ACTA HISTRIAE

32, 2024, 3

UDK/UDC 94(05) ACTA HISTRIAE 32, 2024, 3, pp. 321-458 ISSN 1318-0185

UDK/UDC 94(05)

ISSN 1318-0185
e-ISSN 2591-1767

Zgodovinsko društvo za južno Primorsko - Koper
Società storica del Litorale - Capodistria

ACTA HISTRIAE
32, 2024, 3

KOPER 2024

ISSN 1318-0185 UDK/UDC 94(05) Letnik 32, leto 2024, številka 3
e-ISSN 2591-1767

Izdajatelja/*Editori/ Published by:* Zgodovinsko društvo za južno Primorsko - Koper / Società storica del Litorale - Capodistria© / Inštitut IRRIS za raziskave, razvoj in strategije družbe, kulture in okolja / Institute IRRIS for Research, Development and Strategies of Society, Culture and Environment / Istituto IRRIS di ricerca, sviluppo e strategie della società, cultura e ambiente©

Sedež/*Sede/Address:* Zgodovinsko društvo za južno Primorsko, SI-6000, Koper-Capodistria, Garibaldijeva 18 / Via Garibaldi 18, e-mail: actahistriae@gmail.com; https://zdjp.si/en/p/actahistriae/

Tisk/*Stampa/Print:* Založništvo PADRE d.o.o.

Naklada/Tiratura/Copies: 300 izvodov/copie/copies

Finančna podpora/ ***Supporto finanziario/ Financially supported by:*** Javna agencija za znanstvenoraziskovalno in inovacijsko dejavnost Republike Slovenije / Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency

Slika na naslovnici/ ***Foto di copertina/ Picture on the cover:*** *Ministrska predsednika Jadranka Kosor in Borut Pahor leta 2010 / I primi ministri Jadranka Kosor e Borut Pahor nel 2010 / Prime ministers Jadranka Kosor and Borut Pahor in 2010 (foto/photo: Stanko Gruden, STA, Wikimedia Commons).*

Redakcija te številke je bila zaključena 30. septembra 2024.

Revija Acta Histriae je vključena v naslednje podatkovne baze / Gli articoli pubblicati in questa rivista sono inclusi nei seguenti indici di citazione / Articles appearing in this journal are abstracted and indexed in: CLARIVATE ANALYTICS (USA): Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), Social Scisearch, Arts and Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI), Journal Citation Reports / Social Sciences Edition (USA); IBZ, Internationale Bibliographie der Zeitschriftenliteratur (GER); International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS) (UK); Referativnyi Zhurnal Viniti (RUS); European Reference Index for the Humanities and Social Sciences (ERIH PLUS); Elsevier B. V.: SCOPUS (NL); DOAJ.

UDK/UDC 94(05) Volume 32, Koper 2024, issue 3 ISSN 1318-0185
e-ISSN 2591-1767

VSEBINA / *INDICE GENERALE / CONTENTS*

Received: 2024-09-02 DOI 10.19233/AH.2024.13

FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE AFTER TWO DECADES OF EU ENLARGEMENT: SLOVENIAN AND HUNGARIAN PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

This article examines foreign direct investment (FDI) as an indicator of economic integration, focusing on Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) in the two decades they have been EU members. Although CEE countries have remained on the EU's periphery and struggled with development gaps, they have attracted substantial FDI, especially in the first decade after accession, fuelling the growth of outward FDI and integration into global value chains. Despite CEE economies like Slovenia and Hungary having seen differences in their use of FDI, such investment and European integration will remain central to the region's economic development, even amid the ongoing geopolitical tensions.

Key words: foreign direct investment, economic integration, Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, global value chains (GVCs), Slovenia, Hungary

GLI INVESTIMENTI ESTERI DIRETTI IN EUROPA CENTRO-ORIENTALE DOPO DUE DECENNI DI AMPLIAMENTO DELL'UE: PROSPETTIVE SLOVENE E UNGHERESI

SINTESI

Questo articolo esamina gli investimenti esteri diretti (IDE) come un indicatore dell'integrazione economica, osservando nello specifico l'Europa centro-orientale (CEE) nei due decenni in cui è divenuta parte dell'UE. Sebbene i Paesi della CEE siano rimasti nella periferia dell'UE e abbiano lottato contro divari di sviluppo, hanno attratto ingenti IDE, specialmente nel primo decennio dopo l'adesione, alimentando la crescita di IDE diretti all'esterno e l'integrazione

nelle catene globali del valore. Sebbene le economie CEE come quella slovena e ungherese abbiano conosciuto differenze nell'uso degli IDE, questi investimenti e l'integrazione europea rimarranno centrali nello sviluppo economico della regione, nonostante le tensioni geopolitiche attuali.

Parole chiave: investimenti esteri diretti, integrazione economica, Paesi dell'Europa centro-orientale (CEE), catene globali del valore (GVCs), Slovenia, Ungheria

INTRODUCTION[1]

During the 1990s, following a turbulent period of newly created states emerging in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), countries in this region were looking for proven and fast recipes to propel their development. Liberalisation, arising entrepreneurial spirits and ambitions for growth met with limited domestic markets (low purchasing power) and insufficient financial resources for technology and innovation. The West, and all Western markets and enterprises (along with Western products and services) were highly appreciated and viewed as the preferred model of development.

Both foreign direct investment (FDI) and economic integration were seen as facilitators of economic growth and development and therefore as the best tools, almost a shortcut making the required developmental leap. FDI in CEE was primarily regarded as a source of capital, managerial knowledge and modern technology (Javorcik, 2004; Alfaro et al., 2004; Bloom et al., 2012), while European integration as an accelerator of trade and investment, but also as a synonym of the rule of law, stable and quality institutions and security for the mainly small, yet geopolitically exposed CEE states (Chen, 2009). Notwithstanding certain fears that FDI would take the national silverware and economic sovereignty away (Šušteršic & Rojec, 2010), FDI played an important role in the process of transforming CEE countries into market economies, contributed to productivity and considerably influenced their export capacity (Hunya, 1997; Svetličič & Rojec, 2003; Bevan & Estrin, 2004; Kalotay, 2006; Greenaway & Kneller, 2007; Damjan et al., 2013). During the 1990s, individual countries' attractiveness to foreign investors varied, where the level and method of privatisation and the country risk had important roles in determining where the flows of FDI ended up. The region became more appealing to investors especially after the association agreements were signed in 1991, with most FDI in the CEE region chiefly stemming from the EU, indicating that the trade and agreements had an impact on investment flows (Gelbuda et al., 2008; Baldwin et al., 1997). The goal of

1 This article is the result of the research programme P5-0177 *Slovenia and its Actors in International Relations and European Integrations*, funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS).

advanced economic integration thereby played a role in shaping FDI flows by reducing barriers to trade and investment, harmonising regulations, and expanding market access.

The 'FDI & integration' approach's attractiveness as a toolbox for the transition process of CEE economies was based on theory (such as the effects of regional free-trade agreements on trade and investment flows (Egger & Pfaffermay, 2004) or empirical evidence from the gravity models (Blonigen & Piger, 2014)), but also on the experience of the single market, which showed that FDI and economic integration have always been closely linked and significantly influenced each other (Dunning, 1997; Neary, 2002; Kalotay, 2006) and were also included in the advice given to them by international organisations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) early on in the transition (cf. Fischer & Gelb, 1991).

FDI can accordingly be used not simply as an indicator of success in the transition process, but also as an indicator of success with economic integration. Although the impact of economic integration on FDI was rarely discussed in the main textbooks on European economic integration at the start of the enlarged EU (Baldwin & Wyplosz, 2006; De Grauwe, 2018; El-Agraa, 2011), it can occur in many dimensions and increases as the integration deepens (e.g., common market vs. free-trade agreements). Successful economic integration typically enlarges the market and lowers (bilateral) trade costs, making it more attractive for foreign investors to invest in integrated markets. Such a cutting of costs can lead to increased inflows of FDI as companies can supply larger markets from a single location and, in turn, optimise their operations and costs. However, the success of integration in attracting FDI can vary between the member states of a union. More attractive countries tend to receive a bigger slice of the FDI pie, while less attractive countries may experience lower FDI due to the relocation of investment within the integrated region. When FDI is reallocated, the benefits of integration might not be evenly distributed. A country's ability to attract FDI is closely linked to its institutional framework, including the rule of law, property rights and regulatory efficiency. Countries with higher quality institutions and greater economic freedom tend to attract more FDI since these factors reduce investment risks and add to investor confidence (Carstensen & Toubal, 2004). FDI creates stable and lasting links between countries and facilitates not only the flow of capital, but also the transfer of technology, exchange of knowledge, and creation of jobs. These links are vital for sustainable economic growth and the success of integration because they promote interdependence between member states and support regional stability.

This contribution investigates the relationship between the FDI and European integration, more specifically how the EU's 'big bang' enlargement in 2004 has influenced FDI in CEE countries. We review the trajectories of FDI in CEE in the two decades of their full EU membership. The analysis considers the CEE countries that joined the EU on 1 May 2004 (Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia) and Croatia, which on 1 July 2013 became the 28th EU member country.

Available studies on FDI and EU integration reveal positive development effects (Blomstrom & Kokko, 2003; Egger & Pfaffermayr, 2004), enhanced productivity horizontally within industries (Rojec & Jaklič, 2004; Haskel et al., 2007) and vertically

up and down supply chains (Javorcik, 2004; Damjan et al., 2013) coupled with other spillover effects (Rojec & Knell, 2018) apart from less positive impacts (Gál & Lux, 2022). Nevertheless, historical overviews can help with understanding: (i) how has 20 years of EU membership influenced the FDI landscape in CEE economies; (ii) how has FDI influenced CEE economies' integration into the EU; and (iii) how has FDI in CEE influenced EU FDI overall. Analysing perspectives from Hungary and Slovenia (as an example of a middle power state and a low power state, respectively) provides deeper insights into the varied experiences of FDI and EU integration among countries in CEE. To accomplish these goals, we first discuss FDI developments in the EU following the enlargement in 2004 on both the EU level as a whole and within the new member states, the position of CEE economies within global value chains (GVCs) and present the experiences of two countries – Hungary and Slovenia – in more detail. The concluding section discusses the challenges posed by FDI in CEE and the EU in the future where a new complexity of geopolitics is shaping FDI and the development of integration in the EU.

THE EVOLUTION OF FDI AFTER THE EASTERN ENLARGEMENT

The volume of FDI inflows (and stocks) can be used as a performance measure to assess the effectiveness of economic integration initiatives. A high level of FDI may indicate successful integration, whereas stagnant or declining FDI may indicate challenges in the integration process or unattractive conditions for investors. Beyond mere inflows, the quality of investment – such as the creation of well-paid jobs and sustainable practices – can also serve as an important measure of integration success.

EU membership has been associated with an *FDI premium* (a rise in FDI), suggesting additional benefits for countries within the union, with membership having been found to have boosted FDI inflows by 14%–38% between 1985 and 2013 (Bruno et al., 2016). When exploring the impact of EU membership on FDI for a later period (1985–2018), Bruno et al. (2021) established that EU membership led to about 60% higher FDI investment in the host economy from outside the EU, and around 50% higher intra-EU FDI. A positive FDI premium was identified in all previous EU enlargements (e.g., Spain and Portugal in 1994) and a negative one for the United Kingdom following Brexit (Baldwin & Wyplosz, 2023).

A case study on Central and Eastern European countries is meaningful given that the increase in inward FDI already followed the announcements about future EU membership on FDI in the 1990s (Svetličič & Rojec, 2003; Bevan & Estrin, 2004; Medve-Bálint, 2013; Bruno & Cipollina, 2018). Despite variation across CEE regions and time periods, FDI was a significant investment source during the transition process. FDI increased further upon full EU membership. CEE countries that joined the EU attracted FDI earlier and, even from a global perspective, the CEE region today stands out in terms of both degree of global value chain participation and size of inward FDI stock – two strongly interrelated phenomena. The evolving FDI landscape following the EU's 'big bang' enlargement and its implications for investment patterns and economic dynamics within the region are depicted in Charts 1 and 2. Chart 1 shows the steady rise of inward and

outward FDI stocks, taken as a percentage of GDP in the EU in the first decade. Until the beginning of the Great Recession (2008), EU countries were particularly prominent among global investors as their share in world outward FDI was nearly 50% (at the same time almost 90% of global outward FDI flows came from advanced economies). The EU and other advanced economies attracted between 60% and 70% of total inward FDI flows, and CEE economies held the lion's share.

The global economic and financial crisis had a strong impact on FDI. The CEE region was among those hardest hit by the economic crisis, with FDI inflows plummeting by almost 40% after 2009 (Kalotay & Filipov, 2009; UNCTAD, 2010; 2013). The recovery in CEE and the EU was gradual. As a region of high technological competence and sophisticated brands, the EU strengthened by the single market and the Union's innovation policies (El-Agraa, 2011) attracted much of the FDI from developed but increasingly also from emerging markets. Mainly market- and strategic asset-seeking FDI from emerging markets began to dominate in the EU following the global recession. Similar trends were noticed in CEE.

Charts 2 and 3 shows the increase in FDI inward and outward stocks (measured in % of GDP) in the 'new' EU member states that joined the EU after 2004. Inward FDI flows and stocks rose rapidly in all CEE countries after entering the EU and in most countries remained stable afterwards (they encountered small(er) fluctuations than during the transition).

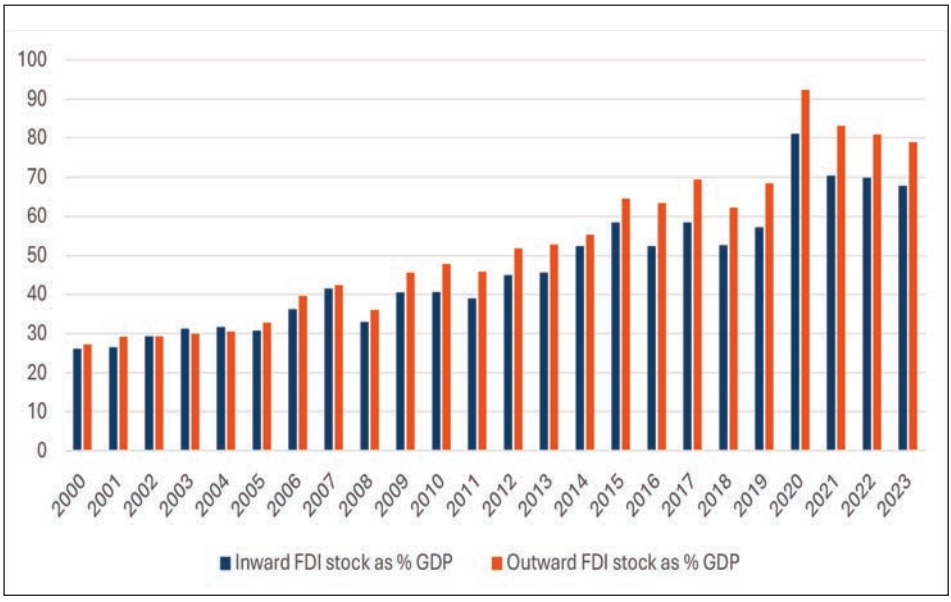

Chart 1: Inward and outward FDI stocks in percentage of GDP in the EU (2000–2023) (UNCTAD Statistics).

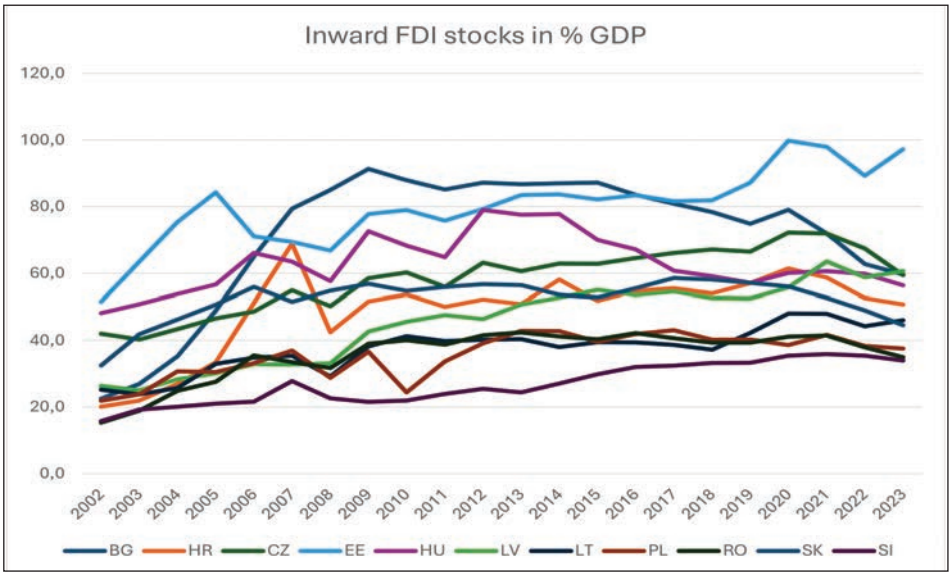

Chart 2: FDI inward stocks in % of GDP in CEE economies that entered the EU (2002–2023) (wiiw FDI Database. https://wiiw.ac.at/fdi-database.html).

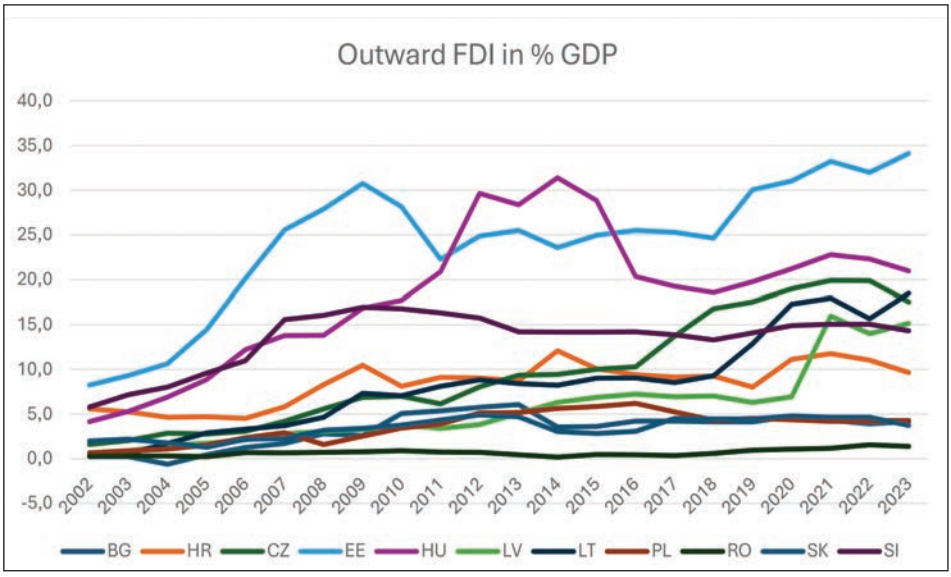

Chart 3: FDI outward stocks in % of GDP in CEE economies that entered the EU (2002–2023) (wiiw FDI Database. https://wiiw.ac.at/fdi-database.html).

CEE economies generally attracted FDI to their manufacturing industries (Damjan et al., 2013) and these industries were also the most important exporters and outward investors (Svetličič & Rojec, 2003; Jaklič & Svetličič, 2010). The commitment to exports and technological innovation attracted foreign investment that proved crucial for economic development. Even though CEE countries still lag behind old EU members in research and development spending (noting that R&D remains largely based in Western European corporate headquarters), they were actively promoting policies that fostered innovation and supported the establishing of advanced manufacturing facilities, thereby creating jobs and boosting local economies.

The shift to high-tech manufacturing called for a workforce equipped with new skills. CEE countries were investing in education and training programmes to address the skills gap in areas like business, engineering, IT, and data analytics. This investment was essential for maintaining competitiveness, attracting FDI and ensuring that local industries effectively participated in advanced supply chains (Rojec & Jaklič, 2013). FDI was important for knowledge and technology transfer and led to spillover effects for domestic producers (Damijan et al., 2013), albeit often below the initial expectations.

The tradition of manufacturing along with technological innovation (further spurred by the European research and innovation policy and smart specialisation strategy) also acted as a key driver of supply chain localisation in the CEE region after the COVID-19 pandemic. By enhancing manufacturing capabilities (including digitalisation and robotisation), responding to geopolitical challenges, attracting investment, and fostering the development of skills, CEE countries were well positioned to capitalise on the opportunities created by the evolving global supply chain landscape and the reshoring/friendshoring/nearshoring trend (Ponikvar et al., 2023). This transformation not only supported economic growth but also helped with the region's integration into the broader European and global economies.

THE INTEGRATION OF CEE INTO GVCS

The strategic geographical and economic advantages and tradition of FDI and skilled labour in CEE countries have been harnessed to consolidate their status as major hubs in several industries. This shift was accelerated by major global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine, which have not only disrupted immediate operations but also required that the stability and security of supply chains be reassessed on a long-term basis. CEE has emerged as an important player in the reshaping of global supply chains.

The CEE countries have been increasingly positioning themselves as dynamic players in the global supply chain, offering a wealth of opportunities for economic progress, innovation and a defining role in the development of international trade. While traditionally regarded as a peripheral region, over the last two decades CEE has become an important hub within the EU in the complex web of global production, logistics and trade that connects virtually every corner of the globe. 'Made in Europe' is thus ever more likely to involve CEE.

The urgent need to diversify supply chains and possibly to relocalise to reduce the risks of geopolitical unrest, transport costs and delays has become apparent. Multinational companies are looking for 'permanent' changes in global supply chains and a balance between localisation and globalisation. A recent report by PwC (2022) states that one-third of CEOs in Central and Eastern Europe mention supply chain instability as a critical factor influencing future business strategies.

The automotive sector is an example of the region's growing importance. Countries like Poland, Czechia, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia and Romania have become important players in the global automotive supply chain. These countries have attracted considerable investment from car manufacturers around the world due to their skilled labour, strategic location, and favourable economic policies. In addition, the shift to electric vehicles has led to the region playing an important role in battery production and assembly, representing an important contribution to sustainable mobility.

Next is the rise of CEE countries from an outsourcing destination to an innovation centre, especially in the manufacturing and IT sectors. Countries such as Estonia, Slovenia, Lithuania, Romania and Poland are known for their IT expertise, competitive cost structures, and burgeoning technology ecosystems, making them attractive to companies looking for IT outsourcing or R&D centres. These countries put strong emphasis on STEM education, government support and an entrepreneurial spirit that is driving innovation in software development, cybersecurity and AI.

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has, however, shown the region's vulnerability and resilience. The initial disruptions and high energy prices have underscored the impact on industries reliant on Ukrainian and Russian resources. Despite these challenges, CEE countries have shown remarkable adaptability and made efforts to diversify their supply chains and strengthen regional cooperation and economic integration. The Three Seas Initiative (3SI) is an example of such efforts aimed at improving the region's infrastructure and consolidating its role on the global stage.

The fact that firms from CEE countries are integrating ever more strongly into global supply chains means the region is on the cusp of a transformative era. With their strategic geographic advantages (even in the new context of geopolitical risks), commitment to innovation and a skilled labour force, CEE countries are vital for the dynamism of global industry. The region's resilience and ability to adapt to challenges give the foundations for future growth and it may play an important role in shaping the landscape of global trade and investment also in the future.

