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# The Strength of Pro-European Consensus Among Slovenian Political Elites

Matej Makarovič, Lea Prijon, Mateja Rek & Matevž Tomšič\*

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**Abstract:** »Die Stärke des pro-europäischen Konsenses unter den slowenischen politischen Eliten«. In this article, the authors analyse attitudes of Slovenian political elites towards EU and the process of European integration on general in the period of crisis. Namely, during the EU accession period, there was a strong consensus among political elites and in general public on desirability of country's integration into European institutional framework. However, the 2008 crisis that strongly affected Slovenian economy and society brought the rise of negative attitudes towards EU and other Western supra-national political entities. The main thesis is that the Europeanness of Slovenian political elites is rather ambivalent since its attitudes are diverging and often inconsistent.

**Keywords:** Political elites, consensus, integration, attitudes, European Union, Slovenia.

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## 1. Introduction

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In the process of the 'return to Europe', meaning the inclusion of countries from Central and Eastern Europe in the European Union (EU), a very important – perhaps even predominant – role was played by national elites of these countries. This holds particularly for political elites who can be defined, according to Higley and Burton (2006, 7), as "persons who are able, by the virtue of their strategic positions in powerful organisations and movements, to affect political outcomes regularly and substantially." It was the one that was handling the process of negotiations concerning EU integration, the respective decision-making and implementation of the common European order.

The lion's share of the Central and Eastern European elites sees EU membership as a prerequisite for 'Europeanising' their former socialist societies, i.e.

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the establishment of the institutional structure, values and principles that characterise established Western democracies (Tomšič, 2016). But the extent of the compatibility of their values, knowledge and capabilities with the Western elites is of utmost importance. Similar holds true for their level of 'Europeanness', consisting of feelings of attachment towards European unification and integration, approval of its present state and the prospect of further developments in this direction (Best et al. 2012, 8). We are speaking about their feeling of European belonging and willingness to implement common rules and standards at domestic level.

Slovenia used to be considered as post-communist 'success story' both in terms of systemic transformation and fulfilment of criteria needed for EU accession. However, due to its financial problems (high indebtedness, 'immobilised' banking sector and increasing budget deficit), this small EU country came under the spotlight of institutions of the European Union. The crisis uncovered structural weaknesses of the Slovenian model of socio-economic regulation (Tomšič and Prijon 2014). It also debates and controversies – both among elites and general public – on future developmental model.

In the last couple of years, the country experienced rather frequent change of governments (four in the last five years). All of them were, regardless their political 'colour', dedicated to common European rules and policy-guidelines, set by EU institutions. This applies also to their recommendations how to tackle crisis. For this reason, they were often accused of 'blindly' following 'dictates from Brussels' what referred particularly to austerity-measures for establishing financial sustainability. However, despite declarative determination to introduce recommended socio-economic reforms, especially privatisation of state-controlled companies) and general liberalisation of institutional environment (in terms of establishment of business-friendly conditions, very few steps were done in this direction. It is a question thus whether this dedication was more a 'lip-service' than actual willingness to introduce necessary change.

In the article, we hypothesize that the Europeanness of Slovenian political elites is rather ambivalent since its attitudes are diverging and often inconsistent. This ambivalence is connected to configuration of Slovenian elites, particularly to power-relations between different elite factions and perception of the impact that the Union could have in this regard. On the one hand, the mainstream elite of both the centre left and the centre right has always declared its pro-EU orientation. On the other hand, parts of the political elite, especially those trying to maintain some of the Slovenian political and economic specifics, may see the EU as a threat to the status quo. The economic and financial crisis has made these fears clearer and more specified. However, even if they share such fears, the key political actors are far from willing to abandon their declared pro-EU stance. We claim that this ambivalence contributes to the lack of coherence in the elites' attitudes towards the EU in a sense that the common EU policies are on the one hand followed but on the other hand heavily criti-

cised and that the EU is on the one hand declaratively supported and on the other hand used as a scape goat, especially regarding the austerity measures.

In the first section, we present main characteristics of Slovenian political space, with the focus on the relationships between different factions of political elite. Further, the conduct of political elite in the process of EU accession is thematised, as well as its behaviour during the crisis. This is followed by empirical section where elite's perception of different aspects of the European Union is analysed, focusing on a comparison between centre-leftist and centre-rightist elite in this regard.

