



INTRODUCING QUALIFIED MAJORITY VOTING IN THE COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY: PERSPECTIVES FROM SLOVENIA AND SLOVAKIA

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The article examines the positions of Slovenia and Slovakia on introducing qualified majority voting in the area of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (QMV CFSP). This topic has gained significance in recent years due to various attempts to obstruct decision-making within the European Union. The analysis is conducted on two levels: official government statements from both countries and the perceptions of students on the issue. The findings reveal a stark contrast between the two levels. While Slovenia and Slovakia hold opposing official positions on QMV CFSP, students from both countries largely support its introduction. However, there is a notable difference regarding QMV CFSP as a preliminary step towards deeper integration: Slovak students are somewhat more reserved than their Slovenian counterparts. This suggests that the political discourse in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly concerns over the 'dangers of EU deepening', is influencing younger generations and the student population.

Key words: qualified majority voting; Common Foreign and Security Policy; Slovenia; Slovakia; students.

1 INTRODUCTION

The issue of qualified majority voting (QMV) in the European Union (EU) has been a subject of extensive debate among member states since the EU's founding. While member states have expressed a willingness to consider delegating certain decision-making powers to the EU – particularly in areas requiring significant human resources or binding commitment – in practice, limitations often arise, with the most significant being “national interest”. This concept, often elusive and abstract, resembles a spectre: intangible and universally referenced yet uniquely interpreted by each member state. Due to its ambiguity, “national interest” can

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be viewed as either a panacea or a curse, depending on the perspective. In the context of the EU, national interest is frequently invoked by member states as a reason for resisting further delegation of power, particularly in foreign policy. As Haass (2013) aptly notes, “foreign policy begins at home,” highlighting that national interest in foreign policy encompasses both “foreign” and “domestic” concerns. Within modern political systems, domestic issues can sometimes outweigh foreign ones due to two main factors: the symbolic value attached to both domains (Arbeiter 2019) and the heightened sensitivity among citizens regarding potential losses of national autonomy in foreign affairs. This sensitivity is mirrored within the EU, where member states are *prima facie* unwilling to facilitate decision-making in the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), widely perceived as the final safeguard of national interests. This resistance became evident in recent years, when Poland and Hungary leveraged the CFSP’s unanimity requirement as a kind of “negotiating tool” during contentious EU discussions. The limitations of unanimity in the CFSP have become even more apparent since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, prompting calls for reform to enable the EU to present a unified voice in its foreign policy decisions.

This article does not aim to explore the general importance, challenges, and limitations of qualified majority voting in depth (for more on this, see Sancin and Mediževc 2024, 429–451). Instead, it seeks to empirically analyse the views of Slovenia and Slovakia on the topic. Our analysis operates on two levels. First, we examine the level of political decision-makers, comparing the official stances of each country on QMV CFSP to identify both commonalities and differences. Second, we focus on political science students in both countries. There are two key reasons for including this group in our analysis. First, as political science students study topics like QMV CFSP, they are likely to have formed opinions on it. Second, these students – by virtue of their studies – are potential future agenda-setters and decision-makers, and their current opinions may influence future national or EU-level policies.

Why did we select Slovenia and Slovakia as case studies to explore perspectives on QMV CFSP? First, Slovenia and Slovakia are small, Central European countries that joined the EU in 2004, making them relatively new members. Second, while both countries share political and historical similarities, they occasionally differ in their approaches toward the EU: Slovenia generally aligns its policies with the expectations and guidelines of EU institutions, whereas Slovakia is sometimes more cautious or even oppositional in specific areas. This dynamic between two comparable yet at times contrasting countries offers an intriguing framework for examining their positions on QMV CFSP. Our framework led us to form two hypotheses that we then wanted to test in the case of these two countries:

H1: The historical legacies and similar political-economic paths to EU membership are not reflected in the views of Slovak and Slovenian authorities on QMV CFSP.

H2: The official positions of both countries are mirrored in the perceptions of political science students in each country regarding QMV CFSP.

The analysis was conducted using a combination of three methods. First, we analysed primary and secondary sources, examining the official statements of both countries. This was complemented by an interview with a Slovenian expert on Slovenia’s position regarding CFSP QMV, as well as a survey administered to Slovenian and Slovak political science students. The survey took place in the first quarter of 2024 among students at the Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica (Slovakia), and

the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia). A total of 86 students participated, with 45 respondents from Slovakia and 41 from Slovenia; of these, 32 identified as male and 38 as female.