INSIGHTS FROM HUNGARY AND SLOVENIA

Hungary and Slovenia are interesting case studies for considering the interplay of FDI and European integration given their unique historical backgrounds, economic transformations, and strategic positions within the EU. The transition to market-oriented systems in both countries required FDI to stimulate economic growth, modernise industry and integrate into European markets. Although Slovenia experienced FDI to and from abroad much earlier than Hungary – inward FDI in Slovenia already existed during the socialist

regime, with Slovenia also being a pioneer among CEE countries in outward FDI early on in the transition period – FDI accounted for a relatively small share of GDP (Charts 2 and 3) and has been relatively lower than in Hungary. Between 2004 and 2023, inward FDI stocks in Slovenia rose from 20% to 33% of GDP. Hungary, in contrast, became a much larger and significant recipient of FDI, attracting around 50% of total FDI flows to transition countries in the last decade. FDI stocks in Hungary accounted for 53.8% of GDP in 2004 and 56.4% 20 years later (wiiw FDI Database). Regarding outward FDI, Slovenia's relative advantage after it joined the EU disappeared completely within two decades; in 2023, outward FDI in Hungary amounted to 21% of GDP and in Slovenia to just 14.3%. The following two sections present insights into country-specific characteristics.

FDI in Hungary

Among countries that started to promote FDI at the start of the transition process, Hungary was a leader in opening its economy to FDI. Hungary was a 'heavily indebted' country according to the World Bank classification (Bod, 2018) since, based on the experience with the 1956 revolution, Hungary's political regime had prioritised the population's well-being and maintenance of high living standards even during periods of stagnation and recession (Kornai, 1995). The net foreign debt stock of Hungary amounted to EUR 11.8 billion at the end of 1990, representing around 70% of GDP (KSH, 2010). The rescheduling of the large foreign debt was infeasible given the related negative consequences and because most of it was owed to foreign commercial banks. Among others, opening to FDI was part of the solution because FDI provided financial means to repay debt and could positively impact Hungary's transition to a market economy. This has been reflected in the active FDI policy pursued by consecutive governments (Antalóczy & Sass, 2023).

In 1990, the first freely elected government aimed to attract large investors despite the unstable circumstances of an evolving market economy. The government provided direct support to foreign investors in the form of fiscal (tax) and other (mainly industrial free-trade zones) incentives. Moreover, foreign investors were allowed to participate in privatisation and acquire full ownership. Connected to privatisation, EUR 4.6 billion in FDI was realised between 1991 and 1997 and the stock of FDI exceeded EUR 10 billion in 1996 (KSH, 2010). Major MNCs (the German Audi, the Swedish Electrolux, the US General Electric and General Motors, the Japanese Suzuki) invested in Hungary. In 1996, the country joined the OECD, declared limited external convertibility of the currency and began negotiations on EU accession. New investors: the Dutch Philips, the Finnish Nokia or the US IBM implemented large greenfield projects. As privatisation was largely over, reinvested earnings and other capital along with the arrival of suppliers and subcontractors of foreign-owned subsidiaries already in operation were the biggest sources of FDI (Antalóczy & Sass, 2023).

The EU accession negotiations entered their final phase in 2002. This provided a boost to FDI by joining the EU's large internal market and regulatory framework and offering low-wage (skilled) labour and geographically close production sites with good

infrastructure for EU MNCs (Kalotay, 2006). At the same time, by complying with EU state aid regulations all of the countries in the accession process had to change their incentive systems, which led to an easing of the ever stronger competition over incentives in the CEE region, establishing a level playing field for the countries affected (Bellak, 2004). Rising wages and changes in FDI policy towards trying to attract projects with a positive impact on the economy encouraged the exit of some assembly activities, such as IBM in 2003. On the other hand, foreign MNCs started to extend their activities to R&D (the German Audi, Bosch and Knorr-Bremse) and export-oriented services (the US GE, Morgan Stanley, the French Lexmark or the Indian Genpact or Tata etc.). In 2005, privatisation-related FDI again came to prominence due to the increasing external imbalances and urgent need for financing. This led to another period of FDI policy being subordinated to other policy aims (Antalóczy & Sass, 2023). In 2007, the stock of FDI represented over 60% of GDP (Chart 2).

In 2010, the incoming government introduced a new FDI policy, favouring efficiency-seeking, GVC-related, export-oriented FDI and aiming to do away with market-seeking projects, especially in various (public) services (Sass, 2017), causing a slight decline in FDI stock from the peak of above 80% of GDP in 2012 to around 60% by 2019 and afterwards (Chart 2). Particularly after the COVID-induced crisis, government policy chiefly targeted export-platform type Asian investors (Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Indian), producing for EU-markets especially in the production of electric cars and their parts and components – due in part to their availability and the positive response to incentives and access to EU markets offered by Hungary.

Hungary's FDI-based strategy was stimulated by various requirements linked to EU accession, which contributed to the modernising of basic state institutions and thus had a positive development impact (Bruszt et al., 2020). FDI assisted with a quick transition to a market economy, to economic growth, to the creation of mostly good jobs and to increasing innovative activities. In certain industries, through growing competition (banking – OTP Bank, today one of the important players in Slovenia) or through supplier linkages (plastics: Jászplasztik or Karsai Holding), it helped successful Hungarian MNCs to emerge and hence the increase in outward FDI. EU countries (notably Germany, whose share has fluctuated around one-quarter) and Austria (around 10%) were the main sources of FDI. Foreign-owned subsidiaries soon played a determining role in the economy, especially in some manufacturing industries (automotive and electronics), but also up until the mid-2010s in certain (public) services (some were nationalised or returned by the Orbán government to domestic hands (Hunya, 2017)). FDI inflows are closely linked to the fact that Hungary is deeply involved in GVCs led by German, other European, US and most recently Asian firms and has contributed significantly to maintaining the international competitiveness of several EU industries. Hungary's development path may be classified as a dependent market economy (Nölke & Vliegenthart, 2009) or the FDI-led and GVC-related growth model. Still, the problem with this GVC-related model is that in the present circumstances the manoeuvring room of the government of a small EU economy is very limited in the short to medium term when it comes to ensuring and increasing the positive impact of the GVC-linked FDI on

the host economy. Indeed, a 'dual economy' was developing in Hungary already in the 1990s with limited backward and forward linkages and other positive spillovers from foreign-owned companies, thus seeing many domestic firms dealing with productivity and competitiveness problems. Drahokoupil and Fabo (2020) showed the limited contribution of foreign-owned firms to the development of local skills and capabilities, while other studies provided mixed evidence on technology transfers and the spillovers from them (Iwasaki & Tokunaga, 2016).

The vulnerability of this FDI-based development model to external shocks and its lower-than-expected positive impact on the domestic economy has become especially clear following the 2008–2009 crisis. This led to a change in FDI policies in 2010 whereby efficiency-seeking export-intensive projects were generously supported (Éltető & Antalóczy, 2017), but attempts were made to push out those aimed at the domestic market. Nonetheless, despite the rhetoric, the FDI-based development path has been maintained in Hungary, still mainly reliant on EU, but also increasingly on Asian FDI. (Actually, 2021 and 2022 were both all-time record years in terms of FDI inflows.) Correcting the shortcomings of this path by magnifying the positive and minimising the negative impacts is crucial with respect to the Hungarian economy's future development.

FDI in Slovenia

Slovenia has always presented itself as a European country, with exports to Western Europe already occurring during socialism and internationalisation through FDI started even before the transition. The strong export orientation stemming from the small domestic market and pre-transition experience with (inward and outward) FDI helped Slovenian enterprises internationalise rapidly after the disintegration of former Yugoslavia, giving the country access to new technologies and knowledge via inward FDI and making it a pioneering outward investor among transition economies (Jaklič & Svetličič, 2010). This facilitated the reorientation from the markets of former Yugoslavia to developed (generally Western European) markets. Since the country's independence, the dynamics of FDI were determined by changes and developments in the macroeconomic situation, the privatisation process, and changes in the regulatory framework concerning FDI, but even more by external factors, the EU integration process of Slovenia and other transition economies, as well as globalisation trends (Jaklič et al., 2009).

The early transition stage (1990–1993), namely the first wave of internationalisation, was characterised by FDI from Western companies, the rapid growth of outward FDI, but also divestments and restructuring. The mid-1990s (1994–1998) saw a rise in inward FDI due to the privatisation process and slow progress in outward FDI activity, which was mostly carried out by existing Slovenian MNEs that consolidated and strengthened their networks of foreign affiliates. A new, turn-of-the-millennium internationalisation wave, after the Europe Agreement had arrived in 1999, sped up FDI inflows into attractive companies, the growth of existing foreign affiliates along with outward FDI by existing Slovenian MNEs and newcomers which broadened and strengthened their networks of foreign affiliates.

FDI then enjoyed continuous growth from the end of the 1990s until the global economic crisis commenced. EU membership further facilitated trade and FDI between Slovenia and other EU member states as well as with non-EU countries. Apart from some larger peaks because of individual larger foreign acquisitions, FDI inflows exhibited steady trends until 2008 and inward FDI stock rose from EUR 5.5 billion in 2004 to almost EUR 12 billion in 2009. In the 2000–2010 period, Slovenia's economy grew faster than most other EU member states, with rising incomes, growing domestic consumption, falling unemployment, low inflation, and burgeoning consumer confidence. However, Slovenia had the lowest (only 20%) share of FDI stock in GDP among the new EU member states in 2004 and kept this position throughout the first and second decades of its EU membership. Inward FDI amounted to 27% of GDP in 2014 and 34% in 2023 (Chart 2). All other new EU member states recorded higher absolute and relative FDI growth. Apart from Slovenia, Romania and Lithuania, all CEE members of the EU exceed the EU average (47%) inward FDI stock to GDP ratio.

Following the global recession, FDI inflows became more volatile (where any major investment/divestment was quite noticeable in a small market). A sharp decline in FDI inflows was observed in 2009 and 2013, while in 2014 FDI inflows recovered slightly after the privatisation process was resumed. FDI inflows dropped again in 2020, likely an effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, rebounded in 2021 (joining the global trend of a booming M&A market with acquisitions in banking and manufacturing), and declined again in 2022 when even FDI in Europe had generally stalled. While foreign owners in the past generally came from the West (EU, Switzerland, USA), a considerable number of foreign investors in the last decade of EU enlargement came from other 'new EU member states' and EU candidate countries. Examples of CEE-CEE ('South-South') investments are the Croatian investment in the retail and food industry, the Hungarian investment in banking (OTP's acquisition of SKB), the Serbian investment in the food and tourism industry etc.).

FDI outflows also saw greater volatility in the second decade of EU membership. An increase in outflows was detected after the global recession (2013) and again after 2020, largely due to the post-COVID adjustment related to the disruptions in GVCs and the need to establish closer contacts with new and existing markets. In 2022, Slovenia saw a record volume of FDI outflows, reflecting the adjustment made in response to risks and disruptions in the GVCs and the search for new markets post-pandemic, the war in Ukraine and increased political risks. Still, Slovenia (with 15% of outward FDI stock in GDP) also lags behind Czechia (18%), Estonia (22.6%), Hungary (22.7%), Latvia (16%) and Lithuania (18%) in the share of outward FDI in GDP (WiiW data).

FDI in the second decade of EU membership thus contributed less to growth and development than in the first decade when foreign affiliates represented between 4%–5% of firms in the corporate sector, yet foreign affiliates were responsible for over 40% of exports and over 25% of employment and value added of the corporate sector (Bank of Slovenia). FDI effects were observed in firms' productivity growth, greater export intensity, innovation, but also spillover effects (Damijan et al., 2013). Slovenia also did

not realise the full potential of the emergence of nearshoring (friendshoring) FDI near to Western Europe that began to develop after the pandemic between 2022 and 2023 (Irwin-Hunt, 2024), and attracted only a minor share of investments in CEE.

Both foreign and domestic investors identified similar obstacles in the business environment that are felt even faster and more intensively in the country's small domestic market. Surveys of foreign direct investors mentioned several barriers to direct investment (Jaklič & Rojec, 2014; Jaklič & Koleša, 2018; 2020; 2022), such as the weak rule of law (lack of legal certainty and unpredictable court rulings and timetables), uncoordinated macroeconomic policies, poor communication between public institutions, slow progress on key infrastructure and, more recently, elevated political risks and limited availability of (skilled) labour (Jaklič & Koleša, 2022). The European Commission's 2022 Country Report – Slovenia attributes Slovenia's persistently poor performance in attracting FDI to the role of the state and the strong influence of state-owned enterprises.

In any case, Slovenia's membership in the EU has overall helped it to maintain the country's competitiveness, as reflected in the ever increasing participation in GVCs, especially during the era when GVCs were booming. Looking at the 20 years of membership today through the lens of the economy, this appears to be an underutilised opportunity that has not quite lived up to the expectations. The awakening of productivity and integration of Slovenian companies into GVCs was accompanied by dormant national policies and institutional development and an invisible contribution to EU policies, despite access to EU funds and programmes that support economic growth, innovation and development.

The key lessons emerging after two decades are in line with the predictions made in textbooks: While the economic integration of a small economy has increased economies of scale and the speed and complexity of internationalisation strategies, which has proven essential for integrating into the GVCs, any hopes for the rapid development of quality institutions with long-awaited structural reforms to boost productivity have unfortunately been dashed. Even though EU accession has not brought the expected progress in the domestic business environment and in the development of institutions, the (most competitive) companies have appreciated the benefits of a larger common market and integration into the EU.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD – CEE AND THE EU IN THE NEW COMPLEXITY OF GEOPOLITICS

Two decades of full EU membership have given CEE economies an advantage in attracting FDI, not only in volume but also in type. Although the expected effects were higher than what was achieved, CEE economies have managed to attract FDI in manufacturing, trade, banking and knowledge-intensive services, often also associated with R&D. Once known for its traditional labour-intensive manufacturing, the region is now on the cusp of a profound transformation driven by automation, reconfigured supply chains and the urgent demand for new skills. The most profitable industries in CEE are still foreign-owned. The development of a domestic economic base remains limited, albeit they have

managed to develop some multinationals of their own. Two decades of promoting entrepreneurship (largely thanks to European policies) have led to many new companies and successful start-ups, but most of them end up abroad in the growth phase due to the poorly developed domestic capital markets and (still unpredictable) institutions.

The region's future also depends greatly on both FDI and the development/survival of EU integration. The two countries under study both demonstrate challenges related to their FDI strategies and European integration. Slovenia, for instance, is keeping the status quo in the FDI market. It is grappling with concerns about its ability to influence EU decision-making processes as a smaller member state, particularly in the light of discussions on differentiated integration within the EU (Bučar & Udovič, 2023). Hungary, on the other hand, has seen a decline in intra-EU investments, but reassessed its attractiveness as an investment destination while further diversifying its economic relations. Both Hungary and Slovenia exemplify the critical role that FDI has in facilitating economic transformation and integration into the European Union. Their experiences show the complexities and opportunities that arise from navigating the intersection of foreign investment and European economic policies. While the glamour of the West and the EU may have faded, FDI and economic integration continue to be an important path to growth and development for CEE countries (notably the small ones).

CEE is seeking to retain a stable position in the FDI landscape, yet a major role as both the source and destination of FDI is now being taken on by emerging markets. This is proving increasingly challenging as the new phase of reorganising GVCs comes with greater protectionism. The number of restrictions worldwide with effects on cross-border trade and FDI has risen sharply in recent years. Investment and financial flows are driven ever more by geopolitical alignment rather than economic distance. Access to the market is not only difficult in non-EU markets, but new barriers and costs are also continuously emerging in the region along with higher taxes in national economies. The EU and the USA plan to discourage imports from China by raising tariffs, and amplifying a China+1 strategy by diversifying sourcing, have led to a considerable reconfiguration of global capital flows. Chinese investments are moving to countries from where exporting to the USA and the EU is free and easy. Some CEE economies (like Poland and Hungary) are beneficiaries of the relocation (apart from some other emerging market economies like Morocco, Vietnam, Indonesia), while others (especially smaller ones) mainly face increased costs caused by new barriers, war risks, and the changing world order. The integration of CEE into GVCs will not simply determine their development, but also the position of the EU as a whole.

Foreign direct investment is an important mechanism for overcoming trade barriers, combating protectionism, promoting economic integration and reducing the risks associated with geopolitical conflicts. The scale, scope, nature and political support for FDI play a role in the management and movement of capital. Therefore, FDI has been the engine of growth, but also the reason for the different positions among CEE economies before EU integration, over the two decades of EU integration and will continue to do so in the future.

TUJE NEPOSREDNE INVESTICIJE V SREDNJI IN VZHODNI EVROPI 20 LET PO VELIKI ŠIRITVI EU: PRIMERA SLOVENIJE IN MADŽARSKE

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POVZETEK

V prispevku obravnavamo neposredne tuje naložbe (NTI) kot večplastno merilo uspešnosti ekonomske integracije in prikažemo zgodovinski pregled dinamike NTI v državah srednje in vzhodne Evrope (SVE) v dveh desetletjih polnopravnega članstva v EU. Čeprav so srednje in vzhodnoevropska gospodarstva ostala večinoma na obrobju EU, se soočala z zamudami pri dohitevanju razvoja in so imela relativno majhen vpliv na oblikovanje politik EU, jim je v dveh desetletjih uspelo (tudi če jih primerjamo z drugimi državami v svetu) pritegniti znatne količine vhodnih NTI (zlasti v prvem desetletju polnopravnega članstva), povečati izhodne NTI in razviti lastna domača večnacionalna podjetja (MNE) ter doseči visoko stopnjo vključenosti v globalne verige vrednosti (GVV). Nadgradnja in napredovanje znotraj GVV (na pozicije razvojnih dobaviteljev z višjo dodano vrednostjo) je sicer potekalo počasneje od pričakovanj. Spremembe v modelu rasti, ki je v zadnjih 20 letih temeljil na neposrednih tujih naložbah, zahtevajo revizijo industrijskih politik, povečano uporabo novih tehnologij, ohranjanje in povečevanja (nivoja) znanja in večja vlaganja v inovacije v gospodarstvih SVE. NTI in evropsko povezovanje bodo še naprej med najpomembnejšimi dejavniki gospodarskega razvoja v državah SVE tudi v obdobju povečanih geopilitičnih trenj, predelovalna industrija in vpetost teh držav v GVV je pomembna za EU kot celoto. Primerjava izkušenj iz Slovenije in Madžarske pa kaže, da kljub skupni poti obstajajo razlike v izkoriščenosti neposrednih tujih investicij in gospodarskem povezovanju.

Ključne besede: neposredne tuje investicije, gospodarsko povezovanje, države srednje in vzhodne Evrope (CEE), Slovenija, Madžarska

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APPENDIX

Table 1: FDI inflows and outflows (in Million EUR) in CEE economies that entered the EU (2003–2023) (wiiw FDI Database 2024).

Country	Direction	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Bulgaria	inflow	1851	2736	3152	6222	9052	6728	2437	1170	1476	1321	1384	347	1998	940	1606	968	1639	2974	1517	2631	3619
Bulgaria	outflow	23	-166	249	141	206	522	-68	237	287	253	141	201	124	366	293	211	401	216	268	533	553
Croatia	inflow	1762	950	1468	2576	3600	3691	2122	885	1144	1021	682	2175	68	250	468	1016	2660	966	3793	3409	2542
Croatia	outflow	106	279	192	202	214	1053	847	75	214	-40	-54	1490	-126	-1761	-652	175	-779	230	783	-241	1089
Czechia	inflow	1863	4007	9374	4355	7634	4415	2110	4637	1668	6217	2769	4141	419	8873	8454	9330	9030	8261	7651	8794	7199
Czechia	outflow	183	817	-15	1170	1184	2959	684	881	-236	1394	3055	1221	2243	1973	6712	7341	3688	2624	6538	5396	6521
Estonia	inflow	822	771	2307	1432	1985	1249	1324	1139	723	1078	516	416	100	933	1131	1208	2727	3100	89	959	4233
Estonia	outflow	137	217	556	882	1277	780	990	126	-1046	680	329	-73	250	431	224	-39	1669	256	-651	799	1393
Hungary	inflow	1888	3439	6172	5454	2852	3145	1415	1352	1727	4096	2062	5150	2298	3880	5136	5566	3123	4641	6707	8566	5365
Hungary	outflow	1914	1114	1808	3576	3235	700	1156	307	576	1538	830	2071	860	1318	3021	2954	2296	2430	2955	3623	2784
Latvia	inflow	271	513	568	1326	1698	863	68	286	1045	863	680	676	666	230	659	814	827	878	2794	1333	1122
Latvia	outflow	44	89	103	136	270	166	-45	14	44	150	310	408	63	145	126	175	-92	223	1965	109	539
Lithuania	inflow	160	623	826	1448	1473	1225	-323	770	1294	624	432	-100	951	273	904	827	2699	3080	2366	2055	1764
Lithuania	outflow	34	212	278	232	437	419	399	32	539	421	99	44	340	39	71	596	1560	2516	1119	348	966
Poland	inflow	4067	9978	7069	12720	15896	8415	7239	9659	11453	9667	2730	10755	13758	14181	8142	13555	12069	12135	24719	29931	25732
Poland	outflow	269	498	1531	4116	2674	1273	1303	4640	738	2257	-340	2184	4501	10484	1926	755	1656	1136	2679	6016	9332
Romania	inflow	1946	5183	5213	9061	7250	9210	3358	2263	1700	2489	2713	2421	3461	4517	4797	5266	5173	3005	8940	10039	6594
Romania	outflow	36	56	-24	337	204	187	-69	-38	-20	-89	-211	-282	507	4	-86	321	324	46	119	1233	37
Slovakia	inflow	1914	2441	1952	3741	2618	3200	-4	1336	2512	2321	-455	-386	96	728	3556	1418	2243	-2104	1539	2756	167
Slovakia	outflow	219	-17	120	408	438	362	651	714	513	7	-236	32	5	86	1173	272	39	305	251	411	82
Slovenia	inflow	271	665	473	513	1106	832	-343	80	782	264	-114	791	1510	1126	795	1172	1307	193	1561	1937	1020
Slovenia	outflow	421	441	516	687	1362	961	154	-14	143	-201	-161	207	241	262	300	238	545	454	1146	649	500

Received: 2024-05-09 DOI 10.19233/AH.2024.14

DIPLOMATIC BRIDGES: TWO DECADES OF SLOVENIA'S DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Slovenia's international development co-operation since its accession to the European Union (EU) in 2004, focusing on its strategic priorities, challenges, and impact in regions such as the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa. Using a historical and comparative approach, the study analyses policy documents, official development assistance (ODA) data and case studies to assess Slovenia's role as a small donor state within the EU framework. The analysis sheds light on the evolution of Slovenian development diplomacy, the integration of development assistance into foreign policy objectives and the challenges of policy coherence and resource allocation. The article also examines the opportunities Slovenia has to improve its development impact and strategic partnerships by better aligning with international standards and adapting to global dynamics.

