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

WORKING PAPER

**Party Positions Toward Differentiated
Integration: the Visegrad Group in
a Comparative Perspective**

Wojciech Gagattek, Daniel Płatek, Piotr Płucienniczak

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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).

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

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**Integrating
Diversity in the
European Union**

Abstract

Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, in diplomatic terms known as the Visegrad Group, or V4, used to be the frontrunners of democratic transformation in Central and Eastern Europe. However, more recently, their attitudes toward various aspects of European integration underlined the heterogeneity of the enlarged EU and played an important reference point in the debates about the prospects for differentiated integration (DI). But while in diplomatic terms the Visegrad Group seems to build a block in many contemporary EU debates, can we observe a similar set of dynamics in these countries related to party politics and DI? Our goal in this working paper is to situate the case of the V4 in a comparative regional perspective and to address two major research questions: How salient is DI for political parties? How heterogeneous are the party positions toward DI? We do so primarily relying on manifesto data and newly collected data regarding the salience of DI in national parliamentary debates.

Keywords

Differentiated integration; European Union; party positions; Visegrad Group

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1. Introduction

Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia, commonly known as the Visegrad Group, or V4, joined the EU in 2004, and have been portrayed as the leaders of the post-communist transformation in Central and Eastern Europe (Jacoby, 2004). At the same time, their limited economic and administrative capacity and relatively short democratic experience have been seen as the main challenges around the implementation of various EU policies in these Member States (Breuss et al., 2004; Bröcker, 1998; Zielonka, 2004). From the point of view of the V4, being excluded from major EU policies such as Schengen, transition periods such as those related to the freedom of movement of persons, and unequal rules concerning direct subsidies from the Common Agricultural Policy, though temporary in nature, caused fears that theirs would be a second-rate membership and that a permanent differentiation would become a major obstacle to the unity of the enlarged EU (Kopecký, 2004; Szczerbiak, 2011).

But the biggest challenges came about in 2015-2016 and were linked to two major developments: democratic backsliding in Poland and Hungary, which caused controversies about the rule of law, minority rights and the freedom of the media (Cianetti et al., 2018), and the V4's joint, open blow to the main EU proposals related to the migration crisis, namely their rejection of EU migrant quotas (Karolewski & Benedikter, 2018). These two events marked an unprecedented political conflict that showed that the degree of heterogeneity in the enlarged EU could be greater than anyone had expected, and that perhaps the solution would be to allow for greater differentiation in the extent and speed of the implementation of various EU policies.

In its 2017 White Paper on the Future of Europe, the European Commission considered such an option as one of five scenarios, and nicknamed it "Those who want more do more" (European Commission, 2017). In academic terms, this is called differentiated integration (DI) (Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2020). In the Central and Eastern European political context, it was mostly referred to as a two-speed or multi-speed Europe. Given that differentiation is portrayed by such EU leaders as Emmanuel Macron as the only viable solution for the EU under the present circumstances, it is a matter of utmost importance to understand the regional heterogeneity of preferences towards DI. And while governments seem to be playing first fiddle in this debate, the question arises: what drives positions on DI? This is a complex issue because, as we will show, the answer deviates from the typical divisions used in EU studies, such as those between Eurosceptics and Euroenthusiasts, between the North and the South or the like. At the same time, support for differentiation in one policy area might not be synonymous with an overall preference for DI in other policy areas.

In this paper, we study party positions towards DI. Our goal is to situate the case of the V4 in a comparative perspective, and to answer the following research questions:

1. Do the existing databases documenting party positions allow us to picture their attitudes towards DI?
2. To what extent is DI a salient topic in domestic politics in the V4?
3. How heterogeneous are party positions in the EU, and in the V4 in particular? Do parties in the V4 present roughly similar views on this matter?

As this is a working paper, we have decided to offer an inventory of various databases that document party positions and social attitudes in the search for those items that could approximate positions on DI. We take a broad approach that includes many variables linked to European integration, by focusing on the case of the Visegrad Four and setting it against other groups of EU Member States.

Our reference cases are all political parties in Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia that in the most recent elections received at least 5 per cent of the vote, that is, crossed the electoral threshold that exists in all four states and won at least two seats in parliament. This might exclude some smaller, radical parties, but our goal in the long run is to correlate party positions with public opinion, and precisely for this reason we only include parties with such a support base. In presenting individual case studies, we have used four country reports written within the InDiVEU consortium; these concentrate on the governmental and parliamentary arena, but are also very useful in offering a deep context to characterise party positions. This paper is structured as follows. We begin with the concept, mechanisms and instances of differentiated integration, and then consider the potential relations between party attitudes on DI with some of the main ways parties are categorised with regard to their positions on European integration. We then describe the political spectrum in the V4, presenting the characteristics of the party systems in these countries.

The second part of the paper is based on an inventory of various databases and attempts to approximate party positions on DI. Our goal here is twofold. First, we want to offer an overall description of party positions on European integration in order to investigate whether there are any visible patterns that could be used to categorize parties in relation to DI. Second, in order to search for regional differences, can we observe any patterns that would distinguish parties and societies in various parts of the EU? For example, is there anything in common among the Scandinavian parties, those in southern Europe, or the Visegrad group?

2. Differentiated integration and party politics: a conceptual and methodological introduction

Although increased interest in the issue of differentiation in European integration has received particular attention since the publication of the 2017 White Paper on the Future of Europe, the topic has been analyzed and debated at least since the 1990s. Any student of European integration can instantly cite examples of such differentiation such as the Eurozone or the Schengen area, legal scholars can prove that the EU legal order is full of normative possibilities for differentiation, and ‘multi-speed Europe’, ‘Europe à la carte’, ‘variable geometry’ and ‘Europe of concentric circles’ are common reference points in many debates about the future of European integration.

The phrase used to refer to all such instances of variety is ‘differentiated integration’ (DI). Schimmelfennig and Winzen contrast DI with uniform integration, and argue that DI “takes place when the legally valid rules of the EU, codified in European treaties and EU legislation, exempt or exclude individual member states explicitly from specific rights or obligations of membership in the EU” (Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2020, p. 4). DI has two variants: one internal and one external. What is presented in the paragraph above is called internal differentiation and concerns different degrees of involvement in selected EU policies by some Member States. External differentiation refers to different degrees of cooperation of non-EU members with the EU. For example, Norway is a member of the Schengen zone and a part of the EU single market, but does not have a customs union with the EU, whereas Turkey has signed a customs union with the EU, but does not take part in the other forms of cooperation that apply to Norway.

In the past, the overall logic behind the need for an internal differentiated integration was roughly similar, namely that in some limited areas a slightly different degree of integration should be allowed for the sake of the success of the entire integration project. However, recent debates over integration, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, have shown that it has become much less fashionable to highlight differentiation as a promise rather than a danger for the future of the European continent. So what has taken place recently to give rise to this new attitude that differentiated integration poses a risk to the very existence of the EU? This is the starting point for our analysis of the positions that seem to be dominant in the Visegrad Group.

DI and overall attitudes towards European integration

This paper focuses on party positions towards differentiated integration, which is part of the broader issue of party attitudes toward European integration. This field of studies has significantly developed over the years, with one of its obvious drivers being the increasing importance of Eurosceptic parties in Member States (Almeida, 2012; Helbling et al., 2010; Marks et al., 2002; Rohrschneider & Whitefield, 2010). On a theoretical level, post-functionalism has shown the extent to which mass party politics matters for the outcome of European integration (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). The challenge that we face right now is how DI fits in with previous studies on party politics and European integration.

The conceptual question that we should discuss first concerns the relationship between party attitudes towards differentiated integration and better-known and studied terms such as Euroscepticism and Euroenthusiasm, on the one hand, and the left and the right on the other hand. This question is quite important because party views on European integration have traditionally been portrayed precisely in relation to these other terms, such as through orthogonal scales where the vertical axis ranges from pro-EU to anti-EU, and the horizontal scale from left-wing to right-wing (Hix & Lord, 1997). For this reason, what kind of parties might be hypothetically expected to promote or oppose differentiated integration?

Studies have shown that DI has contributed overall to progress in European integration. Given the heterogeneity of preferences, it was a way to appease certain sceptical Member States to move forward with integration. When we observe the current debate in the EU, it seems that French President Emmanuel Macron is the greatest advocate of DI, which he presents as a means of resolving the gridlock in some areas and move EU integration forward, at least for those Member States that wish to see this happen. From this perspective, Eurosceptic parties will obviously not support DI. However, if DI is presented as a way to reduce or stop the level of political and economic integration, at least for those Member States that do not wish to integrate further, then potentially, it could gain support from some, perhaps softly Eurosceptic parties. In this context, it is worth recalling that, during the negotiations leading to the Maastricht Treaty, the principle of subsidiarity was advocated both by those who believed it would lead to a more federal Europe, and at the same time by those who thought it would limit the degree to which the EU would become centralised and grant more powers at the national level.

However, the matter may be not quite so simple, since those Member States that remain outside the group of the more tightly integrated Member States also bring some costs. Geopolitically, this relates to the fear of staying outside the main core of European integration, and the emergence of an EU centre and periphery, or to put it differently, of first- and second-class members. We refer here not to individual examples of certain DI mechanisms (such as enhanced cooperation), but to the overall logic of European integration.

For this reason, the key question that needs to be analysed when studying party positions on DI is the rhetoric that political parties use. One might expect that even some softly Eurosceptic parties will argue that their opposition toward DI is motivated by a desire to maintain the unity and internal coherence of the European project, and that DI is the first step towards European disintegration because, in the long run, it will lead to an exclusion of some Member States. As mentioned above, allowing some Member States to integrate further but at the same time to remain outside the core group could potentially diminish the power of the outsiders. This creates a need for us in our analysis to combine quantitative and qualitative sources so as to obtain the broadest possible picture of party attitudes.

That picture, however, may be strongly affected by two major factors. First, given the complexity of EU policies and policy-making, which leads to their low salience from the point of view of electoral and party competition, parties might not have detailed positions on DI, or if they have any, these may be relatively shallow. For example, can we really expect that a party will have strong views on such examples of differentiated integration as cooperation in civil marriages? In other words, analysing their position on such a matter necessitates identifying areas in which they potentially might have something to say. The second factor concerns the fact that, in many Member States, matters belonging to EU policy are often seen as a part of foreign policy that do not form part of the standard subjects of inter-party competition (Hill, 2003). In other words, for the sake of the existential geopolitical interests of a given country, its mainstream parties will not compete on such issues, even if they have very different ideological backgrounds, and even if they strongly differ on their vision of European integration. Such competition is perhaps more likely to arise with regard to external differentiation, and for this reason it is important to bear in mind that DI has also an external aspect.

Overall, it seems difficult to point to an exact model that could lead us to predict which parties will have strong views on DI, which will have no views on the issue whatsoever, and what factors drive the stances on DI they take.

Methodological considerations

From the analytical point of view, we follow the approach taken in the already cited national reports on government positions written within the InDivEU project. They divide DI into three blocks: models, mechanisms and instances. Models are the most general issue and come up in the discussion on a two-speed, multi-speed, two-tier or multi-end EU, to name a few models. The main question here is whether differentiation can and should be a temporary solution, or rather constitute a sort of expected finalité of European integration. By mechanism we mean enhanced cooperation and opt-out. The question here concerns the overall attitude of parties toward these two forms of DI. Instances are individual cases of DI, such as the Prüm Convention, unitary patent, PESCO, the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO), and so on. How can one compare party positions on these matters?

Political scientists use various methods to document and compare party positions (Dinas & Gemenis, 2010; Laver, 2014; Ray, 2007). With some simplification, we can identify three major methods, each of which has its pros and cons. The first method is the qualitative and quantitative coding of party platforms, with the most well-known example being the Comparative Manifesto Project, a comprehensive database covering party platforms in more than 50 countries, including all EU Member States. While a document such as a manifesto certainly represents a party's official position and allows the party to be treated as a unitary actor, this method has been criticised for analysing parties' intentions rather than what parties actually do while in government or in parliament. In response to this criticism, a second method based on analysing voting records has gained particular popularity in studies on voting behaviour in the European Parliament. One of this approach's main disadvantages is that it can fail to account for the various institutional and political circumstances that affect individual voting records, such as the nature of coalition politics (if applicable), internal divisions within a given parliamentary group, relationships with constituents, etc. Hence the third method of expert surveys, which often try to strike a balance between parties' intentions (platforms) and their actions (e.g. legislative initiatives, votes, speeches). Given, however, that experts do not always need to substantiate their assessment of a party's position, this method is also not flawless. Finally, various voting advice applications (such as EU Profiler, euandi and Kieskompas) aim to combine a multitude of different sources that make it possible to position parties within the political spectrum, and to take account of both what they promise and what they do (Gagatek, 2018).

In most cases, an attempt is made to document the positions of the relevant parties (strategies about what constitutes a relevant party differ, although the selection may be based on winning at least one seat in parliament) across the relevant political issues (those that are important from the electoral point of view). With regard to DI, this raises a number of questions and challenges. Since the 1990s, the salience of European integration has risen considerably (Marks & Steenbergen, 2004; Whitefield & Rohrschneider, 2015), yet overall, in comparison with other issues, it is still not that significant (Hoeglinger, 2016), in which case the question becomes: how salient can a topic related to DI be, and what if a party does not have an official position on certain issues? This relates to our expectations that overall matters related to DI - except those related to high politics, such as the future of the EU and DI models - will mostly be of a technical nature, understood as a matter for experts rather than a political campaign issue. We can therefore expect that the discussion will involve representatives of governments and experts on EU integration, such as those sitting on EU affairs parliamentary committees. However, where there is no official party stance, can we assume that a party position is defined by a speech or statement just one of its members of parliament? How should we treat an opinion of a Member of the European Parliament? Finally, given the nature of diplomatic language, can we assume that a party position's is defined when its minister or other high official in a relevant ministry presents the view of his or her country on a certain issue?

While we did engage into original analysis of the salience of DI in party manifestos (see further), we have come up with a conclusion that voting records cannot offer promising results for our analysis. While roll-call voting lists are available for plenary sessions of all four national parliaments in V4, votes on matters related to DI are taken rarely. As far as parliamentary committees in charge of giving opinions and preparation of legal acts related to European integration are concerned (Výbor pro evropské záležitosti in Czechia, Európai ügyek bizottsága in Hungary, Komisja do spraw europejskich in Poland and Výbor NR SR pre európske záležitosti in Slovakia), unfortunately, only Czech committee provides lists of votes by name instead of aggregated results. Without information on individual voting decisions, we cannot study neither partisan nor individual positions on the DI.

There are other problems. Acts with many differentiated clauses, such as Regulations of support schemes for farmers under the common agricultural policy, were amended numerous times. It is then difficult to assess which voting should be studied. Others, such as Regulation on the conservation and sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources under the Common Fisheries Policy or Directive on the marketing of the cereal seed, contain several differentiations for Visegrad countries, yet were voted before they even joined the EU. Differentiated legal acts related to euro, such as legislation on the euro coins, Regulation on the professional cross-border transport of cash, or Regulation on enforcement measures to correct excessive macroeconomic imbalances in the euro area, apply on to only one country of the Visegrad group: Slovakia. It is hard to consider them suitable for our research because of that. To conclude: analysis of voting on the issues related to DI was impossible due to lack of adequate data from national parliaments.

Finally, another important question is the time span of the analysis. While differentiation has been a feature of European integration since the 1990s, the concept gained some sort of official recognition as one of the models for the future of the EU only after the publication of the White Paper of the European Commission in 2017 (see above). For this reason, it is particularly interesting to check the extent to which this model received any attention from political parties, and if so, how they reacted. Therefore, while we cover the entire period of the membership of the Visegrad countries in the EU since 2004, we focus in particular on the period just before and after the publication of the *White Paper*. This choice is further motivated by the greater visibility of the V4 as a group since 2015 (see above).