This article is structured in three parts. Following the introduction and presentation of the research problem, we provide a theoretical framework on CFSP decision-making by qualified majority voting, focusing particularly on the official Slovenian and Slovak positions. The empirical section follows, presenting the results of the survey among Slovenian and Slovak students. The article concludes with a discussion and evaluation of the hypotheses, reflecting on the findings and suggesting questions for future research on this topic.

2 QMV IN CFSP WITH REFERENCE TO OFFICIAL POSITIONS OF SLOVAKIA AND SLOVENIA: A THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Since the establishment of the CFSP, the main decision-making mechanism has been unanimity, applied at the institutional level of the European Council and the Council of the EU. The Treaty on the European Union codified this mechanism in Article 24, stating, “The common foreign and security policy is subject to specific rules and procedures. It shall be defined and implemented by the European Council and the Council acting unanimously, except where the Treaties provide otherwise” (Consolidated Version of The Treaty on European Union 2012). Article 11 of the Treaty of Lisbon reaffirms unanimity as the primary decision-making mechanism for foreign and security matters. However, the Lisbon Treaty revision expanded the range of situations in which decisions can be adopted by QMV, with certain limitations. QMV decision-making cannot be applied to matters that directly impact on the defence and military areas. Instead, it applies to cases involving joint actions, the adoption of joint strategies, and the appointment of special representatives (Treaty of Lisbon 2007).

Since November 2014, a new QMV voting procedure has been introduced within the Council, implementing the double majority rule. Under this rule, the traditional principle of ‘one state, one vote’ no longer applies. Instead, both the number of states and the total population they represent are considered. QMV is thus achieved when at least 55% of member states (a minimum of 15) vote in favour of a proposal, provided they also represent at least 65% of the EU’s total population (approximately 290 million people) (The Council of the EU 2024). However, within the CFSP framework, an exception allows member states to use an “emergency brake.”² When invoked, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR) must revise the proposal. If consensus cannot be reached even after the revision, QMV cannot proceed, and the final decision reverts to unanimity (Blockmans 2017).

The debate surrounding the effectiveness of unanimity in decision-making, and its impacts on the EU, is longstanding. Since the establishment of the CFSP, discussions have continued, yet recently, decision-making within the CFSP has received heightened attention. The primary driver of these debates is the increasing difficulty member states face in reaching a unified stance on various foreign policy issues. Divergent views often arise from differences in geographic

² Article 31(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning the European Union includes an important provision in the form of an “emergency brake” which inhibits the calling of a vote in the Council if a Member State invokes vital and stated reasons of national policy.

location and perceptions of the security environment. This growing heterogeneity of perspectives among member states complicates negotiations, creating obstacles that impede the effective implementation of the CFSP (A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence 2022; Žipaj 2021). Consequently, some argue for abandoning the unanimity requirement in favour of QMV. Nonetheless, despite calls for change, there are still compelling arguments for retaining unanimity as the foundational principle of CFSP decision-making.

A frequently cited argument for maintaining unanimity is the goal of a unified external EU representation. Unanimity aims to strengthen the EU's external presence by ensuring that foreign policy positions reflect the consensus of all member states. agenda. Charles Michel, the outgoing President of the European Council, has advocated for preserving unanimity, viewing it as a mechanism that facilitates the achievement of shared goals. The need for unanimous decisions, he argues, encourages representatives to find compromises that accommodate diverse member state interests (Repčys 2022). This view has garnered support from several EU member state representatives, such as those from Poland³ and Czechia,⁴ and resonates with some EU-level advocates who favour the current system.⁵

Proponents of unanimity warn that changing decision-making mechanisms could exacerbate foreign policy divisions within the EU. In this context, the unanimity requirement serves as a reference point for defining the interests and boundaries within which the CFSP operates (Kuusik 2019).

Arguments in favour of retaining unanimity, and against shifting to QMV, are also grounded in concerns about weakening the democratic legitimacy chain among member states. Under QMV, there is a risk that this chain could be disrupted, especially if member states perceive outcomes as inequitable (Schuette 2019). Advocates of unanimity view the national veto as a tool that ensures final decisions incorporate the interests of all member states. Adopting decisions via QMV could lead to a sense of imposed resolutions and injustice among certain countries, potentially eroding democratic legitimacy and fostering mistrust within the EU (Latici 2021; Bendiek et al. 2024; cf. Haček and Brezovšek 2014).

Support for unanimity is also bolstered by representatives who oppose or question deeper EU integration, often aligning with Eurosceptic, nationalist, populist, or right-wing positions. These voices argue for strengthening the authority of individual member states over transferring greater powers to the supranational level, often criticising the concept of the "Brussels bubble"⁶ (Žipaj 2023). They contend that a shift to QMV could fuel Euroscepticism, especially if member states present QMV-based decisions as imposed from above (Pisklová 2023).