Keywords: international development cooperation, Slovenian diplomacy, Western Balkans, sustainable development, European Union

PONTI DIPLOMATICI: DUE DECENNI DI COOPERAZIONE ALLO SVILUPPO IN SLOVENIA

SINTESI

Questo articolo esamina la cooperazione internazionale allo sviluppo della Slovenia a partire dalla sua adesione all'Unione Europea (UE) nel 2004, concentrandosi sulle sue priorità strategiche, le sfide e gli impatti in regioni come i Balcani occidentali, l'Europa orientale e l'Africa sub-sahariana. Utilizzando un approccio storico e comparativo, lo studio analizza i documenti politici, i dati sull'aiuto pubblico allo sviluppo (APS) e alcuni casi di studio per valutare il ruolo della Slovenia come piccolo Stato donatore nel quadro dell'UE. I risultati evidenziano l'evoluzione della diplomazia dello sviluppo slovena, l'integrazione degli aiuti allo sviluppo negli obiettivi di politica estera e le sfide poste dalla coerenza politica e dell'allocazione delle risorse. L'articolo esplora anche le opportunità per la Slovenia di migliorare il suo impatto sullo sviluppo e i suoi partenariati strategici attraverso un migliore allineamento con gli standard internazionali e l'adattamento alle dinamiche globali.

Parole chiave: cooperazione internazionale allo sviluppo, diplomazia slovena, Balcani occidentali, sviluppo sostenibile, Unione Europea

INTRODUCTION[1]

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of its accession to the European Union (EU), Slovenia has undergone a significant transformation as a small diplomatic actor. Since gaining independence in 1991 and especially after joining the EU in 2004, the country has endeavoured to align its foreign policy with the general objectives of the EU while pursuing its strategic interests in the Western Balkans. However, Slovenia's path in development co-operation has not been without challenges. While Slovenia has aligned itself with the EU's development policy, its development efforts often reflect the tension between altruistic goals and pragmatic diplomatic (political and economic) interests in the region (Bučar, 2011; Udovič & Bučar, 2014; Udovič & Vojinović Jaćimović, 2019). As global development priorities have shifted towards sustainable development and addressing challenges such as migration and climate change, Slovenian development diplomacy needs to adapt to these changing demands. The integration of such global priorities into Slovenia's foreign policy strategy reflects the country's efforts to harmonise national interests with its commitments to international development objectives.

One of the most important instruments for balancing these aims has been development co-operation.[2] Over the past 20 years, Slovenia has not only transformed itself from an aid recipient to an active donor country in 2004 and a member of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (DAC OECD) but has also sought to reshape its development cooperation to reflect changing global dynamics, regional priorities and the country's growing role within the EU. At the centre of this evolution is Slovenia's approach of using Official Development Assistance (ODA) to build diplomatic bridges through development cooperation. While the official narrative emphasises the use of ODA to improve economic and social stability in recipient countries and to support the integration of the Western Balkans into Euro-Atlantic structures, there is also a need to critically analyse the effectiveness and strategic coherence of these efforts (Bučar, 2011; Rogelj et al., 2023). For this reason, this article focuses not only on a historical overview of Slovenia's development cooperation since EU accession, but also on the main phases, strategic priorities and possible future directions.

In the first years after its independence, the focus of Slovenian foreign policy was on gaining international recognition and securing membership in key international organisations, shifting the focus away from the ex-Yugoslav countries (Udovič &

1 The present paper is the result of the authors' research within the research programme P5-0177 *Slovenia and its Actors in International Relations and European Integrations*. The author would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their comments on the first version of the text, which were helpful in revising and improving the analysis.

2 Development cooperation is one of the most important tools of development diplomacy, which is about using development assistance to achieve foreign policy objectives by building relationships, fostering good relations and strengthening a donor's soft power (Zielińska, 2016).

Bučar, 2016). However, after joining the EU in 2004, Slovenia faced new challenges and opportunities as it transformed from a post-socialist state to an active participant in the EU, which required a shift in Slovenia's foreign policy orientation towards a more proactive engagement with its neighbouring regions. This shift was influenced not only by Slovenia's strategic interest in the region, but also by its economic ties and the potential benefits of regional stability for its own security and economic growth (Mrak et al., 2007; Jaklič & Svetličič, 2016).[3] Bučar (2011) highlights that Slovenia's transition from a recipient of development assistance to a donor was characterised by a strategic emphasis on promoting stability in the Western Balkans through targeted development cooperation.[4] However, this strategy was often characterised by Slovenia's dual objectives of promoting development and attempting to advance its own economic interests at the same time (Udovič & Bučar, 2014; Arbeiter et al., 2019).[5] The prioritisation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia and Albania in Slovenian development cooperation reflects both Slovenia's historical ties and its strategic interest in promoting stability and integration into Euro-Atlantic structures (Udovič & Bučar, 2014). By acting as a bridge between the EU and the Western Balkans, Slovenia has sought to use its unique position to promote regional cooperation and stability, strengthen its diplomatic influence in the region and create a favourable environment for its own economic interests (Mrak et al., 2007).[6]

Slovenia's integration into the EU framework entailed the adoption of important legal and political framework conditions for the country's development cooperation. The 2006 International Development Cooperation Act (IDC Act) and the 2008 Resolution on International Development Cooperation of the Republic of Slovenia until 2015 (ReIDC) were important milestones, but their implementation was sometimes inconsistent, reflecting the overall challenges of aligning national policies with international development objectives (Udovič & Bučar, 2014). Although the documents outlined Slovenia's commitment to supporting sustainable development, democratic governance and economic stability in its neighbouring regions

3 While development cooperation is often presented as an altruistic effort to support development in recipient countries, it is often intertwined with strategic and self-interested motives of donor countries such as geopolitical influence and economic advantage (Arbeiter et al., 2019; Arbeiter & Bučar, 2022).

4 This also reflects Slovenia's diplomatic identity, which is deeply rooted in its collective memory of regional conflict and historical transition (Kočan & Udovič, 2020; Udovič, 2022). By prioritizing the Western Balkans, Slovenia wishes to use ODA as an extension of its diplomatic influence, with historical ties and collective memory of shared experiences guiding its foreign policy.

5 As Udovič and Bučar (2014) point out, Slovenia's efforts are primarily aimed at the Western Balkans due to historical ties and strategic interests in promoting regional stability and economic cooperation.

6 Slovenia's ODA focus on the Western Balkans not only reflects national strategic interests, but is also in line with the broader diplomatic focus of the EU, which has endeavoured to address the difficult past of its member and non-member states. Slovenia's contribution to development in the region reflects the EU's efforts to promote stability and reconciliation, even if these efforts face challenges in implementation (Zupančič et al., 2021).

in line with broader EU development goals, various scholars pointed out that the practical application of these commitments often falls short, with policy coherence and effective implementation remaining a challenge (Bučar & Milosavljević, 2011; Arbeiter et al., 2019).

Over the past two decades, Slovenia's development cooperation strategy has gone through several development phases characterised by shifts in focus, geographical priorities and thematic areas. In the first phase (2004–2010), important framework conditions were created and Slovenia's development policy was harmonised with that of the EU, while the political and economic transition of the Western Balkan countries was actively supported through bilateral aid and technical assistance. The following phase (2010–2015) involved a strategic consolidation and expansion of Slovenian development cooperation with a broader geographical focus and greater integration into EU development initiatives (Arbeiter et al., 2019). In recent years, Slovenia has sought to adapt its development cooperation in response to new global challenges such as the migration crisis, climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. The latest Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia (MFA, 2019a) for the period 2023–2030 reflects these changes and emphasises the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), humanitarian aid and a stronger focus on building resilience in fragile states, which is in line with Slovenia's commitment to international solidarity and the promotion of peace, security and human rights worldwide. Thus, it seems that by further build diplomatic bridges through targeted development cooperation, Slovenia aims to increase its influence and contribute to a more stable and prosperous international environment.

This paper will provide a comprehensive historical overview of Slovenia's development co-operation since its accession to the EU, focusing on the key phases, achievements and challenges of the last 20 years. It will also analyse possible future directions of Slovenia's development cooperation strategy in the light of new global and regional dynamics. By examining Slovenia's evolving role as a donor country within the EU framework, the paper aims to contribute to a better understanding of the opportunities and challenges faced by small states in shaping an effective development co-operation policy, understood as one of the most important instruments of mature diplomacy in the world. This paper is divided into four main sections. The first two sections provide a historical overview of Slovenia's development cooperation since its accession to the EU in 2004, discussing the legal and institutional framework and analysing the strategic priorities. The analysis of Slovenia's development cooperation is divided into two main periods to reflect the country's changing role in the international development landscape: before and after joining the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) in 2013. The first period (2004–2013) covers Slovenia's first years as a donor country after its accession to the European Union in 2004, during which time Slovenia focused on establishing a legal and institutional framework for development cooperation, aligning its policies with EU objectives and prioritising regional stability in the Western Balkans.

The second period (2013–2024) represents Slovenia's development cooperation efforts as a DAC member, characterised by a more strategic and structured approach to official development assistance, a stronger alignment with international development standards and an increased commitment to global priorities such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This division allows for a nuanced analysis of the evolution of Slovenia's development cooperation strategy from a regional focus to a broader engagement in global development efforts, reflecting the country's growing responsibility and influence within the international donor community. The third section discusses the challenges Slovenia has faced in the different phases of its development policy. The final section discusses possible opportunities for Slovenia's development cooperation, taking into account current global trends and political changes in the EU.

THE FOUNDING YEARS: SLOVENIA'S ESTABLISHMENT AS A DONOR COUNTRY (2004–2013)

Following its accession to the European Union (EU) in 2004, Slovenia's approach to international development cooperation changed significantly. As a new member state, Slovenia had to align its policies with the EU's development objectives, which focus on poverty eradication, international development and later on sustainable development, the promotion of human rights and democracy worldwide. This alignment required the creation of a solid legal and policy framework to guide Slovenia's development cooperation efforts and integrate them into the broader EU context (Bučar & Udovič, 2007; Mrak et al., 2007; Udovič & Bučar, 2014; 2016).

Initially, Slovenia focussed on establishing a basic legal and institutional structure through the IDC Act (2006) and the subsequent ReIDC (PISRS, 2008), as shown in Table 1. These frameworks were designed to align with EU development objectives while reflecting Slovenia's strategic interests, particularly in the Western Balkans. The IDC Act emphasised the importance of aligning Slovenia's development goals with EU policies while considering Slovenia's national interests. It established the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as the central coordinating body for development cooperation, responsible for policy formulation, coordination of aid programmes and compliance with international commitments (Udovič & Bučar, 2014).

Building on the IDC Act, Slovenia adopted the Resolution on International Development Cooperation of the Republic of Slovenia until 2015 (ReIDC) in 2008. The ReIDC (PISRS, 2008) set out Slovenia's strategic priorities for development cooperation, emphasising geographical and thematic priority areas. The ReIDC identified the Western Balkans as a priority area determined by Slovenia's historical ties and its strategic interest in promoting regional stability and development (Mrak et al., 2007). This alignment with the EU's development policy framework emphasises Slovenia's commitment to principles such as aid effectiveness, ownership and partnership.

Table 1: Legal and institutional structure of Slovenian development cooperation 2004–2013 (own elaboration based on documents mentioned).

Year	Document	Main Objectives	Geographical Priorities	Other important Points
2006	Act on International Development Cooperation of the Republic of Slovenia (*Zakon o mednarodnem razvojnem sodelovanju Republike Slovenije*)	Eradication of poverty in developing countries	Developing countries eligible for ODA (OECD DAC criteria)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs as the national coordinator
		Promotion of peace, human security, democracy, and good governance		Emphasising policy coherence
		Sustainable development (economic, social, environmental)		Creation of a framework for bilateral and multilateral development cooperation
		Provision of basic social services		
2008	Resolution on International Development Cooperation of the Republic of Slovenia until 2015 (*Resolucija o mednarodnem razvojnem sodelovanju Republike Slovenije za obdobje do leta 2015*)	Alignment with international development goals (MDGs)	Western Balkans and neighbouring regions	Strengthening partnerships with international organisations and NGOs
		Improving the effectiveness of aid		Promoting human rights, democracy, and the rule of law
		Focus on priority sectors (good governance, education, economic development)		Contribution to global peace and security

The focus on the Western Balkans – particularly Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo – was at the centre of Slovenia's ODA strategy during this period (Mrak et al., 2007; Udovič & Bučar, 2016; Rogelj et al., 2023). This focus also reflects Slovenia's diplomatic and foreign policy ambitions and shows that, at least strategically and at a declaratory level, Slovenia wanted to use ODA as a tool not only to support the development of the region, but also to consolidate its role as a diplomatic bridge between the EU and the Western Balkans. Slovenia wanted to use its own post-socialist transition experience to support the political and economic reforms of its neighbours, strengthen institutional capacity and promote regional cooperation. These efforts were closely aligned with the EU's broader objectives, which prioritised good governance, human rights and sustainable development as part of the EU enlargement process (Arbeiter et al., 2019).

An important trend during this period was the gradual increase in Slovenia's ODA. From 2005 to 2013, Slovenia's total ODA increased steadily from EUR 29.02 million to EUR 46.22 million (MFA, 2019b; OECD, 2020; 2024; MFEA, 2023). This growth in ODA reflects Slovenia's commitment to becoming an active

Table 2: Slovenia's ODA 2005–2013 (own elaboration based on MFA (2014) and OECD (2024)).

Year	Bilateral Aid (Millions EUR)	Multilateral Aid (Millions EUR)	Total ODA (Millions EUR)	ODA as % of GNI
2005	11.96	17.06	29.02	0.11%
2006	13.99	21.09	35.08 ↑	0.12%
2007	17.38	22.14	39.52 ↑	0.12%
2008	20.32	26.55	46.87 ↑	0.13%
2009	18.16	33.11	51.27 ↑	0.15%
2010	17.87	27.47	45.34 ↓	0.13%
2011	13.53	31.58	45.11 ↓	0.13%
2012	14.86	30.62	45.48 ↑	0.13%
2013	15.35	30.87	46.22 ↑	0.13%

donor, despite its relatively small size and economic capacity. By increasing its aid, Slovenia wanted to demonstrate its commitment to global development goals and position itself as a reliable partner in EU development.

As Arbeiter and Bučar (2020) emphasise, the global level of ODA did not fall excessively after the 2008 financial crisis and the real results only became visible after 2011.[7] In the case of Slovenia, ODA funding actually increased in 2009 and the impact of the crisis was only reflected in the budget allocated to ODA in 2010 (Table 2). The real challenges for Slovenia's ODA efforts due to the global financial crisis thus only emerged after 2013.

The growth of Slovenia's ODA from 2005 to 2013 shows a steady increase in the total volume of ODA over the years, but also illustrates that Slovenia has not met its commitment to increase ODA to 0.33% of gross national income (GNI) by 2015, as shown in Chart 1. Despite efforts to increase development aid, reflected in occasional peaks, Slovenia's ODA as a percentage of GNI remained well below target. There was a modest upward trend with a peak of 0.15%, probably reflecting a brief increase in aid flows, but the subsequent plateau suggests that economic constraints and competing national priorities make it difficult to sustain this growth. This highlights the challenges Slovenia has faced in reconciling economic constraints at home with its international development commitments and

7 A 1% decrease in ODA was recorded in 2011, followed by a 4% decrease in 2012 (World Bank, n.d.)

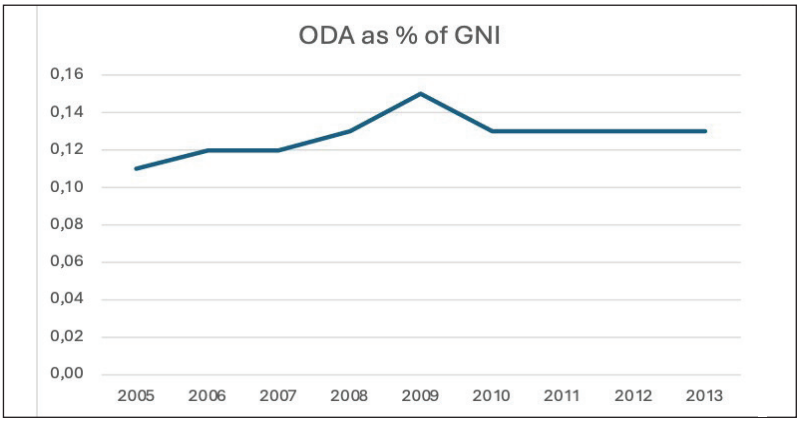

Chart 1: ODA as % of GNI (own elaboration based on OECD (2024)).

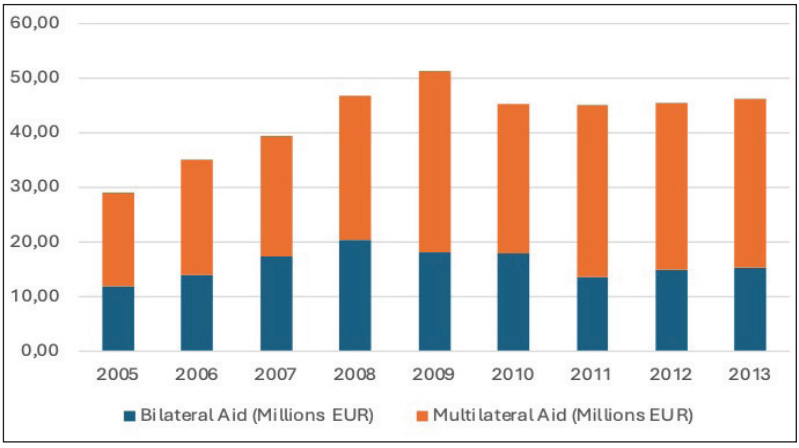

Chart 2: Slovenia's bilateral and multilateral ODA (2005–2013) (own elaboration based on OECD (2024)).

mirrors similar struggles in other EU member states that joined the EU after 2002 (Arbeiter & Bučar, 2020).

One of the main features of Slovenian ODA in these years was also a strong emphasis on multilateral aid, as Chart 2 shows. A significant share of Slovenian development assistance was channelled through multilateral organisations such as EU institutions, United Nations agencies and other international development organisations (Bučar, 2011). The higher share of multilateral contributions primarily reflects the share of Slovenia's contribution to the EU budget and is only to a

lesser extent an expression of Slovenia's strategic orientation to capitalise on its EU membership by contributing to EU-led development initiatives (OECD, 2020). This is evidenced by the fact that the allocation of multilateral ODA to EU institutions averaged 83% (OECD Data Explorer, n.d.).[8]

To summarise, Slovenia's development cooperation from 2004 to 2013 was characterised by significant change, driven by the country's integration into the EU framework and the introduction of sound legal and policy guidelines. Despite its modest economic size, Slovenia demonstrated a strong commitment to increasing its ODA contributions and aligning its strategic priorities with broader EU and global objectives. However, challenges such as economic constraints and the global financial crisis impacted Slovenia's ability to achieve its ODA targets, in particular reaching the commitment of 0.33% of GNI by 2015. An important milestone on this path, however, was Slovenia's accession to the OECD DAC in 2013, which elevated the country to the ranks of the world's top donors and underlined its commitment to meeting international standards for aid effectiveness and transparency.

STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT: SLOVENIA'S EXTENDED ENGAGEMENT IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (2014–2024)

The period from 2014 to 2024 marks a significant evolution in Slovenia's approach to international development cooperation, characterised by both successes and critical challenges, as highlighted in the OECD Development Cooperation Peer Review (2017). The adoption of several strategic documents during this period reflects Slovenia's efforts to align its development policy with international standards while recognising its unique context as a small, emerging donor country. The Slovenian strategy (2019) clarifies the alignment with global development frameworks such as the SDGs and emphasises priorities such as sustainable development, climate action and the fight against migration. Although the strategy reflects global commitments, Slovenia faces the challenge of fully realising these priorities due to limited resources and the need to reconcile regional stability, particularly in the Western Balkans, with these broader international goals. This dual focus reveals both opportunities and tensions in the declaratory and actual implementation of Slovenia's development co-operation.

During this period, Slovenia adopted important legal frameworks that shaped its approach to development co-operation and humanitarian assistance (Table 3). These include the Resolution on Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (PISRS, 2017), the Act on Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (PISRS, 2018a), the Decree on the Implementation of International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (PISRS, 2018b) and the Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid Strategy until 2030 (2019).

8 In 2009, the share of multilateral ODA allocated to EU institutions decreased to 65.73%, but already increased to 94.79% in 2010 (OECD Data Explorer, n.d.).

Table 3: Legislative and institutional structure of Slovenia's development cooperation 2014–2024 (own elaboration based on the documents mentioned).

Year	Document	Main Objectives	Geographical Priorities	Other important Points
2017	Resolution on Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid of the Republic of Slovenia (*Resolucija o mednarodnem razvojnem sodelovanju in humanitarni pomoči Republike Slovenije)*	Contributing to balanced global development	Western Balkans, European Neighbourhood, Sub-Saharan Africa	Policy coherence for development
		Promotion of peace, stability, and inclusive societies		Raising public awareness and global education
		Fight against climate change		Commitment to increase the ODA share of GNI
		Provide humanitarian assistance during crises		
2018	Act on Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid *(Zakon o mednarodnem razvojnem sodelovanju in humanitarni pomoči Republike Slovenije*)	Contribution to global poverty reduction	Western Balkans, European Neighbourhood, Sub-Saharan Africa (Least Developed Countries)	Guidelines for the distribution of ODA funds
		Promotion of human rights and sustainable development		Emphasising partnerships with NGOs and the private sector
		Harmonisation with international standards for development cooperation		Role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as coordinator
2018	Decree on the Implementation of International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid of the Republic of Slovenia (*Uredba o izvajanju mednarodnega razvojnega sodelovanja in humanitarne pomoči Republike Slovenije*)	Operationalisation of the strategic objectives of Slovenian development cooperation and humanitarian aid	As defined in the relevant strategies (Western Balkans, European Neighbourhood, Sub-Saharan Africa)	Roles and responsibilities of the various government agencies
		Establish procedures for the implementation of development and humanitarian projects		Specifies the framework for project selection, resource allocation, monitoring and evaluation
		Ensures alignment with EU and international standards for aid effectiveness		Emphasis on transparency and accountability in the use of development funds
2019	Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia until 2030 (*Strategija mednarodnega razvojnega sodelovanja in humanitarne pomoči Republike Slovenije do leta 2030*)	Eradication of poverty and inequality	Western Balkans (60–70% of aid), European Neighbourhood, Sub-Saharan Africa	Focus on thematic priorities (employment, climate change, governance, crisis response)
		Promoting sustainable development		Strengthening institutions and raising public awareness
		Strengthening humanitarian aid and resilience		Regular evaluations to adapt the strategy
		Effective and inclusive partnerships		
		Managing for results		

Table 4: Slovenia's ODA 2014–2022 (own elaboration based on MFA (2018; 2019b; 2020; 2022; 2023).

Year	Bilateral ODA (EUR millions)	Multilateral ODA (EUR millions)	Total ODA (EUR millions)	% of GNI for ODA
2014	15.19	31.19	46.38 ↑	0.13%
2015	22.62	34.48	57.11 ↑	0.15%
2016	25.22	48.33	73.55 ↑	0.19%
2017	22.11	45.12	67.23 ↓	0.16%
2018	24.81	45.95	70.76 ↑	0.16%
2019	27.77	49.68	77.44 ↑	0.16%
2020	26.49	53.12	79.61 ↑	0.17%
2021	38.96	59.29	98.25 ↑	0.19%
2022	82.31	77.34	159.66 ↑	0.29%

Each of these documents set objectives such as contributing to global poverty reduction, promoting human rights and sustainable development, and harmonising Slovenian efforts with international and EU standards for development cooperation.