3. Party politics in the Visegrad Group

The Visegrad Group was officially created in 1991 with a view to facilitate cooperation between Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia (and later, the Czech Republic and Slovakia) on their way towards effective democracy and various forms of European cooperation (Fawn, 2013). The group's institutional structure is based on six-month presidencies held in turn by the four countries, and includes regular cooperation through consultations, exchanges of views and experience, and joint statements at the presidential, governmental and parliamentary levels. The 2004 declaration signed by the V4 prime ministers emphasised their goal to strengthen "the identity of the Central European region" in the process of European integration, and expressed support for further enlargement of the EU, in particular for V4 countries "to use their unique regional and historical experience and to contribute to shaping and implementing the European Union's policies towards the countries of Eastern and Southeastern Europe" (Visegrad Group, 2004). The Visegrad group has had its ups and downs. There have been many moments of intensive cooperation, but there has also open political conflict over to historical animosities, minority rights, and different views and strategies towards European integration (Dangerfield, 2008). This last issue became visible as a lack of solidarity within the V4 concerning certain crucial elements of the pre-accession negotiations, and especially so during the negotiations over the Nice Treaty and the Constitutional Treaty. The argument was that, in the post-enlargement EU, the size and geopolitical role and ambitions of Poland would naturally move it away from smaller countries such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia or Hungary. And indeed, during the Civic Platform and Polish People's Party government (2007-2015), Polish foreign policy was focused on reinvigorating another form of regional cooperation - the Weimar Triangle of France, Germany and Poland (Zięba, 2020). This coincided with an ambition of the government of the day to put Poland back in the heart of Europe as a regional leader, and naturally diminished the importance of the V4; another factor, however, was the lack of agreement between the pro-integrationist Civic Platform in Poland and the Eurosceptic President Vaclav Klaus in the Czech Republic (2003-2013), and Fidesz in Hungary (in power since 2010).

However, when the new government of the Law and Justice party (PiS) came to power in Poland in 2015 (a party that had a long and close relationship with Fidesz), after which Poland's relations with Germany immediately deteriorated, the Visegrad Group became reinvigorated, propelled by Poland and Hungary. The key issue that highlighted the role of the group was migrant quotas. All of the V4 countries vehemently opposed these, leading to a serious crisis in their relations with their EU partners (Braun, 2020). The main reason for their being different responses in the V4 to DI is that only Slovakia is a member of the Eurozone; this creates a different set of challenges for Slovakia than those faced by the three other countries.

In these circumstances, the V4 intensified its cooperation and identity as a vector in EU politics. One of the key programmatic documents that defined its recent priorities was a joint declaration adopted before the Rome summit held in 2017 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, entitled "Strong Europe – Union of Action and Trust" (Visegrad Group, 2017). The V4 argued for an EU that is active, engaged, competitive, dynamic, and capable of acting both within its borders and beyond. Internally, the group advocated a further deepening of the Single Market (particularly concerning the Digital Single Market and the Energy Union), and externally, taking an active role in global politics and trade relationships, with security, defence and the European Neighbourhood Policy as the most important priorities. Here the V4 advocated deepening defence cooperation while keeping NATO as the pillar of collective defence, and transatlantic ties as a foundation for tackling strategic global challenges. The Visegrad Group has unequivocally supported further EU enlargement to the Western Balkans and neighbouring countries to the east, arguing that these are areas that will ensure the strength of the Union.

An equally important key word is trust. There is a need to regain the trust of citizens, and perhaps more importantly, of the Member States. While dismissing the paradigm of “more Europe” or “less Europe” as outdated, the declaration as a whole emphasised unity and consensus. The following passage is worth quoting at length:

“Regardless of the speed of integration, we all need to pull in one direction, have a common objective, vision and trust in a strong and prosperous Union. However, to ensure a necessary flexibility, we can take advantage of enhanced cooperation, as stipulated in the Treaties. Yet any form of enhanced cooperation should be open to every Member State and should strictly avoid any kind of disintegration of Single Market, Schengen area and the European Union itself”

This can be interpreted as a criticism of multi-end Europe (“we all need to pull in one direction”), but at the same time as an acknowledgement of a need for enhanced cooperation, a need that stems from the diversity among the EU Member States, defined as a “a key asset of the EU”. The declaration emphasised mutually beneficial coexistence between Eurozone members and non-members in order to avoid “discrimination based on the currency” and to “strengthen the unity of the European project”. This primarily means that there should be a single institutional framework for all Member States, regardless of their currency, based on the “respect for the Council’s powers and respect for the financial autonomy of all Member States”, and that any new institutional developments within the Eurozone should be open to all Member States, all of which are equal under the Treaties. The above concerns could be connected with the syndrome of ‘second-class’ EU members, something the V4 countries want to avoid at all costs.

Finally, from the institutional point of view, the declaration sent a clear message that the role of EU institutions should be limited (in accordance with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality), and the role of national institutions (particularly the national parliaments) strengthened. Although not explicit, this can be interpreted as a desire to limit the role of the European Commission and the European Parliament, and to strengthen those institutions based on intergovernmental relations (such as the Council of the EU, and particularly the European Council, which should set “major political objectives”). This vision stems directly from the “Europe of nations”, model which is particularly cherished by Poland and Hungary.

However, there is some recent evidence to claim that the V4 is not as united as pictured above. Two days before the 30th anniversary of the Visegrad Group, the Slovak minister for foreign affairs openly questioned the Group’s unity and dismissed its role as a political bloc, instead opting for limiting cooperation to economic matters. The major reason for such scepticism related to a concern that the V4 is becoming an anti-European alliance, which does not conform to the Slovak priorities, and that some V4 members are using the Group as a political weapon for domestic political competition. The Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babis echoed similar arguments (Kokot, 2021; visegradgroup.eu, 2021).

The political spectrum in the V4

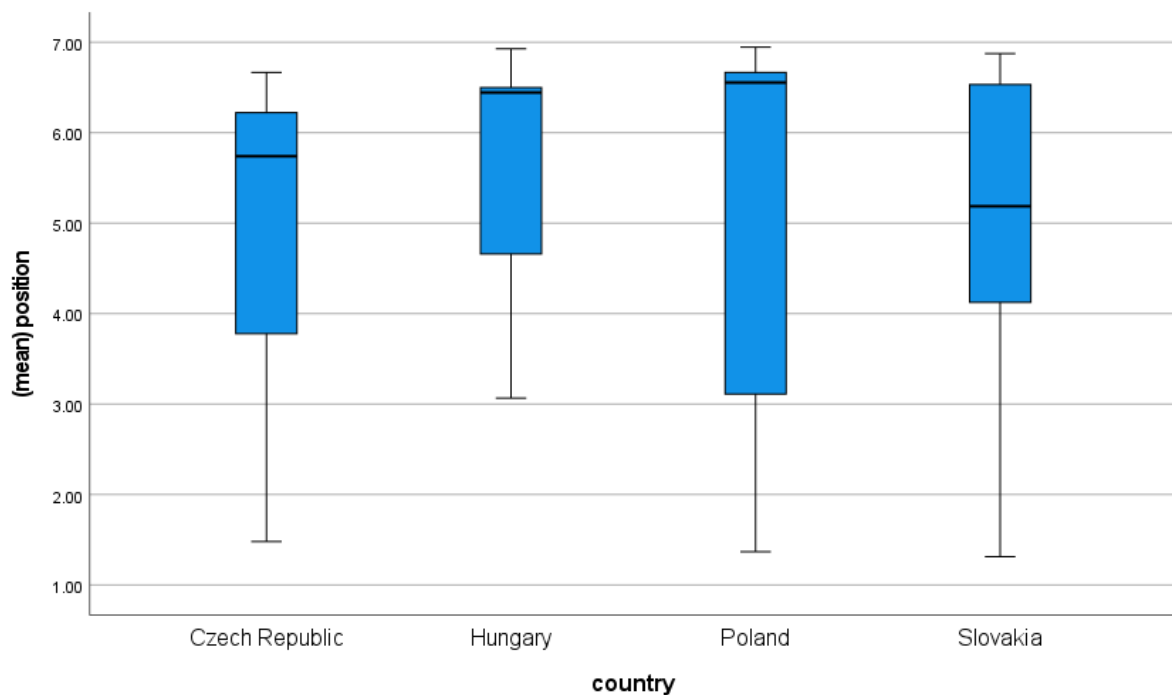
Inasmuch as the Visegrad Group seems to form something of a diplomatic bloc in many EU debates today (despite very recent controversies), can we consider it so as far as party politics is concerned? To what extent are the political spectrums in these four Member States similar?

In this section, we outline the general features of the political spectrum in the V4; they will be further discussed in part 6 of this paper. The issue that we want to address here is the extent of variance of attitudes towards the EU in the whole set of relevant parties in each country and among them.

Based on the euandi 2019 data (Reiljan et al., 2020), we can point to a number of observations. The greatest difference between party positions are seen in Poland and in Hungary, where we have to clear blocs: a pro-European camp, located mostly on the centre-left/liberal side, and an anti-EU camp located mostly on the right. In Slovakia and the Czech Republic this spectrum is much more diverse, in the sense that we see both pro- and anti-EU attitudes from parties representing both the left and the right. This is an important point for a further analysis of the relationship between attitudes on DI and party platforms.

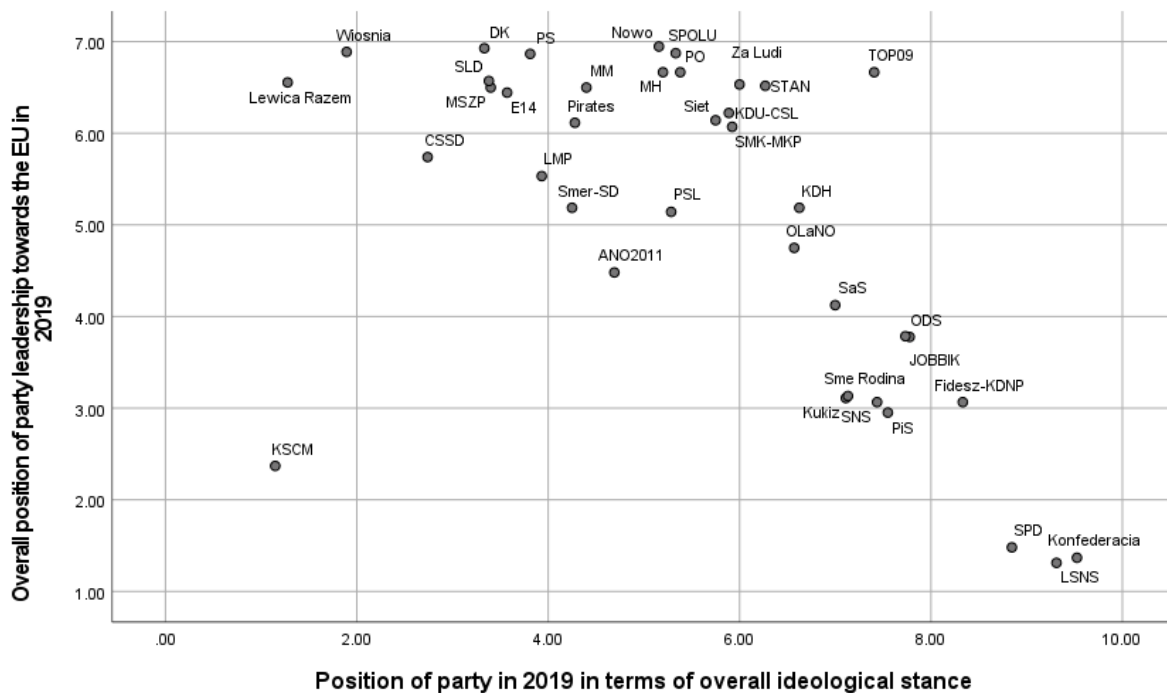
In the 2019 edition of the Chapel Hill expert survey (Bakker et al., 2020), the graph of the overall orientation of party leadership towards European integration shows quite a strong degree of homogeneity, with the median position of parties oscillating between (roughly) 5 and 6.5, where 1 means strongly opposed, 2 opposed, 3 somewhat opposed, 4 neutral, 5 somewhat in favour, 6 in favour and 7 strongly in favour.

Figure 1. Overall orientation of party leadership towards European integration in V4 political parties



However, the key parties now in government in Poland and Hungary are located quite low: PiS (2.95) is very close to Fidesz (3.07), but farther from ANO 2011 (4.48) and even more so from SMER (5.19), which governed (either alone or as a senior coalition partner) in Slovakia from 2012 to 2020, and whose leaders as Prime Ministers signed the 2017 joint declaration. These attitudes towards European integration can be set against the overall ideological positions of the political parties; on a basic level, this gives us a sufficient view of the entire political spectrum and the positions of the main parties. Below is a scatterplot setting the variable documenting the overall position of party leadership towards the EU in 2019 against the position of the party in 2019 in terms of its overall ideological stance (where 0 means extreme left and 10 extreme right).

Figure 2. Scatterplot: Overall orientation of party leadership towards European integration in V4 political parties vs ideological stance



Two things are striking about today's political spectrum: Hungary (since 2010) and Poland (since 2015) are governed by parties very close to each other as far as overall ideological stance and attitudes towards the EU are concerned, whereas the senior governing parties in Slovakia (SMER 2012-2020) and the Czech Republic (ANO2011 since 2017 and the Czech Social Democratic Party ČSSD 2013-2017, the latter in coalition with ANO2011 since 2017) are more moderate ideologically and more pro-European. As explained above, such information is necessary when analysing whether party positions on DI are driven by national preferences or ideological/European attitudes.

4. Salience, governments' views, parliamentary debates

Before we move on to analyse party programmes, the first step should be to assess the salience of DI in political debates and the positions taken up by governments. It can be reasonably expected that governments are somehow obliged to have an opinion on DI, particularly when they have to decide whether to join some enhanced cooperation initiatives or opt out from those they find unacceptable. Parliamentary debates, then, whether in plenary or in specialised parliamentary committees, can reflect the range of views on DI held by various parties.

We use the results of four country reports written as part of the InDivEU project. The main objective was to characterise the salience and positions of main actors on DI since 2004 (Havlík & Smekal, 2020; Janková, 2021; Kyriazi, 2021; Walecka & Gagatek, 2021). The reports were written using the same research design and research objectives, and thus feature a high level of comparability. The authors systematically analysed government programmes, key speeches by Prime Ministers, and parliamentary debates.

The overall picture that emerges from these studies is that the salience of DI has been low or very low, based on analyses of speeches by prime ministers (including 'fist speeches' in which government priorities are set out), government programmes, and parliamentary debates. In concrete terms, this means that government policies almost never mention DI, speeches by prime ministers refer only sporadically and unsystematically to certain DI models, and in parliaments, where the subject is debated somewhat, this is still on a very small scale. There have been a few moments since 2004 when the salience of DI changed noticeably. For example, just after the 2004 enlargement, the next major strategic goal of all four countries was to join the Schengen zone, and DI was discussed. During the early 2010s, interest was shown in institutional and economic forms of anti-crisis measures, such as the Fiscal Compact or the European Stability Mechanism, which were open to Member States on a voluntary basis. In 2012, the Czech government collapsed due to internal disagreement within the coalition over the European stability mechanism. The level of interest in DI peaked around 2017, just after the publication of the White Paper of the European Commission and the debate on the Future of Europe and the discussion on the European Public Prosecutor's Office (enhanced cooperation). And although there were some differences between the four Visegrad countries in the specific moments when DI was indirectly referred to, the overall their views were very similar.

The concept of DI as such has not been recognised in the public discourse, although a two-speed or multi-speed Europe are often referred to, the two expressions usually being treated as synonymous. Poland has always taken a dim view of a two-speed Europe, arguing that this would lead to European disintegration, with some Member States receiving better treatment than others. This argument was made by Donald Tusk of the Civic Platform during a debate in the Polish parliament on the anti-crisis measures taken by the Eurozone, and has since been repeated, particularly strongly, by the Law and Justice government (since 2015), even though these two parties stand on completely different poles as far as European integration is concerned. In 2017, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki of PiS said: "we do not want a two-speed EU, we do not want a division that will leave some Member States behind, we do not agree to divide Europe into the better and the worse". In Slovakia, there was a shift of opinion by the governing party SMER and Prime Minister Robert Fico. Up to 2016, their opinion had been close to that in Poland. However, Fico later began to argue that a multi-speed Europe was becoming a reality, a *fait accompli*, and that in that case Slovakia wanted to be in the core, taking the highest speed, as there was no alternative to European integration. Hungary's Fidesz government once shared the negative view on a two-speed Europe, but since around 2017 Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has shifted to a more neutral position. Finally, in the Czech Republic, the debate has been perhaps the least intense of all the countries discussed here, with no references to DI models at all being made by the government.