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## 2. Configuration of Slovenian Political Space and Political Elite

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Political space in Slovenia is characterised by a bipolar division, consisting of two political blocs (Fink-Hafner 1997; Tomšič 2006; 2008; Jou 2011). This division largely covers the left-right cleavage since one camp is usually labelled in public discourse as 'leftist' and the other as 'rightist'. This bipolar structure remained for the whole period, meaning that right-left division of political space became considerably stabilised (Bebler 2002). However, some changes regarding relationships took place within both political camps. In the 'left' camp, *Liberal Democracy of Slovenia* (LDS) played the leading role throughout most of transition period, followed by *Social Democrats* (SD) and later by *Positive Slovenia* (PS) and now the *Party of Modern Centre* (SMC), although in the case of the latter, situation is more complicated since it is recently established party with weak local organisation and without strong ideological 'core' (more on the phenomenon of this party follows). In the 'right' camp, the leading role was first played by *Slovenian Christian Democrats* (NSi's predecessor), then by *Slovenian People's Party* (SLS) and now for more than a decade by *Slovenian Democratic Party* (SDS). While in the 'left' camp, situation was rather stable through most of the transition period and become more volatile in the last years, in the 'right' camp's situation became stabilised from the beginning of the century, with SDS maintaining its dominant position.

For most of the post-communist period, the Slovenian political space was dominated by a 'left-liberal' bloc (Adam and Tomšič 2012). From the first parliamentary elections in 1990 onwards, there were eight 'political turnovers' (including the establishment of the first non-communist government in 1990, and the current one), in other words, changes of the political options in power (and seven different heads of government, including the current one). However, in this (25-year) period (1990-2015) governments not dominated by 'left-liberal' oriented parties were in place for just seven and a half years.

Elite configuration strongly affected prevailing cultural orientations, i.e. values and ideas in political space and society in general (ibid.). Namely, elites

are the most important 'cultural entrepreneurs', i.e. producers and transmitters of cultural scenarios that affect political and social dynamics (Kubik, 2003). Certain observers speak about strong consensus-based politics that was characteristic for post-communist Slovenia, pointing out relatively low polarisation between political parties and high agreement on national level with regard to key policy issues (Guardianchich 2011; Bennich-Björkman and Likič-Brborič 2012). However, the situation with regard to elite consensus is much more complicated. It is true that all major political forces shared some common political goals like integration into the European Union or introduction of the Euro and also maintenance of main elements of welfare state (Fink-Hafner 2006); but there is strong disagreement on many other issues, the ones that are related to strong ideological divisions (over the role of Catholic church, the nature of communist regime etc.) and fierce conflicts, described by some as 'cultural war' (*Kulturkampf*) (Adam, 1999; Tomšič, 2008). When major international strategic goals became fulfilled, politico-ideological polarisation intensified again. Although it seems that at the moment, these ideological conflicts affect pro-European consensus among the main faction of political elite, they might, if the crisis sharpens, bring the rise of scepticism towards European Union.<sup>1</sup>

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### 3. Elites and the Process of EU Accession

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After the independence, there was a broad consensus shared by diverse political and other elites in Slovenia that recognised EU membership as one of the country's priorities and main strategic goal. In that period, Slovenian political elites were, at least on the declarative level, strongly devoted to a pro-European orientation (Tomšič 2006, Krašovec and Lajh 2008). Only one parliamentary party, the *Slovenian National Party*, expressed skeptical attitudes towards Slovenian membership in the EU, while other parties, belonging to either right or left political orientations, supported the membership. The attitudes of the political elite had strong support in the public opinion regarding the issue of EU membership. The accession to the EU that materialized in May 2004 was namely also strongly supported by wider public and considering publicly declared support towards acceptance of the EU membership Slovenia was an example of most euro-enthusiastic new EU members. In March 2003, ten years after the accession process started, when the referendum on membership of the EU took place, 89,6% voted for EU membership. During the accession processes Slovenia has, like other candidate states, adjusted its legislation to the *acquis communautaire*, i.e. the Union's legislative setting. The adoption and

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<sup>1</sup> This can happen in the case if radical parties of both left and right gain on political 'weight'.

enforcement of established EU laws and implementation of reforms needed was continuously applied through the accession period, while the whole process was being monitored by specialized bodies of the European Commission. Accession negotiations were completed in 2002 and in the next year the Treaty of Accession was signed in Athens.

Since its membership in the EU, members of Slovene political elite have been taking part in joint decisions within EU institutions. There are eight Slovene members of the European Parliament representing the interests of Europeans. The meetings of the EU Council are regularly attended by the representatives of the Slovene government. Slovenia has a member in the European Commission and representatives from Slovenia are members of both consultative committees, Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions.

Already during the accession process, most major political parties of that time became integrated in political associations with different ideological profiles at the European level. The LDS became a full member of the ELDR/ALDE in 1998; the SD of the PES in 2003; the SDS, SSL and NSi of the EPP in 2004, and Zares of the ELDR/ALDE in 2008. SMC became member of ELDR/ALDE after its victory at 2014 elections. Integration into the European institutional framework caused only a slightly modification to the Slovenian party system. There were only minor changes to the programs of political parties which have primarily seen Europe as something positive, although usually in a general (the importance of the EU *per se*) or using the EU in an instrumental fashion (stressing EU norms and standards) in order to legitimize specific national related issues.