³ "What suits one country may not suit another. We should find a way to respect the differences between all 27 countries." (Morawiecki 2022)

⁴ "It's a question of sovereignty. Losing the veto would be fatal for us." (Babiš 2023) Much like EU integration, the idea of QMV CFSP is sometimes also the subject of conspiracy theories (cf. Kukovič 2022; Fiot and Tecovich 2023; Haček 2024; Kukovič et al. 2024; Šteger 2024).

⁵ Mainly EU Parliament members affiliated with the European Conservatives and Reformists and the Identity and Democracy political groups. They demonstrated this stance by voting against the resolution expanding the use of QMV in the CFSP (European Parliament Plenary 2024).

⁶ The concept of the Brussels bubble originated from the myth propagated by the EU's opponents, suggesting that all important decisions are made within a single power centre in Brussels. This notion is closely associated with Eurosceptic, nationalist, and populist tendencies (Papagiannas 2024).

Opposition to QMV is especially strong among smaller member states, who fear subordination to larger countries. For these states, unanimity and veto rights on proposals are seen as vital for maintaining stability. Countries such as Hungary, Malta, Bulgaria, and Cyprus strongly oppose switching to QMV in all CFSP matters, with Austria, Croatia, and Lithuania also aligned in favour of unanimity (Navara and Jančová 2023).

On the other side, proponents of QMV argue that the national veto can hinder effective EU decision-making, as member states may use it to pursue domestic interests at the expense of broader EU priorities. For example, in 2020, Cyprus vetoed sanctions against Belarus – not due to opposition to the sanctions themselves, but as a leverage to press the EU to adopt a stricter stance toward Türkiye (Intel and Ondarza 2022). Similarly, Hungary’s use of the veto complicated sanctions against Russia, aiming to pressure the EU into a softer stance on Hungary’s domestic policies and to release blocked EU funds (Moens, Barigazzi and Lynch 2022). In response, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz joined calls for CFSP reform, urging member states to reconsider the national veto and explore a transition to QMV (Zachová et al. 2022). In May 2023, the foreign ministers of several EU countries published the “Joint Statement on the Launch of the Group of Friends on Qualified Majority Voting in EU Common Foreign and Security Policy”, commonly referred to as the Group of Friends to Foster QMV.⁷

Supporters of QMV, recognising the complexity of the decision-making process as an EU weakness, also argue that shifting to majority voting would enable faster, more efficient decision-making. The Conference on the Future of Europe emphasised this, calling for reduced reliance on unanimity (Drachenberg 2022). This aligns with the European Commission’s ‘A Stronger Europe in the World’ initiative, which aims to streamline the EU’s external action (European Commission 2024). The Strategic Compass also advocates for a move toward QMV on select security matters, suggesting it could significantly enhance the EU’s responsiveness in crisis situations (A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence 2022).

An additional rationale for QMV is the mitigation of “Trojan horse” risks – situations where a single EU member state could block action under the influence of an external actor. With unanimity, an external power needs to influence only one member state to block a decision. Under QMV, however, influencing at least a third of member states would be necessary, making such interference nearly impossible (Orenstein and Kelemen 2017). Unanimity also restricts the HR to presenting only those positions unanimously supported by all member states (Žipaj 2021). Josep Borrell, former High Representative, has argued for reform in CSFP decision-making, noting that QMV already applies in areas like the single market and climate policy, which are not necessarily less “sensitive” than foreign and security policy (Borrell 2020). These arguments for and against QMV were extensively debated, with member states either supporting or rejecting them.

2.1 The Slovak Approach to QMV CFSP

In recent years, Slovakia has shifted from a ‘neutrally-reserved’ stance to a more ‘reserved-opponent’ position regarding the potential switch to QMV in CFSP. Between April 2020 and May 2023, under a centrist conservative government, Slovakia maintained a quasi-neutral stance on the issue, despite a generally pro-European outlook (Pisklová 2023). Former Slovak prime minister Eduard Heger underscored the importance of unanimity in matters of European security: “We

⁷ Full statement at: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/-/2595304>.

need to speak with one voice, and when it comes to geopolitics [...] when we are talking about European security, Europe must be represented there, we must find a mechanism to achieve such a mandate.” (Heger 2022). In April/May 2023, following a government crisis and Heger’s resignation, Slovakia’s interim government⁸ took a more ‘pragmatic approach’ to the member states’ veto power and QMV CFSP. Miroslav Wlachovský, the interim foreign minister and a seasoned diplomat, emphasised that Slovakia “should not turn voting by qualified majority into another ‘mythical spooks from Brussels’”. He pointed out that QMV is already the primary voting method in the EU Council, with over 80% of EU legal acts approved this way (Wlachovský 2023). Wlachovský argued that Slovakia should not distance itself from these discussions, particularly with the prospect of EU enlargement – a longstanding Slovak priority. “If there are to be more of us [member states] in the future that will sit at the same table, it is necessary to ask ourselves how we want to function more effectively” (ibid. 2023).