However, the first OECD Peer Review for Slovenia (2017) identified several critical issues that Slovenia needs to address in order to improve its effectiveness as a donor. While Slovenia has made progress in establishing a comprehensive policy framework, the review pointed to gaps in implementation, particularly in ensuring policy coherence and coordination between different government agencies and sectors. The review also pointed to the need for a more strategic approach to resource allocation, particularly in targeting limited ODA resources to the areas with the greatest impact (OECD, 2017).

The analysis of Slovenia's ODA trends from 2014 to 2022, as shown in Table 4, reveals a period of strategic adjustments and responses to both external pressures and evolving domestic priorities. During this period, Slovenia's total ODA increased significantly, reflecting a commitment to strengthening its international development role. However, this growth was not without fluctuations, as evidenced by the decline in 2017, which can be attributed to budgetary constraints and shifts in strategic focus (Arbeiter & Bučar, 2020). From 2014 to 2016, Slovenia's ODA experienced significant growth, with a notable peak in 2016, as shown in Chart 3, primarily due to higher multilateral contributions. This increase was in line with

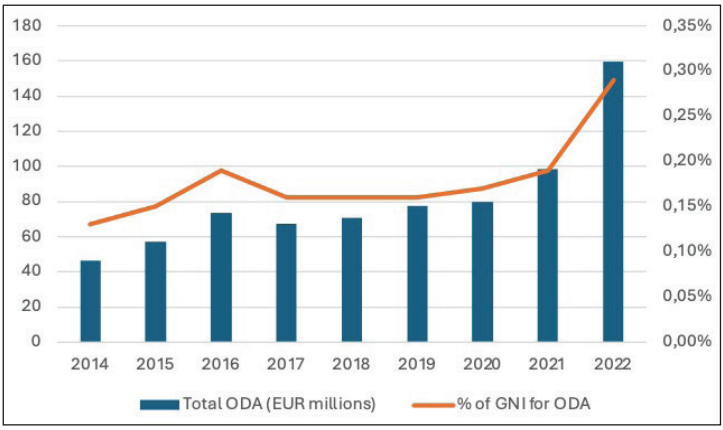

Chart 3: Slovenia's total ODA and its % of GNI (2014–2022) (own elaboration based on MFA (2018; 2019b; 2020; 2022; 2023)).

global and European responses to the Syrian refugee crisis and other international humanitarian needs, demonstrating Slovenia's alignment with EU-wide priorities (OECD, 2017). The subsequent decline in 2017 reflects adjustments in domestic budgeting and possibly a recalibration of development priorities.

The period from 2018 onwards was characterised by a recovery and a steady increase in ODA, which culminated in a significant increase in 2022. This increase in 2022 was mainly influenced by relatively high allocations of Slovenia's funds for Ukrainian refugees and humanitarian aid to this country. Slovenia, like many other donors, has reallocated funds to support reconstruction and address the immediate challenges posed by the war.

Despite the overall increase in ODA, the percentage of GNI allocated to ODA remained below Slovenia's target of 0.33% by 2030. This shortfall points to the ongoing challenges of scaling up financial commitments amid economic constraints and competing national priorities. Like the majority of countries that joined the EU between 2004 and 2007 and failed to achieve internationally agreed targets for development co-operation (Zrinski & Bučar, 2015), Slovenia also belongs to this club. The increase to 0.29% of GNI in 2022 reflects a significant increase in the volume of ODA, which was mainly influenced by high allocations for Ukrainian refugees and humanitarian aid for Ukraine.

A significant portion of ODA was spent on multilateral aid and fluctuated between 48% and 67% of total ODA over the period analysed. This indicates a strategic preference for channelling aid through international organisations such as the EU and the UN, but also, and more importantly, the share of Slovenia's contribution to the EU budget. However, as is often noted, small donors use multilateral aid to maximise their impact by contributing to broader, collective efforts (OECD, 2017).

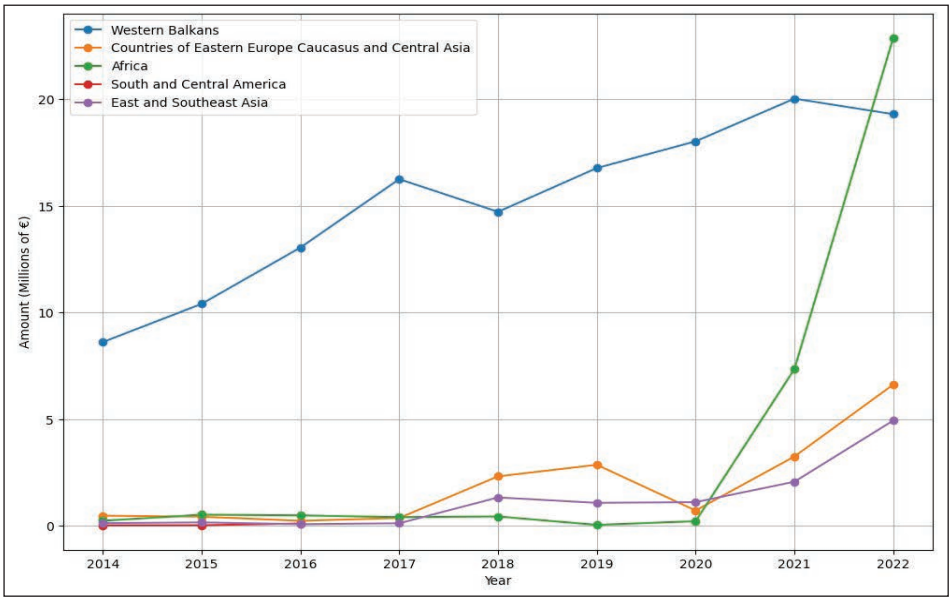

Chart 4: Geographical allocation of Slovenia's bilateral ODA in € million (2014–2022) (own elaboration based on MFA annual reports (MFA, 2018; 2019b; 2020; 2022; 2023)).

However, the reliance on multilateral contributions also emphasises the challenges Slovenia faces in scaling up its bilateral aid initiatives, which are critical to building direct partnerships and promoting long-term development impact. Slovenia's development co-operation efforts have often been hampered by fragmented coordination between various actors, including ministries, NGOs and international partners. This fragmentation has led to inefficiencies in project implementation and a lack of clear, strategic priorities (OECD, 2017).

The allocation of Slovenia's bilateral ODA to specific geographical regions from 2014 to 2022 partly reflects a strategic approach that is consistent with Slovenia's legal and institutional framework. The data shows that the Western Balkans consistently received the largest share of Slovenia's bilateral ODA during this period, emphasising Slovenia's commitment to regional stability and integration. However, this approach has been criticised for its fragmentation and lack of targeted impact, as Slovenia's aid was spread thinly across several countries, resulting in numerous small projects with limited transformative potential (OECD, 2017).

The Western Balkans remains a priority for Slovenia's bilateral ODA (Chart 4) and consistently receives a significant share of bilateral ODA, peaking at almost 74% in 2017. In 2022, however, there was a notable decrease to 23% (EUR 19.31 million), with the largest share of bilateral ODA allocated to the Africa region, which received 27% of total bilateral ODA (EUR 22.8 million).

Table 5: The percentage of total bilateral ODA for the countries of the Western Balkans (2014–2022) (own elaboration based on MFA annual reports MFA (2018; 2019b; 2020; 2022; 2023)).

Year	North Macedonia (%)	Montenegro (%)	Kosovo (%)	Bosnia and Herzegovina (%)	Serbia (%)	Albania (%)	Turkey (%)
2014	13.86	7.58	5.01	15.91	6.25	1.96	0.39
2015	10.09	5.09	4.24	14.61	6.29	0.29	0.20
2016	10.89	4.88	4.42	12.45	7.86	2.32	5.96
2017	14.19	5.61	7.18	19.28	12.05	0.71	10.40
2018	15.61	5.48	3.84	15.65	16.10	0.32	4.67
2019	16.83	5.55	3.56	18.17	12.85	1.04	3.03
2020	20.05	3.66	3.92	20.62	16.66	1.12	3.13
2021	15.74	3.19	2.29	16.14	12.51	0.17	1.11
2022	7.41	1.10	1.02	6.69	6.05	0.33	0.57

Although the largest portion of Slovenia's bilateral ODA is earmarked for the Western Balkans, a detailed analysis, as shown in Table 5, reveals that each country received a relatively modest share of total bilateral aid to the region. This fragmentation contributed to a dilution of Slovenia's overall development impact, as resources were spread too thinly to achieve significant results (OECD, 2017).

The share of bilateral ODA for Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia was relatively modest and generally fluctuated between 1% and 10%. This allocation and the visible fluctuations (Chart 4) reflect changing geopolitical priorities and responses to regional crises. The main recipients in this region were Ukraine, Moldova, Syria and Palestine. Slovenia's assistance to this region was often driven by the need to support democratic transitions, human rights and socio-economic reforms, which is in line with the objectives of the EU's Eastern Partnership (Arbeiter & Bučar, 2020). Nevertheless, Slovenia's aid efforts were again spread across too many initiatives, which reduced the potential effectiveness of interventions and hampered efforts to effectively monitor and evaluate their impact (OECD, 2017).

Fig. 1: Development project of Caritas Slovenia: Women's entrepreneurship development in agriculture in south-east Serbia (Caritas Slovenia, 2024a). More information about the project is available at https://www.gov.si/podrocja/zunanje-zadeve/mednarodno-razvojno-sodelovanje-in-humanitarna-pomoc/razvojni-in-humanitarni-projekti/razvoj-zenskega-podjetnistva-v-kmetijstvu-v-jv-srbiji/

Africa's share of bilateral ODA remained relatively low until 2020 and then increased dramatically from 0.84% in 2020 to 18.88% in 2021 and further to 27.80% in 2022.[9] This was related to the cancellation of clearing debt to some countries and was unfortunately not a strategic decision to redirect ODA to less developed countries. However, it is certain that this measure by Slovenia is at least partly related to the desire to gain the support of African countries for its candidature for a seat as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. However, an important player alongside the official channels are non-governmental organisations (NGOs),[10] which are very active in Africa. One example of this is

9 Main recipients of bilateral ODA in African region were Ruanda and Uganda (OECD, 2017; MFA, 2023).

10 The Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs regularly publishes public tenders for the implementation of international development projects for NGOs. As Arbeiter and Bučar (2020) found, NGOs often improve economic opportunities at the micro level with their projects and thus increase the chances of survival in specific communities.

Fig. 2: Development project of Caritas Slovenia: Ensuring sustainable primary education capacity for children in Nyangungu, Burundi (Caritas Slovenia, 2024b). More information about the project is available at https://www.karitas.si/mednarodna-pomoc/humanitarna-in-razvojna-pomoc-afrika/

the Slovenian Caritas, which implements international development cooperation projects and programmes in Central African countries (Figure 2), particularly in rural areas in Rwanda, Burundi, Zambia, Malawi, the Central African Republic, Madagascar and Botswana, with a priority on water and food supply, education and healthcare (Caritas Slovenia, n.d.). However, similar to other regions, Slovenia's scattered aid initiatives in several African countries lack a coherent strategic focus, further fragmenting the country's overall development efforts (OECD, 2017).

Bilateral ODA allocations to East and Southeast Asia remained relatively low throughout the period, reflecting a more limited strategic interest compared to other regions. However, the slight increases in aid in 2018 and 2022 show that Slovenia is responding (declaratively) to emerging global issues such as climate change and economic development, particularly in countries such as Vietnam and Myanmar, which are among the main recipients of EU aid programmes. The lack of a clear strategic framework for these allocations suggests that Slovenia's limited resources could be better utilised through a more targeted and strategic approach (OECD, 2017).

The geographical distribution of bilateral ODA in Slovenia indicates a strategy that attempts to balance national interests, regional stability and alignment with EU foreign policy objectives. The consistent focus on the Western Balkans underlines Slovenia's commitment to promoting stability in its immediate neighbourhood, while the selective engagement in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Africa reflects the response to the EU's broader development policy and global challenges. However, the fragmented distribution of Slovenian aid across countries (and regions) poses a major challenge. Slovenia's limited resources require a more concentrated approach to ODA allocation, focusing on fewer regions and sectors where it can have a greater impact and increase its diplomatic leverage (Arbeiter & Bučar, 2020). Going forward, Slovenia's ability to sustain and strategically deploy its ODA will depend on its ability to adapt to changing geopolitical dynamics, reduce fragmentation and maintain alignment with the EU and international development frameworks (OECD, 2017).

NAVIGATING COMPLEXITY: CHALLENGES IN SLOVENIAN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Slovenia's development cooperation has evolved considerably since its accession to the EU in 2004. However, it faces several challenges that affect its effectiveness and its ability to achieve strategic objectives. These challenges are driven by internal constraints, such as limited resources and institutional capacity, and external factors, such as global crises and complex regional dynamics. Understanding these challenges is crucial for identifying opportunities for improvement and strengthening Slovenia's role as a donor country.

One of the biggest challenges for Slovenia's development cooperation is the limitation of financial and human resources. Slovenia's ODA remains below the EU average and is far from the international target of 0.7% of GNI set by the UN. In 2022, Slovenia's ODA amounted to 0.29% of GNI, which is an improvement on previous years but still falls short of the commitments of other EU member states (OECD, 2022). This limited funding restricts Slovenia's ability to implement large-scale, impactful development projects and limits its flexibility to respond to new global needs.

In addition, Slovenia's development efforts are constrained by insufficient human resources and institutional capacity. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other ministries involved in development cooperation are understaffed, making it difficult to plan, implement and monitor development programmes. This lack of qualified personnel also affects Slovenia's ability to effectively engage in international policy dialogue and coordinate with other donors, further limiting its influence and impact in the development sector (Arbeiter et al., 2019).

The second identified challenge is achieving policy coherence, which requires that national policies in areas such as trade, agriculture and migration do not undermine development objectives (Arbeiter et al., 2019). However,

Slovenia struggles to ensure coherence between its various policy areas, leading to potential conflicts that could undermine the effectiveness of its development assistance. For example, trade or agricultural policies designed to protect domestic interests may unintentionally harm developing countries and run counter to Slovenia's development goals.

Although Slovenia has committed itself to the principles of policy coherence for development in its development strategy, practical implementation has often been hampered by a lack of coordination between ministries and authorities. The fragmented approach to policymaking can lead to inconsistencies where domestic policies can conflict with Slovenia's international development goals, reducing the effectiveness of development assistance and in some cases even cancelling out its positive impact (OECD, 2017; Arbeiter et al., 2019; Arbeiter & Bučar, 2020).

The rapidly evolving global landscape poses ongoing challenges for Slovenia's development cooperation. The COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and increasing migration flows have required Slovenia to adopt a more flexible and adaptive approach to its development strategy. While Slovenia has proven that it is able to respond to these crises – for example, it has increased its support for healthcare systems during the pandemic – it can only scale up its efforts to a limited extent due to resource constraints. Dealing with climate change and environmental sustainability is another area where Slovenia faces challenges. Although the country has integrated climate action into its development strategy, there is a need for more comprehensive, cross-sectoral approaches that recognise the complexity of environmental problems in partner countries. Developing such approaches requires better coordination and stronger policy frameworks (Arbeiter & Bučar, 2020).

Another challenge is geopolitical constraints and regional dynamics. Slovenia's development cooperation is also influenced by broader geopolitical dynamics, particularly its involvement in the Western Balkans. The region's complex political environment and the Western Balkan countries' varying commitment to EU integration create a difficult context for Slovenia's development activities. The challenge of reconciling Slovenia's strategic focus on the Western Balkans with its responsibilities as an EU member state can lead to tensions. Slovenia's development policy must be in line with EU objectives while taking into account its unique geopolitical interests. This makes it difficult to pursue a coherent and effective development strategy. In addition, Slovenia must manage its role within the EU and harmonise its national interests with broader European priorities (Bučar & Udovič, 2014). Very importantly, however, the focus on the Western Balkans is not only a strategic choice, but is also characterised by Slovenia's collective memory of its shared history, which is an important driver in supporting a country's diplomatic identity. By supporting the development of the region, Slovenia is engaging in what Kočan and Udovič (2020) call 'diplomacy with collective memory diplomacy', using its own historical

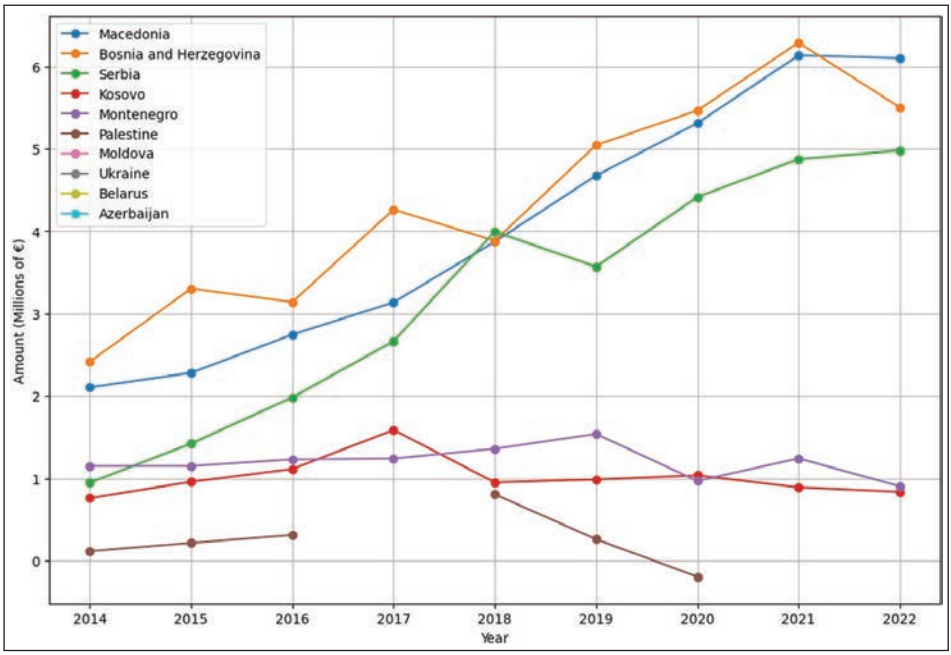

Chart 5: Top 10 recipients of Slovenia's bilateral ODA (2014–2022) (own elaboration based on annual reports on Slovenia's Development Cooperation (MFA, 2017; 2018; 2019b; 2020; 2022; 2023)).

experiences to guide its diplomatic actions and strengthen relations within the region. However, juggling all these aspects can often be difficult and often leads to a lack of strategic focus.

Slovenia's bilateral aid is often criticised for its fragmentation and lack of geographical focus. Although Slovenia has always prioritised the Western Balkans, aid is spread across numerous countries and projects (Chart 5), which reduces the overall impact. The OECD Peer Review emphasises that the distribution of Slovenian aid across several countries leads to a limited strategic focus, which weakens the effectiveness of development measures (OECD, 2017). A more focussed approach, concentrating on fewer countries or projects, could potentially improve the strategic impact and effectiveness of Slovenia's ODA.

Slovenia's development cooperation faces several challenges. However, these challenges also offer Slovenia the opportunity to increase its development impact, build strategic partnerships and align its efforts with global development priorities. By capitalising on its unique strengths and addressing its weaknesses, Slovenia can continue to play a significant role in international development and contribute to global efforts towards sustainable development.

CONCLUSION: STRATEGIC INSIGHTS AND SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES

Over the past two decades, as Slovenia celebrates the 20th anniversary of its accession to the EU, the country has been at a pivotal point in its journey as a diplomatic and development actor. Slovenian development cooperation has undergone a significant transformation, evolving from a newly established donor to an experienced partner in international development. It has navigated through complex geopolitical dynamics, economic constraints and changing global development priorities. This dual role of reconciling national interests with the realisation of international goals has shaped Slovenia's declaratory development strategy, particularly in the Western Balkans. This article traces Slovenia's path, which has been characterised by both opportunities and challenges, reflecting the complexity of navigating global development dynamics as a small state within the EU framework.

Analysing Slovenia's development cooperation strategy reveals several important findings. First, Slovenia's development efforts have consistently focussed on the countries of the Western Balkans, a region with which it shares historical ties and strategic interests. This focus is reflected, at least at the declaratory level, in the significant share of Slovenia's bilateral ODA to countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Albania. In practice, however, the amount of aid to individual countries varies greatly, which in reality reflects the lack of a long-term strategy. Although one might think that Slovenia's strategy should be linked to sharing its post-socialist transition experience in order to support political and economic reforms in these countries, promote their integration into Euro-Atlantic structures and thereby strengthen regional stability and Slovenia's own security and economic interests. The reality is often related to current politics and the (global) crisis, especially the lack of clear ideas in the selection of so-called priority countries, which change too often without the reasons being clear.

Second, Slovenia's integration into the EU framework has required the adoption of important legal and policy frameworks, such as the International Development Cooperation Act of 2006 (IDC Act) and the Resolution on International Development Cooperation until 2015 (ReIDC) of 2008. While these frameworks have aligned Slovenia's development goals with EU policies, their implementation has been uneven, reflecting the overall challenges in policy coherence and alignment of national policies with international development objectives.

Thirdly, the evolution of Slovenia's development cooperation strategy has been characterised by shifts in focus, geographical priorities and thematic areas. In the first phase (2004–2010), Slovenia established important framework conditions and harmonised its development policy with that of the EU by actively supporting the political and economic transition in the Western Balkans. The subsequent phase (2010–2015) was about strategic consolidation and expansion

with a broader geographical focus and stronger integration into EU development initiatives. More recently, Slovenia has sought to adapt its development cooperation to new global challenges such as the migration crisis, climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, which is reflected in the Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid Strategy for 2023–2030.

Looking to the future and despite the identified challenges, Slovenia has several promising opportunities to strengthen its role in international development. One of the most important opportunities lies in building and strengthening strategic partnerships, particularly with the countries of the Western Balkans and other regions undergoing similar transformations. Slovenia should capitalise on its unique experience as a post-socialist country and EU member, as it is well positioned to provide valuable support in the areas of governance, rule of law and democratic transition. However, to truly assume a leadership role in the region, Slovenia should forge closer ties, promote stability and develop a clear long-term strategy for its role in the Western Balkans.

Slovenia's participation in EU development initiatives such as the European Development Fund and the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument also represents a strategic opportunity. By aligning its development efforts with broader EU strategies, Slovenia can increase its impact through joint initiatives and thus increase its visibility and influence within the international development community. This alignment not only strengthens Slovenia's development co-operation, but also ensures that its efforts are more effectively integrated into the broader EU development framework.

The global sustainable development agenda, particularly the SDGs, offers another significant opportunity for Slovenia. By integrating the SDGs into its national policies, Slovenia has created a comprehensive framework for tackling a range of development challenges, from poverty reduction to climate action. Slovenia's commitment to the SDGs, as outlined in its Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid Strategy, positions the country well to contribute to global efforts to achieve these goals. In addition, Slovenia's progress in integrating the SDGs into its national development strategy could improve its ability to attract funding and partnerships for SDG-related projects, further enhancing its impact.

Improving policy coherence and coordination remains a key opportunity for Slovenia to increase the effectiveness of its development cooperation. Strengthening a whole-of-government approach to development that ensures coordination between all relevant ministries and agencies is essential to reducing policy incoherence and maximising the impact of Slovenia's development assistance. By promoting greater awareness of development issues across government and improving coordination between ministries, Slovenia can streamline its efforts and better align its policies with its international development goals, for which it could also utilise all available diplomatic means.