However, we can also establish that the strong public support and positive attitude of Slovene wider public in a pre-membership period towards the EU membership didn't transform into high participation rates in the case of EU elections. The first time Slovenian citizens could vote representatives to the European parliament was in June 2004. At the time of the elections, Slovenia had seven seats in the EP but this number was increased to eight after ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. There were 1,628,918 citizens with this right to vote, although the total number of votes received was 461,879 (28.35%).<sup>2</sup> In 2009 the voter turnout was similar, with a total of 1,699,755 citizens having voting rights. For the eight seats of the EP reserved for Slovenia 12 political parties and lists contested. The total number of votes received was 482,136 (28.33%).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> State Elections Commission: Elections to the European Parliament 2004. Accessed at: <<http://www.dvk-rs.si/index.php/si/arhiv-evropski-parlament/leto-2004>>.

<sup>3</sup> State Elections Commission: Elections to the European Parliament 2009. Accessed at: <<http://www.dvk-rs.si/index.php/si/arhiv-evropski-parlament/leto-2009>>.

In 2014 the share of voters increased significantly, being 42.61%.<sup>4</sup> However, the increase in voters' turnout in this case can be attributed to the domestic political agenda at that time (forthcoming national elections) and not to the broader European context. The campaign before the European election became highly 'nationalised', meaning the strong prevalence of national issues over those related to the EU.

The initial pro-European enthusiasm of the accession period is also not reflected in the scope of participation of Slovene elites in EU associations. Participation in providing expertise to policy makers at the EU level, interest articulation, representation and lobbying is, similarly as in case of other new members from Central and Eastern Europe underdeveloped (see for instance Howard, 2003, Zimmer and Priller, 2004, Raik 2004). The participation in policy consultation is weak, while the understanding of EU-level networking, advocacy and lobbying in case of interest groups representation and the possibilities, that it offers, is still unclear, even pejorative.

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#### 4. Elites and the Crisis

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Slovenia belongs the group of such countries as the crisis has had rather strong effects on Slovenian economy, which are reflected in and by many economic indicators, for example: a drop in GDP (from 55,589,863,776.2 \$ in 2008 to 49,416,055,609.2 \$ in 2014), an increase of unemployment rate (from 4.4 % in 2008 to 10.2% in 2013), a decline in foreign direct investments (from 1,104,479.172 \$ in 2008 to 1,503,189.329 \$ in 2014) (The World Bank, 2015). In what follows, we present three figures, which summarize Slovenian (socio)-economic situation compared to developed and innovation-driven economies according to the survey made by World Economic Forum (2015-2016) and presented in its annual *Global Competitiveness Report*.<sup>5</sup> We have decided to

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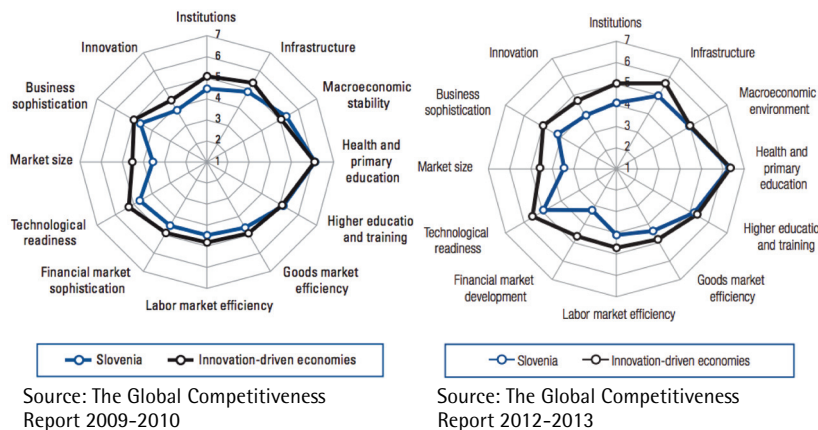
<sup>4</sup> State Elections Commission: Elections to the European Parliament 2014. Accessed at: <<http://www.dvk-rs.si/index.php/si/arhiv-evropski-parlament/volitve-v-evropski-parlament-2014>>.

<sup>5</sup> Which comprise annually analysed macro-economic indicators within 12 pillars. Competitiveness involves static and dynamic components and is defined as a set of institutions, policies, and factors, which determine the level of productivity, which influences the level of economic prosperity. All factors, which influence competitiveness and growth are mutually connected. Therefore, it is important to analyse all of them and consider them when interpreting country's economic outcomes and progress. World Economic Forum has grouped these factors in the so-called 12 pillars of competitiveness, which tend to influence and reinforce each other, therefore they are considered as crucial macro-economic indicators, which reflect a country's competitiveness level and it's developmental potentials. These 12 pillars are; Institutions, Infrastructure, Macroeconomic environment, Health and primary education, Higher education and training, Goods market efficiency, Labour market efficiency,

use data from this source as *The Global Competitiveness Report* analyses and assess competitiveness of 140 countries (economies) and provides valuable data about driver factors of productivity and prosperity.