As far as DI mechanisms are concerned, opt-outs gained currency only once during the negotiations of the Lisbon Treaty. Poland, and later the Czech Republic, decided to opt out from Protocol 30 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Enhanced cooperation was discussed much more often. Starting with Poland again, regardless of the government's colour, Poland has always been rather hesitant, or at best neutral, about the notion of this mechanism. Government representatives emphasised this even when a decision was made to join one of such mechanism. In Hungary, different perceptions of enhanced cooperation became one of the main dividing lines between the government and opposition (see below). In Slovakia and the Czech Republic, the debate has concerned specific instances rather than the concept or the advantages and disadvantages of enhanced mechanisms overall.

In all cases, the Eastern Partnership and EU enlargement were strongly supported. In specific situations, the V4 took different decisions on whether to join in on enhanced cooperation or inter se agreements. For example, all V4 countries joined PESCO, a particularly salient case over which they shared common convictions as expressed in their joint declaration of 2017 (see above), and all supported the European Unitary patent (not treated as a political issue, and therefore not controversial). Perhaps the greatest political interest and controversies surrounded the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) in 2017, which Poland and Hungary did not join, but the Czech Republic and Slovakia did. At that time, the former were being strongly criticised for backsliding on democracy, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, and felt that the EPPO could create a risk for them of potential interference in their domestic politics. The Czech Republic was the only V4 state to join the Divorce Law and Property Regime Rules regulating the status and property of international couples, and only Slovakia showed any interest in the Financial Transaction Tax (FTT).

As far as political competition between the major parties within a single Member State is concerned, it seems that there is widest agreement on DI in Slovakia, where the major parties all agreed to bring their country to the core of the EU. In other cases, there are clear divisions between the government and the opposition related to broader divisions over European integration. By referring to the centre (Western Europe), the periphery (CEE) or the notion of second-class Member States, parties compete over who is more capable of making their country a part of the core that is consulted and important in many respects. In Hungary, the social democratic opposition to Fidesz has strongly supported initiatives for enhanced cooperation (e.g. EPPO), and has advocated joining the eurozone, since this could move the country from the periphery (in the real and metaphorical senses) to the core of European integration. The argument is that this could mitigate the negative governing record of Fidesz and the resulting practical departure of Hungary from the main group of EU countries. However, as mentioned above, in its search for pragmatic solutions, the current Hungarian government does not reject DI, as it believes that it will give it more flexibility. It is worth mentioning that, in recent speeches, Viktor Orbán has pragmatically acknowledged DI as a fact, but does not see it as a problem for the EU. He does not believe, for example, that all Member States should aim to join the eurozone. What is characteristic of PiS and Fidesz is their frequent references to the national interest as the focal point of their European policies, founded upon the metaphor of a "Europe of nations".

5. Saliency of DI in party manifestos

In this section we present the results of our original analysis of saliency of DI in national and European party manifestos. The following countries will be analysed: Visegrad countries, Scandinavian countries (Finland, Denmark, Sweden) and Western European countries (France, Germany, Spain). This way, we follow our overall approach to analyse V4 in relation to other EU members states or group of states. Particularly, we look at the saliency of DI in the political parties discourse through concrete references to words indicating an interest in the subject of DI. All words were checked for the context in which they occurred in the manifestos, i.e. their reference to European themes.

Party manifesto were downloaded from the Manifesto Project website (<https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu>) and transformed into files for processing with a word count software (QDA miner). For our analysis, we selected only those political parties that reached the 5% electoral threshold. In case of the Visegrad countries, we have included all election years since these countries became members of the European Union. For the other countries, we focused on fewer election years (see below). Overall, we collected and analyzed 423 manifestos, including 180 in the Visegrad Group (see Appendix 1 for details). We used the word search function in the paragraphs of text of each document analyzed following the list of keywords selected for the InDivEU reports on governmental preferences on DI cited above (see Appendix 2 for detail). The graphs below show the absolute values of words occurring in the manifestos of parties in a country.

The results prove our earlier expectations: the frequency of DI-related words in the Visegrad countries was not very high in both the European and national election manifestos. Among all the countries, Hungary stands out with the highest salience of words. In the national elections, among the Hungarian parties, a distinctive presence of the “Euro-Mediterranean Partnership” word was noted in 2014. This issue was mainly raised by the social-liberal Democratic Coalition party (*Demokratikus Koalíció*, DK). In 2018 appeared several mentions of the word “European public prosecutor” taken up by the green party Dialogue for Hungary (*Párbeszéd Magyarországért*). However, the frequency of other words in manifestos issued for national elections in the remaining countries was very low.

With European elections, the number of words slightly increased, especially in Hungary and the Czech Republic. Both countries recorded a higher salience of words such as “Schengen” (in Hungary - 19 words in 2009 and 10 in 2004 – all of them also belonging to Fidesz) and “Economic and Monetary Union” (in the Czech Republic (15 words in 2014, most of which recorded in ANO 201 manifesto, party founded by Andrej Babiš, the current Prime Minister of the Czech Republic). In the rest of the countries, there were only a few mentions on various topics related to DI.

Among Western European countries, German parties stand out during national elections, devoting in 2017 relatively more space in their manifestos than parties in other countries to the “Customs Union + Turkey” (36 words - particularly present is the word 'Turkey', the salience of which is mainly the product of populist and nationalist Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland*, AfD) manifesto. In Spain in 2016 and 2019, parties paid relatively more attention to the “Social Charter” (especially Podemos party and Spanish Socialist Workers' Party) and in France in 2012 to the “Financial Transaction Tax” (especially Radical-Socialist and Radical Republican Party (*Parti républicain, radical et radical-socialiste*) and Europe Ecology (*Europe Écologie*) party.

During European elections, the average salience of words in party manifestos increased. In the manifestos of the German parties in 2014 there were, as before, references to the “Customs Union + Turkey” (this time words were used by different parties: Alternative for Germany, Christian Democratic Union of Germany (*Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands*, CDU) and Christian Social Union in Bavaria (*Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern*, CSU), but there was also a significant presence of the phrase “future of Europe” (which belonged to the same parties). In France, the words “Schengen” (especially in the manifesto of the Socialist Party (*Parti socialiste*) and “Financial Transaction Tax” (here too the Socialist Party manifesto prevailed) appeared most prominently in 2014. And in Spain, the “Area of Freedom, Security and Justice” (here the manifesto of the People's Party (*Partido Popular*) and VOX party dominated) and the “Charter of Fundamental Rights” (noted mainly in the manifesto of the European Spring party (*Primavera Europea*) stood out in the same year.

In the Nordic countries, differentiated integration was relatively less salient in both national and European elections. In Finland, parties devoted some space in their manifestos during the national elections (in 2019 and 2015 respectively) to the “Schengen” (especially the Social Democratic Party of Finland (*Suomen sosialidemokraattinen puolue*, SDP) and “Security and Defence Policy” (especially the Christian Democrats (*Kristillisdemokraatit*, KD). In Sweden “the opt-out” mechanism has most clearly emerged in 2014 not linked to any particular party. The Danish parties raised the issue of “Security and Defence Policy” 4 times in 2019. In the European elections in the latter country, DI word “Customs Union + Turkey” was used slightly more often than in other Scandinavian countries in 2009.

VISEGRAD COUNTRIES – NATIONAL ELECTIONS

Figure 3. Salience of DI words – Hungary, national elections

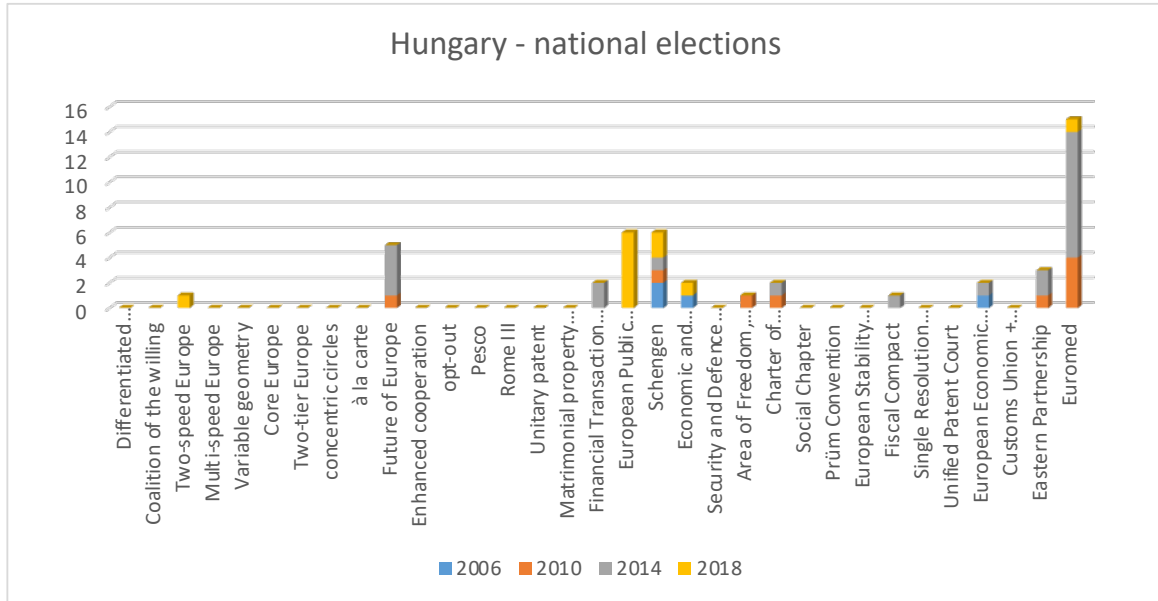


Figure 4. Salience of DI words – Poland, national elections

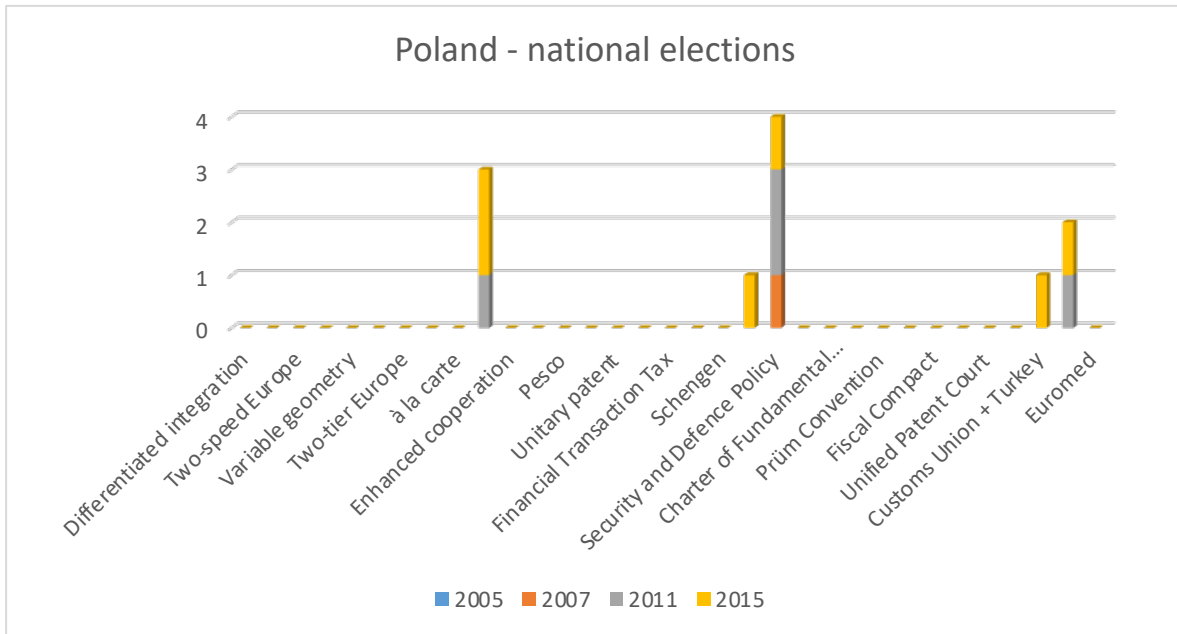


Figure 5. Saliency of DI words – Slovakia, national elections

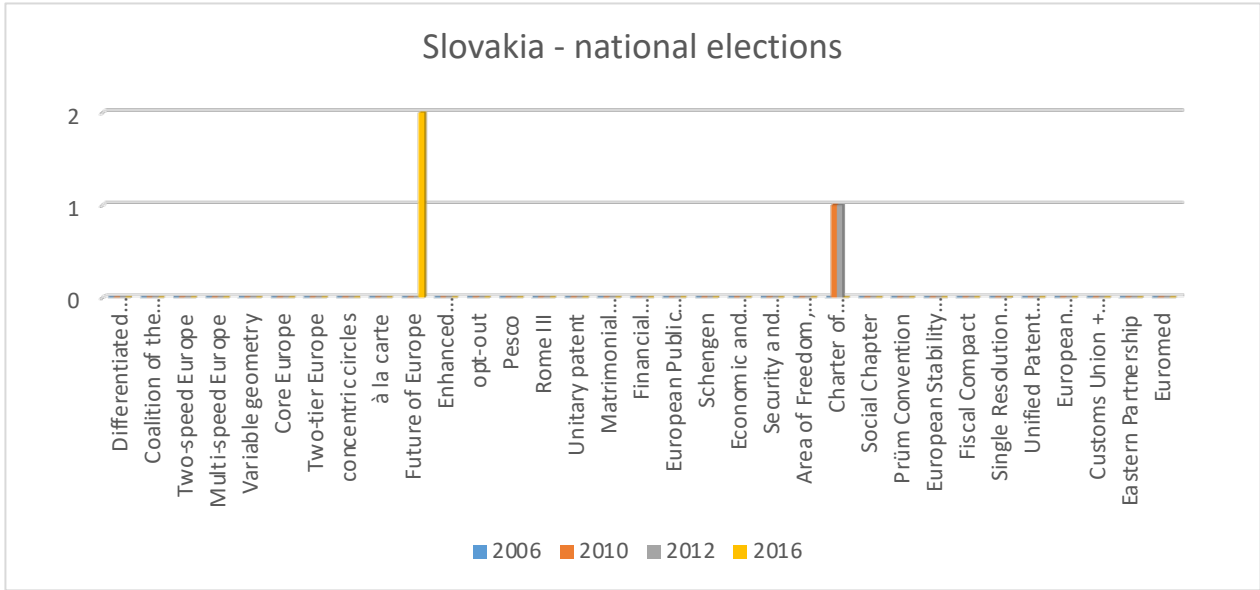
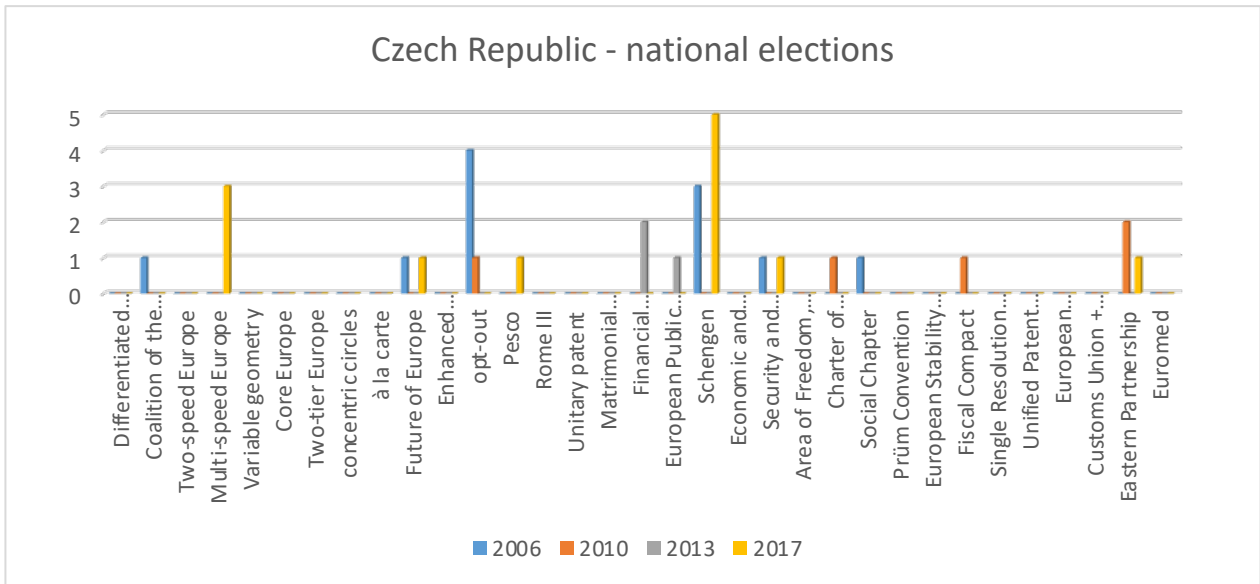