Slovenia's development co-operation over the last two decades illustrates the path of a small state navigating the complexities of international development. By harmonising its strategic interests with its commitments to international development goals, Slovenia has demonstrated its ability to make a meaningful contribution to regional stability and global development. In the future, Slovenia's development cooperation, and thus development diplomacy, will need to focus on capitalising on the country's unique strengths, such as its experience with democratic governance and EU membership, while addressing the challenges related to policy coherence, limited resources and the changing global landscape. In this way, Slovenia can further enhance its role as a constructive and influential player in international development and contribute to a more stable and prosperous international environment.

DIPLOMATSKI MOSTOVI: DVE DESETLETJI SLOVENSKEGA RAZVOJNEGA SODELOVANJA

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POVZETEK

Članek ponuja celovito analizo slovenskega mednarodnega razvojnega sodelovanja med letoma 2004 in 2024, podrobno opisuje razvoj, strateške prednostne naloge ter vlogo mednarodnega razvojnega sodelovanja v okviru zunanje politike. Članek podrobneje proučuje, kako je Slovenija uporabljala razvojno pomoč kot diplomatsko orodje, zlasti v kontekstu Evropske unije (EU), za spodbujanje regionalne stabilnosti in podporo trajnostnemu razvoju. Raziskava, ki uporablja zgodovinskoprimerjalno metodologijo, analizira politične dokumente, podatke o uradni razvojni pomoči in konkretne študije primerov ter opredeljuje ključne faze slovenskih prizadevanj za razvojno sodelovanje. Ugotovitve poudarjajo premike v geografskih in tematskih težiščih Slovenije, s posebnim poudarkom na Zahodnem Balkanu, medtem ko se je geografski fokus zaradi globalnih izzivov razširil tudi na Vzhodno Evropo, Podsaharsko Afriko in druge regije. Študija obravnava izzive, kot so omejeni finančni in človeški viri in potreba po skladnosti politik. Poleg tega članek prepoznava priložnosti za Slovenijo za krepitev razvojnega sodelovanja prek strateških partnerstev, izboljšanja institucionalnih zmogljivosti in boljšega usklajevanja z mednarodnimi razvojnimi cilji ter cilji EU. Ugotovitve prispevajo k boljšemu razumevanju vloge malih držav v mednarodnem razvoju in diplomaciji ter izpostavljajo potencial Slovenije, da s ciljno usmerjenimi in kontekstu prilagojenimi ukrepi prispeva k regionalni stabilnosti in trajnostnemu razvoju.

Ključne besede: mednarodno razvojno sodelovanje, slovenska diplomacija, Zahodni Balkan, trajnostni razvoj, Evropska unija

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Received: 2024-08-15 DOI 10.19233/AH.2024.15

SLOVENIA'S FIRST AND SECOND EU COUNCIL PRESIDENCY: LESSONS LEARNT TO ENHANCE THE BENEFITS OF EU MEMBERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

By comparing Slovenia's Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU) in 2008 and 2021 the article aims to provide lessons learnt and suggestions for enhancing the benefits of EU membership in the future. We first analyse the two very different institutional, geo-political and geo-economic contexts during which Slovenia conducted its Presidency stints, before analysing how the changed context reflected on Slovenia's preparation, organization, the objectives and the achievements of the Presidency. The comparison of both Presidencies demonstrates fundamental changes in the country's relationship to the EU and limitations of the 'Presidency effect' for times of 'ordinary' membership.

Keywords: Slovenia, rotating Presidency, European Union, small states, achievements, context

PRIMA E SECONDA PRESIDENZA SLOVENA DEL CONSIGLIO DELL'UE: LEZIONI APPRESE PER MIGLIORARE I VANTAGGI DELL'ADESIONE ALL'UE

SINTESI

Confrontando le Presidenze slovene del Consiglio dell'Unione Europea (UE) nel 2008 e nel 2021, l'articolo si propone di indicare le lezioni apprese e proporre dei suggerimenti per migliorare i benefici dell'appartenenza all'UE in futuro. Iniziamo analizzando i due contesti istituzionali, geopolitici e geoeconomici molto diversi in cui la Slovenia ha svolto i suoi mandati di Presidenza, per poi esaminare come il contesto mutato si sia riflesso sulla preparazione, l'organizzazione, gli obiettivi e i risultati della Presidenza slovena. Il confronto tra le due Presidenze evidenzia cambiamenti fondamentali nel rapporto del paese con l'UE e i limiti dell''effetto Presidenza' nei periodi di appartenenza 'ordinaria'.

Parole chiave: Slovenia, Presidenza a rotazione, Unione Europea, stati piccoli, risultati, contesto

INTRODUCTION

In 2024, the European Union (EU) celebrated 20 years since the 'Big Bang' enlargement of 2004. Simultaneously, Slovenia – along with nine other member states – celebrated 20 years of membership in a club it did not shape from the start.[1] In fact, it was quite the opposite, as the EU had placed significant conditions on aspiring members that they had to fulfil prior to joining. Since joining the EU, Slovenia – just like all the other member states – has been enjoying equal rights and carrying out the duties of a member state. The country's capacity to pursue its interests and co-shape the EU, like those of other member states, are not given. They are strongly correlated with the competences of its political elite and public administration.

Slovenia's two turns undertaking the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union (hereafter: the Presidency) took place in remarkably different institutional, political and economic circumstances, which affected the tasks, objectives and 'what it took' to execute the Presidency. The first Presidency came early into Slovenia's membership of the EU in 2008. The country was the first among those countries that joined the Union in 2004, at a time when it was still under the conditions of the Treaty of Nice. Slovenia proved that it was more than capable of managing such a difficult task (Kajnč, 2008; 2009; Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015, 6). The second Presidency took place after years of having gradually developed the skills required to successfully navigate the EU and having learned from painful lessons in the process (Svetličič, 2024, 110).

In this article, the authors compare Slovenia's turns holding the Presidency in 2008 and 2021, as well as the changes in the country's preparation, organisation, objective-setting and achievements of both its Presidencies. It contextualises them against the institutional, economic and political context in which the two Presidencies took place. Finally, the authors reflect on what the differences in approach to the two turns of holding the Presidency mean for Slovenian's membership of the EU following the Presidencies. The aim of this article is to examine the changes in attitudes of Slovenia's political elites and public administration to the role of the Presidency and how the major differences in the contexts affected the required adjustments, reshaping of the agenda and general performance of the two Presidencies. Finally, the goal was to determine the impact of the changes observed between 2008 and 2021 for Slovenia's EU membership. The article begins with an explanation of why studying the Presidency in the four dimensions of preparation, organisation, objective-setting and achievements can help conclusions to be drawn in terms of the

1 This article is part of the programme financially supported by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (research core funding No. P5-0177). Sabina Lange's research has been supported by Public Scholarship, Development, Disability and Maintenance Fund of the Republic of Slovenia (Under the 'Ad futura' call contract No. 11013-17/2023). Authors would like to thank the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia (then Ministry of Foreign Affairs) for its cooperation and support in disseminating the surveys among the 'Presidency actors'. We would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their comments on an earlier draft of this article.

attitudes of Slovenia's political and civil servants to EU membership. A comparison follows of the two very different contexts in which both Presidencies took place. In the third part, the authors compare the preparation, organisation, objectives and main achievements of the two Presidencies. In the final discussion, conclusions are drawn about what these findings mean for the future of Slovenia's EU membership.

HOLDING THE EU PRESIDENCY AND 'ORDINARY' EU MEMBERSHIP

The rotating Presidency is a mechanism to equalise the power differences between the EU's small and big member states (Bunse, 2009, 5). Despite their differences, which result in different capacities, the role of holding the Presidency is the same for all member states. Following a member state's six-month turn in office, it returns to being an 'ordinary' member state. In a Union of 27 members, any two turns at holding a Presidency are 13.5 years apart, thus making the 'ordinary' membership period the only reality for a considerable length of time. The Presidency, meanwhile, offers member states a particular advantage that exceeds its short term in office (Bunse, 2009; Haughton, 2010). A member state's influence is greater during its time at the helm (Thomson, 2008; Warntjen, 2008) and can be extrapolated for later 'ordinary' membership. Rotating presidencies are a 'window of opportunity, bringing Europe closer to citizens' everyday political life' (Eisele, 2022, 343), making EU issues more visible and relevant in the public domain.

This is particularly the case for small member states, as the dual role of managing the Presidency and 'ordinary' membership requires sustained attention by its politicians. It also demonstrates the strengths and weaknesses of diplomacy and public administration in general. As a member state, the country holding the Presidency continues to implement EU laws and policies at home. It also continues to be represented as member state in the Council and retains its voting power. On average, it takes about three years to formulate and adopt laws in the EU.[2] The six-month stint as Presidency is only part of this process. Irrespective of which stage of the process a country's Presidency takes place, in the other stages of the process a member state is in a position to formulate its preferences and represent its national interests on a given dossier. Careful management of staff and Presidency-related knowledge and experience renders the country better equipped for the latter (Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015, 16).

Since the early days of academic literature on the role of the rotating Presidency (e.g. Wallace & Edwards, 1976; Elgström, 2003; cf. Vysotskaya Guedes Vieira & Kajnč Lange, 2011), it was considered that the rotating Presidency undertakes the following tasks: management of the Council and liaison with other Union

2 Law is used as a generic term for legally binding legislative Union acts. Of the average of three years, roughly half of this time is taken up by the Commission's process of formulating a policy and the other half by the decision-making procedure.

institutions,[3] provider of political initiatives, package-broker and external representative – initially of the member states of the European Economic Community and, following the entry into force of the Treaty of Maastricht, of the members of the European Union.

Several institutional innovations of the Treaty of Lisbon (1 December 2009) affected the nature and tasks of the rotating Presidency (Kajnč & Geyer, 2011; Van Hecke & Bursens, 2011; Kočí & Antal, 2024). The introduction of 'external actors of the Union'[4] and extension of the powers of the European Parliament changed the gravitas of the rotating Presidency – from managing the agenda and the member states in the European Council and the Council and representing the EU externally pre-Lisbon to legislative negotiations in the Council and effective representation of the Council in negotiations with the European Parliament.[5] The introduction of a full time President of the European Council (POTEC) also reduced the political role of the Presidency.

Many of the tasks of the rotating Presidency are unique to the position of the Presidency. Chairing meetings in the Council and aiming to bring about a compromise differs from representing a national position. It requires more time because there are many more actors with whom to engage, expertise on policy matters to be deployed, and drafting sessions to count on. Though member states' Permanent Representations follow the work of the European Parliament (Perarnaud, 2022), the Presidency, representing the Council, de facto negotiates on legislation with parliamentary delegations, creating a unique situation in which national diplomats negotiate directly with elected politicians.[6] Making the Presidency's political initiative a success requires a carefully crafted and timely executed campaign, whereas a representation of national position resembles more work in multilateral diplomacy and is a response to an invitation to do so in meetings scheduled by the Presidency.

Though there are several distinctive features of membership and the Presidency, they are also qualitatively related. Presidency builds on the knowledge and competences that a member state acquires and applies during the 'ordinary' times of its membership (Kajnč & Svetličič, 2010, 85). Several of the competences required for the Presidency to exercise its role may also be beneficial for 'ordinary' membership.

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3 The management and liaison functions are Treaty-based functions, typologies also sometimes (e.g. by Elgström, 2003) as administrative and coordinating functions.

4 President of the European Council (POTEC), High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HRUFASP) and the Commission are explicitly given tasks of external representation of the Union (Art. 15 (6), 17 (1) and 27 (2) of the Treaty on European Union).

5 For the analysis of relations between the Presidency and the European Parliament, cf. Sierens and Vandenbussche (2024).

6 Ministers may occasionally lead a Presidency delegation in dialogue negotiations, however, it is practice for the Council delegation to be led by the (deputy) Permanent Representative (Brandsma, 2015; Brandsma et al., 2020).

Table 1: Distinctive characteristics of membership and the roles and nature of the Presidency (The authors' own analysis).

	Role	**Nature**
Ordinary membership	*Representation of national interests in the Council* *Informal links to other institutions* *Taking part in coordination of external representation of the Union* *Preparation of national positions* *Implementation of EU laws*	*Focus on the Council* *Reactive* *Participatory* *Gravitas on preparation, coordination and implementation at home*
Presidency	*Managing the work of the Council and driving its work forward by finding compromises* *Liaison and de facto negotiator with other institutions* *Source of political initiative* *Taking part in coordination of external representation of the Union and representing member states externally when so agreed* *Preparation of roadmaps and national positions*	*Focus on the Council, special attention paid to the Commission and the EP* *Honest broker* *Organisation and coordination* *Leader* *Gravitas on management and negotiation in Brussels*

Member states experience a different Presidency every six months, giving them a chance to build on best practices. In pursuit of their national interest, member states listen to other member states and other actors, reporting home on the positions of others and the direction of the negotiations. Subsequently, they actively seek out coalitions to support each other in meetings and present joint proposals. Groups of member states submit their own (political) initiatives, usually in a non-paper form.

New knowledge, networks and skills acquired through the Presidency, as well as issues and processes, serve to represent national interests in the period following a Presidency as stakeholder positions are known or it is easier to determine them, coalitions are built faster, and compromise suggestions are crafted more easily (Grumbinaitė, 2023). The effects of the Presidency also go beyond public administration into the realm of politics. Haughton (2010) confirms that there was an important domestic 'Presidency effect' in the case of the first Presidencies of Slovenia (2008) and Czechia (2009), since both countries took the preparations very seriously. The profile of EU politics was raised, institutional change led to a reinforcement of the EU-related capacity of the state and some mildly Eurosceptic politicians embraced more positive positions.

Finally, as we examine the two Presidencies and how Slovenia adapted to the changed role in each of them in view of what they mean for the 'ordinary' membership, we look

at the four dimensions of preparation, organisation, objective-setting and achievements. We chose these dimensions in function of the attitude of the government towards the Presidency. Which resources and what kind of political will can be discerned from the analysis of preparation? What kind of an understanding of the EU as a political system is mirrored in the organisation of the Presidency? Ambition, direction, nature and priorities can be dissected from the analysis of the objectives the Presidency sets for itself. What has been considered as achievements of the Presidency, and by who, is considered in order to further elucidate the relationship between the country and the EU.

(GEO) ECONOMIC, (GEO) POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS IN 2008 AND 2021

Slovenia's two turns of holding the Presidency took place in very different institutional, political and economic contexts at national, European and global levels, all of which affected the preparation, organisation, objectives and achievements of the country's two turns.[7]

Slovenia's first turn at holding the rotating Presidency in 2008 took place prior to the 2009–2012 financial and economic crisis, and prior to the 2008 Russian-Georgian war, which first shook the post-World War II European security architecture.

What followed at the global level has been named 'the age of unpeace' (Mark Leonard), 'the age of revolutions' (Fareed Zakaria), and 'the age of artificial intelligence' (Henry Kissinger, Eric Schmidt, Daniel Huttenlocher), to name just a few attempts to characterise the changes.[8] The negative consequences of globalisation and financialisation exposed following the 2008 financial crisis demonstrated how old recipes (back to the *old normal*) could not address the real causes of (poly) crises. The COVID-19 crisis revealed the inadequacy of the existing anthropocentric development models. Technological advancements, digital transformation and artificial intelligence are transforming societies. Climate change and environmental degradation started to be discussed as matters of international security.

In Europe specifically, the period following the first Slovenian Presidency was marked by what some labelled 'the age of permacrisis' (Zuleeg, Emmanouilidis & Borges de Castro, 2021). It started with the 2008 financial crisis, evolving into the sovereign-debt crisis and the Eurozone crisis, followed by the migration wave in 2015, securitisation of the Western Balkans (Osland & Peter, 2021) and the existential crisis of Brexit becoming a reality following the June 2016 referendum.

7 A comprehensive analysis of these factors and their break down is in Kočí and Antal (2024). They examine how these factors impact the success of the Presidency in exercising its different roles. We, in turn, look at how they affected the different roles of the Presidency.

8 Garton Ash (2024) offers a compilation of such characterisations, demonstrating how looking into the past helps us understand our present reality.

After a short respite, the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the energy crisis marked the ninth legislative period in the EU between 2019 and 2024, with the latter two following Slovenia's 2021 Presidency. An extraordinary political will, resources, mechanisms and tools were amassed in the EU to manage these crises. As member states pooled resources, the balance of power in the EU shifted towards the European Council and the Council.

These changes transformed EU politics (Dawson, 2015). They most notably exposed the importance of crisis management, pooling of resources, and joint and coordinated responses in the EU (Ladi & Polverari, 2024). They also affected political agendas, with complex policy clusters, such as digital transformation, the 'Green Deal' and 'promoting the European way of life' finding themselves among the European Commission's 2019–2024 priorities, while management of the COVID-19 and the 2022 energy crises abruptly entered the agenda.

The rotating Presidency's manoeuvring space to manage the work in the Council was diminished by the larger parts of the agenda being determined by crisis management measures. Its brokerage role suffered from the increasing role of the European Council (Schramm & Wessels, 2023) and from the need for faster decision-making, which did not always allow time to exhaust negotiations to find a consensus or to ensure technically and politically optimal decisions.[9]

Finally, with the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon on 1 December 2009, the EU itself underwent major institutional changes, including changes to the role of the rotating Presidency. In terms of management of the Council, it introduced two new actors: the President of the European Council (POTEC) and the High representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, who is also vice President of the Commission (HRVP), who each in turn took over the chairmanship of the European Council and the Foreign Affairs Council. This leaves the Presidency in charge of the organisation of the work of the remaining nine Council formation. Alongside the European Commission, the POTEC and the HRVP also undertake the role of 'external actor' of the Union, thus taking over the external representational tasks from the rotating Presidency.[10] With the POTEC taking over the chairmanship of the European Council, the power of political initiative – previously exercised by the Presidency's control of the European Council agenda – has diminished (Eisele et al., 2023, 328). The role of a package-broker, meanwhile, was to be transformed, in particular by two new sets of norms in the Treaty of Lisbon. First, by a general change from decision-making by unanimity

9 The duration of the ordinary legislative procedure time in the first half of the ninth parliamentary term (1 July 2019–31 December 2021) needed to forge a consensus fell by four months to 12 months in comparison to the same period five years earlier. However, the difference is due to the files adopted via simplified or urgency procedures, rather than being due to the general acceleration of decision-making on non-urgent files (European Parliament, 2021).

10 Other states may still ask the country holding the rotating Presidency to represent them externally in cases when the subject matter falls outside of the Union competences. HRVP may also arrange for them to be represented by the rotating Presidency, for example in bilateral dialogues.

to decision-making by a qualified majority vote in the Council. Second, by the expansion of a scope of the application of the ordinary legislative procedure, thus requiring the rotating Presidency to act in many more cases of legislative negotiations as the de facto negotiator on behalf of the Council in the trilogue meetings between the European Parliament, the Commission and the Council, eventually also boosting its brokerage role beyond the confines of the Council.

This means that the job of the rotating Presidency drifted away from the foreign policy themes and diplomats. Instead, parts of the national administration in charge of organising and coordinating the Presidency's efforts (often based in the foreign ministry or in a government office directly attached to the President or Prime Minister of the country), as well as sectoral ministries negotiating complex legislative dossiers, came to the fore. The Presidency had to take the high dynamics of crisis management into account, as it had to face a presidential Commission,[11] working more closely with the European Council.[12] The agenda structuring powers of the Presidency gave way to crisis-conditioned dynamics (Coman & Sierens, 2024). Initially it slowed-down legislative decision-making following the introduction of the Treaty of Lisbon, but sped up as COVID-19, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the energy crisis demanded quick responses. Dissenting voices and negative votes in the Council showed the pressure efficiency places upon unity.[13] In-depth expert knowledge on concrete legislative proposals in sectoral policies, understanding partners' negotiating positions, crafting of negotiating strategies and executing them in the Council and in trilogues were demanded of officials in sectoral ministries and their colleagues based in the Permanent Representations. Informal meetings[14] at various levels sought to forge a shared understanding of common and topical issues (unlike the previous practice of placing issues of national interest on the agenda of informal meetings as the Presidency sought to Europeanise them, present them as common EU interests because 'they are in fact two sides of the same coin' (Udovič & Svetličič, 2018, 7)). These shifts increased the importance of operational and relational skills.

11 The Treaty of Lisbon increased the powers of the President of the Commission. In contrast to previous Commission Presidents trying to avoid politics, Jean-Claude Juncker declared his Commission (2014–2019) as a political one and Ursula von der Leyen declared hers (2019–2024) as a geo-political one.

12 The President of the Commission is a member of the European Council. The frequency of European Council meetings has increased in the period since 2010 and peaked at 16 meetings in a single year (authors' own calculation based on data on the Council website). Bilateral meetings between the Commission President and national leaders have also become very common.

13 This is most notably visible in the area of Common Foreign and Security Policy, where unanimity is the norm. The use of veto power led to the establishment of a Group of Friends, led by Germany, in support of qualified majority voting (Federal Foreign Office, 2023).

14 The number of informal Council meetings per Presidency rose from the average of 14 in the years prior to 2010 to just over 20 in the last ninth legislative period (2019–2023) – (authors' own calculation based on the Council's website).

A COMPARISON OF THE PREPARATION, ORGANISATION, OBJECTIVES AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE 2008 AND 2021 PRESIDENCIES

Preparation and organisation

Slovenia's preparations for its first Presidency were marked by its wish to reaffirm its status as the 'star pupil' (Klemenčič, 2007, 12). Preparations ran smoothly from early 2005 onwards, resulting in a broadly agreed well organised and well executed Presidency (Kajnč, 2009).

This was partly the result of an internal political consensus based on a 'non-attack pact' signed by all but two parliamentary political parties.[15] Preparations for the 2021 Presidency built on best practices of the 2008 Presidency. They started as early as in 2017 under the centre-left government of Miro Cerar (Government of the Republic of Slovenia, 2019) and continued after the 2018 Parliamentary elections under the centre-left minority government led by Marjan Šarec (2018–2020). The fall of the government in early 2020 interrupted preparations for the 2021 Presidency. The new centre-right government of the three-time Prime Minister Janez Janša (2020–2022) changed the course of preparations.

Consequently, the second Slovenian Presidency was marked by political volatility and civil society protests against the government that took over at the start of the pandemic in March 2020. Though lead by the same Prime Minister (Janez Janša) as during the first Presidency, the opposition refused to enter a similar 'non-attack' arrangement, viewing foreign and European policies as being instrumentalised for domestic consolidation of power, and turning away from the more liberal centre of the EU (Bojinović Fenko & Svetličič, 2022), while also eroding democracy and with it Slovenia's reputation in the EU and in the world.[16] These internal developments demanded extra effort from the Presidency actors to demonstrate their commitment to the Presidency and EU ideals,[17] This was also confirmed in our survey, where 34.6% of respondents in 2021 compared to 26.1% in 2008 agreed that domestic political issues strongly influenced the Presidency.[18]

15 Signed on 17 May 2007 this was 'Agreement on the Co-operation of Political Parties, the Group of Unconnected Deputies and Representatives of National Minorities in the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia for the Successful Implementation of the Preparation and Presidency of the EU'. It is arguable whether or not the agreement held firm throughout the entire term of the Presidency, with presidential elections on the way and parliamentary elections following closely thereafter (cf. Fink-Hafner & Lajh, 2008). In 2021, all but one opposition party refused to enter such an arrangement (Fink-Hafner, 2022).