As it is shown in Figure 1, the key pillars were quite close to those of innovation-driven economies, especially what regards business sophistication, financial market sophistication, labor market efficiency, higher education and training, health and primary education and macroeconomic stability. But, the figure next to it reflects Slovenian socio-economic changes, after the economic crisis has strongly penetrated into the pores of Slovenian society and its subsystems (mostly in the economic field). The latter is reflected in deterioration of measured pillars from which it can be spotted that Slovenia is beginning to lag behind the innovation-driven economies. And if the most of the pillars of innovation-driven economies improved, some Slovenian ones deteriorated, special what regards business, sophistication and financial market sophistication. A slightly better trend can be spotted in the case of Health and primary education's pillar.

Figure 1: Comparing Slovenian 12 Pillars in 2009–2010 vs. 2012–2013



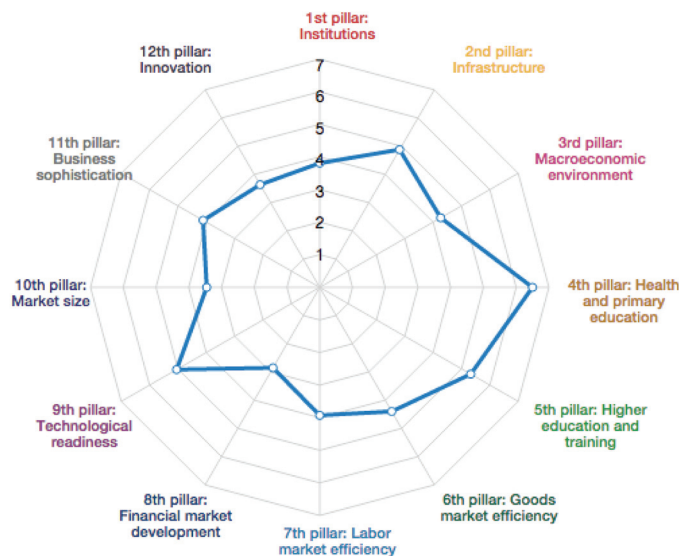
The WEF's *Global Competitiveness Report* from 2014–2015 also shows a deterioration of some pillars (see Figure 2). It is essential to point out the deterioration of pillars regarding institutions and innovation. While at the same time the pillar regarding health and primary education has risen.

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Financial market development, Technological readiness, Market size, Business sophistication and Innovation.



Figure 2: 12 Pillars in Slovenia (2014-2015)



Source: The Global Competitiveness Report 2014-2015.

Global economic crisis in Slovenia cannot be researched separately from political sphere, but first of all one has to understand Slovenian process of transition, which started with Slovenian secession from Yugoslavia and its independence in 1990/1991. Transition brought changes and progress, but at the same time it circumvented certain areas, which would urgently need restructuring. The latter is the result of a so-called *gradualist approach* to transition, which comprised slow and gradual disconnecting with a communist order and tradition. We cannot clearly define the type of Slovenian economic system, for which some experts claim it is still marked by strong elements of *managerial capitalism* (Szeleny, 1996) or *crony-capitalism*, which is characterised by entanglement of political and business elites (Prijon 2012; Prijon and Tomšič 2012; Tomšič and Prijon 2014).

## 5. The EU from the Perspectives of the Centre Left and the Centre Right: the Survey Results

Divisions in Slovenian political space on ‘the left’ and ‘the right’ depart from their meanings in the context of Western democracies, to some extent blurring the picture of the Slovenian political space. The two camps are most clearly divided by their institutional origins and attitudes towards the communist peri-

od, with 'left' expressing positive or at least benevolent attitude towards it while 'right' being highly critical in this regard. Economic cleavage is less relevant in this regard.<sup>2</sup> The EU related issues were usually not a source of political divisions and conflicts.

## 5.1 Data Analysis

Within the ENEC cross-national comparative survey, 50 structured interviews were conducted with the Slovenian members of parliament in 2013 and 2014. For the purposes of our analysis, the MPs have been categorised on the basis on their party affiliation into three groups: the centre left, the centre right and the radical left. The independent MPs (who either left their initial parties or were expelled by them) have not been included in any of these categories. The classification is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Categorisation of the Slovenian Political Parties for the Purposes of the ENEC Survey