Figure 6. Saliency of DI words – Czech Republic, national elections



VISEGRAD COUNTRIES – EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

Figure 7. Salience of DI words – Hungary, European elections

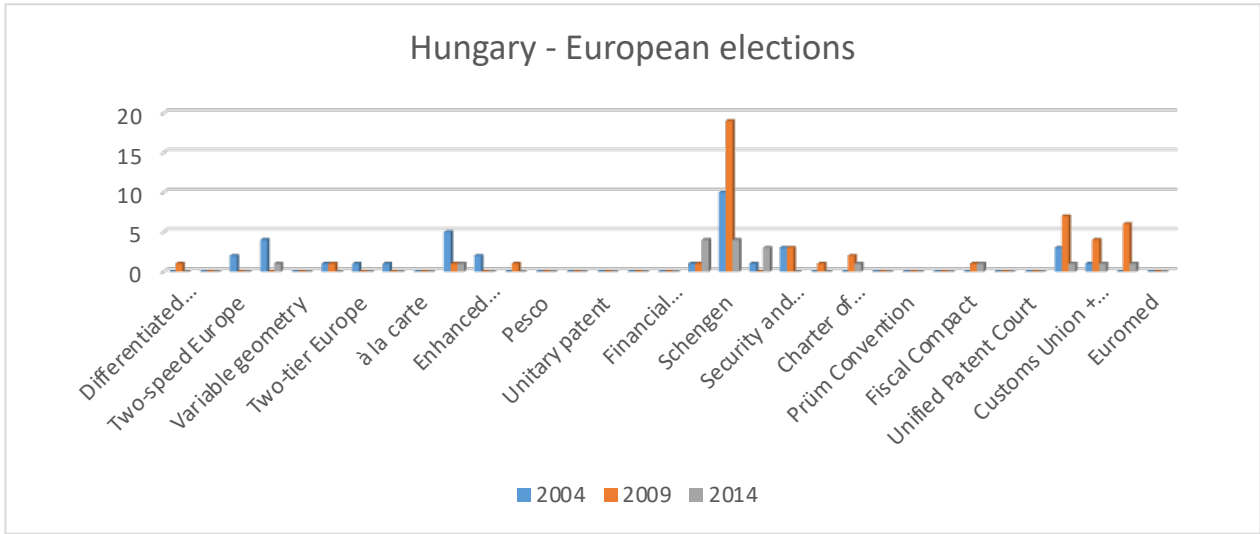


Figure 8. Salience of DI words – Slovakia, European elections

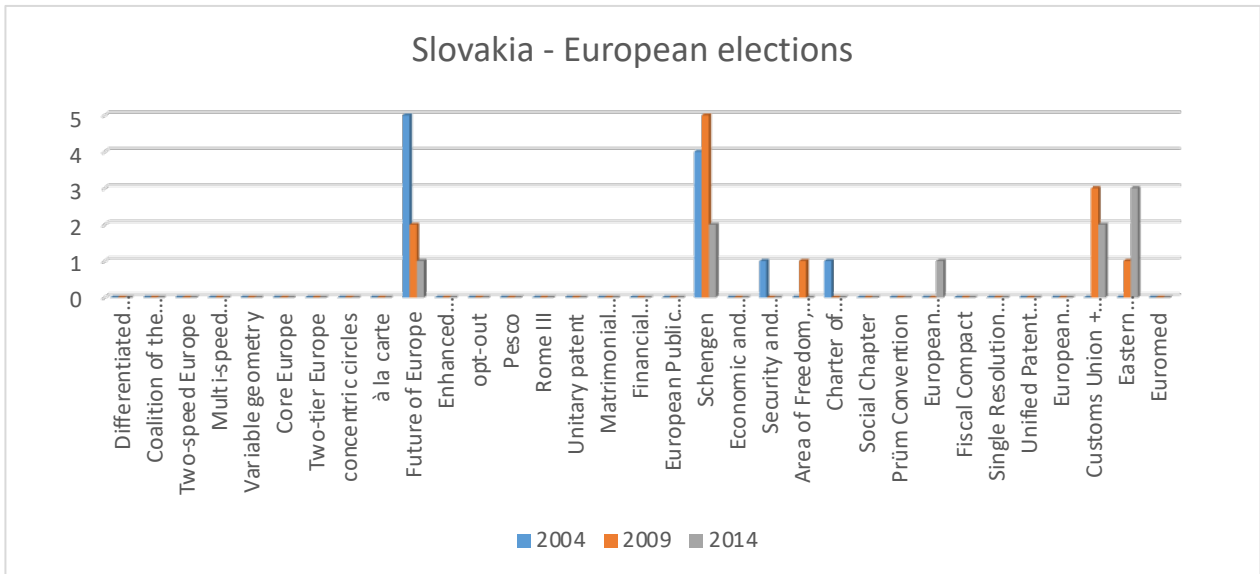


Figure 9. Salience of DI words – Poland, European elections

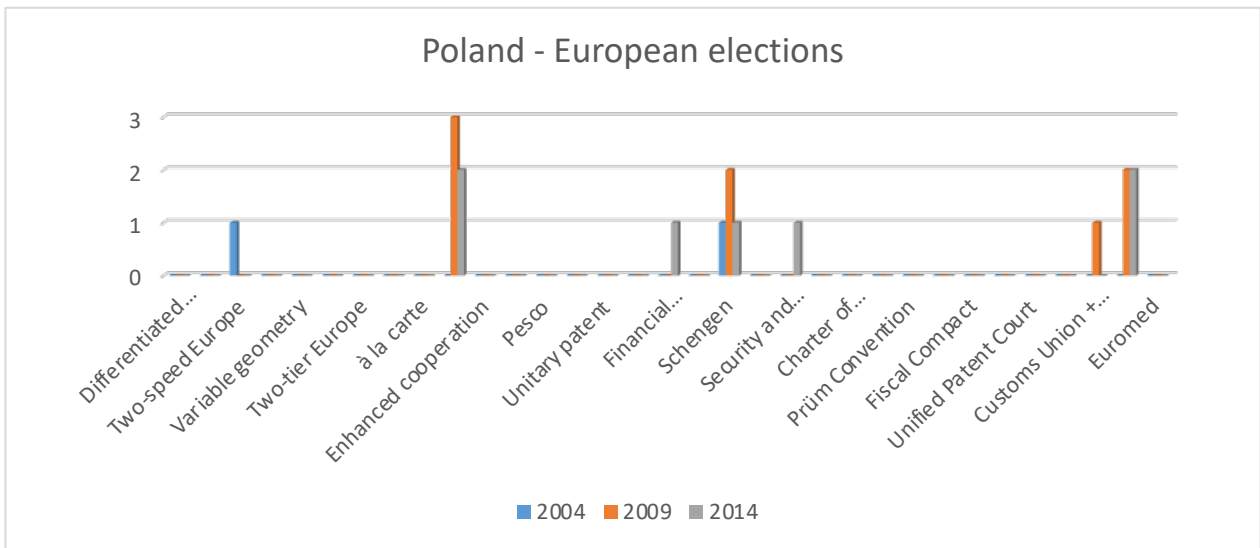
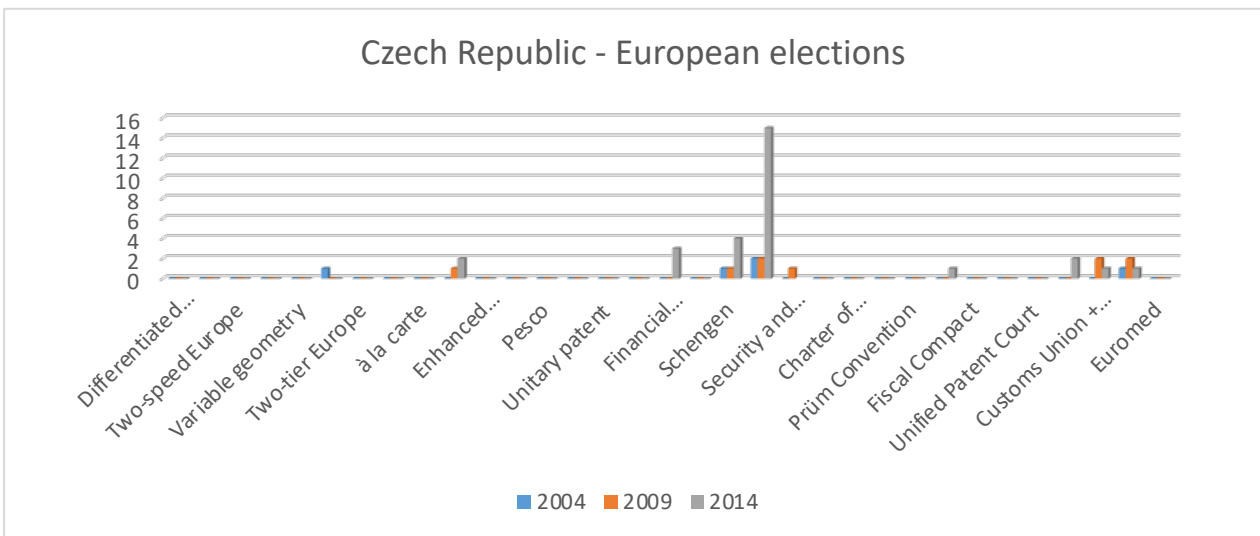


Figure 10. Salience of DI words – Czech Republic, European elections



GERMANY, FRANCE, SPAIN – NATIONAL ELECTIONS

Figure 11. Saliency of DI words – Germany, national elections

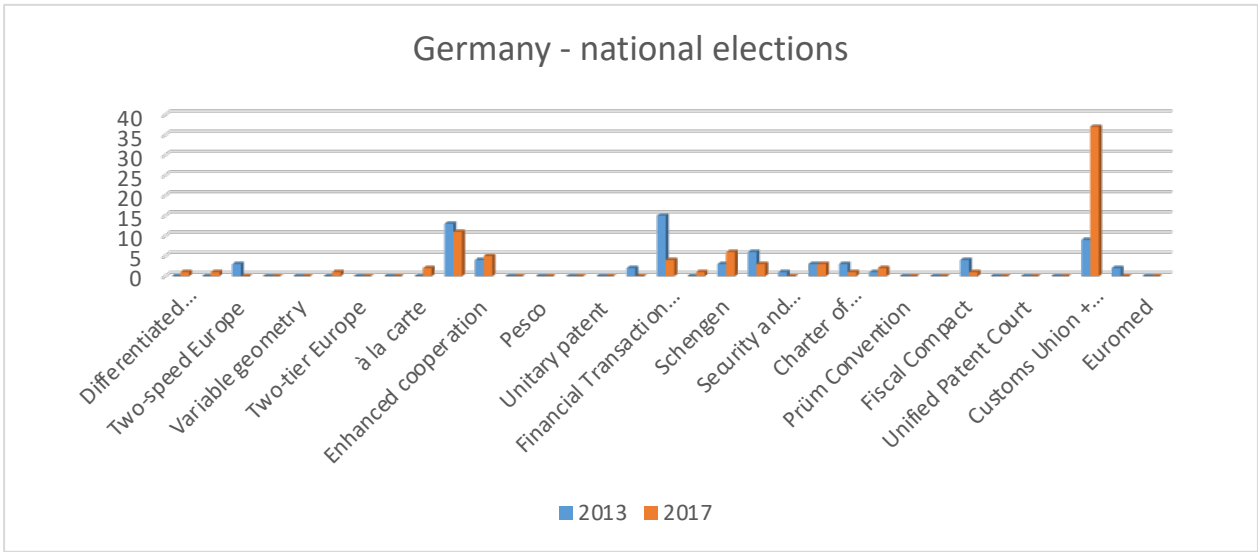


Figure 12. Saliency of DI words – France, national elections

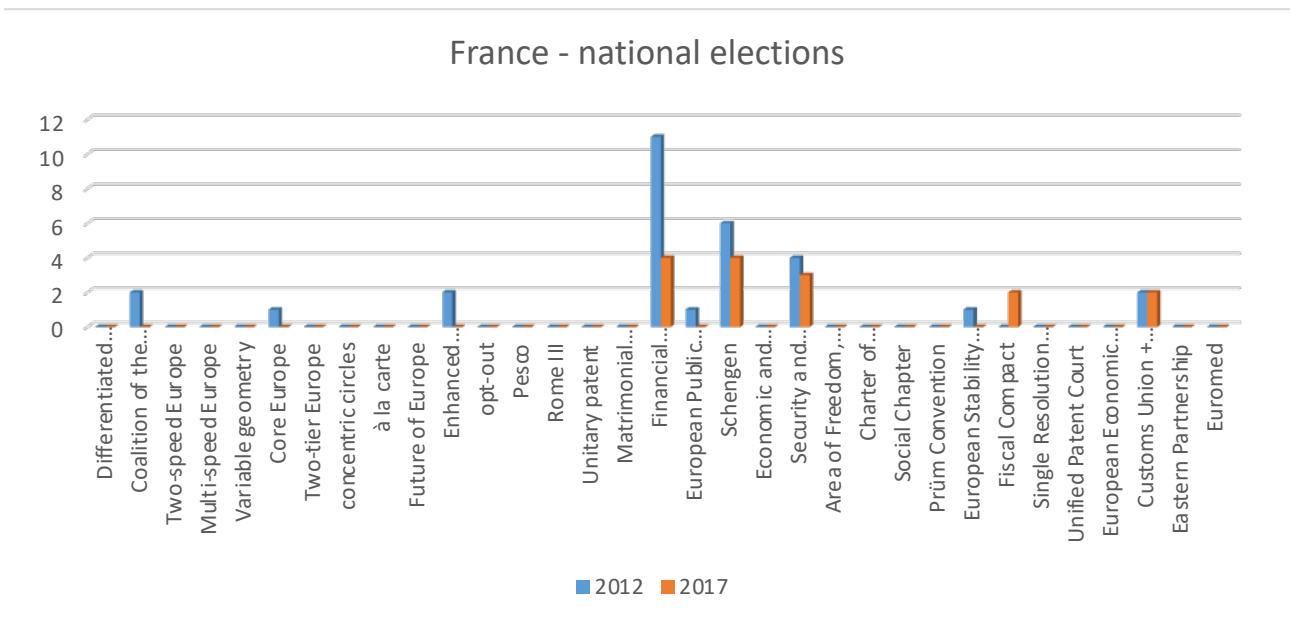
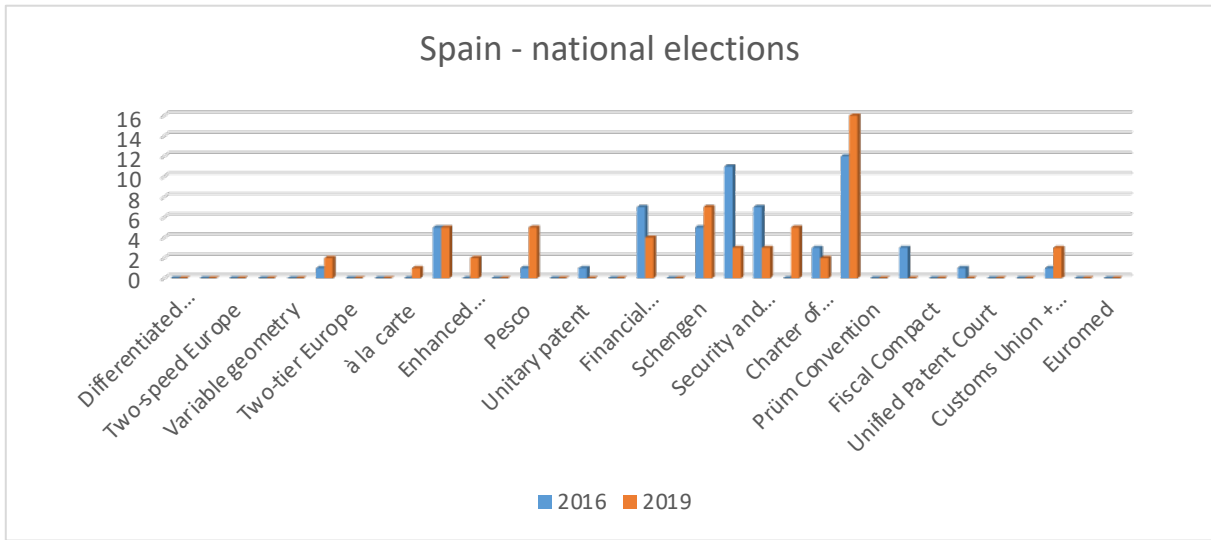