16 Freedom House's (2022) report 'Nations in Transit' assessed Slovenia as a country that 'saw sharpest democratic decline in Eastern Europe, Central Asia in 2021'.

17 A good illustration of this is the article published by Politico Europe on the first day of Slovenia's 2021 Presidency, titled 'A Call for Vigilance as Slovenia's EU Presidency Begins' (Buyon, 2021).

18 We undertook two surveys among the Slovenian Presidency actors following the 2008 and the 2021 Council Presidencies. The surveys were distributed by the Ministry of Foreign (and European) Affairs as an online questionnaire to those officials that were identified as Presidency actors by the Ministry. The surveys differ insofar as to take account of changes in the EU, primarily the changing role of the rotating presidency of the EU. Cf. Kajnč and Svetličič (2010) for the methodological explanation on the survey.

The preparation for, and organisation of, the 2008 and 2021 Presidencies were similar, yet with important differences in the approach to the Presidency project and with changes following the change of government in 2020. A comparison of the organisational aspects is summarised in Table 2 below. Organisation of the 2021 Presidency was more political in the description of its tasks and reflected on the changes in the functioning of Brussels institutions. Leadership of the 2021 Presidency initially rested within the Prime Minister's office. This was partly the result of changes in the coordination of European affairs in 2012, which saw a dismantling of the Government Office for European Affairs and the placing of its departments into the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Situating the Presidency project closer to the Prime Minister also reflected on institutional changes at the EU level and subsequent crises, which cemented the European Council at the centre of EU decision-making. The new government in 2020 (with many of its lead European affairs experts also in prominent positions during the 2008 Presidency) later moved the nucleus of the Presidency project to the Minister of Foreign Affairs but planned (though never implemented) for a specially designated state secretary in charge of relations with the European Parliament, in recognition of the importance of the latter for the success of the Presidency. The inclusion of the Permanent Representative in Brussels into the core organisational group is a testimony of the understanding of the importance of the post as not only a recipient of instructions but also a policy shaper. This is also in line with conclusions by Eisele et al. (2023, 332) that 'a high degree of experience in terms of expertise, credibility and reputation is crucial in terms of the organisation of the presidency in particular.'

Both of Slovenia's Presidency turns were so-called 'Brussels-based' Presidencies, meaning interdepartmental coordination and day-to-day operational decisions were taken in Brussels (Kajnč & Svetličič, 2010; Apelblat, 2021). The overall lower political exposure of the Presidency in Brussels the second time affected the political nature of the Presidency project. The first Presidency was very much oriented towards proving its own aptness for belonging to, and in fact leading, the EU as well as defending the system in which small member states must be given a chance to lead (Kajnč, 2009, 89). In contrast, the second Presidency was more politicised and strategically oriented towards domestic politics. This can be seen in the shift towards the Prime Minister's office, the attention paid to domestic public support, and the importance placed upon the long-term benefits for Slovenia of the efforts and resources dedicated to the Presidency (cf. Government of the Republic of Slovenia, 2019; 2020). These changes are partially a consequence of the diminished roles of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, as well as the lack of high-level international meetings that would shine light on them at the EU level. They also correspond to lower public support for EU membership in Slovenia in the decade leading up to the 2021 Presidency (Bučar & Udovič, 2023).

In this light, it is particularly telling that according to the results of our surveys, lack of effective cooperation within ministries/agencies was considered a problem for 40.4% of respondents in 2021, while only for 18.8% of respondents in 2008.

Table 2: Organisational structure of the 2008 and 2021 Presidency: bodies, composition, tasks (Government Office for European Affairs, 2007; Government of the Republic of Slovenia, 2019; 2020).

Organisational structure	**2008**	**2021**
Core organisational group	*Prime Minister, Ministers of Finance, Foreign Affairs and Public Administration, State Secretary for European Affairs/ Head of Government Office for European Affairs; formulates general political directives and priorities of the Presidency, oversees preparation and implementation of the Presidency*	*Prime Minister, Ministers of Finance, Foreign Affairs and Public Administration, State Secretary for European Affairs in the Prime Minister's Office, Permanent representative to the EU, following revision in 2020 added: Secretary General of the Government, Secretary of State for European Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, newly established post of a Secretary of State for relations with the EP (never appointed); exercises political and strategic leadership, oversees preparation and implementation of the Presidency project*
Head of the Presidency project	*Prime Minister as head of the core group*	*State Secretary in the Prime Minister's office (2019), changed to the Minister for Foreign Affairs following the 2020 revision*
Broad project group	*Representatives of all relevant ministries and government offices and heads of subgroups, led by State Secretary/ Head of Government Office for European Affairs; coordinates, directs and oversees the work of the subgroups and ministries and government offices.*	*State secretaries from all relevant ministries and government offices and heads of subgroups, led by the head of the Presidency project (initially Sate Secretary in the Prime Minister's office, changed to the Minister for Foreign Affairs in 2020); adopts operational decisions on the basis of direction from the core group.*
Subgroups within the broad project group	*Subgroups for programme, human resources, communication and promotion, budget and secretariat of the Presidency*	*Subgroups for programme, human resources, communication and promotion, budget and secretariat for coordination of the preparation, logistics and implementation of the Presidency*
Secretariat for the Presidency	*Project group for coordination of preparation and implementation of the Presidency within the Government Office for European Affairs, Secretariat for the Presidency under the Secretary General of the Government; organisational and logistical support*	*Secretariat for coordination of the preparation, logistics and implementation of the Presidency, initially in the Prime Minister's office, following the 2020 revision in the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs; organisational and logistical support and other tasks*

Similarly, cooperation between ministries/agencies was considered a bigger issue in 2021 (an increase from 21.8% in 2008 to 38.1% in 2021). As many as 79.5% in 2008 claimed that when the Republic of Slovenia's next Presidency turn comes round, it would be necessary to upgrade interdepartmental cooperation, while 66.2% responded that cooperation within ministries and institutions in the country would be necessary (Kajnč & Svetličič, 2010, table 8). Despite having identified the difficulties in 2021, only 22.3% of respondents, agreed or fully agreed with the statement that an agency/ministry should be reorganised to achieve greater effectiveness in working with the EU.

In terms of human resources (numbers and preparation), the two Presidency terms show similarities in their approach, but also significant differences. In terms of the number of additional staff that needed to be hired, the numbers were almost the same for both terms for extra hirings for the Permanent Representation in Brussels, with around 10% less additional staff hired in Ljubljana in 2021 and a reduction in extra staff for diplomatic representations in a third country (in favour of more staff positioned in Brussels) (Government Office for European Affairs, 2007; Government of Republic of Slovenia 2019; 2020). The 2021 Presidency also gave less prominence to seconded experts and third country experts hired for running the Presidency, which demonstrates the maturity of Slovenia's public administration in European affairs in comparison to 2008 (Government of Republic of Slovenia, 2019; 2020). Learning from criticism in 2008 when the majority of the contracts of the extra staff hired ended immediately after the end of the Presidency (Kajnč & Svetličič, 2010, 90), the 2021 contracts for such staff ended three months after the end of the Presidency term (Government of the Republic of Slovenia, 2019; 2020). This allowed time for debriefs and consideration of and support for future employment of the extra staff hired.

Preparation for the staff undertaking various new functions was substantial in both cases, and was obligatory in 2021 (Government of Republic of Slovenia, 2019; 2020). The second turn repeated a broad approach to training, designed specifically for staff within different function groups within the Presidency and tailored to civil servants, those in managerial positions and the holders of political office. Apart from the specifics of training during the COVID-19 pandemic and for the conduct of the Presidency affected by the pandemic, the preparation ahead of the 2021 Presidency differed slightly from the previous preparation in three aspects: there was less general training on the EU ahead of the 2021 Presidency, but more time was dedicated to the European Parliament. Instead, more focus was placed on the managerial tasks of the Presidency as well as on communication, including a strong emphasis on language skills.[19] Training on interpersonal skills, including stress management, featured more prominently in 2021. Additionally, in 2021 more attention was paid

19 This is not surprising, since a lack of language skills were singled out as among the main problems in the first Presidency (Kajnč & Svetličič, 2010, 93, 102). However, this must be linked to the articulation of the arguments and persuasion as explained by the respondents.

to collaboration with Slovenian experts as trainers, including those within the public administration (Government Office for European Affairs, 2007; Government of the Republic of Slovenia, 2019; 2020).

Consequently, results in our survey revealed that knowledge of languages has, for instance, substantially improved as reflected in the claims that it was considered less important than in 2008 (95.5% in 2008 compared to 58.1% in 2021). Similar results were obtained for informal contacts and analytical and writing skills, all testifying to the 'internalisation' of these skills, to which many of the Presidency actors in 2008 were first exposed in the dynamic environment of Presidency.

In terms of preparation for and organisation of the 2008 and 2021 Presidencies, continuity and the use of good practice can be seen, as well as adaptation to the current situation. The revision of the organisational structures for the Presidency following the change in government in March 2020 demonstrates the political nature of this adaptation and a difference in the understanding of the relationship between the EU and a member state. This difference is even more visible in the priorities and the programme of the Presidency – more about this below.

Setting of the objectives

The first Slovenian Presidency in 2008 set five priorities: (i) coordination of the ratification process and timely entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, (ii) launch of the third cycle of the renewed Lisbon Strategy, (iii) advancing the climate-energy package further by seeking an agreement on further liberalisation of the internal market for gas and electricity, (iv) promoting dialogue between cultures, beliefs and traditions in the context of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, and (v) the super priority: bringing the countries of the Western Balkans one step closer to the EU (Slovenian Presidency of the EU, 2008).

Of these priorities, the first three were part of the so-called 'inherited agenda'. Among them the first and the fourth priorities are more symbolic, showing support for European integration, while the EU in fact has no competence over national organisation of the ratification processes. The fifth was a true Slovenian national priority (Kajnč, 2009). The overall pursuit of an 'ever closer Union' and a liberal underpinning of the objectives characterises the Presidency (e.g. through market liberalisation and focus on the knowledge and innovation part of the Lisbon Strategy). Objectives were set for the priority files, while most other dossiers had operational objectives (SVEZ, 2007). In relation to the Western Balkans, for example, a very specific objective was set to bring each of the candidates one-step closer to EU membership (Kajnč, 2009). To this end, the overall objective of proving that a new small member state can assume the responsibility of the Presidency must be added (Kajnč, 2009).

Setting of the 2021 objectives follows a similar pattern of a combination of inherited agenda, symbolic and substantive objectives and an overall objective or purpose of the Presidency. Its major priorities were: (i) the resilience, recovery and strategic

autonomy of the European Union, (ii) a Conference on the Future of Europe, (iii) a Union of the European way of life, the rule of law and equal criteria for all, and (iv) a credible and secure European Union, capable of ensuring security and stability in its neighbourhood.

Within the first priority, the majority of pressing EU dossiers were in line with the Commission's work programme (on green and digital transitions, and on recovery and resilience following the COVID-19 crisis) and international agenda (COP26 Glasgow). As part of its role in holding the Presidency, it fell to Slovenia to fulfil the role of representative on behalf of the Council at the Conference on the Future of Europe. This was unavoidable, but also in line with Slovenia's long-term stance as a supporter of European integration. The third priority, however, strongly demonstrates an ideological vision of the government in office, which was struggling at home and facing continued protests due to the deteriorating rule of law situation. The last priority incorporated constant support for the Western Balkans, but also specifically mentioned the need to strengthen transatlantic ties, among others.

Achievements

The 2008 Presidency was broadly considered a success, albeit from a low bar,[20] having proven the capacity of a small, new member state to manage the Council. This was contrary to the speculations surrounding the 2004 enlargement process when questions were raised about the new members' capacity to effectively execute the Presidency as well as the potential negative effects on the work of EU institutions. The prevailing assumption was that they would slow down the decision-making process (König, 2007; Malová et al., 2010). As this did not materialise to such an extent, research, however, showed that new members needed time to adjust and to fully participate in EU politics, policy and decision-making processes (Malová et al., 2010; Toshkov, 2017). The early Presidency stint worked as an accelerator for Slovenia in terms of coming to grips with the actors, issues and processes in Brussels. The Presidency exposed it to Brussels' institutional apparatus and the depths of many of the policies it had not dealt with previously. It made EU institutions and other countries interested in making their own preferences known to the actors involved in the Slovenian Presidency (Kajnč & Svetličič, 2010).

A closer look provides a more nuanced picture in terms of the question of whether a small, new member state can lead the Council. On the one hand, an extra challenge of Kosovo's declaration of independence in the early days of the Presidency, did not derail Slovenia's work on progress in Western Balkans relations with the EU. Slovenia's knowledge and resources it had been dedicating (and continues to do so) to the region paid off. On the other hand, the assessment of achievements on other priorities is less straight forward. Other member states and the Commission

20 The Economist (16. 11. 2006, 34), for example, remarked that Slovenia really had just one priority for its term: to run it smoothly, or according to one official interviewed by the Economist: 'just not screw it up'.

occasionally showed that they prefer to deal with a big member state. On substantive dossiers occasionally the most difficult issues were not always placed on the agenda. Instead, they were left for the next – French – Presidency to tackle them. Alternatively, sometimes only operational objectives were set, leaving the direction of the dossier to the influence of other EU institutions or member states (Kajnč, 2009).

At the same time, the 2008 Presidency suffered from a series of external events on which it had to organise the EU's response. Some of them were international events taking place in areas beyond Slovenian presence and reach (e.g. the situation in Myanmar), and other actors, such as the European Commission, quickly stepped in (Kajnč, 2009). In other, most notably in case of an already mentioned declaration of independence by Kosovo, Slovenia's leadership profited from its deep knowledge of the issue.

The 2021 Presidency was far more influenced by external events, primarily by the COVID-19 pandemic and poly crises. Still, according to the government reports, the 2021 Presidency achieved all the set goals (Government of the Republic of Slovenia, 2021). By the end of Slovenia's presidency, 22 national recovery plans had been approved and significant progress in the field of health and digitisation had been achieved. Improvements were achieved in minimum wages in the EU and in terms of equal pay for women and men. Encouraging changes were implemented in relation to the EU's common migration and asylum policy, and the European future for the partners of the Western Balkans was confirmed at the Brdo Summit. The Presidency also significantly contributed to the progress of the EU in such important and priority areas, such as crisis management, health union, digital transformation, the rule of law, the process of expansion to the Western Balkans and cyber security (Government of the Republic of Slovenia, 2021).

Despite the post-Lisbon rotating Presidency focus on legislative work and relations with the European Parliament, Slovenia's achievements – just like the objectives – stress the importance of the role of political initiative of the Presidency. The Brdo Declaration of 6 October 2021 in which the European perspective of the Western Balkans Six was confirmed, even though little other substantive progress was included, was seen as a major achievement and a confirmation of the long-standing role of a Western Balkans advocate. The work on cybersecurity, combining two priorities (resilience, recovery and strategic autonomy and security of the EU), spanned from legislative work to awareness raising and preparing the ground to share understanding by organising a major conference. It also brought together representatives of the Western Balkans and the EU for discussions on enhancing cyber security on the continent. These discussions were followed up by specific actions.[21]

In terms of legislative files, substantial progress was made, and many files were concluded, most notably in the areas of resilience and digitalisation, as well as in other policies (cf. the list on SI PRES, 2021), despite still operating under the

21 For example, Slovenia and France, together with Montenegro, set up the Western Balkans Cyber Capacity Centre in Podgorica, Montenegro.

shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the European Commission's (2021) Rule of Law Report and the European Parliament resolution on the fundamental rights and the rule of law in Slovenia overshadowed the Presidency. The reports stated grave violations by the government of the rule of law, media independence and anti-corruption measures. The postponed nomination of its representatives to the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) raised concerns about its commitment to fighting corruption and upholding EU legal standards, diplomatic awkwardness (for example, when Prime Minister Janez Janša congratulated Donald Trump on winning the US election, which was in fact won by Joe Biden) made Slovenia more visible within the EU, however, fraternisation with Eurosceptic, populist politics was misdirected (e.g. Avbelj, 2021; Fink-Hafner, 2020; Požgan & Bojinović Fenko, 2022). In the eyes of the Presidency actors, these political developments, however, did not seem to affect the exercise of the Presidency. Namely, the assessment of the achievements of the Presidencies by the Presidency actors who responded to the surveys we conducted following both Presidency turns, provided almost the same results to the question on their assessment of the Presidency: 75% of respondents assessed the Presidencies in both cases as excellent and very good and less than 1% as poor.

What does the future hold for Slovenia's EU membership?

The comparison of handling of the Presidency under very different economic, political and institutional circumstances revealed an interplay between the elements of continuity and change, adaptation to the situation at hand and space for political partisanship, despite the diminished role of the rotating Presidency under the Treaty of Lisbon.

The first and perhaps most important stepping stone for the positive impact of Presidencies on 'ordinary' membership is the importance of political unity in creating and advocating national interests. This was formally achieved during the first Presidency but not during the second, when domestic political issues strongly influenced the whole presidency. Domestic political issues were also played out in Brussels' institutions, resulting in a negative impact on Slovenia's image and influence. The second Presidency was notably easier due to accumulated valuable managerial, organisational and communication experience and networks in the years following the first term in office. It can also be said that in the years following the first Presidency, Slovenia developed a sense of belonging, while also starting to become more confident about its own specific national interests (Svetličič, 2024, 110). The Presidency gave Slovenians the necessary self-esteem to improve its, in the words of Iztok Seljak, 'negative value system demonstrated in the lack of self-confidence, consequently too low and not enough ambitious goals and too weak cooperation' (Weiss, 2024, 45).

These two sets of lessons – the importance of domestic politics and of experience for the maturity of the country's engagement in Brussels – are the most important

takeaways from both Presidencies for the 'ordinary' membership period. As Table 1 shows, there is little overlap between the roles of the Presidency and 'ordinary' membership, however, they overlap in the most important element for a member state – that of focusing its work on the Council. Furthermore, there is a close connection in relation to the nature of the two roles. The skills required and acquired to broker compromises are transferrable to the role of promoting national interest. Enhanced hard skills and basic organisational/managerial knowledge accumulated during the first Presidency, combined with upgraded skills for facing unexpected events, form a very useful stepping-stone for improving the benefits of 'ordinary' membership in the future.

The importance of unity in domestic politics extends downward into the government services. Lack of effective cooperation within ministries as well as between them prevented efficient implementation of the Presidency priorities or national interests at the EU level, even in cases when there was a national consensus about basic national interests, albeit this was not always the case (Svetličič & Kajnč, 2010). Although the competencies acquired during the two Presidencies helped secure benefits from membership, they did not shield Slovenia from numerous mistakes and lost opportunities for a more efficient pursuit of benefits from membership and also did not prevent mistakes in the pursuit of national interests. Resource limitations frequently lead to an inability to prioritise, overly slow adjustments to uncertainties, weak collaborations with partners, poor communication and visibility, inadequate coordination, overestimating of capacities and not making appropriate alliances.

Some of such limitations can be compensated by leveraging the unique strengths of small countries, such as flexibility, enhanced collaboration and a strong commitment to European integration. Creating coalitions with the right partners is a key tool in increasing the weight of small states through collective action (Högenauer & Mišík, 2024). Unfortunately, Slovenia is among the least-desired partners for coalition creation in the EU (cf. Naurin & Lindahl, 2008; Busse et al., 2020). In many aspects, Slovenia does not have natural coalition partners: it is geographically positioned at the crossroad of various coalitions and shares interests in environment, budgetary, agricultural and many other policies with members of various traditional like-minded groups. At the same time, Slovenian politicians, diplomats and officials do appear less active than some of their peers as suggested by the analysis of their attendance at formal as well as (anecdotal) observations on attendance at informal events (Svetličič, 2024, 114). Such lower attendance also diminishes the networking activity, and with this the opportunities to establish long-term relationships through informal contacts outside official meetings/negotiations. At the same time, interest organisations from Slovenia have also been found less active than average in using lobbying methods and techniques at the EU level (Hafner-Fink et al., 2016, 621). This is a serious weakness, since a lack of soft skills, particularly speedy adjustments and decision-making, coalition building and informal contacts, became sine qua non for the creation of novel solutions to address new problems and consensus building. However, the accumulated hard knowledge about EU affairs during the

Presidencies and standard managerial and organisational skills are insufficient if the right mix of hard and soft knowledge/skills is not achieved.

Despite limitations and mistakes, the benefits of conducting a Presidency for 'ordinary' membership are obvious and can even be enhanced by focusing on further strengthening soft skills, displaying political unity and prioritising the pursuit of national interests.

PRVO IN DRUGO PREDSEDOVANJE SLOVENIJE SVETU EVROPSKE UNIJE: NAUKI ZA POVEČANJE KORISTI OD ČLANSTVA V EVROPSKI UNIJI

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POVZETEK

Članek primerja predsedovanje Slovenije Svetu EU v letih 2008 in 2021 ter proučuje razlike v pripravi, organizaciji, ciljih in dosežkih v različnih institucionalnih, gospodarskih in političnih kontekstih obeh predsedovanj. Naloge predsedovanja se bistveno razlikujejo od nalog rednega članstva v EU, saj je predsedovanje bolj kot na zastopanje nacionalnih interesov osredotočeno na vodstvene vloge in odnose z drugimi institucijami. Vendar kompetenca, pridobljena v eni vlogi, lahko vpliva na uspešnost v drugi. Med prvim in drugim predsedovanjem Slovenije se je institucionalna pokrajina EU drastično spremenila, zlasti zaradi Lizbonske pogodbe, ki je na novo opredelila vlogo predsedujoče države članice, tako da jo je osredotočila na zakonodajne funkcije in prenesla velik del nalog zunanjega zastopanja na predsednika Evropskega sveta in na Visokega predstavnika. Poleg tega je EU v času pred in med drugim mandatom Slovenije zaznamovala vrsta kriz – gospodarska, finančna, migracijska, brexit, COVID-19 in izredne podnebne razmere –, ki so predstavljale izziv za gospodarsko in geopolitično stabilnost EU. Ti različni konteksti so pripeljali do različnih pristopov med predsedovanjema Slovenije. Predsedovanje 2021 je pokazalo večjo samozavest pri izbiri političnih ciljev, bilo je bolj prilagojeno vse manjši podpori EU v javnosti ter je odražalo politično in institucionalno dogajanje znotraj EU. Obe predsedovanji sta pomembno vplivali na izkušnjo slovenskega članstva v EU, saj sta okrepili njene kompetence, mreže in vpliv v Uniji. Ta primerjava pokaže, kako razvijajoči se pristop Slovenije k njenemu predsedovanju EU odraža njen politični odnos z EU in njeno prilagajanje spreminjajoči se dinamiki Unije, vendar razkriva tudi njene pomanjkljivosti v smislu virov in odnosnih sposobnosti.