Party	Translation + Party Family	Number of MPs in the survey	Categorisation:
SMC	Party of Modern Centre, Left Liberals	13	Centre-Left
SDS	Slovenian Democratic Party, Conservatives	15	Centre-Right
SD	Social Democrats, Socialists/Social democrats	6	Centre-Left
NSI	New Slovenia, Christian Democrats	3	Centre-Right
ZL	United Left, New Left	1	Radical Left
ZAB	Aliance AB, Left liberals	2	Centre-Left
DL	Ciziten's List, Liberals	3	Centre-Right*
DESUS	Democratic Pensioner's Party of Slovenia, Others (interest group party)	2	Centre-Left**
PS	Positive Slovenia, Socialists/Social democrats	1	Centre-Left
SLS	Slovenian People's Party, Christian Democrats	1	Centre-Right
/	Non-aligned representative	3	Not categorised

\* Although the party has initially participated in the centre right government and then played a major role in establishing the centre left government led by A. Bratušek, it can be classified as centre right since most of its key personalities have been traditionally positioned closer to the centre right and its president had started his political career in the governments of the centre right.

\*\* Because of its interest group character and participation of both left centre and right centre governments, the party is difficult to classify. However, its participation in the left centre governments has been considered by its members and the electorate as more self-evident than the participation in the centre right governments that has been subject to greater controversies.

<sup>2</sup> For example, the members of the business elite are proponents of 'the left' (unlike the situation in the West) while many of those who considered themselves de-privileged (often described in terms of injustices suffered during the communist regime) have supported 'the right'.

Since the radical left is only represented in our survey by a single MP and it has remained quite marginal in the Slovenian political arena, it has not been included in our analysis. Due to its firmly Euroskeptical views, it could be considered a special case quite far from the mainstream pro-EU consensus that has remained evident at least at a declarative level. After the exclusion of the three non-aligned representatives and the representative of the United Left, our further analysis has been included 24 MPs of the centre left and 22 MPs of the centre right. Simple statistical analyses have been performed – using t-test comparisons of the two independent samples to compare the EU-related attitudes of the centre-left and the centre-right group of MPs. After checking for the equality of variances using the F-test statistics for each of the comparison, the proper t-test scores have been obtained (based on the assumptions of the equality of inequality of the independent samples variances).

At the most general level, one can hardly observe any relevant differences between the attitudes between the centre-left and the centre-right members of the parliament based on the ENEC survey. First, looking at the overall identity issues that are not necessarily related to the attitudes towards the European Union and its particular institutions, there are no significant differences in terms of attachment to the regional, national and the European level. 75% of centre-left and almost 86% of centre-right MPs expressed their attachment to Europe. The difference is statistically insignificant.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, even when we move to the issue of institutional trust regarding the EU institutions, the situation remains the same as indicated in Table 2.

**Table 2: Trust in EU Institutions**

Trust in EU institutions: 0-10 scale (0 = no trust at all; 10 = complete trust)	Mean Values		Equal Variances Assumed	t-test value	t-test significance
	Centre Left	Centre Right			
European Parliament	7.42	7.45	Yes (F = 0.10)	-0.07	0.94
European Commission	7.25	6.59	Yes (F = 0.02)	0.52	0.60
European Council of Ministers	7.46	6.59	Yes (F = 1.25)	1.56	0.12

Thirdly, Table 3 indicates a clear consensus between the left and the right centre MPs that ‘the Member States ought to remain the central actors of the EU, and both groups of MPs are similarly cautious regarding the idea of the European Commission ‘to become the true government of the EU’. Regardless of their political orientation and clearly related to their national character they

<sup>6</sup> Assuming equal variances for the attachment to Europe based on the F value of 0.02, the t-test statistics only equals 1.03 with the significance level of P = 0.31.

both tend to maintain the significance of the nation states when compared to supranational alternatives.

On the other hand, a slight divergence between the left and the right centre appears regarding the claim that ‘the powers of European Parliament should be strengthened’: the support for the strengthening of the European Parliament might be somewhat stronger among the centre right. The difference may be related – at least to some extent but perhaps not exclusively – to a rather politically pragmatic issue: the centre right political parties have been traditionally more successful at the European elections when compared to the national ones.

The difference becomes more significant in the case of the European Central Bank, where centre right MPs are much more likely to agree that its powers ‘should be strengthened’. This may be related to the differences in the economic views between the Slovenian centre right and centre left, which will be debated later, also regarding some further questions.