In Autumn 2023, Slovakia appointed a new government, marking a decisive shift from its previously pragmatic approach to QMV CFSP. The first indication of this change came in November 2023, when Foreign Minister Juraj Blanár emphasised that the new government’s agenda restored sovereignty to Slovak foreign policy, which, according to him, had been lacking under the previous administration. Blanár stated, “Slovakia will not agree to the abolition of the right of veto in the EU Council and insists on the principle of unanimity among all member states, when making decisions in the fields of foreign policy and security” (Blanár 2023). This position was further reinforced during a session of the Council for Foreign Affairs, echoing the government’s stance expressed throughout the pre-election campaign.

Prime Minister Robert Fico reiterated this position on potentially doing away with the veto rights in an April 2024 interview following Slovakia’s presidential elections. Fico described the right of veto in CFSP as “[...] the right to survive in the European Union. If someone wants to take away the right of veto, we have nothing to do there [...] you just come to some negotiation and the French with the Germans will let you know what the result is” (Fico 2024). His statement reflects a concern shared by some Central and Eastern European countries – the fear of being outvoted on critical issues. The hot-button issue of QMV CFSP was further highlighted by two prominent political scientists, Miroslava Pisklová and Jozef Bátora⁹. Pisklová urged that the discussion should focus on addressing the concerns of those advocating for unanimity, rather than pushing a single approach. Bátora, meanwhile, noted that the prospect of EU enlargement could act as a catalyst for revisiting the CFSP decision-making process (Pisklová 2024; Bátora 2024).

The most recent comment on the topic came from Slovakia’s newly elected president, Peter Pellegrini. Previously viewed as a moderate pro-European by Slovakia’s Western allies, Pellegrini voiced support for unanimity in CFSP, asserting that the veto right benefits Slovakia by providing “a real influence” in this area and the ability to “deflect’ some decisions of the future head of diplomacy [sic]” (Pellegrini 2024).

⁸ The interim government exercised its mandate from May 15 to October 25, 2023.

⁹ Miroslava Pisklová is a Research fellow at Slovak Foreign Policy Association, Jozef Bátora is a Professor at the Department of Political Science, Comenius University in Bratislava.

2.2 The Slovenian Approach to QMV CFSP

Slovenia is member of the 'Group of Friends to Foster QMV', indicating it is willing to discuss switching to QMV CFSP. However, Slovenia's stance has evolved over time. In 2019, under the government of PM Marjan Šarec, Slovenia opposed moving away from unanimity in CFSP. Then-Foreign-Minister Miro Cerar explained that Slovenia "never supported qualified or any other kind of majority decision-making anywhere [...]", adding: "Our opinion is that decision-making in the EU should be based on consensus [since] EU members are weak if they are not united" (STA 2019).¹⁰

The first indication of a shift came when a letter supporting QMV in EU foreign policy, co-signed by seven EU foreign ministers, was published in Politico.¹¹ The article, which was titled *It's time for more majority decision-making in EU foreign policy*, did not go unnoticed in Ljubljana. His letter sparked mixed reactions in Slovenia, with opposition leader Janez Janša tweeting that for a small country like Slovenia, "which represents less than 0.5% of the EU population, QMV would be "a catastrophe," even suggesting it could breach the Slovenian constitution by infringing on sovereignty. Janša labelled the government's position as bordering on "treason" (Janša 2023). In response, the Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs clarified via Twitter that Slovenia's support was not binding, but rather aimed at ensuring small states remain influential in discussions about QMV. They explained that the intention of the ministry "is to be part of the debate and to ensure small states are not outvoted" (MFA Twitter 2023).