Ključne besede: Slovenija, predsedovanje Svetu Evropske unije, Evropska unija, male države, dosežki, kontekst

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Received: 2024-08-29 DOI 10.19233/AH.2024.16

TRENDS IN THE TRANSLATION OF SLOVENIAN LITERATURE IN THE EUROPEAN UNION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PUBLISHED WORKS IN 16 LANGUAGES (1991–2024)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the circulation of Slovenian literature in the European Union from Slovenia's independence in 1991 through its accession to the EU in 2004 to 2024. By analysing COBIB bibliographic data and interviews with experts on the literary book market, we compare the translation of Slovenian literature into 16 EU languages, divided into four European regions. Our results show that the number and variety of translations increased significantly after EU accession compared to the 1990s, especially into German, followed by Italian, Spanish and French. In addition, an increase and diversification of translations into most of the 12 other, mainly peripheral languages can be observed.

Keywords: Slovenian literature, translation, translation flows, European Union, European Union Prize for Literature, central languages, (semi-)peripheral languages

TENDENZE NELLA TRADUZIONE DELLA LETTERATURA SLOVENA NELL'UNIONE EUROPEA: UN'ANALISI COMPARATIVA DELLE OPERE PUBBLICATE IN 16 LINGUE (1991–2024)

SINTESI

Questo studio esamina la circolazione della letteratura slovena nell'Unione Europea dall'indipendenza della Slovenia (1991) all'adesione all'UE (2004), fino al 2024. Analizzando i dati bibliografici del COBIB e le interviste con gli esperti del mercato librario confrontiamo la traduzione della letteratura slovena in 16 lingue dell'UE, suddivise in quattro regioni. I risultati mostrano che il numero e la varietà delle traduzioni sono aumentati significativamente dopo l'adesione all'UE rispetto agli anni Novanta, soprattutto in tedesco, seguito da italiano, spagnolo e francese. Inoltre, si può osservare un aumento e una diversificazione delle traduzioni nella maggior parte delle altre 12 lingue, perlopiù in quelle periferiche.

Parole chiave: letteratura slovena, traduzione, flussi di traduzione, Unione Europea, Premio letterario dell'Unione Europea, lingue centrali, lingue (semi-)periferiche

INTRODUCTION[1]

Europe's cultural richness depends to a great extent on translation, which enables European cultural and creative works, values and ideas to reach wider audiences and markets, both within Europe and globally (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2022). This article explores literary translation as a crucial form of the intercultural transmission of fiction (Grosman, 1997, 11) beyond the boundaries of its original language. Through translation, readers gain access to a wealth of narratives, insights and artistic expressions that would otherwise remain inaccessible. Literary translation plays an important role in preserving national cultural identity and promoting different languages and cultures, especially those that are endangered or underrepresented. The reputation of a national literature is greatly enhanced by the number of works translated into foreign languages (Moder, 1993, 16), which facilitates its entry into the global literary space and establishes its international presence.

This article examines the circulation of literary translations from Slovenian into various languages of the European Union (EU). Literary exchanges between cultures depend on numerous factors (e.g. historical and political) that influence its intensity and continuity. According to Heilbron (1999), the position of a language in the international translation system is determined by the proportion of its literature translated into other languages. A central position indicates a high number of translations from that language, while translations from peripheral languages are less frequent (Heilbron, 1999). In Heilbron's model,[2] languages are categorised into four positions: hyper-central, occupied by English with 55–60% (Heilbron, 2010, 2)[3] of all books translated worldwide; central, with 10–12% of the international translation market; semi-peripheral, with 1–3%; and peripheral, with less than 1% (Heilbron, 1999, 9–10; 2010, 2).

To analyse the extent of translations of Slovenian literature into different EU languages, we have selected languages from different geographical regions. We hypothesise that geographical proximity to Slovenia influences literary exchange and that languages within the same geographical region may show similar patterns. Following the EuroVoc classification (Publications Office of the European Union, n.d.), our study focuses on western, eastern, northern (including languages of Nordic and Baltic states) and southern European languages. We examine translations in 16 languages categorised

1 This article is the result of research carried out in the research programme P6-0265 *Intercultural Literary Studies*, co-funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS) in 2019–2024.

2 Similar, albeit less complex, models for classifying languages within the global language system have been proposed by scholars such as de Swaan (2001; 2010), who ranked languages based on the number of non-native speakers, and Casanova (2002; 2004), who integrated the number of non-native speakers and language users with the number of literary translators working to and from a language. However, Heilbron's approach is the most suitable for this study, as his classification criterion focuses on the number of book translations.

3 This proportion could be even higher, as Heilbron (2020, 137) states that in 2002 over 60% of all book translations worldwide originated from English.

as central (French, German), semi-peripheral (Italian, Spanish, Swedish) and peripheral (Bulgarian, Danish, Dutch, Estonian, Finnish, Greek, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Portuguese, Romanian) according to Heilbron's world system of translation (van Es & Heilbron, 2015, 297). Our results will show whether translation flows from Slovenian into these[4] languages correspond to Heilbron's model.

This comparative analysis of literary translation flows from Slovenian into 16 languages[5] examines bibliographic data on book translations (prose, poetry, drama)[6] from the Slovenian COBIB bibliographic database.[7] The study begins in 1991, the year in which Slovenia became an independent state, thereby losing part of the former Yugoslav translation market and seeking integration into the wider European literary sphere (Bučar & Udovič, 2023; Leben, 2023, 460).

With Slovenia's accession to the EU in 2004, the country's visibility gradually increased. One of the main objectives of this research is to determine whether European integration has increased interest in Slovenian literature in EU Member States compared to the pre-2004 period, and whether it has led to a greater quantity and diversity of literary translations from Slovenian. The study collects data on published translations from 1991 to June 2024 and analyses them by decade (1991–2000, 2001–2010 and 2011–2020). For the period 2021–2024, the focus is on the average number of books published per year to enable a comparison with previous decades. In addition, the collected data is supplemented by interviews with experts on the literary book market, which shed light on how the Slovenian book market has responded to European integration.

The EU encourages literary translation to make the diverse literary heritage of its Member States accessible to all European citizens. This initiative not only enriches the

4 Certain languages, such as English and most Slavic languages – with the exception of Bulgarian due to its geographical proximity to Romanian – were excluded from the study, as their inclusion would go beyond the scope of this article. Moreover, the translation of Slovenian literature into many of the omitted languages has already been addressed in previous research (cf., e.g., Pokorn et al., 2023). For further analyses of translations into Slavic languages, including Czech, Polish and Slovak, cf. Žbogar (2014).

5 Our analysis shows some discrepancies with statistical data for 10 (semi-)peripheral languages collected by Mikolič Južnič and Pokorn (2023, 908). For six other languages, descriptive overviews of published translations can be found in Pokorn et al. (2023).

6 Only translations published in book form, including ebooks, are considered in this article, while translations published in literary magazines and unpublished dramatic works commissioned by theatres are excluded. Anthologies and reprints are also included in the analysis.

7 According to the Institute of Information Science (2024), the COBIB database most likely does not contain all translations of Slovenian literature published abroad, as foreign publishers are not always required to submit copies of their publications to a repository, in our case the National and University Library of Slovenia (NUK). However, the NUK strives to acquire as many translations of Slovenian authors published abroad as possible in order to include them in the national Slovenika collection, which contains "all works which were either edited or published in Slovenia, refer to Slovenia [and Slovenians], and were written in the Slovenian language or […] by Slovenian authors" (National and University Library, n.d.). In addition, authors often donate copies of their translations to libraries, which leads to the creation of bibliographic records, or they may request the creation of such records to facilitate the compilation of a bibliography (Institute of Information Science, 2024). In this sense, we believe that the translations recorded for this study represent the vast majority of all translations published in Slovenia as well as abroad.

European literary landscape, but also fosters a deeper appreciation of the continent's cultural diversity. The main mechanism for supporting "the translation, publication, distribution and promotion of works of fiction" from both EU Member States and non-EU countries is the Creative Europe programme (European Commission, n.d., Circulation of European Literary Works). This programme "supports over 500 book translations every year in more than 40 original and 30 target languages" (European Commission, n.d., Books and Publishing).

The programme also funds the European Union Prize for Literature (EUPL), which is awarded annually to "the best emerging fiction writers[8] in Europe" (European Union Prize for Literature, n.d.). Since the prize was introduced in 2009 and up to 2017, "almost 1,000 translations have resulted from the award" (Wischenbart et al., 2020, 53), which corresponds to an average of around 125 translations per year. The Creative Europe programme encourages the translation of works that have been awarded the EUPL by providing translation grants to publishers. Without the EUPL, authors who write in peripheral languages and come from smaller markets would probably receive far less international visibility and fewer translation opportunities (Wischenbart et al., 2016, 42f.).

So far, four Slovenian authors have received the EUPL: Nataša Kramberger (*Heaven in a Blackberry Bush: Novel in Stories*, 2010), Gabriela Babnik (*Dry Season*, 2013), Jasmin B. Frelih (*In/Half*, 2016) and Anja Mugerli (*Bee Family*, 2021). Tina Vrščaj also received a special mention in 2024 for her novel *On Slope*. According to the COBIB database, these authors did not have any of their works translated before receiving the award.[9] Another aim of this study is therefore to investigate whether the EUPL Prize has influenced the translation of these Slovenian authors' works into the observed languages.

CHARTING SLOVENIAN LITERATURE'S TRANSLATION FLOWS INTO 16 EU LANGUAGES

Western European languages (Dutch, French and German)

Among the western European languages, translation activity into German has been the highest since 1991 (804 published book editions), followed by French (223), while the figures for Dutch (31) are significantly lower. Translations into German and French recorded steady growth between 1991 and 2020. Over the three decades, the share of German translations increased from 24.2% in 1991–2000 to 36.1% in 2001–2010, and further to 39.7% in 2011–2020. Similarly, the share of French translations increased from 22.5% to 33.5% and then to 44%, respectively. In contrast, translations into Dutch

8 In addition to a cash prize of €5,000, each EUPL prizewinner receives institutional support for the translation and promotion of their work.

9 However, prior to receiving the award, some of their short stories or excerpts from novels had been published in literary magazines or anthologies, usually featuring non-award-winning works.

were initially minimal, with only four editions in the first decade and three in the second. However, the period 2011–2020 saw a sharp increase, with 19 editions accounting for 73.1% of the total. The average annual number of translations (Chart 1) into German increased significantly from 25.3 books per year in 2011–2020 to 41.75 books per year in 2021–2024. Conversely, the number of translations into French fell from an average of 9.2 books per year to 3.5 books per year in the same periods. There was also a slight decline in translations into Dutch, from an average of 1.9 books per year in 2011–2020 to 1.25 books per year in 2021–2024.

In the first decade (1991–2000), prose accounted for the largest share of translations into German, while poetry had the highest share (38%) compared to other periods. This was partly due to the 10 publications of the Slovenian Romantic poet France Prešeren, which were mainly published by Slovenian publishers and the Austrian Hermagoras Society. Other frequently translated poets were Kajetan Kovič (7 editions), Srečko Kosovel (5) and Gustav Januš (4). Among prose authors, Ivan Cankar (8) took the lead ahead of contemporary authors such as Drago Jančar, Florjan Lipuš and Žarko Petan. Poetry was translated most often into French, led by France Prešeren (8 editions), followed by Dane Zajc (3), Boris A. Novak (3), Tomaž Šalamun (2) and Veno Taufer (2). Among the prose authors, Boris Pahor (4), Kajetan Kovič (3) and Vladimir Bartol (2) were translated most often. Translations into Dutch included only two novels by Drago Jančar and two volumes of poetry by Tomaž Šalamun and Veno Taufer, which were co-financed by the Slovenian Trubar Foundation.

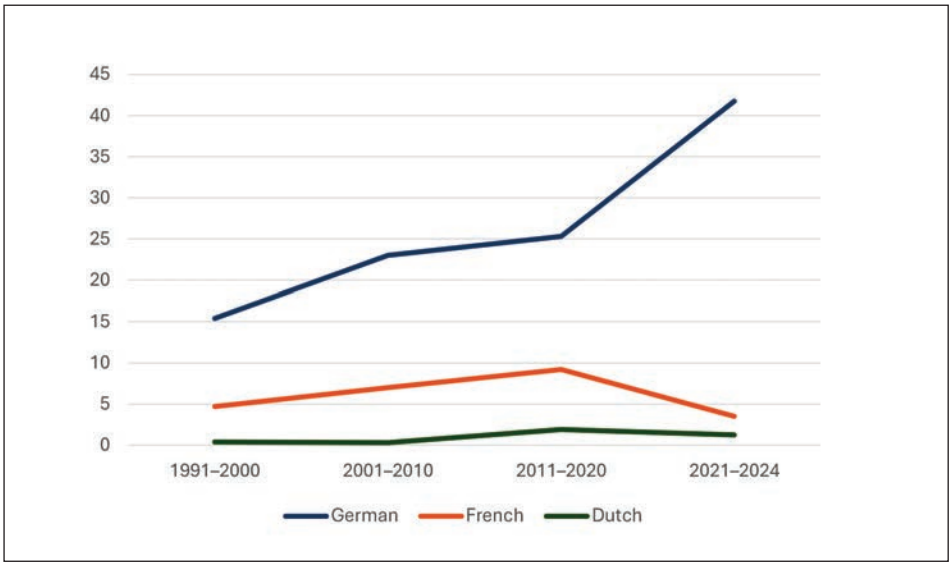

Chart 1: Average number of translations per year from 1991 to 2024 in some western European languages.

In the next decade (2001–2010), prose continued to dominate in German and poetry in French, while the diversity of literary genres increased. The classic authors began to fade, although Ivan Cankar remained represented with six editions in German and France Prešeren with four editions in French. Contemporary authors dominated the translations: Boris Pahor (12 editions in German, 8 in French), Florjan Lipuš (10 in German) and Lila Prap (9 picture books in German, 5 in French). Other frequently translated authors were Drago Jančar (7 in German, 5 in French) and Tomaž Šalamun (6 in German, 4 in French). Only three prose works were published in Dutch: two by Lojze Kovačič and one by Vitan Mal.

During the third period (2011–2020), translations into German, French and Dutch reached their peak. Prose continued to dominate in the German translations, and surpassed poetry for the first time in French, doing so to such a degree that prose titles ended up outnumbering the French translations of poetry for the overall 33.5-year period examined in this study. In Dutch translations, poetry increased, as did the number of novels (6 each). The range of genres widened, with more picture books in German (51) and French (15) and the first picture books (3) and a comic book in Dutch. The number of comics in German (6) and French (4) also increased due to their growing popularity alongside graphic novels (Kac, 2024). The most important authors in German included Drago Jančar, Florjan Lipuš, Evald Flisar and Mojca Stubelj Ars (7 editions each), as well as Lila Prap and Prežihov Voranc (6 each). In French, the most important authors were Drago Jančar (13), Boris Pahor (6), Vladimir Bartol (4) and Lila Prap (4). After 2010, Dutch translations focused on established authors such as Pahor and Kovačič, reflecting an international trend towards autobiographical novels (Zamida, 2024). After 2014, contemporary Slovenian poets (e.g. Andrej Hočevar), comic authors (Ciril Horjak and Rok Jurič), picture books (e.g. Helena Kraljič) and fairy tales (Tanja Galli) were translated into Dutch, along with internationally recognised authors such as Drago Jančar (3 books).

Translation activity from Slovenian into German has increased significantly in the last four years (2021–2024), which is largely due to Slovenia's status as Guest of Honour at the 2023 Frankfurt Book Fair, bringing greater visibility and better sales for the publishers (Stergar, 2024). Prose remained the genre most often translated into German, with translations of picture books just ahead of novels. Prežihov Voranc was the author most often translated into German, with five editions appearing in collaboration with Carinthian publishers (Wieser, Drava) and a Trieste publisher (Založništvo tržaškega tiska). Contemporary authors such as Jana Bauer, Drago Jančar, Božena Boža Lesjak, Anja Štefan, Aleš Šteger and Goran Vojnović were also frequently translated. In French, poetry (8 editions) surpassed prose (6). In addition to Drago Jančar and Florjan Lipuš, the lesser-known writers Mojca Stubelj Ars and Agata Tomažič were also translated into French. Five books were translated into Dutch during this period, including a novel by Jančar, three picture books and an anthology of Slovenian folk tales.

Approximately one third of all translations into German, French and Dutch were published in Slovenia, with the majority published abroad (68% for German and Dutch translations, 64% for French). More than a third of the Dutch translations were sponsored by the Slovenian Book Agency and/or the Trubar Foundation.

Southern European languages (Greek, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish)

The analysis of the bibliographic data on literary translations from Slovenian into Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and Greek between 1991 and 2024 shows that Italian is the predominant language among the southern European countries. With a total of 558 translated works, Italian far outstrips Spanish with 268 translations and is well ahead of Portuguese (42) and Greek (36).

Over the first three decades (1991–2020), the number of translations into these four languages increased significantly. Italian translations rose from 23.1% (1991–2000) to 34.6% (2001–2020) and finally to 42.3% (2011–2020). Spanish translations increased from 13.7% to 32.7% and finally to 53.5% in the same periods. Portuguese translations rose from 9.1% (3 books) to 18.2%, eventually reaching 72.7% (24 books), while growth in Greek rose from 9.5% (2 books) to 28.6%, reaching 61.9% (13 books) in 2011–2020. From 2021 to 2024, however, there was a slight decline in the average number of translations per year (Chart 2): Italian fell from 20.5 (2011–2020) to 18.25, Spanish from 12.1 to 10.75 and Portuguese from 2.4 to 2.25. In contrast, translations into Greek rose from 1.3 to 3.75 published books per year.

In the first decade after Slovenia's independence (1991–2000), poetry was the genre most often translated into Italian, mirroring the trend in other western European languages. Notable poets include France Prešeren (6 editions), Kajetan Kovič (5, including a novel), Srečko Kosovel (4) and Marko Kravos (3, including a picture book). Among the prose authors, Dušan Jelinčič had three editions. In the 1990s, 77% of Slovenian translations into Spanish were poetry, with 62.5% published within Slovenia (e.g. Kajetan Kovič, Boris A. Novak, Dane Zajc). Only two editions (by Alojz Ihan and Tomaž

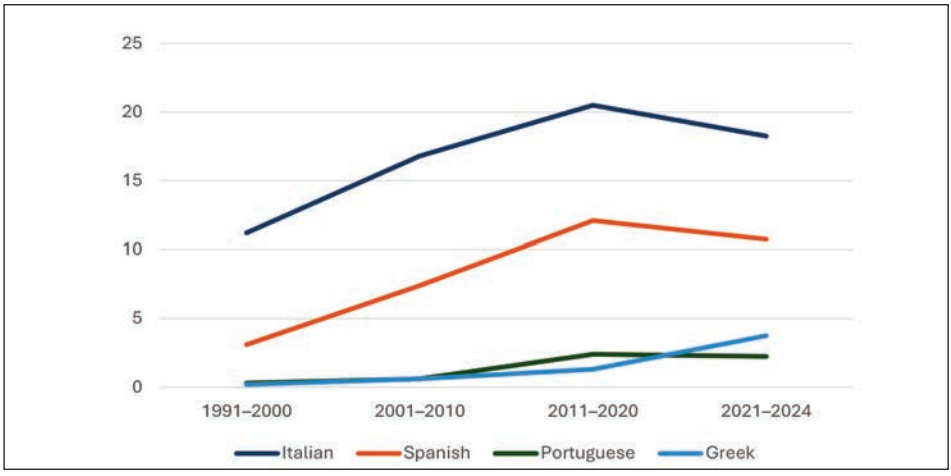

Chart 2: Average number of translations per year from 1991 to 2024 in some southern European languages.

Šalamun) were published in Spain, and two in Argentina by members of the Slovenian community (Igor Moder and Tone Rode). Slovenian prose translations into Spanish were limited: only one work by Andrej Blatnik was published in Spain, the rest were published in Slovenia or Italy by the Slovenian national minority. During this period, only two works by Petan were translated into Greek and published in Athens, while three anthologies of Slovenian poetry and other genres were translated into Portuguese and published in Ljubljana.

Between 2001 and 2010, translations of Slovenian poetry into Italian increased considerably, as did those of picture books and comics. Contemporary authors are translated most often, led by Boris Pahor[10] with 17 editions, followed by Dušan Jelinčič (8), Marko Kravos (5) and both Lila Prap and Brane Mozetič (4 each). Prose and poetry are almost equally represented among the translations into Spanish. A large proportion of these translations (35.1%) were published in Slovenia, and many also in Latin America (32.4%) and Spain (31.1%). Lila Prap is the author most often translated into Spanish, with nine editions of her picture books, mainly in Latin America. She is followed by Vladimir Bartol (4 editions of *Alamut*) and two volumes of poetry each by Srečko Kosovel, Brane Mozetič and France Prešeren, most of which were published in Spain. Other notable Slovenian authors published in Spain include Drago Jančar, Lojze Kovačič and Boris Pahor, while Alojz Gradnik, Svetlana Makarovič and Tomaž Šalamun were published in Latin America. Slovenian publishers have also contributed to the publication of works by Miha Mazzini, Tone Pavček and several anthologies.

Translations into Portuguese have doubled in this decade (to 6 editions), including three picture books by Lila Prap published in São Paulo and works by Ivan Cankar and Brane Mozetič in Portugal. Translations into Modern Greek increased from two to six, including mainly contemporary prose (e.g. by Evald Flisar, Boris Pahor and Brina Svit). In addition, an anthology covering various genres was published in Greek in Slovenia.

Between 2011 and 2020, translations into Italian, Spanish and Portuguese reached their peak. Numerous works by Ivan Cankar, a key figure of Slovenian modernism, were translated into Italian (9 editions in Slovenia or in the Trieste region). He was followed by Boris Pahor and Srečko Kosovel (7 editions each), and other frequently translated authors were Marko Kravos (6), Alojz Rebula (6), Dušan Jelinčič (5) and Mojca Stubelj Ars (5). Translations into Spanish were published in Slovenia (37.2%), Latin America (30.6%) and Spain (27.3%). Prose surpassed poetry, partly due to the increase in translated picture books by Helena Kraljič (8 editions), Peter Svetina (7) and Jana Bauer (6). Brane Mozetič was the leader in adult literature with nine editions, followed by Karel Destovnik, Drago Jančar and Goran Vojnović (2 editions each).

The Portuguese translations grew mainly due to the picture books published in Brazil, especially by Helena Kraljič. There was a balance in translations into Greek

10 On the translations of Pahor's prose into Italian and French, cf. Mezeg and Grego (2022).

between poetry (by Aleš Jelenko, Aljaž Koprivnikar, Brane Mozetič and Srečko Kosovel) and prose, including children's literature by Maša Ogrizek and two novels published in Athens by Gabriela Babnik and Drago Jančar.

Since 2021, picture books have been the genre most often translated into Italian, which is probably due to Slovenia's role as Guest of Honour at the Bologna Children's Book Fair in 2024. However, in contrast to the increase in German translations after the Frankfurt Book Fair, there was no comparable increase in Italian translations. According to Stergar (2024), the Bologna project did not produce the expected results. Only one Slovenian publisher, KUD Sodobnost, has significantly increased its translations (16 editions). Nevertheless, Stergar (2024) remains optimistic about the future impact of the Bologna project. Notable translations in the last four years include picture books by Tadeja Pirnat (published in Ljubljana) and works by Marko Kravos (3 editions each) as well as Peter Svetina and Goran Vojnović (2 editions each).