**Table 3: The Attitudes Regarding the Role the EU Institutions**

	How much do you agree (%)							
	The Member States ought to remain the central actors of the EU		The European Commission ought to become the true government of the EU		The powers of the European Parliament should be strengthened		The powers of the European Central Bank should be strengthened	
	Centre Left	Centre Right	Centre Left	Centre Right	Centre Left	Centre Right	Centre Left	Centre Right
Agree strongly	43,5	54.5	19.0	27.3	23.8	31.8	31.6	59.1
Agree somewhat	47.8	36.4	38.1	40.9	28.6	50.0	31.6	31.8
Disagree somewhat	8.7	9.1	33.3	22.7	33.3	18.2	15.8	9.1
Disagree strongly	0.0	0.0	9.5	9.1	14.3	0.0	21.1	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Who agrees more	Differences not significant		Differences not significant		Centre right		Centre right	
Equal variances assumed	Yes F = 0.11		Yes F = 0.04		No F = 5.30		No F = 7.05	
t-test value	t = 0.54		t = 0.70		t = 1.92		t = 2.55	
t-test significance	P = 0.59		P = 0.49		P = 0.06		P = 0.02	

Similarly, although there are no significant differences in the overall institutional trust, the MPs of the centre left are consistently more critical in negative terms towards the EU institutions’ ‘management of the Eurozone crisis’ than their centre right colleagues. This includes the European Commission, the European Council and the European Central Bank. It can thus be noted that a shift from general (declarative) statements on trust to practical issue may bring forward significant differences.

**Table 4: Managing the Eurozone Crisis**

Role of EU institutions in the management of the Eurozone crisis: 0-10 scale (0 = very negative at all; 10 = very positive)	Mean values		Equal Variances Assumed	t-test value	t-test significance
	Centre Left	Centre Right			
European Commission	4.85	6.95	Yes (F = 1.46)	-3.41	0.00
European Council	4.65	6.37	Yes (F = 0.84)	-2.97	0.01
European Central Bank	4.05	6.71	Yes (F = 0.18)	-3.79	0.00

Somewhat lower levels of satisfaction of the centre left MPs are also manifest in their attitudes towards democracy in the EU: since 72.7 % of them claims to be satisfied ‘with the way democracy works in the EU’ – compared to the more than 90.5 % of their centre right counterparts.<sup>7</sup>

**Table 5: Perceptions of EU Related Dangers, Responsiveness and Efficiency**

	EU as a danger: EU endanger (%)								Responsiveness/efficacy (%)			
	the integrity of the Slovenian cultural system		the achievements of welfare state system in Slovenia		(EU decisions endanger) economic growth in Slovenia		the quality of democracy in Slovenia		Those who make decisions at EU level do not take enough account of the interest of Slovenia		The interests of some Member States carry too much weight at the EU level	
	Centre Left	Centre Right	Centre Left	Centre Right	Centre Left	Centre Right	Centre Left	Centre Right	Centre Left	Centre Right	Centre Left	Centre Right
Agree strongly			16,7		8,3		12,5		30,0		65,2	10,0
Agree somewhat	8,3		4,2	4,8	25,0		4,2		50,0	38,1	30,4	60,0
Disagree somewhat	16,7	15,0	58,3	23,8	45,8	9,5	8,3	4,8	15,0	47,6		30,0
Disagree strongly	75,0	85,0	20,8	71,4	20,8	90,5	75,0	95,2	5,0	14,3	4,3	
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
Who agrees more	Differences not significant		Centre Left		Centre Left		Centre Left		Centre Left		Centre Left	
Equal variances assumed	No F = 6.00		Yes F = 1.66		No F = 17.34		No F = 23.03		Yes F = 0.00		Yes F = 0.49	
t-test value	-1.19		-3.46		-5.80		-2.23		-3.40		-3.69	
t-test signif.	0.24		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	

<sup>7</sup> F = 6.17; t = 2.05; P = 0.05.

The differences become even clearer when we look at the assumed dangers to the national interests supposedly originating from the EU (see Table 5). Although most of the MPs do not see the EU as a major source of danger, the fears related to it are consistently more present among the centre-left MPs. The latter are significantly more likely to believe that ‘EU legislation endangers the achievements of the welfare state system in Slovenia’, that ‘EU decisions endanger economic growth in Slovenia’ and that ‘EU endangers the quality of democracy in Slovenia’. Even the fear that ‘EU endangers the integrity of the Slovenian cultural system’ (that might generally be considered as a typically rightist-conservative fear) is not stronger among the centre-right than among the centre-left MPs ( $F = 6.00$ ;  $t = -1.19$ ;  $P = 0.240$ ).

Moreover, Table 5 also indicates that the centre left oriented MPs are also significantly more critical in negative terms regarding the EU responsiveness. They are more likely to agree that ‘those who make decisions at the European Union level do not take enough account of the interests of Slovenia at stake’ and that ‘the interests of some Member States carry too much weight at the EU level’.