To address these concerns, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs organised a public hearing in the National Assembly on 29 September 2023, inviting MPs, researchers, and the interested public. In her opening debate, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tanja Fajon, clarified that Slovenia "actively supports the discussion [emphasis by authors] on increased use of QMV in CFSP". Her explanation of why Slovenia joined the like-minded group of member states was the following: "Slovenia must be present and actively involved in all discussions on the future of the EU. We must not let anything take us by surprise. That is why we have joined the debate among the member states on the effective use of the QMV, which includes a review and examination of the safeguards that would be available to countries to protect their national interests in potential cases of the QMV." (Fajon 2023) Speakers at the hearing, including professors and researchers, supported discussions on QMV but advised caution, echoing the *festina lente* principle. MEPs Klemen Grošelj, Milan Brglez, and MP Anže Logar, who also participated, backed active Slovenian involvement, although Logar also stated that "Slovenia should not be member of the Groups of Friends of the QMV", since its membership could limit its ability to advocate independently (Logar 2023). Additionally, EU Commissioner Janez Lenarčič expressed support for QMV CFSP, viewing it to prevent EU paralysis and enable quicker responses to international events (Esih 2023). Following the public hearing, no other formal statements on the QMV issue were made public.¹²

¹⁰ In 2023, Miro Cerar wrote a column on why Slovenia should not be part of the group of countries supporting QMV CFSP (Cerar 2023). Dimitrij Rupel, the former Slovenian foreign minister, similarly highlighted (2023) that Slovenian support for QMV in CFSP would mean the end for the "sovereign Slovenian state" and cause "damage to Slovenian national interests".

¹¹ The signatories were Annalena Baerbock (Germany), Hadja Lahbib (Belgium), Jean Asselborn (Luxembourg), Wopke Hoekstra (the Netherlands), Bogdan Aurescu (Romania), Tanja Fajon (Slovenia), and José Manuel Albares Bueno (Spain).

¹² The academic circles organised different debates. One of these was at the New University in Ljubljana where different academics debated the challenges and opportunities of QMV CFSP. One

However, unofficial sources indicate that the Group of Friends to Foster QMV CFSP met in March 2024 to discuss legal frameworks for its implementation. In June 2024, a committee of experts, nominated by interested member states and known as the “Sounding Board”, published a commentary in Delo outlining some of the challenges and considerations surrounding QMV CFSP.¹³

FIGURE 1: EXCERPT FROM THE COMMENTARY OF THE SOUNDING BOARD PUBLISHED IN DELO

GOSTUJOČE PERO

(KOMENTAR) Kako se znebiti veta v zunanji in varnostni politiki EU

Svet se spreminja in EU se mora opremiti s sredstvi za ustrezen odziv na velike izzive.



Galerija

FOTO: Tereza Koudelkova/Shutterstock

Belén Becerril Atienza, Annegret Bendiek, Juha Jokela, Sabina Lange, Sofia Vandenbosch, Ramses A. Wessel

29. 6. 2024 | 05:00

6:19

Source: Delo (2024).

3 POLITICAL SCIENCE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE ON THE QMV CFSP IN SLOVENIA AND SLOVAKIA

3.1 Methodological Framework of the Empirical Research

To test the second hypothesis, we conducted a survey among a sample of 41 Slovenian and 45 Slovak students in their final year of undergraduate studies and the first year of postgraduate studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, and the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations, Matej Bel University (n = 86). The survey was carried out between January and April 2024, coinciding with a period of renewed discussion on the introduction of QMV CFSP within the European Union.¹⁴ The questionnaire, administered electronically via the 1ka platform, consisted of 8 encompassing a total of 20

of the speakers was also the former president of the republic, who said that “the national interest of Slovenia is to have a better and more efficient decision-making system in the CFSP”, which must be built in a way that would allow Slovenia to protect its national interests (Nova Univerza 2024).

¹³ According to the unofficial stances of some Slovenian experts, the QMV CFSP proposal is currently a “dead duck due to the Hungarian and Polish presidencies of the Council and due to the political situation in France, where Macron has lost his political power”.

¹⁴ During the same period, Slovakia held a presidential election campaign – 1st round on 23 March, 2nd round on 4 April.

variables (sub-statements). Respondents took an average of 2 minutes and 21 seconds to complete the survey.

The composition of respondents was as follows: of the total 86 respondents, 46% were men and 54% were women. Specifically, in Slovenia, 41% of the 41 respondents were men and 59% were women, while in Slovakia, 52% of the 45 respondents were men and 48% were women. Additional demographic data were collected to determine factors that might influence opinions on QMV CFSP. The data revealed that Slovenian respondents were relatively more “left-oriented” compared to their Slovak counterparts.¹⁵ The average ideological self-assessment on a scale from 0 (left) to 100 (right) was 30.6 ($s = 20.89$) for Slovenian respondents, while Slovak respondents had an average of 48.7 ($s = 17.42$), indicating a more centrist position. Another question sought to understand respondents’ political/ideological background by asking them to self-assess as either “pro-national” (independentist) or “pro-European.” The results showed smaller differences between the two groups: both Slovenian and Slovak respondents described themselves as strongly pro-European ($\bar{x}_{SLO} = 69.8$ ($s = 20.76$); $\bar{x}_{SK} = 72.3$ ($s = 26.76$)). The Slovak sample showed greater variability compared to the Slovenian sample.