Figure 13. Salience of DI words – Spain, national elections



GERMANY, FRANCE, SPAIN – EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

Figure 14. Salience of DI words – Germany, European elections

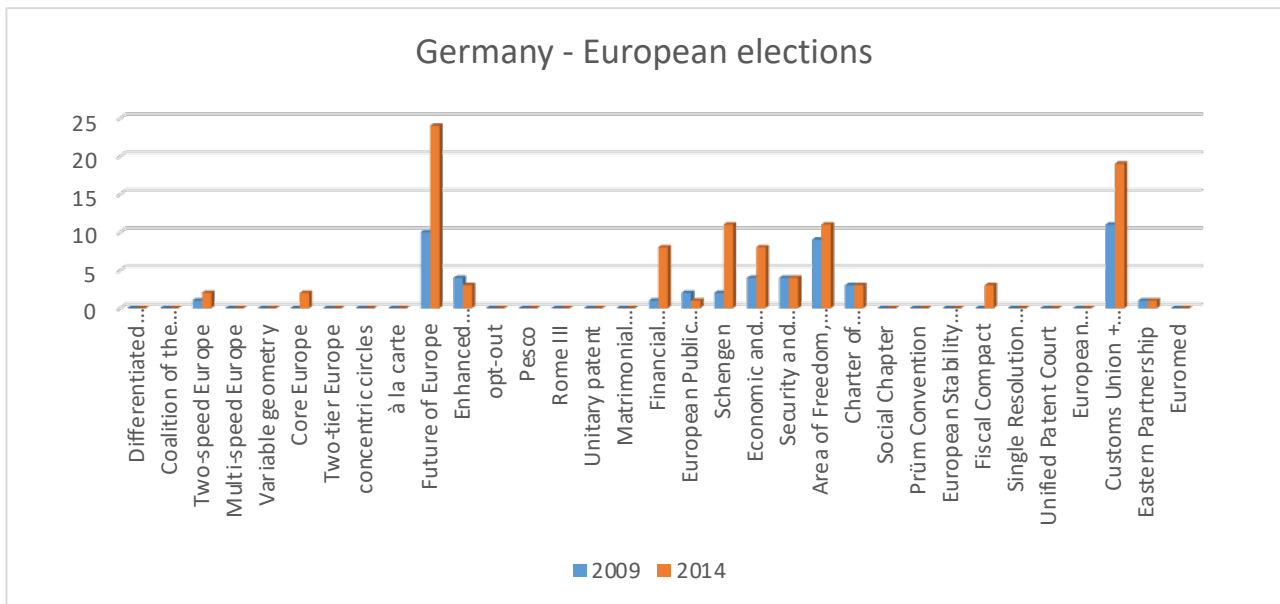


Figure 15. Salience of DI words – France, European elections

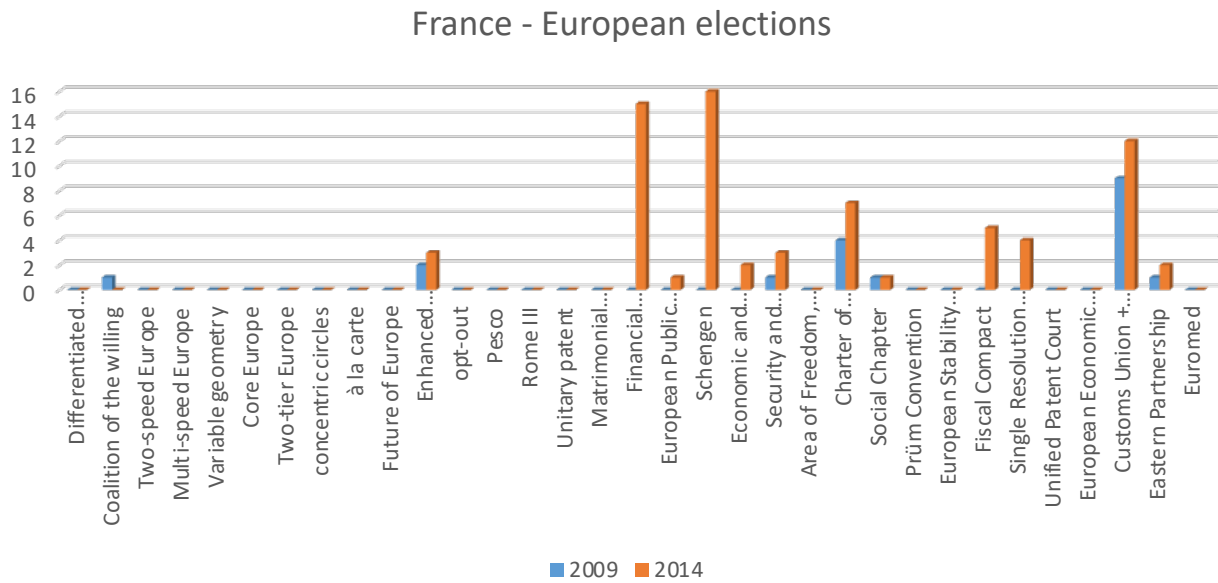
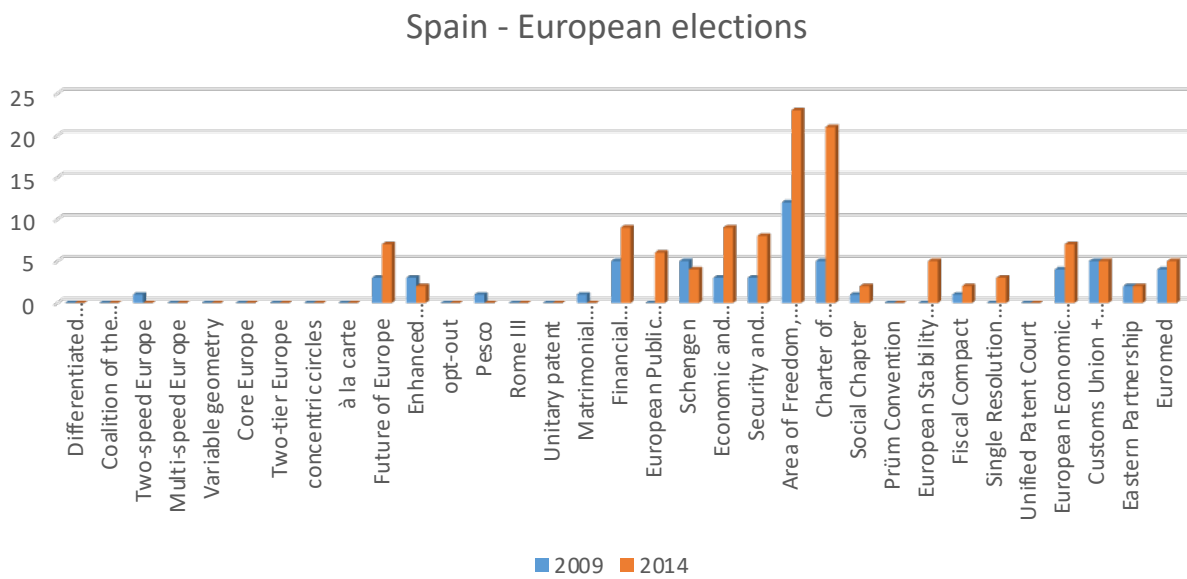


Figure 16. Salience of DI words – Spain, European elections



SCANDINAVIAN COUNTRIES – NATIONAL ELECTIONS
Figure 17. Salience of DI words – Finland, national elections

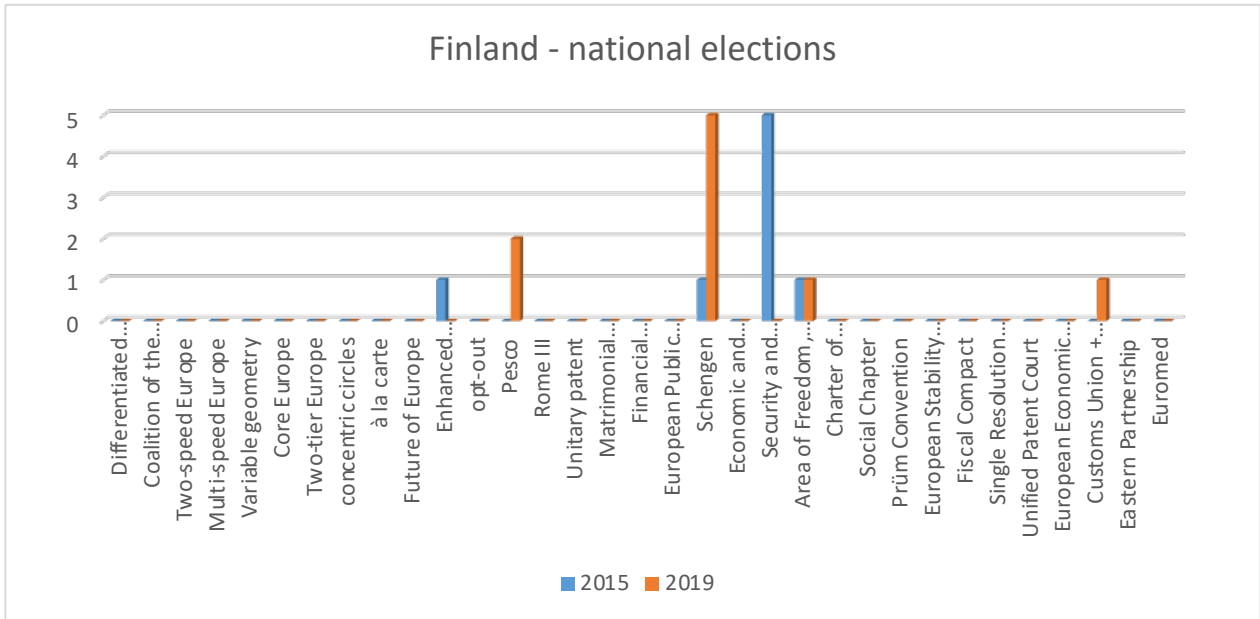


Figure 18. Salience of DI words – Sweden, national elections

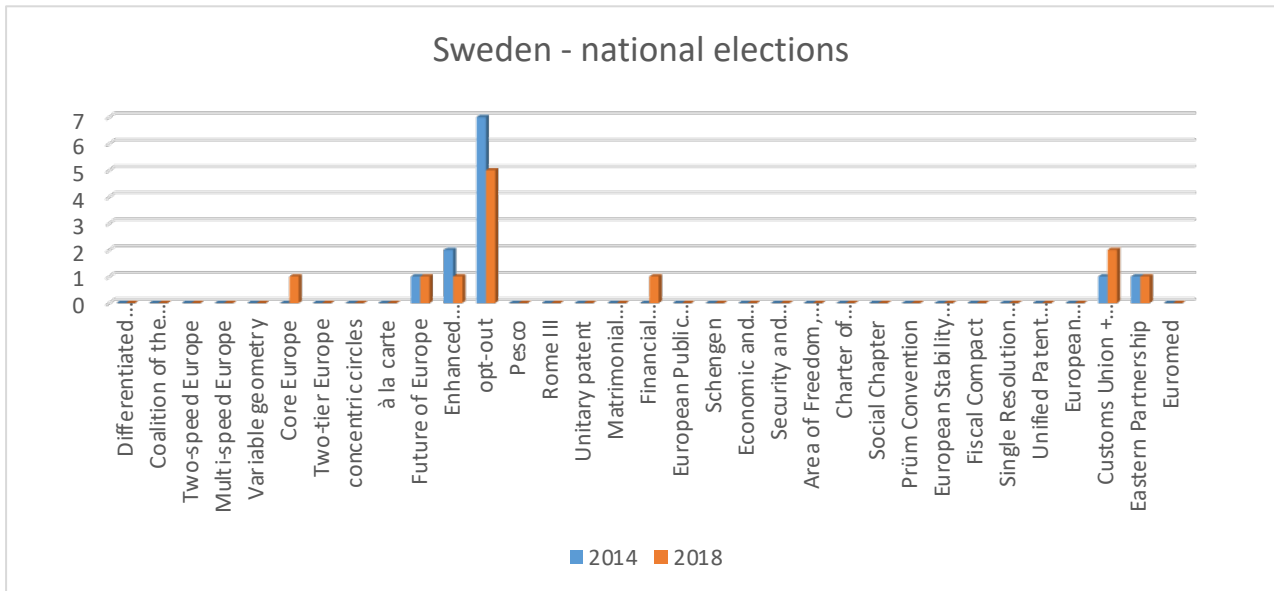
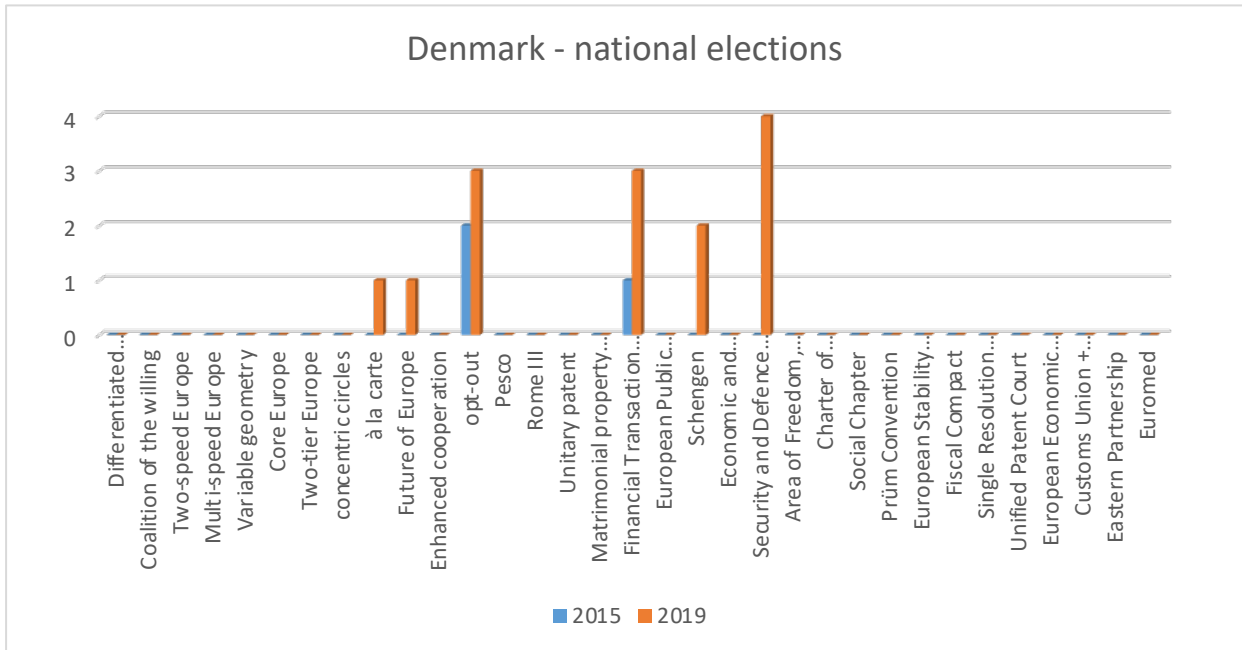