**Table 6:** Further Transfer of Powers to the EU

Policy-making preferences (in 10 years) %	Unified tax system		Common social security		Single foreign policy		More help for regions		Issuance of Eurobonds	
	Centre Left	Centre Right	Centre Left	Centre Right	Centre Left	Centre Right	Centre Left	Centre Right	Centre Left	Centre Right
Strongly in favour	20.8	10.5	29.2	10.0	45.8	65.0	75.0	35.0	21.7	22.2
Somewhat in favour	50.0	42.1	45.8	50.0	41.7	25.0	25.0	55.0	52.2	55.6
Somewhat against	25.0	26.3	20.8	25.0	8.3	5.0	0.0	5.0	21.7	11.1
Strongly against	4.2	5.3	4.2	5.0	4.2	5.0	0.0	5.0	4.3	0.0
Neither in favour or against (V)	15.8	0.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	11.1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Preferred more by:	Differences not significant		Differences not significant		Differences not significant		Centre Left		Differences not significant	
Equal variances assumed	Yes $F = 0.09$		Yes $F = 0.00$		Yes $F = 0.78$		Yes $F = 3.02$		Yes $F = 0.60$	
t-test value	-0.73		-1.11		1.23		-2.78		0.90	
t-test significance	0.47		0.27		0.23		0.01		0.36	

Nevertheless, these differences are not reflected in any significant differences in the attitudes towards the further transfer of powers to the EU level are not

significant statistically regarding the support for the unified tax system, which is quite cautious both at the centre left and the centre right, common social security, where the situation is quite similar, single foreign policy and issuance of Eurobonds. The differences can only be proven statistically regarding 'more help for regions in economic or social difficulties', which is favoured more strongly by the centre-left MPs (see Table 6).

Although the centre-left MPs seem to be more worried by the role of the EU institutions in relation to the nation state they are even more eager to support the redistribution of resources within the EU framework. A classical leftist issue of solidarity may thus prevail over some other fears, since 91% of the centre left MPs (compared to 72% of the centre right ones) agreed that 'in order to preserve the common currency [...] it is appropriate that the EU financially supports countries in difficulty, even if this implies transfers of resources among Member States'.

## 5.2 Main Findings

The empirical data from the ENEC survey clearly reveals some interesting gaps and inconsistencies. The general support for the EU, at least at a declared level, is rather high within the mainstream political elite and there is a broad consensus between the centre left and the centre right. This is reflected by some of the most general attitudes towards Europe and even through the general trust to the EU institutions.

While we move towards more specific issues, the scepticism and worries increase, particularly among the centre-left. At the first glance, the critical scepticism of the centre-left MPs seems to be related to classical leftist concerns regarding the protection of the benefits provided by the nation states. This is well in line with their worries about increasing inequalities within the EU and the almost unanimous support for redistribution between the Member States within the Eurozone. Some aspects of the EU may thus be seen by the centre-leftists in the Slovenian parliament as a treat to the leftist value of solidarity, while solidarity at the EU level is – on the other hand – supported.

Nevertheless, the situation is somewhat more complicated. The centre-left MPs do not only seem to criticise the EU when some of its policies are perceived as threats to the (national) welfare state. They also worry more than their centre-right counterparts about the EU institutional impact to the economic performance and about the EU impact on democracy. Moreover, it is not the centre-right who is more worried about the EU as a potential threat to the integrity of the Slovenian cultural system, implying that the elite of the Slovenian centre-left is far from being impressed by a culture of cosmopolitanism that might be provided through European integrations. The centre-left MPs are also significantly more critical to the particular responses of the EU institutions to the Eurozone crisis. These concerns are also reflected in lower willingness of

the centre left MPs to transfer further national powers to the EU and its institutions.

This is rather inconsistent with the general views of the centre left MPs regarding the EU, where they do not differ in any relevant way from the views of the centre right. The inconsistency may imply a kind of gap between the declared and the actual views and/or the persistence of some general political orientations that can hardly be changed without a radical redefinition of the policies of the Slovenian centre left (established since the end of the 1980s as a part of an overall pro-European consensus), combined by some practical concerns of the Slovenian centre-left starting to believe gradually that some of their (more or less intimate) political views are hardly consistent with the prevailing policies within the EU. Since the views of the centre-left seem to differ in this regard from the views of the centre-right, one can hardly speak about a general disappointment over the EU. If this was the case similar phenomena would be present at the centre-right – but they are not. Clearly, more in-depth (especially qualitative) research would be needed to clarify these gaps within the centre left.

An inconsistency within the centre-right, on the other hand, may be linked to a complex relationship between the nation state and the EU. As already noted, the MPs of the centre-right are not more concerned about the preservation of the Slovenian cultural traditions than their centre-left counterparts. On the other hand, they are significantly less worried about the economic development and democracy in the EU context and therefore less likely to object further transfer of state powers to the EU level. Although the relationship between the nations and the EU is complex and far from being a ‘zero-sum game’, some combinations of claims are still hardly consistent. This may reflect certain difficulties of the centre-right to reconcile fully its national-patriotic and cosmopolitan pro-EU attitudes.

The persistence of such inconsistencies may be seen as a result of inexperienced political elites (which is not surprising given the lack of stability of the political parties and a disproportionately high numbers of newcomers in the Slovenian parliament after the recent elections). It may be also related to weak reflexivity regarding the EU issues caused by a lack of intra-party, media and other EU related public debates. The Slovenian MPs may simply lack external stimuli to force them to resolve certain inconsistencies and (re)consider subsequently their political orientations and actions.