3.2 Results

3.2.1 Awareness of the Official Position Regarding QMV CFSP

The first question posed was, “Are you aware of the official position of your country regarding QMV CFSP?” This question aimed to determine two things: the general level of awareness of the national stance on QMV CFSP and to ensure that subsequent questions were answered by those who had some knowledge of their country’s position. The results revealed a significant difference between the two countries. In Slovenia, only 39% of respondents were aware of their national position on QMV CFSP, whereas in Slovakia, 60% of respondents were familiar with their country’s stance. A gender-based breakdown indicated that women were more likely to be aware of the national position on QMV CFSP than men.

The considerable gap between the two countries raised questions about the reasons for this discrepancy. In Slovenia, the issue of QMV CFSP was relatively absent from public discourse, whereas in Slovakia, it had been a prominent topic during the 2023 parliamentary elections and the 2024 presidential elections¹⁶. We concluded that the greater presence of the issue in public and political debates in Slovakia likely contributed to higher levels of awareness among Slovak students.

The second part of the questionnaire aimed to explore the reasons behind respondents’ support for the introduction of QMV CFSP. Respondents were asked to evaluate four statements on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = I totally disagree, 7 = I totally agree) regarding why they would want their country to support QMV CFSP. The statements assessed respondents’ agreement with the following reasons for support: (1) QMV CFSP would portray their country as more pro-European, (2) it would bring a higher degree of efficiency to EU affairs, (3) it would lead to greater Europeanisation of their country’s policies, and (4) it would

¹⁵ We measured a respondent’s political and ideological orientation on a differential from 0 to 100, where 0 meant a position that could be described as “far/radical left”, while 100 was intended to describe someone that considers themselves to be “far/radical right”.

¹⁶ In the case of the Slovak presidential elections, Štefan Harabin, an anti-system and right-wing populist candidate, as well as Peter Pellegrini both used this topic as a tool to demonise Ivan Korčok, a candidate that supported the deeper EU integration of Slovakia, claiming Korčok would give up Slovakia’s veto right in the event of victory (Mikušovič 2024).

strengthen the EU's geopolitical position in the world. Detailed results of these evaluations are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1: REASONS FOR SUPPORTING QMV CFSP (1 = I TOTALLY DISAGREE, 7 = I TOTALLY AGREE)

	SLOVENIA		SLOVAKIA	
	\bar{x}	s	\bar{x}	s
Europeanisation of my country	5.3	1.4	5.4	1.3
Higher efficiency when it comes to EU decision-making	5.7	1.5	5.7	1.6
Supporting "more Europe"	5.7	1.3	3.9	1.4
Strengthening the geopolitical position of the EU in the world	5.9	1.0	5.6	1.3

Source: Authors' own calculations.

As shown in Table 1, both Slovenian and Slovak students generally agree that supporting QMV CFSP would contribute to the increased Europeanisation of their country and improve the efficiency of EU decision-making processes. Notably, the understanding that QMV CFSP could enhance the EU's geopolitical influence in the world was also prevalent, though somewhat surprising. This perception likely stems from the belief that improved decision-making efficiency in CFSP would enable the EU to respond more swiftly and assertively, thereby boosting its status as a significant global actor.

The difference in the official stances towards QMV CFSP between Slovenia ("pro") and Slovakia ("reserved-opponent") was mirrored in the respondents' views on whether QMV CFSP would signal a shift towards a more "pro-European" orientation. Slovenian students were more inclined to agree with this statement, whereas Slovak respondents showed more hesitation. This divergence can be attributed not only to the perception that QMV CFSP embodies "more Europe" but also to the contrasting political discourse within each country. Slovenia's political narrative, characterised by alignment with Brussels and its preference for being seen as a cooperative, "good pupil" that aligns with EU expectations (cf. Bučar and Udovič 2023; Haček 2019; Horvat 2020), contrasts with Slovakia's more nuanced stance. As described by Mokra and Kovačikova (2023), Slovakia's relationship with Brussels can be seen as "in and out," demonstrating a willingness not only to adopt EU policies but also to actively shape the agenda.