Figure 19. Salience of DI words – Denmark, national elections



SCANDINAVIAN COUNTRIES – EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

Figure 20. Salience of DI words – Finland, European elections

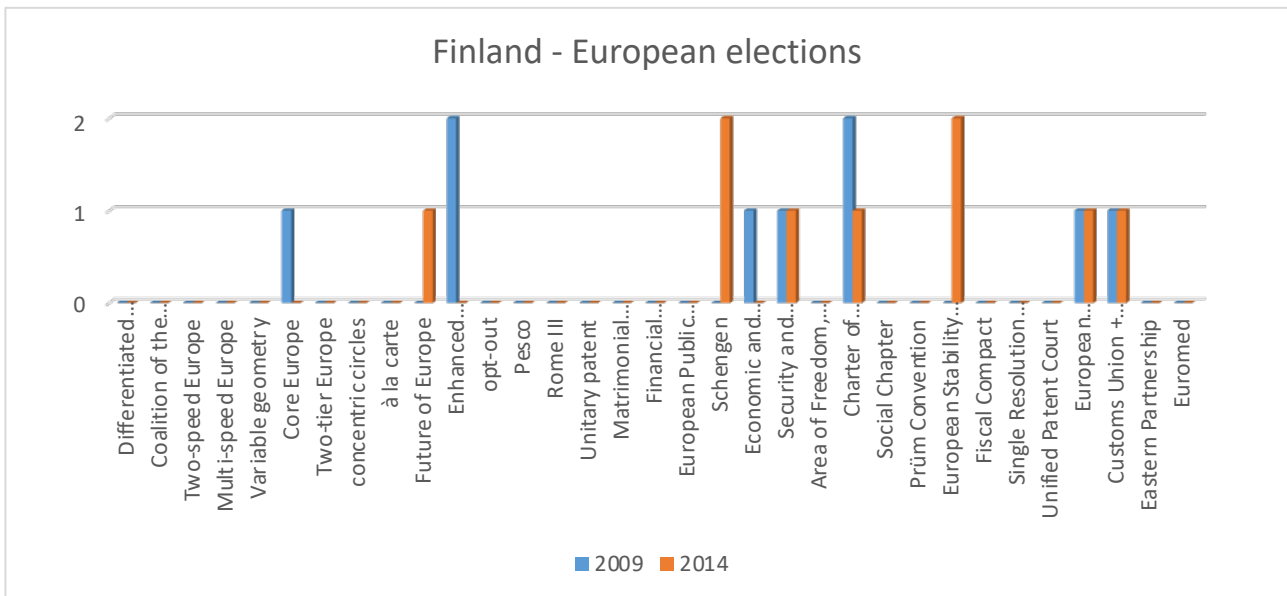


Figure 21. Salience of DI words – Sweden, European elections

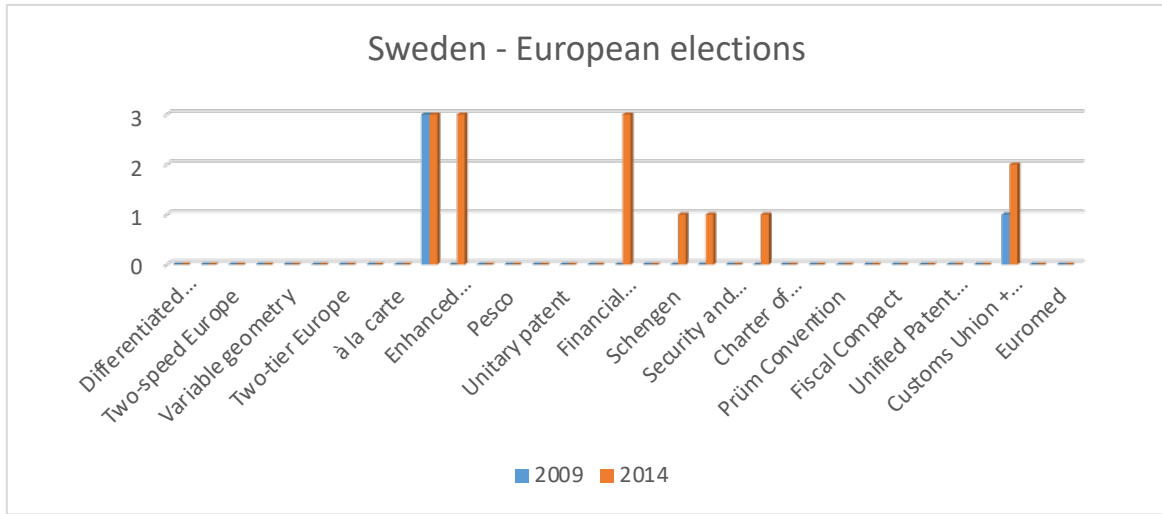
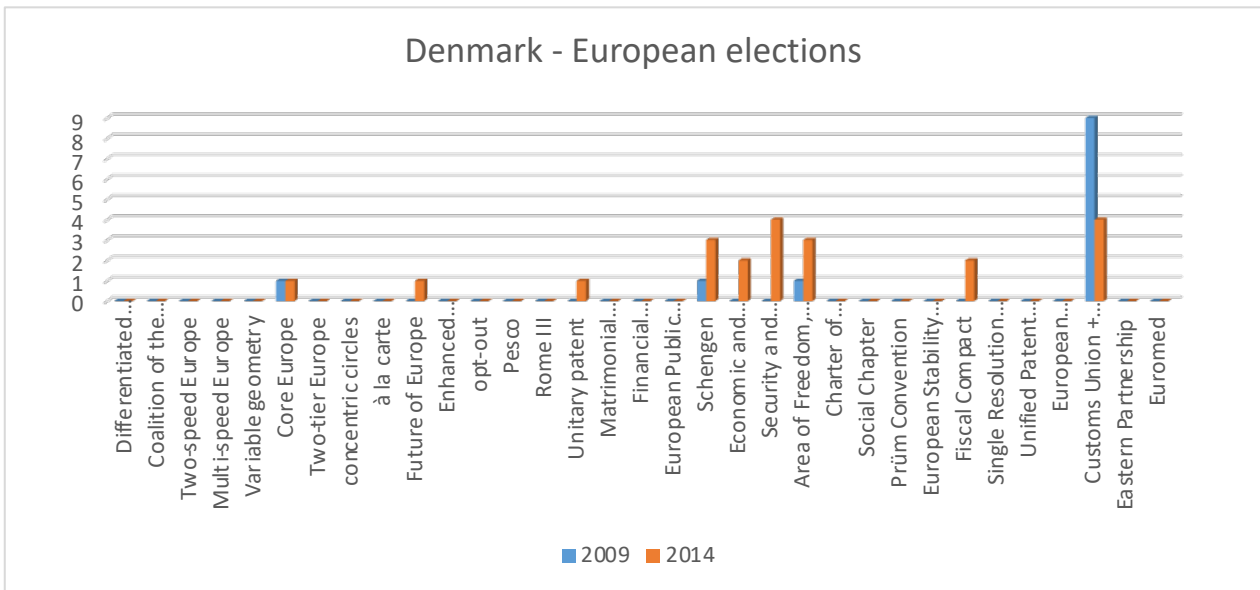


Figure 22. Salience of DI words – Denmark, European elections



6. Inventory of databases on party positions

In this section we review a number of databases containing answers to questions that were close, but never directly related, to the issue of differentiated integration within the European Union. However, our goal in this paper was to offer a broad perspective that in our opinion is necessary to grasp the specificity of the V4 attitudes to European integration in general and to DI in particular. Three databases (Chapel Hill, Euandi and the Manifesto Project) were used to search for party preferences, and YouGov for societal preferences.

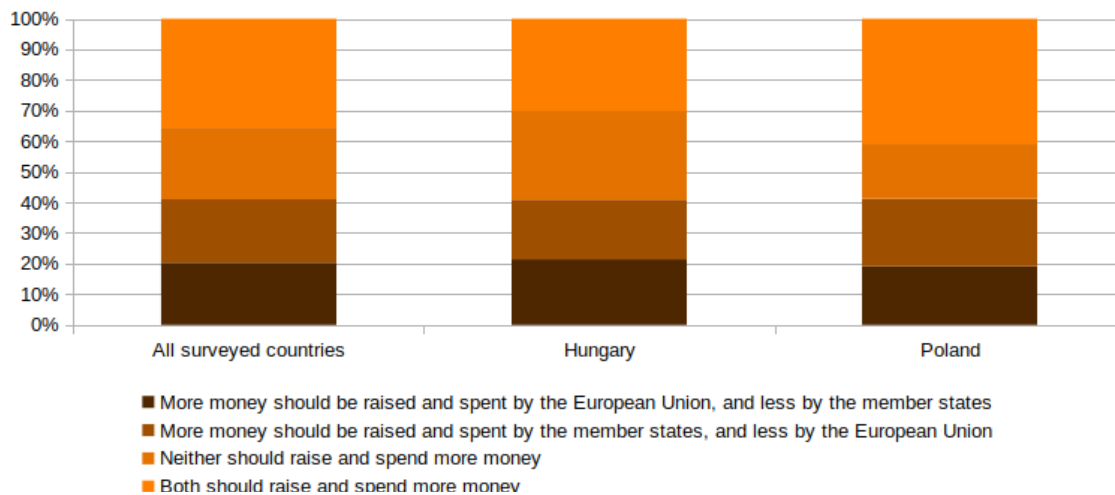
YouGov database

The YouGov database consists of the results of a collection of 21,000 responses to a series of questions on politics and society. The countries included are Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden and the UK. Only two Visegrad countries feature on this list (Hungary and Poland), so the usefulness of this source is limited. Nevertheless, it does allow us to study popular attitudes towards differentiated integration. The first question is “Thinking about the money that is spent by the European Union and the money that is spent by the European Union member states, which of the following best reflects your view?”. Respondents could indicate that either the EU should raise and spend more money, member states should do this, neither should, or both should.

Figure 23. Social attitudes towards the relationship between EU and national budgetary expenses in Hungary, Poland and all respondent countries

Thinking about the money that is spent by the European Union and the money that is spent by the European Union member states, which of the following best reflects your view?

(YouGov, "don't know" answers were omitted)

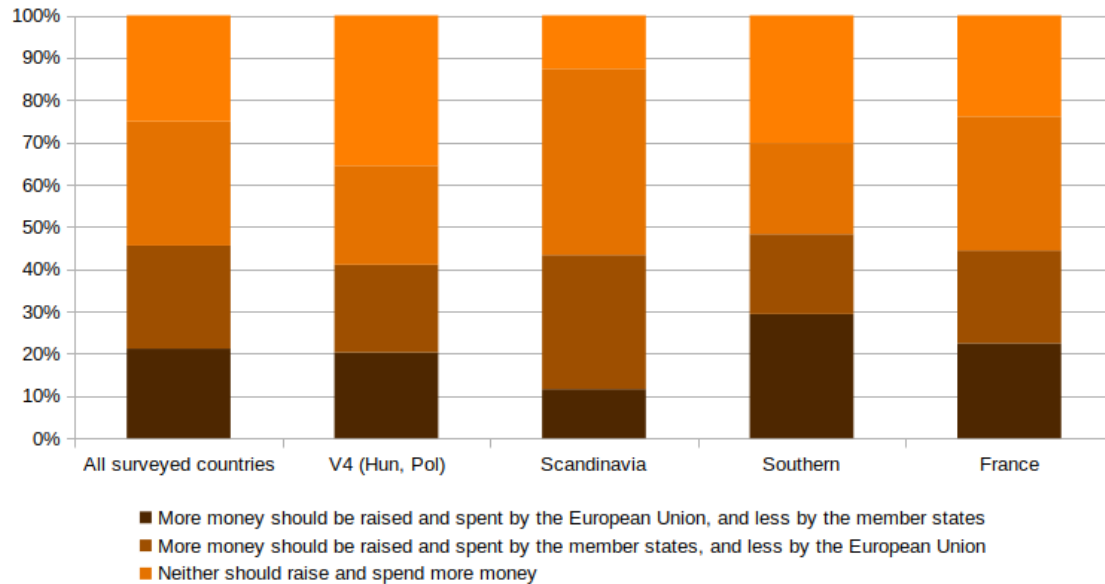


The difference between all the countries surveyed and the two Visegrad countries are minor. The opinion that both the Union and Member States should raise and spend more money is more popular among Hungarians and Poles (30.1% of Hungarians and 40.9% of Poles), while the mean for all countries is only 25.09%. Preferences concerning either national or European spending power are roughly equal. Hungarians and Poles differ in their preferences for more strict spending policies in both the European and national dimensions: 29% of Hungarians agree that neither institutions should spend more, while only 17.9% of Poles share this sentiment (the mean for all the countries surveyed is 29.3%).

Figure 24. Social attitudes towards the relationship between EU and national budgetary expenses by groups of Member States

Thinking about the money that is spent by the European Union and the money that is spent by the European Union member states, which of the following best reflects your view?

(Source: YouGov)



Do the populations of V4 countries differ from other regions of the EU? The above graph compares the opinions of the populations of the two V4 countries included in the YouGov database (Hungary and Poland) with other European blocs: Scandinavia (Denmark, Finland, Sweden), Southern Europe (Greece, Italy, Spain), and France - considered to be a core pro-integration country. Together with the Southern European countries, the Visegrad countries seem to be most pro-integration in terms of the shared European budget and increased Union spending power vis-a-vis Member States. The Poles and Hungarians are the greatest supporters of the idea that both the EU and Member States should have more raising and spending power, with 35.5% in favour. The southern bloc comes second, with 30.2% of support for that policy. The difference between the two blocks is visible in the preference “more money should be raised and spent by the EU and less by the member states”. This opinion is preferred by only 20.3% of the surveyed in Visegrad countries (and is the least popular option), while in the Southern bloc it is accepted by 29.4% of the public.

People in Scandinavia and France are relatively conservative fiscally and cautious towards budget integration. In the Scandinavian bloc, 44% support “neither should raise and spend more money” and 31.7% believe that “more money should be raised and spent by the member states”. In France, those options are supported by 31.7% and 22% of the public, respectively.

Euandi database

The Euandi database, referred to earlier in this paper, was created by the European University Institute in Florence (Reiljan et al., 2020). The database contains political parties' positions on a series of 22 policy-related issues. Those issues were selected for their salience across Europe, and some of them can be considered as indirect indicators of attitudes towards different aspects of DI. They are: "Asylum seekers should be distributed proportionally among EU member states"; "The EU should rigorously punish member states that violate the EU deficit rules"; "The EU should strengthen its security and defence policy"; "The single European currency is a bad thing"; and "Individual member states should have less veto power". Party positioning relied both on party self-placements and expert coding. There were five answer categories: "completely disagree" (0), "tend to disagree" (25), "neutral" (50) "tend to agree" (75) and "completely agree" (100).

Unfortunately, responses changed between consecutive editions of the study, so the possibility of making a diachronic study of changing party attitudes is limited to 15 statements, of which only a few relate to the question of differentiated integration. A summary of the 2019 study is presented below.

