph clearly indicated that it referred to a European (Union) core. |
| Two-tier Europe | Kahetasandiline Euroopa | |
| Concentric circles | Kontsentrilised ringid | |
| à la carte | à la carte | |
| DI Mechanisms | | |
| Enhanced cooperation | tõhustatud koostöö, süvendatud koostöö; tihendatud koostöö | Three different versions are used repeatedly. When counting a search hit, the context was evaluated to make sure that the reference was substantively to EU enhanced cooperation. |
| opt-out | opt-out | There is no established translation. Some official documents use the term ‘loobumisklausel’ (abstention clause) but it was never used in actual debates. |
| DI Instances – Enhanced cooperation | | |
| Pesco | Pesco/alaline struktureeritud kaitsekoostöö | |
| Rome III | Rooma III | |
| Unitary patent | Ühtne patent, Euroopa patent, ühtse toimega Euroopa patent | Different wordings referring to the same policy |
| Matrimonial property regimes | abieluvararežiim; abieluvara režiim | |
| Financial Transaction Tax | finantstehingute maks | |
| European Public Prosecutor | Euroopa/Euroopa Liidu prokuratuur/prokurör | ‘prokuratuur’ refers to the institution; ‘prokurör’ refers to the person doing the job. Both were counted as mentions of EPP. |
| DI Instances – Opt-outs | | |
| Schengen | Schengen | |
| Economic and Monetary Union | Majandus- ja rahaliit | |
| Security and Defence Policy | Julgeoleku- ja kaitsepoliitika, ESDP | Only the times when the policy was discussed in the EU context were counted. |
| Area of Freedom, Security and Justice | Vabadusel, turvalisusel ja õigusel rajanev ala | |
| Charter of Fundamental Rights | põhiõiguste harta | |
| Social Charter | sotsiaalharta | |
| DI instances – inter se agreements | | |
| Prüm Convention | Prümin leping | |
| European Stability Mechanism | Euroopa stabiilsusmehhanism, ESM | The abbreviation ‘ESM’ is very often used in debates. |
| Fiscal Compact | Fiskaallepe; Fiskaalleping; Fiskaalkokkulepe; stabiilsuse, koordineerimise ja juhtimise leping | Slightly different wordings that all refer to the same compact |
| Single Resolution Mechanism | Kriisilahendusmehhanism; SRM | The English abbreviation ‘SRM’ is sometimes used. |
| Unified Patent Court | Ühtne Patendikohus | |
| DI Instances – external integration | | |
| European Economic Area | Euroopa Majanduspiirkond | |
| Customs Union + Turkey | Tolliliit + Türgi | |
| Eastern Partnership | Idapartnerlus | |
| Euromed | Euromed; Barcelona protsess | |

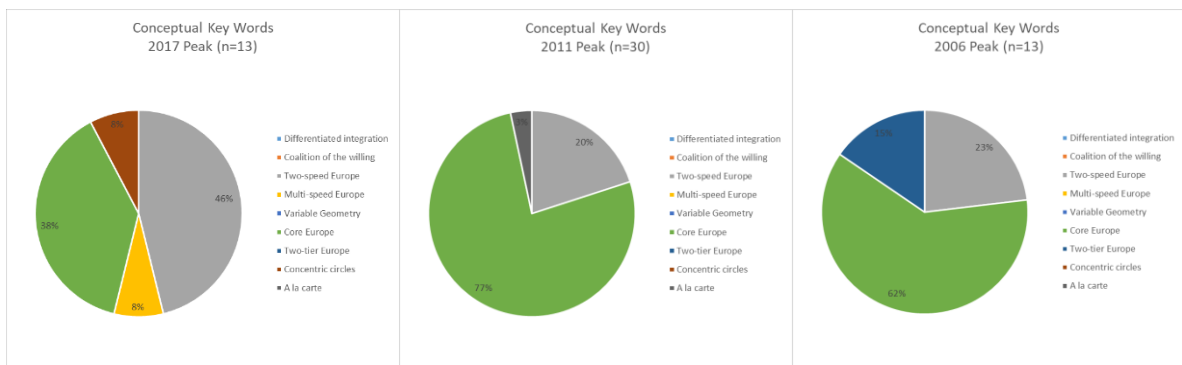
Appendix 3 DI instances (2004-2020) in coalition agreements and PM first speeches (+ following debates)



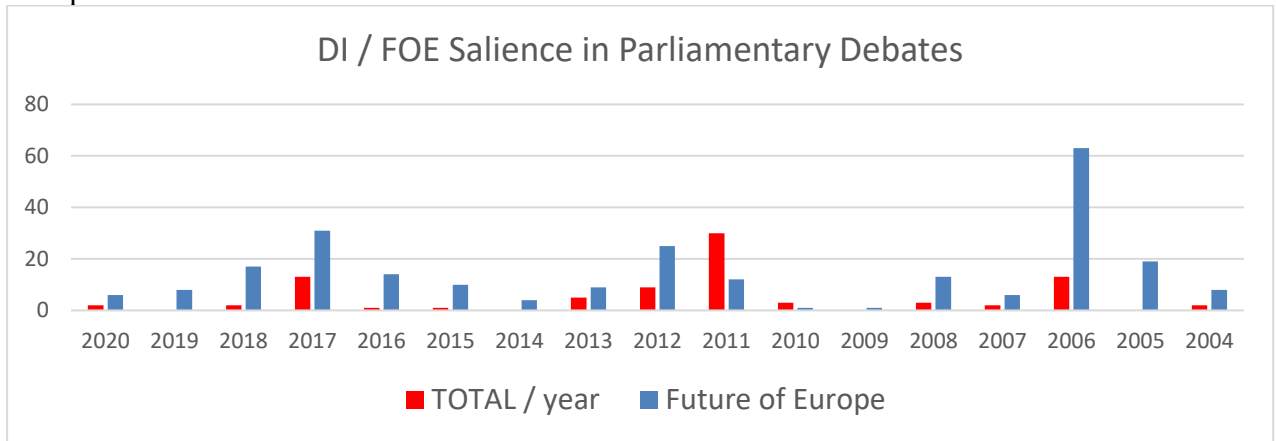
Appendix 4 DI models and mechanisms in EU-related speeches and debates (document categories 3 to 5)



Appendix 5 Salience of conceptual key words in peak salience years (2017, 2011, and 2006)



Appendix 6 Salience of conceptual key words in parliamentary debates relative to ‘Future of Europe’



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

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