3.2.2 Dangers of Introducing QMV CFSP

The subsequent set of questions focused on potential risks associated with the adoption of QMV CFSP. Slovenian and Slovak respondents exhibited similar beliefs on this matter. Both groups agreed that the adoption of QMV CFSP could result in smaller EU member states being subordinated to the interests of larger states, potentially diminishing the significance of their own interests, sometimes to their detriment. They also concurred that maintaining the national veto (unanimity) is vital for safeguarding national interests. Slovak respondents were slightly more convinced of this than their Slovenian counterparts ($\bar{x}_{SK} = 4.9$; $\bar{x}_{SLO} = 4.5$). A minor difference emerged in responses concerning the link between the introduction of QMV CFSP and a potential rise in Euroscepticism. Slovenian respondents tended to slightly disagree with the notion that QMV CFSP could fuel Euroscepticism, whereas Slovak respondents showed slight agreement. Notably, Slovakian responses were more concentrated around the affirmative side, while Slovenian responses leaned toward uncertainty, falling more in the "we do not know – maybe" category.

One significant concern that could hinder the process of introducing QMV CFSP is the potential need to amend EU treaties. This could become a long-term or even deadlocked process, involving protracted negotiations and numerous

compromises; more critically, changes to foundational EU treaties require unanimous consent. Slovak respondents appeared less worried about this issue, indicating that they did not consider treaty changes necessary. Conversely, most Slovenian respondents agreed that the implementation of QMV CFSP would indeed require amendments to EU treaties.

3.2.3 *If I Were a Politician ...*

Building on the insights from Mihelič and Lipičnik (2010), we considered the significant role that today's students, as future leaders and policy-makers, might play in shaping public and political opinion regarding QMV CFSP. To understand their potential approaches if faced with a public declaration on this topic, we posed a scenario in which they had to choose one of the following options: (1) to oppose the introduction of QMV CFSP, (2) to advocate for a national referendum on the issue, or (3) to align with the behaviour of certain EU member states that seek to limit the transfer of power to Brussels. Table 2 presents the results.

TABLE 2: IF I WERE A NATIONAL POLITICIAN I WOULD ... (1 = I TOTALLY DISAGREE, 7 = I TOTALLY AGREE)

	SLOVENIA		SLOVAKIA	
	\bar{x}	s	\bar{x}	s
be against the QMV CFSP	2.2	1.8	2.9	2.0
call for a referendum on the introduction of QMV CFSP	3.6	2.1	3.2	2.0
never subordinate my state to the EU	2.4	1.8	2.6	1.6

Source: Authors' own calculations.

Table 2 reveals a shared sentiment among respondents from Slovenia and Slovakia that supports the notion of deeper EU integration. This is reflected in their overwhelming rejection of outright opposition to the introduction of QMV CFSP. When considering the possibility of holding a referendum, respondents demonstrated some openness, though with a degree of restraint. The most telling result, however, was their agreement on the need to sometimes prioritise common EU interests over individual national interests, underscoring an understanding that state interests may need to yield for the greater good of collective EU decision-making.¹⁷

To probe further, we analysed whether gender influenced perspectives on the three response options. The findings revealed notable differences: (1) male respondents exhibited greater overall support for QMV CFSP than their female counterparts, and (2) support for referenda was more common among female respondents.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of the article was to examine the views of Slovenia and Slovakia on the issue of QMV CFSP. Why focus on QMV CFSP and these two small post-transition countries? Firstly, the QMV CFSP could facilitate a "smoother" decision-making process within the EU's CFSP, a process that has gained even more importance following the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the Israeli-Gaza war. In both cases, the EU's decision-making in CFSP was partially impeded by the unanimity requirement, suggesting that a shift towards greater efficiency might involve changes in voting and political decision-making procedures. Secondly, we chose to investigate Slovenia and Slovakia because of their shared socialist legacy,

¹⁷ Nevertheless, this result seems encouraging. We have to take into consideration the structure of the sample, where the largest part of respondents declares themselves as pro-European.

geographic location in Central Europe, status as small states within the EU, and common cultural and linguistic traditions. These similarities provide a valuable framework for analysing commonalities and differences between the two countries on one of the EU's most pressing issues at the moment.

To focus the discussion, we set two hypotheses for testing. Hypothesis 1 examined the impact of past legacies and similar political-economic paths to the EU on the views of Slovak and Slovenian authorities/politicians regarding QMV CFSP. Hypothesis 2 assessed how the statements made by state officials in both countries influence the perspectives of political science students on the QMV CFSP.