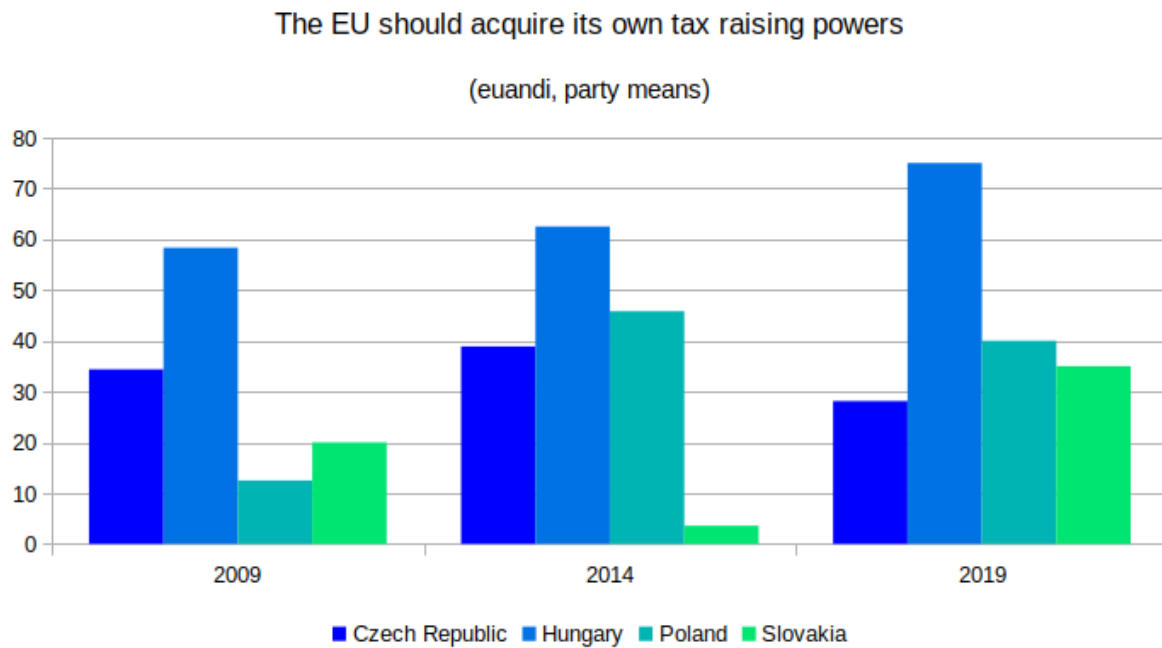
Table 1. Party positions in the European Union towards selected statements in the 2019 Euandi database

	Completely disagree	Tend to disagree	Neutral	Tend to agree	Completely agree
2. Asylum seekers should be distributed proportionally among EU Member States through a mandatory relocation system	32%	11%	13%	23%	31%
12. The EU should rigorously punish Member States that violate the EU deficit rules	27%	21%	13%	24%	15%
17. The European Union should strengthen its security and defence policy	19%	13%	7%	25%	37%
18. On foreign policy issues, the EU should speak with one voice	16%	13%	11%	20%	40%
20. The single European currency (Euro) is a bad thing	44%	17%	11%	12%	17%
22. Individual member states of the EU should have less veto power	31%	27%	6%	21%	15%

V4 countries

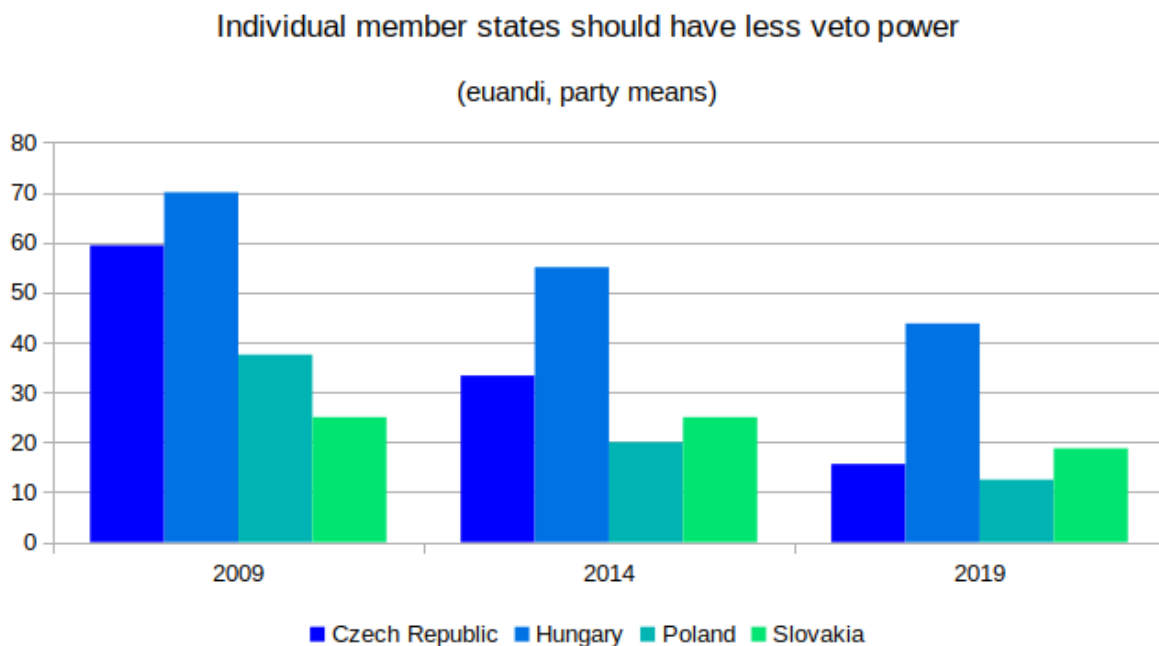
Here, we consider three variables from the Euandi study of political parties' attitudes. "The EU should acquire its own tax raising power" – agreement to that statement could mean being in favour of EU unification and against differentiated integration, as taxes would most probably be uniform across all states. "On foreign policy issues, the EU should speak with one voice" is related to external differentiated integration. Agreement with that sentence means that a given party would support closer integration of European foreign policy. Finally, "Individual member states should have less veto power" indirectly refers to the possibility of having a two-speed Europe. With less veto power, it is expected that the Union would be more uniform, making differentiated integration harder to obtain.

Figure 25. Party attitudes in V4 towards the question of EU tax raising power



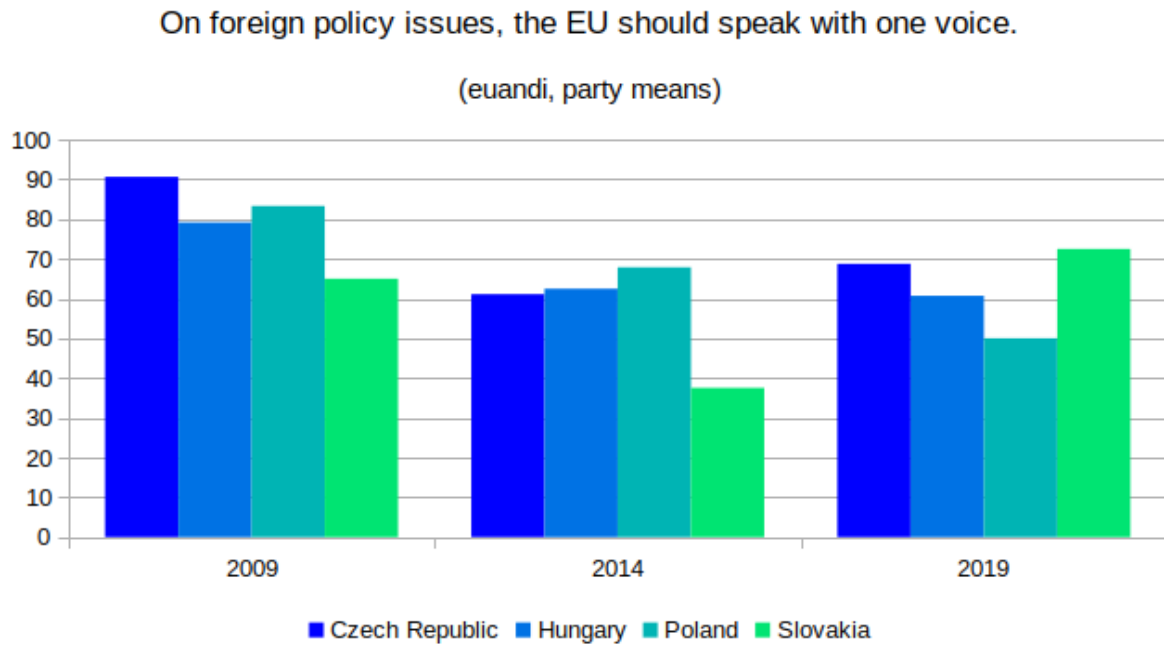
Hungarian political parties seem to be most supportive for European tax raising powers. This is an indicator of disagreement with this particular aspect of differentiated integration and support for a more unified integration policy. Czech, Polish and Slovakian political parties seem more cautious in this regard. There are discontinuous shifts in their attitudes rather than linear trends. Nevertheless, we can observe a slight decrease in acceptance of EU tax raising powers in the Czech Republic (from 34.3% in 2009 to 28.1% in 2019), while the opposite is true in the case of Hungary (from 58.3% in 2009 to 75% in 2019), Poland (from 12.5% to 40%) and Slovakia (from 20% to 35%).

Figure 26. Party attitudes in V4 towards the question of individual veto power in the EU



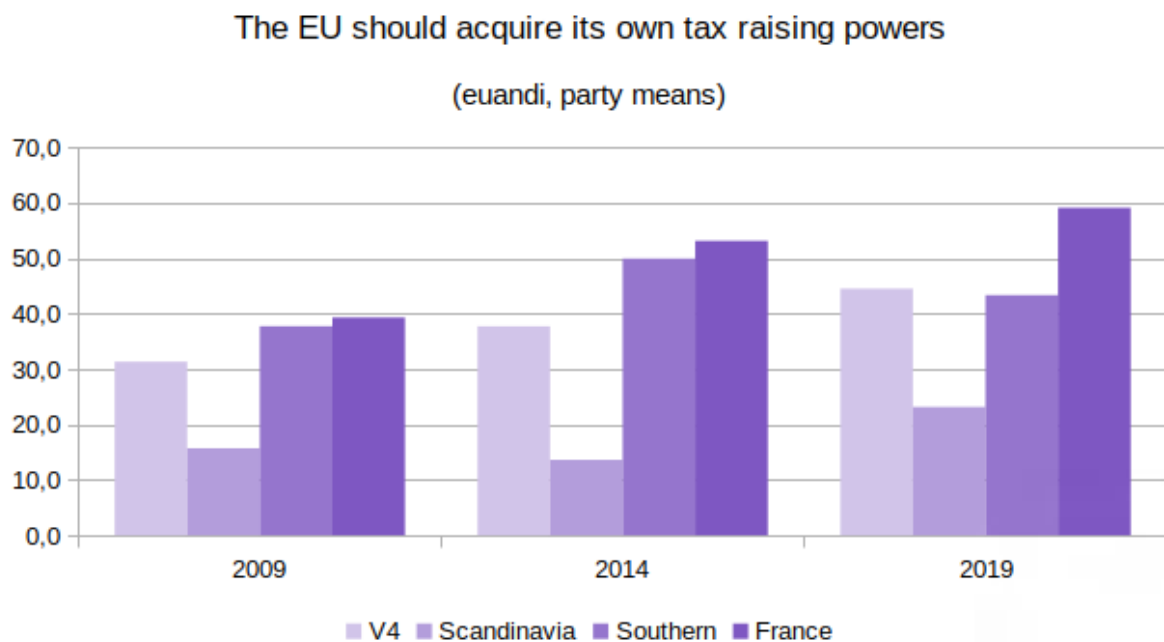
In all four countries, support for lower veto power decreased. While support for a decrease in veto power was low in Slovakia through the survey period, in the Czech Republic it fell drastically, from 59.3% to 15.6% in just ten years. The shifts in Hungary and Poland were less drastic, but still significant: from 70% in 2009 to 43.8% in 2019 in Hungary, and from 37.5% to 20% in Poland.

Figure 27. Party attitudes in V4 (cont.)



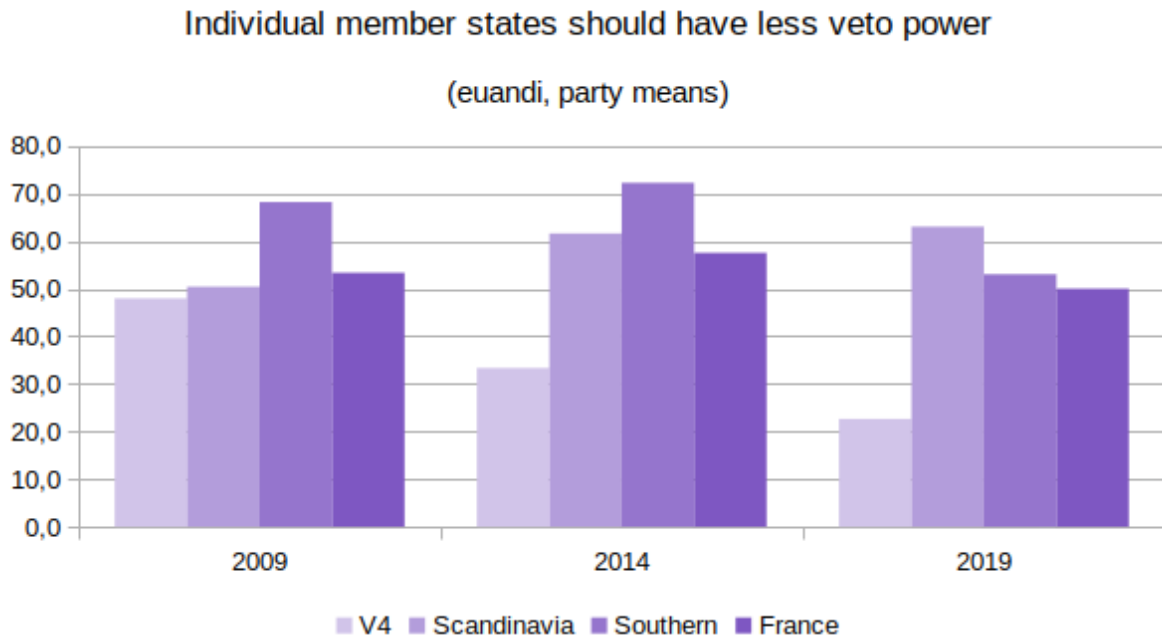
Finally, there was a steady decline in support for the unified foreign policy. Political support for this process was similar across the region. The mean response in 2019 for parties in each country was as follows: 68.75% in Czech Republic, 60.71% in Hungary, 50% in Poland and 72.5% in Slovakia.

Figure 28. Party attitudes on EU tax raising powers in selected group of EU Member States



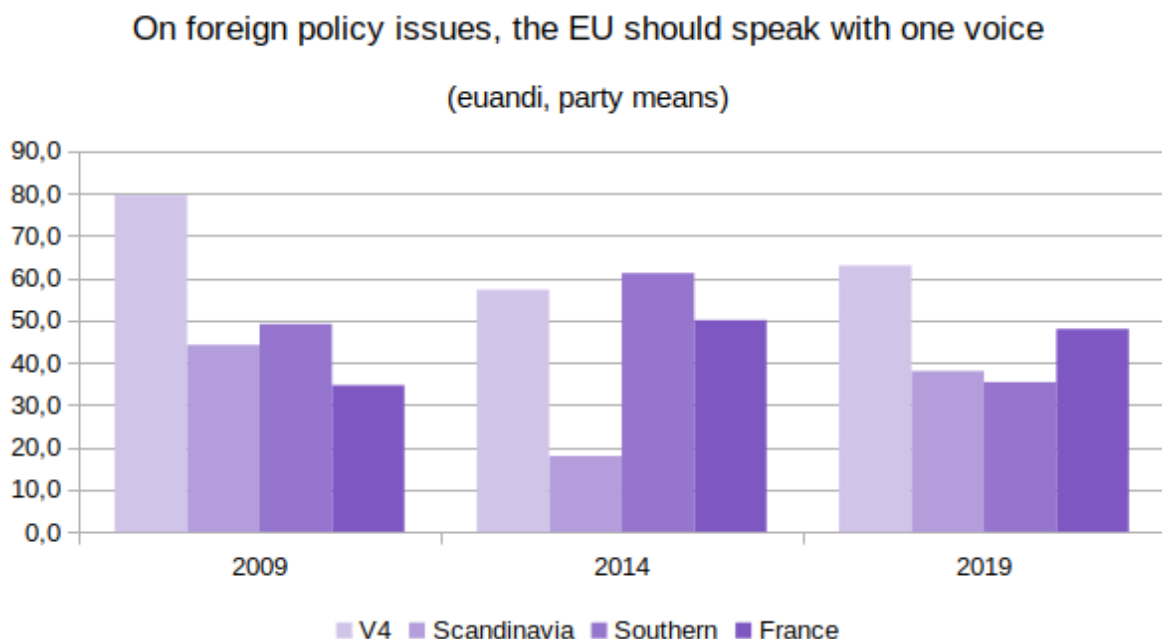
In terms of party attitudes towards EU taxing power, the views of the four Visegrad countries were similar to those of the group of Southern European countries (Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain). Support for this policy has increased in the last decade. While close geographically, parties in the Scandinavian bloc countries (Denmark, Finland and Sweden) have clearly divergent views on this issue.

Figure 29. Party attitudes on EU tax raising powers in selected group of EU Member States (cont.)



On the issue of Member State voting power, the attitudes of Visegrad political parties are increasingly dissimilar from those in France and the Scandinavian and Southern blocs. In the other respondent countries, support for Member States voting power also increased, albeit much more gradually.