Till the beginning of the crisis EU-related issues were very rarely a matter of political disputes. However, when a package of anti-crisis measures entailing cuts in public spending and a reduction of the public sector, the privatisation of state-owned companies and reform of the banking sector was launched, not insignificantly due to the pressure of international political and financial circles and following a significant downgrade of Slovenian government bond ratings, this ‘outside’ intervention triggered anti-capitalist and anti-EU sentiments



among both the general public and the elite circles, presenting Slovenia as a 'victim' of international financial circles and European policy-makers.<sup>3</sup>

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## 6. Conclusion

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Relations between elite factions strongly determine the character of political setting. This applies also to the democratic system. Elite settlement that provides consensus over fundamental rules and principles is one of the key prerequisites for stable functioning of representative democracy (Field et al. 1990; Higley and Burton 2006). Without at least basic agreement among elites on key strategic goals of society, consistent policy-making process can hardly take place.

Elites are often perceived as generators of the process of European integration. However, they should not be seen as unified actor. As stated by Best (2012, 240), "the 'Europe of elites' is multifarious and polycephalic entity, formed by manifold national influences and shaped by differentials within and between elite sectors, elites and non-elites, and – foremost – between national settings." In this regard, national elites – even those from smaller EU member countries like Slovenia – play a non-negligible role in shaping common European policies. Their actual influence in considerable extent depends on their ability to establish agreement on key political priorities.

On declarative level, Slovenian political elites still share rather strong pro-European consensus. Not only that there is no parliamentary party that advocates Slovenia's exit from the EU, but consecutive governments – regardless their political 'colour' – adhere to the policy-guidelines as set by EU institutions. It is evident that they cannot ignore the international institutional framework in which the country is integrated. This means that it has to follow the recommendations of the European Commission and other relevant institutions. Nevertheless, if these recommendations or even demands challenged some entrenched interests, they could provoke tensions or even revolts among their protagonists. Divergences between centre-left and centre-right faction of Slovenian elite in their support for EU's institutions and their policies are related to their power and influence. Centre-left that is dominant in terms of both formal and informal power tries to protect *status quo* and – at least part of it –

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<sup>3</sup> At the beginning, adherents to the institutional *status quo* first tried to downplay the importance of international assessments. For example, the leading advocate of the gradualist approach, Jože Mencinger, stated that the country ratings provided by credit-rating agencies "should simply be ignored" (Finance 16.1.2012). Later, when the European Commission announced its reform 'guidelines' for Slovenia, evidently directed at liberalisation and deregulation, he claimed that the EC's idea of competition is "destroying the EU" where "Slovenia is turning into an irrelevant province, worse than it was in former Yugoslavia" (MMC 2013), so "the government 'should stand up against Brussels'" (Mencinger 2013).

could see interventions from the side of the EU institutions as instrument that could undermine their position. On the other hand, centre-right politicians often see the EU institutions as 'external ally' that could provide assistance in their effort to change 'rules of the game' and thus strengthen its positions. Due to this, it is – unlike the situation in many European countries – more pro-European oriented than its political opponent.

Slovenian political elites are still pro-European, but often in mere *pro-forma* fashion. In the case of a considerable part of Slovenian political but also other (business, intellectual etc.) elites, we can speak about some kind of *reserved Europeanness*. Namely, a considerable part of both Slovenian elites and public exert sceptical if not negative feelings towards Western type of capitalism. They see Western institutional setting – including the EU – as a mechanism of its maintenance. The economic crisis strengthened anti-European orientations as reflected in accusing EU institutions and its leading countries (especially Germany) of serving merely the interests of international financial circles and exploiting less developed member-countries of the EU. This is also reflected in rather critical attitudes of a faction of political elite (the centre-leftist camp) towards the conduct of European institutions – especially in relation to its handling of the financial-economic crisis. One should also mention strong pro-Russian sentiments that became evident during crisis in the Eastern Ukraine where, was very reluctant to support sanctions against Putin's regime.<sup>4</sup> On the other side, escalation of migrant crisis could provoke the rise of Euroscepticism also on the right side of political spectre. In this respect, attachment to the EU, its rules and principles is not as firm – and even less consistent – as it seems on the surface.

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<sup>4</sup> In July 2015, Russian Prime Minister Dmitrij Medvedjev was invited as the guest of honor to take part at the commemoration at the Russian Chapel (dedicated to the tragic accident from the First World War then the avalanche in Slovenian Alps took couple of hundreds lives of Russian POWs). At this event, with the presence of top of Slovenian political pyramid, former President of Republic Milan Kučan, still very influential political person, indirectly blamed European Union for the crisis in Ukraine.

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