The first hypothesis was confirmed, as we demonstrated that officials from both countries, and therefore the countries themselves politically, hold different positions on the introduction of QMV CFSP. Slovenia supports its introduction and has joined the group of states advocating for a shift in EU CFSP decision-making from unanimity to qualified majority. Slovakia, on the other hand, has historically been "reserved" about the issue and, under the current government and new president, has shifted from a reserved-reluctant stance to an "unrelenting opponent," associating the veto power with preserving national sovereignty in foreign policy. This divergence highlights that a shared cultural and political legacy, as well as a similar political-economic trajectory, does not necessarily impact fundamental perceptions of national interest. In this context, the shared history and socialization of both countries, even with common roots, become secondary to the perceptions of political elites and citizens regarding potential sovereignty loss.

While the first hypothesis was confirmed, the second hypothesis was only partially supported. Our assumption that political statements would directly shape students' perspectives was only marginally validated. Slovak students demonstrated greater awareness of the issue, likely due to its prominence in their recent parliamentary and presidential election campaigns. Conversely, Slovenian students showed lower familiarity with the QMV CFSP topic, as it appears to be regarded as a relatively "irrelevant topic" among political elites and the public. This may be partially attributed to Slovenia's tendency to support proposals originating from Germany or Austria, with the push for QMV CFSP enjoying strong backing from Germany's Wilhelmstrasse.

However, the empirical research reveals several other relevant topics that should be highlighted. First, there is a consensus among both groups of students that the introduction of QMV CFSP would strengthen the Europeanisation process in both countries, enhance the effectiveness of EU decision-making, and reinforce the EU's role in the world. The only divergence is regarding whether QMV CFSP would also signify a shift towards greater integration or deepening of the EU. Slovak students are much more reluctant than Slovenian students on this matter, which suggests that part of the political discourse surrounding the "danger of EU deepening," particularly prevalent in Central and Eastern Europe, is influencing younger people or the student population. Secondly, students from both countries agreed that the issue of introducing QMV CFSP should not be decided by the electorate, but rather by the political elites running the country. This indicates that both groups of students recognise that mismanagement and populist approaches, if the question were left to the electorate, could lead to a result contrary to the actual national interest of both countries.

Finally, a methodological note: While the results presented provide insight into the topic, we must also acknowledge several limitations that are important for

the proper interpretation of the data. The first limitation is that our sample is relatively small and unstructured. The second limitation is that we surveyed students who were at least partially familiar with QMV CFSP, although we were surprised to find that 50% of the students were not familiar with the issue and therefore did not participate in the survey. Another limitation arises in the interpretation of the results, specifically regarding ideological affiliation or orientation. In our sample, students identified themselves as more left-wing on the left-right spectrum, which suggests they may be more likely to support CFSP QMV, as right-wing politicians tend to be more sovereigntist, while left-wing politicians are generally more supportive of deeper European integration.

Despite all these limitations, our results are still revealing and demonstrate a certain orientation of the younger generation towards the European Union and its processes. They also suggest that the theory of cross-cultural convergence may be based more on a “professional” culture rather than a “national” culture, as seen in the case of political science and international relations students. This is undoubtedly an area that warrants further exploration, as it is particularly interesting to compare the views of students in the same field from different EU member states on topics related to European integration.

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UVEDBA GLASOVANJA S KVALIFICIRANO VEČINO V SKUPNI ZUNANJI IN VARNOSTNI POLITIKI: POGLEDI IZ SLOVENIJE IN SLOVAŠKE

Članek se osredotoča na stališča Slovenije in Slovaške glede uvedbe glasovanja s kvalificirano večino na področju skupne zunanje in varnostne politike (SZVP) – vprašanja, ki je postalo posebej aktualno v zadnjih letih, ko so se v okviru Evropske unije začeli pojavljati različni poskusi blokiranja odločanja. Analiza je izvedena na dveh ravneh: na ravni uradnih stališč političnih elit oziroma političnih odločevalcev v Sloveniji in na Slovaškem ter na ravni študentske populacije obeh držav. Glavne ugotovitve je mogoče razvrstiti v dve skupini. Prvič, Slovenija in Slovaška imata na ravni političnih odločevalcev nasprotna stališča do uvedbe glasovanja s kvalificirano večino v okviru SZVP. Drugič, stališča študentov obeh držav so si medsebojno bistveno bolj podobna kot stališča političnih elit.

Ključne besede: glasovanje s kvalificirano večino; skupna zunanja in varnostna politika; Slovenija; Slovaška; študenti.