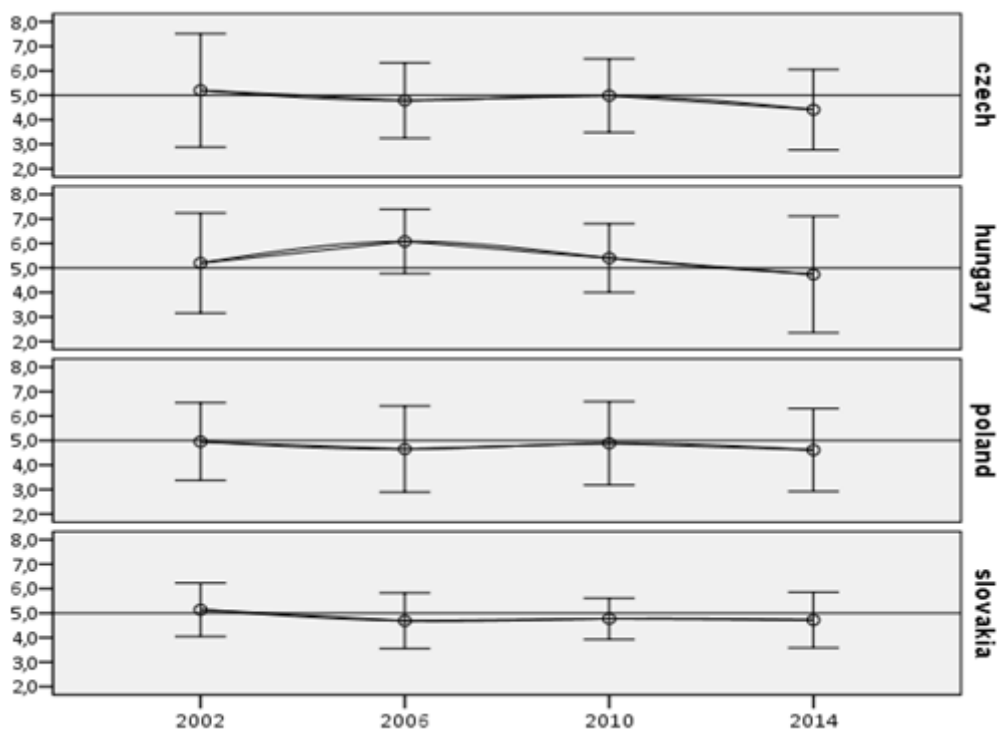
Figure 30. Party attitudes on EU tax raising powers in selected group of EU Member States (cont.)



On the issue of the EU speaking with a single voice in foreign policy, the Visegrad group was quite different from the other respondents. Support for unified foreign policy was significantly higher among them, which could result from their proximity to Russia. The countries of Central & Eastern Europe feel that only a unified Europe can help them in the case of increased hostilities.

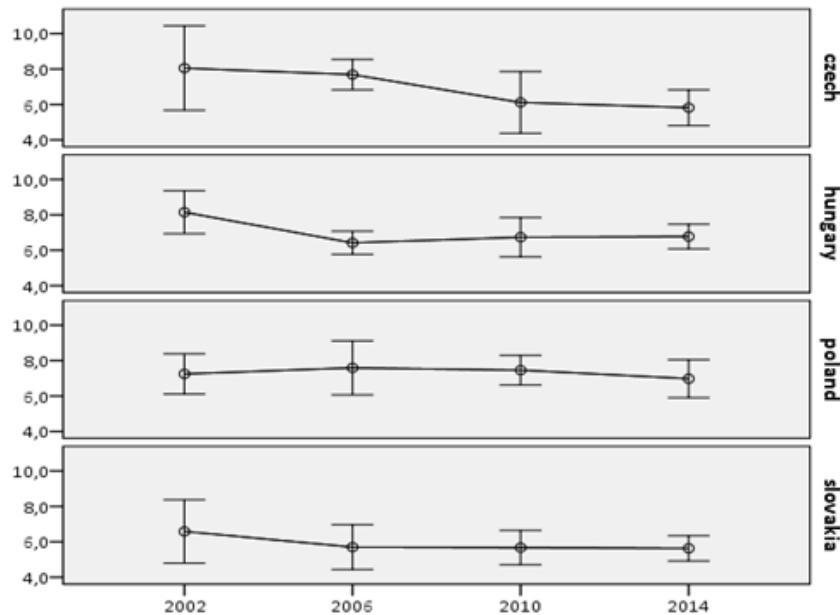
It should be noted that the differences in opinions among parties about support for integration with the European Union were the highest in Hungary in 2002 and 2014. In Poland and Slovakia, those differences were smaller and more stable than in other countries. Similarly, the highest average of responses was recorded in all countries in 2002, with the exception of Hungary, where the strongest support for integration was recorded in 2006. In general, since 2010 we have witnessed a decline in the average support for the European Union among parties in the former post-communist countries (except for Slovakia). Importantly, Hungary had the highest average party response on the scale of „overall orientation” in all years taken together.

Figure 31. Average positions of all parties in each country and range of the observation confidence interval (95%) for the variable Position – “Overall orientation of party leadership towards European integration”.



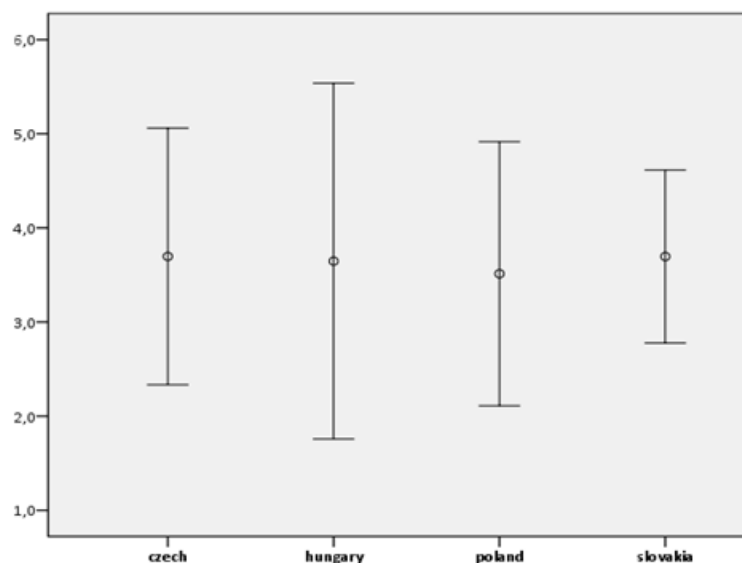
A second variable, “relative salience of European integration in the party’s public stance” (Figure 31), is on an 11-point scale from 0 – “European Integration is of no importance, never mentioned” to 10 – “European Integration is the most important issue”. As can be seen, the strongest differences between the parties occurred prior to EU accession, in 2002 in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. In all countries except Poland, in the same year the highest average of answers was also recorded. After 2006, the average response rate clearly declined in the Czech Republic, which means that parties adopted stances that indicated an increasing decline in the importance of the European Union in national politics. A similar phenomenon on a smaller scale can also be observed in the other countries. Poland and Hungary have the highest average on the scale of “relative salience” in all the years considered taken together.

Figure 32. Average positions of all parties in each country and range of observation confidence interval (95%) for the variable “Relative salience of European integration in the party’s public stance”



“Position of the party leadership on EU authority over member states’ economic and budgetary policies” is the third variable from the Chapel Hill survey. The answers extend on a 7-point scale from 1 – “strongly opposed” to 7 – “strongly in favour”. This question was asked only in the 2014 edition of the survey. The highest averages of consent to EU authority over Member States’ economic and budgetary policies were recorded in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, although the parties in the other countries were only slightly different from their neighbours, with average responses of 3.6 and 3.5 on the scale. The parties in Hungary had the most varied opinions about the centralised authority over budgetary policies.

Figure 33. Average positions of all parties in each country and range of the observation confidence interval (95%) for the variable “Position of the party leadership on EU authority over member states’ economic and budgetary policies”



Manifesto Project

The Manifesto project analyses party election manifestos in order to examine party political preferences (Volkens et al., 2020). The project team collects and compares the content of party manifestos with the support of coders from over 50 different countries. The data set provided by the Manifesto Project for analysing political preferences covers more than 1,000 political parties, from 1945 to the present day and in more than 50 countries. The database does not contain variables directly related to a party's opinion on differentiated integration. Only two variables refer directly to the European Union: "European Union - favourable mentions of European Community/Union in general" and "Negative references to the European Community/Union". Questions about the differences in integration may be considered as partially answered by the variables "Decentralisation. Support for federalism or decentralisation of political and/or economic power" and "Centralisation. General opposition to political decision-making at lower political levels. Support for unitary government and for more centralisation in political and administrative procedures". These, however, are general in scope and do not relate specifically to the European Union.

Figure 34. Distribution of observations for the variable "European Union - favourable mentions of European Community/Union in general".

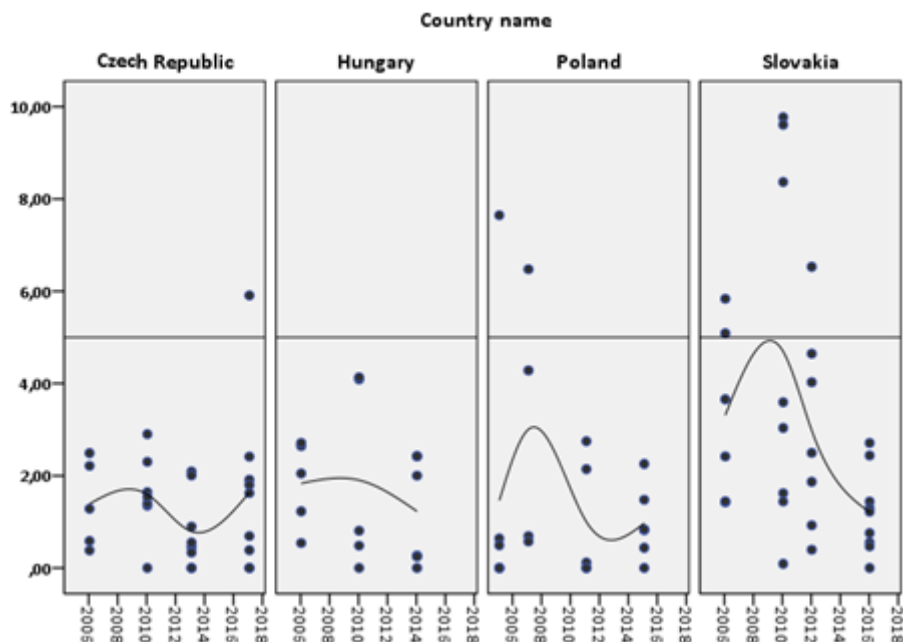


Figure 34 shows the distribution of positive mentions concerning the European Union in party manifestos. Each dot symbolizes the proportion of favourable mentions in one party manifesto. If no such mention is made, the party (for example, the Slovakian Kotleba People's Party) does not appear in the graph. The highest average of mentions for all the years under consideration was recorded in Slovakia (2.97 mentions), and the lowest average in the Czech Republic. The trend lines show that the number of positive mentions increased in all countries up to 2010 and then declined. This phenomenon is most evident in Slovakia and Poland. Unlike the other countries, in the Czech Republic the attitudes of political parties towards the European Union became slightly more favourable after 2012 but remained at a relatively low level.

Figure 35. Average positions of all party manifestos in each country and range of the observation confidence interval (95%) for the variable “European Union - favourable mentions of European Community/Union in general”

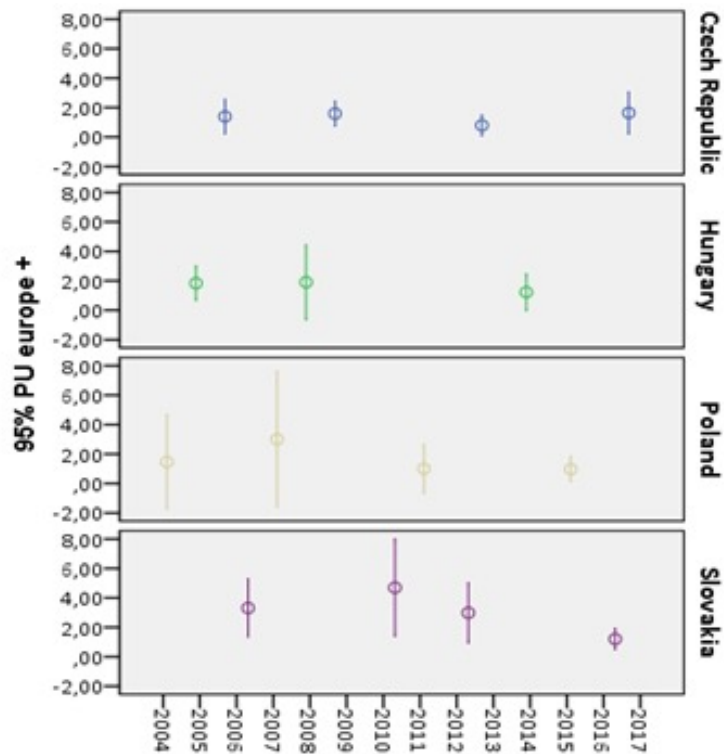


Figure 35 shows what countries displayed the strongest differences between parties. The party manifestos in Slovakia were clearly different in 2010, followed by a narrowing of opinions in subsequent years and a decrease in positive mentions about the European Union. In Poland, the strongest differences of opinions were found in 2007, and then, as in Slovakia, there was a decrease in the average number of positive mentions. Relatively, the greatest stability in the opinions expressed over all the years of the survey was among parties in the Czech Republic.

Conclusion

This working paper has examined the positions of political parties towards differentiated integration using the case of the Visegrad Group. The first research question aimed to provide a basis for a comparative analysis, to the extent to which various databases documenting party positions lend themselves to a study of DI. Unfortunately, this can be done only indirectly, although important point of reference is to be found. Characterising positions on DI necessitates framing them together among a wider set of problems concerning the salience of and overall attitudes towards European integration, as well as towards specific problems and challenges. We have tried to see whether any specific differences emerge regarding these variables among EU member states, but for the moment our analysis is cursory at best.

The second question dealt with assessing the salience of DI. Through an inventory of various databases, we established that the overall salience of European integration has fallen since the beginning of the last decade, and quite dramatically in some cases, such as in the Czech Republic. No wonder, then, that DI is commonly believed to play only a very minor role, or to be completely unimportant, in domestic politics in the V4. This is evident from government programmes, speeches by prime Ministers, and parliamentary debates. Most of the time, peaks in salience are driven by external political and economic developments rather than domestic factors.

The position of political parties in the V4 towards DI needs to be nuanced. Until around 2015, all major parties clearly stood against DI models, with a two-speed and multi-speed Europe most often being referred to. Since around 2016, while no major party could be categorized as advocating DI, the positions of the Slovak and Hungarian governments towards these models have changed to neutral, so that now they neither accept nor clearly reject them. With regard to mechanisms, in most cases governments and major parties remain neutral towards such issues as enhanced cooperation, treating it as a natural, perhaps necessary phenomenon in today's EU. Interestingly, the pro-European opposition in Poland, and especially in Hungary, seem to be much more sympathetic to these kind of initiatives, taking the view that they can bring their countries closer to the core of the EU even when the government is formed by softly Eurosceptic parties. Finally, there seems to be a joint approach towards the external elements of DI, particularly as far as support for the European Neighbourhood policy and future enlargements of the EU are concerned. Regarding internal DI, no clear pattern emerges that would signify a common position among political parties, although here we have to remember that the salience of these instances is mostly very low.

Appendix 1. DI words in English

Keyword	
DI models (conceptual keywords)	Differentiated integration
	Coalition of the willing
	Two-speed Europe
	Multi-speed Europe
	Variable geometry
	Core Europe
	Two-tier Europe
	Concentric circles
	à la carte
	(Future of Europe)
DI mechanisms	Enhanced cooperation
	opt-out
DI instances – enhanced cooperation	Pesco
	Rome III
	Unitary patent
	Matrimonial property regimes
	Financial Transaction Tax
	European Public Prosecutor
DI instances – opt-out policy fields	Schengen
	Economic and Monetary Union
	Security and Defence Policy
	Area of Freedom, Security and Justice
	Charter of Fundamental Rights
	Social Charter
DI instances – inter se agreements	Prüm Convention
	European Stability Mechanism
	Fiscal Compact
	Single Resolution Mechanism
	Unified Patent Court
DI instances – external agreements	European Economic Area
	Customs Union + Turkey
	Eastern Partnership
	Euromed

Appendix 2. Number of manifestos reported in section 5

	National Elections	European Elections
Slovakia	30	24
Poland	19	20
Hungary	22	15
Czech Republic	28	22
	National Elections	European Elections
Germany	13	22
Spain	39	26
France	20	19
	National Elections	European Elections
Denmark	19	16
Finland	17	16
Sweden	16	20

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