The more recent translations into Spanish are predominantly prose, with children's literature, which is mainly published in Slovenia, being translated more often than adult literature. The proportion of translations published in Slovenia has risen to 58.1%, while the proportion of translations published in Latin America is less than 10%. Around a third (32.6%) is published in Spain, including prose for adults by Miha Mazzini and Goran Vojnović, picture books by Helena Kraljič, comics by Damijan Stepančič, poetry by Gorazd Kocijančič, Brane Mozetič and Lucija Stupica and a drama by Tone Partljič.

The number of translations into Portuguese remains low and is mainly focused on children's literature, which is mostly published in Brazil (e.g. Manica Klenovšek Musil, Ida Mlakar Črnič) or Portugal (Peter Svetina). Around a third of the Spanish translations relate exclusively to poetry published in Slovenia, including an anthology and works by Samo Dražumerič and Srečko Kosovel. The translations into Greek are mainly contemporary prose, divided almost equally between literature for adults and children. The adult literature includes works by Jasmin B. Frelih, Drago Jančar, Evald Flisar (2 works), Lojze Kovačič and Marko Sosič. In children's literature, three works by Brane Mozetič have been translated into Greek.

In the 33.5-year period analysed, translations into Greek have the highest percentage of publications within their home country (78% published in Greece). Italy follows with 62.5% of translations published there, while 31% of translations into Italian are published in Slovenia. Slovenia also plays an important role in translations into Spanish: 42.8% are published in Slovenia, compared to 27.5% in Spain and 25.6% in Latin America, which emphasises the strong influence of Slovenian local initiatives. The geographical distribution of Portuguese translations shows a different pattern: only 19% are published in Portugal, while 31% are published in Slovenia. Brazil is an important hub, with 50% of translations into Portuguese published there, demonstrating the global reach of Slovenian literature.

Languages of Nordic (Danish, Finnish, Swedish) and Baltic (Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian) states

The data show different trends in Slovenian literary translations into northern European languages, with Swedish leading the way with 28 translations, followed by Finnish and Lithuanian with 21 and 20 translations, respectively. Danish and Latvian have 13 and 12 translations, respectively, while Estonian has the fewest translations (6). Translation activity was modest in the first decade, but increased significantly between 2001 and 2010: translations into Finnish rose from two to 10, into Swedish from two to nine, into Danish from one to eight and into Lithuanian from two to four. In the third decade (2011–2020), translations into Finnish and Danish fell to four and three, respectively, while translations into Swedish and Lithuanian rose to 14 and 11, respectively. This period also saw the first translations into Estonian (4) and Latvian (5). A comparison of 2011–2020 with 2021–2024 shows a significant increase in the average annual number of translations (Chart 3) into Latvian (from 0.5 to 1.75) and Finnish (from 0.4 to 1.25) and a slight increase into Estonian (from 0.4 to 0.5). In contrast, translations into Swedish and Lithuanian fell (from 1.4 to 0.75 and 1.1 to 0.75, respectively), as did those into Danish (from 0.3 to 0.25).

Between 1991 and 2000, a volume of poetry and a novel by Maja Novak were translated from Slovenian into Finnish, poems by Tomaž Šalamun and Dane Zajc into Swedish, and poems by Šalamun and a fairy tale by Polonca Kovač into Lithuanian. While Danish received a translation of an anthology, there were no translations into Estonian and Latvian.

During 2001–2010, the number and variety of Slovenian literary translations increased significantly. The Finnish translations included prose by Evald Flisar, Boris Pahor and Vladimir Bartol, while the number of poetry translations was smaller (an anthology and poems by Tomaž Šalamun and Aleš Debeljak). More poems (by Aleš Šteger, Lucija Stupica and Šalamun) were translated into Swedish and less prose (Fran Levstik, Aleš Šteger, Alojz Rebula). Danish translations increased mainly due to the picture books by Lila Prap, Mojca Osojnik and Cvetka Sokolov. Translations into Lithuanian doubled (to 4 editions), including anthologies and poems by Aleš Debeljak. No Slovenian literary translations were made into Estonian or Latvian during this period, even though these countries joined the EU together with Slovenia in 2004.

In the third decade, the Danish translations were exclusively fiction prose (e.g. Feri Lainšček, Nataša Kramberger). In Finnish translations, prose (e.g. Drago Jančar) predominates over poetry (Srečko Kosovel), while Swedish translations include picture books (Lila Prap, Tina Orter, Brane Mozetič), comics (Iztok Sitar, Tanja Komadina) and novels (Boris Pahor, Goran Vojnović). Translations into Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian have focused mainly on picture books by authors such as Majda Koren, Peter Svetina and Jana Bauer, as well as some prose for adults by Gabriela Babnik (Latvian) and Vladimir Bartol and Goran Vojnović (Lithuanian).

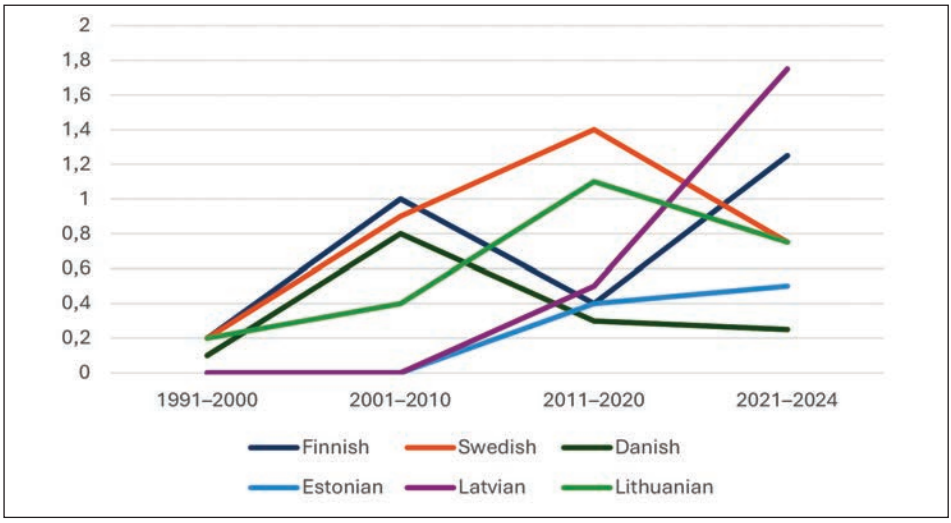

Chart 3: Average number of translations per year from 1991 to 2024 in some northern European languages.

Between 2021 and 2024, translations into Finnish and Latvian increased, mainly through picture books (Jana Bauer for Finnish and Latvian; Andreja Peklar for Finnish, Ida Mlakar Črnič for Latvian) and novels (Drago Jančar for Finnish; Evald Flisar and Vinko Möderndorfer for Latvian). Poetry translations were less frequent, with notable works including Bratko Brelih's poems in Finnish and an LGBT anthology in Latvian (2022). Two children's books have been translated into Estonian, including Josip Jurčič's *The Goat Trial of Višnja Gora*, which was also published in Danish (2014), Latvian and Lithuanian (2021) in Slovenia. Translations into Swedish, Danish and Lithuanian have declined. Notable Swedish translations include Katja Perat's *The Masochist* and Lucija Stupica's poetry. Jančar's *I Saw Her That Night* was translated into Lithuanian (2021) and Danish (2022), while Vojnović's *The Fig Tree* was only translated into Lithuanian.

Since Slovenia's accession to the EU, most translations have been published by Nordic and Baltic publishers. The average number of translated books per year has increased very slowly and still does not reach one book per year in most languages, except Finnish and Latvian.

Eastern European languages (Bulgarian, Hungarian and Romanian)

From 1991 to 2024, translations from Slovenian into Hungarian were the most common (94), followed by those into Bulgarian (68) and Romanian (28). The number of Hungarian translations rose from 19.5% (1991–2000) to 48.3% (2001–2010) and then fell to 32.2% (2011–2020). The number of Bulgarian translations increased

steadily from 2.1% (1991–2000) to 18.75% (2001–2010) and then rose to 79.2% (2011–2020). The number of Romanian translations rose steadily from 8.7% (1991–2000) to 34.8% (2001–2010), reaching a peak of 56.5% (2011–2020). From 2021–2024, the average annual translation figures (Chart 4) for Hungarian (from 2.8 to 1.75) and Romanian (from 1.3 to 1.25) decreased, but increased for Bulgarian (from 3.8 to 5).

In the 1990s, both prose (e.g. by Drago Jančar, Feri Lainšček, Kajetan Kovič) and poetry (e.g. by Aleš Debeljak, Edvard Kocbek, Janko Messner, France Prešeren, Tomaž Šalamun) were translated into Hungarian. It is noteworthy that about 30% of these translations were published in Slovenia, reflecting a significant Slovenian initiative. In particular, the Slovenians facilitated the publication of two volumes of poetry by Kajetan Kovič and one by France Prešeren, as well as prose works by Ivan Bizjak and Feri Lainšček. In contrast, translations into Romanian and Bulgarian were rare, with only two Romanian translations (works by Žarko Petan and Prežihov Voranc) and one Bulgarian translation (poems by Cvetka Lipuš).

Between 2001 and 2010, translations from Slovenian into Hungarian, Bulgarian and Romanian increased in various genres. In Hungarian, poetry (e.g. by Srečko Kosovel, Aleš Šteger, Dane Zajc) slightly outweighs prose (e.g. two novels by Drago Jančar and *Alamut* by Vladimir Bartol). Several picture books (e.g. by Barbara Hanuš, Mojca Kumerdej, Lila Prap, Svetlana Makarovič) have been published, mostly in Slovenia or Austria, with the exception of Lila Prap's *Miért?* (*Zakaj?*/*Why?*) published in Budapest. Poetry collections (e.g. by Tone Dodlek, Štefan Huzjan, Feri Lainšček, Janko Messner) were also mostly published in Slovenia or Austria. Overall, 78% of the translations were published in Hungary, including a drama by Evgen Car and several anthologies.

The increase in Bulgarian translations is mainly due to contemporary poetry (e.g. by Ivan Dobnik, Kajetan Kovič, Brane Mozetič, Aleš Šteger), while only two prose works (by Drago Jančar and Slavko Pregl) were published during this decade. Romanian translations increased mainly due to children's books (e.g. by Desa Muck, Marjeta Novak-Kajzer, Ela Peroci, Anja Štefan), but also poetry (by Srečko Kosovel, Tomaž Šalamun) and an anthology of prose.

In the decade from 2011 to 2020, Hungarian translations declined, mainly due to a significant decrease in translations of poetry. These were mainly published in Hungary and included works by Aleš Debeljak and Tomaž Šalamun. Prose translations remained stable, with 39% published in Slovenia, including children's literature and short prose by Sandi Horvat. Hungarian publishers focused on contemporary authors (e.g. Gabriela Babnik, Jasmin B. Frelih, Drago Jančar, Lojze Kozar, Miha Mazzini, Dušan Šarotar, Suzana Tratnik) and also published two dramas by Evald Flisar and an anthology of various genres.

In the Bulgarian language area, translations of poetry (e.g. by Ivan Cankar, Aleš Debeljak, Iztok Osojnik, Josip Osti, Tomaž Šalamun, Aleš Šteger) remained stable. There was a significant increase in prose in particular, which rose from

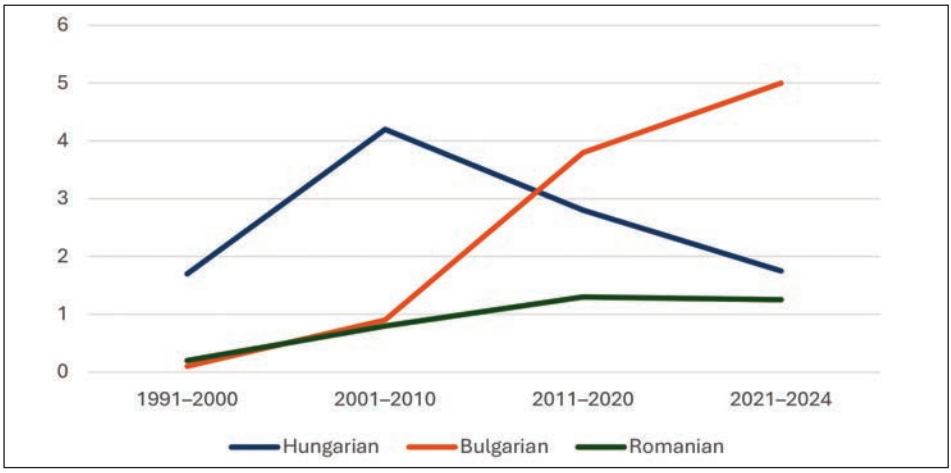

Chart 4: Average number of translations per year from 1991 to 2024 in some eastern European languages.

two works in the previous decade to 25. Drago Jančar was the most frequently represented author with five works. Other contemporary Slovenian writers who were translated into Bulgarian were Vladimir Bartol, Evald Flisar, Tadej Golob, Slavko Pregl, Janja Vidmar and Goran Vojnović. Some children's literature (e.g. by Helena Kraljič, Frane Milčinski) was also published. Romanian translations mainly included prose for adults (e.g. by Boris Pahor, Goran Vojnović) and picture books by Helena Kraljič, while translations of poetry were rarer, with notable exceptions such as Aleš Debeljak and Jana Putrle Srdić.

From 2021 to 2024, translations into Bulgarian increased significantly, averaging five works per year. Around 90% of these translations were prose, including novels by contemporary authors (e.g. Drago Jančar, Anja Mugerli, Suzana Tratnik, Goran Vojnović, Bronja Žakelj). In addition, numerous picture books (e.g. by Špela Frlic, Helena Kraljič, Desa Muck) and only two volumes of poetry by Esad Babačić and France Prešeren have been translated into Bulgarian. Translation activity into Romanian has declined slightly. Notable translations include two editions of fairy tales by Jana Bauer and a novel by Suzana Tratnik. In contrast, the number of translations into Hungarian fell to less than two books per year, of which only three were published in Hungary: prose by Borut Kraševec, Feri Lainšček and Anja Mugerli.

Overall, a significant proportion of translations into Hungarian (28%) were published in Slovenia, which can be due to the fact that Hungarian is recognised there as a minority language. In contrast, most translations into Bulgarian and Romanian were published abroad (96% in Bulgaria and 86% in Romania).

DIVERGENCE IN TRANSLATION: CENTRAL VS. (SEMI-)PERIPHERAL EU LANGUAGES

An overview of translation activity for all the languages shows that a total of 2,253 translations of Slovenian literature have been published since 1991 (Chart 5). Four target languages had a significantly higher number of translations compared to the others – first and foremost German as the central language (804), followed by two semi-peripheral Romance languages, Italian (558) and Spanish (269), and another central Romance language, French (223).

Fewer translations were published in the other, mostly peripheral languages, with the highest number in Hungarian (94) and Bulgarian (68). Languages with 20 to 45 editions include Portuguese (42), Greek (36), Dutch (31), Swedish (28), Romanian (28), Finnish (21) and Lithuanian (20). Fewer than 15 works were translated into Danish (13), Latvian (12) and Estonian (6) in the last 33.5 years.

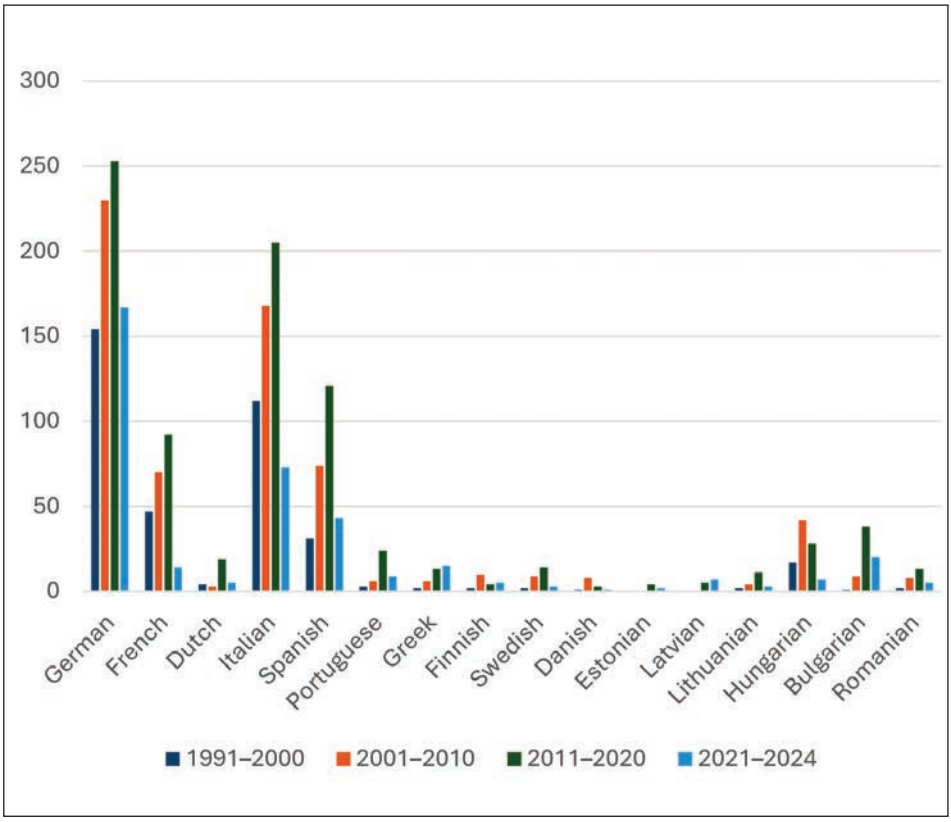

Chart 5: Total number of translations from 1991 to 2024 in all languages observed.

The analysis of the average number of translations published per year shows that such activity has increased for most of the 16 languages since 1991 and up to 2011–2020. The exceptions are translations into Estonian and Latvian (first published in 2015), Danish and Hungarian (declining since the 2010s) and Finnish and Dutch, where translation activity has fluctuated. Translation trends since 2021 show that Slovenian literature is experiencing increasing growth in some languages (German, Latvian, Finnish, Estonian, Greek, Bulgarian), while this trend is reversed in others (French, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Swedish, Lithuanian, Danish, Hungarian, Romanian). It should be noted that there were also COVID-19 lockdowns during this period, which led to book publications being postponed or cancelled due to lower sales (Kovač & Gudinavičius, 2020, 20–22).

After Slovenia's accession to the EU, translation activity increased in all the languages surveyed (Chart 6). While we recorded no translations into Estonian and Latvian before 2015, there were six and 12 published editions, respectively, in the subsequent period. In other, mostly peripheral languages, there was an average of less than 0.5 translations per year before 2004. After 2004, for some of these (Danish, Finnish, Lithuanian) the number of translations increased minimally to less than one per year after 2004 (around 0.5–0.8). In other cases (Dutch, Swedish, Romanian, Greek, Portuguese) an average of between one and 1.85 translations were published after 2004, while in Bulgarian an average of around three translations were published per year. Although there was some increase recorded in translation activity in these languages, the total number of translations from 1991 to 2024 was still very low for each language, ranging from 13 to 68 (Chart 5). In contrast to the

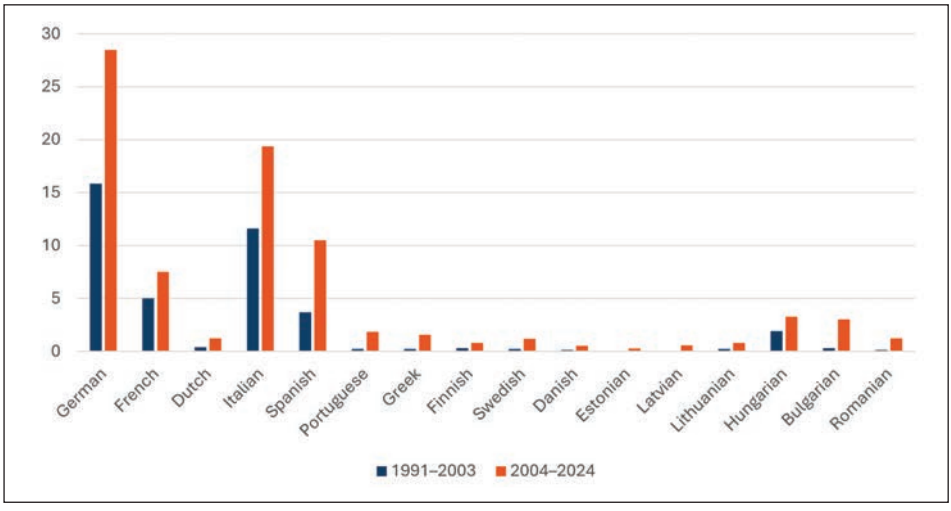

Chart 6: Average number of translations per year in the periods since Slovenia's independence and after joining the EU in all observed languages.

other peripheral languages, Hungarian had a higher average number of published translations per year before 2004 (1.9), but recorded a smaller increase after 2004, with around 3.3 published translations.

The largest increase in the average number of translations per year after Slovenia's accession to the EU was recorded in the countries with the highest total number of translated editions. In first place is central German, where translation activity almost doubled after 2004 (an increase from almost 16 books per year to almost 29). This is followed by semi-peripheral Italian (an increase of almost 8 books) and Spanish (an increase of almost 7 books). Slovenia's accession to the EU had the least impact on translations into central French, where around 2.5 more translations per year were published after 2004.

An analysis of the distribution of translations of Slovenian literature into 16 different languages since 1991 leads to some interesting observations. For example, 35.7% of all translations were into German, which shows that this language is the most central and thus also the main target language for Slovenian literary export. Italian (24.8%) and Spanish (11.9%), which belong to the semi-peripheral languages in the international translation system, have a more central position for Slovenian literature than French (9.9%). In the case of Slovenian literature, however, all four languages are central, as translations in each language account for more than 10% of the total. Between one and about four percent of the translations were published in semi-peripheral Swedish (1.2%) and some peripheral languages – Hungarian (4.2%), Bulgarian (3%), Portuguese (1.9%), Greek (1.6%), Dutch (1.4%) and Romanian (1.2%) – which means these languages are semi-peripheral for Slovenian literature. In contrast, the smallest number (less than 1%) was translated into other peripheral languages – Finnish (0.9%), Lithuanian (0.9%), Danish (0.6%), Latvian (0.5%) and Estonian (0.3%). In other words, the position of some languages has changed in the case of translated Slovenian literature compared to the global translation system (Heilbron, 1999), as some of them have moved more to the centre (Italian, Spanish) or semi-centre (Hungarian, Bulgarian, Portuguese, Greek, Dutch, Romanian). Translations into more central languages play a very important role, as they can stimulate translations into peripheral languages (Heilbron, 2020, 141). However, this trend can also work in the opposite direction, as translations into peripheral languages can be seen as a kind of confirmation of quality for publishers in more central markets, and this can lead to more translation rights being sold there (Kac, 2024).

The analysis shows that translated authors and genres have changed over time. In the 1990s, classic authors and poetry took centre stage, but in the period after 2001, and especially after 2011, prose by both established and emerging contemporary authors and new genres such as picture books, fairy tales and comics were strongly represented. Among the translated authors are also four Slovenian EUPL laureates, whose award-winning and non-award-winning works were translated into various languages after receiving the prize. Looking at the

translations into 16 languages examined in this article,[11] Gabriela Babnik stands out with eight editions in seven different languages (French,[12] German, Italian, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Latvian, Greek). Nataša Kramberger follows with five translations in three languages (2 translations into German,[13] 2 into Italian, 1 into Danish). The most recent laureates, Jasmin B. Frelih and Anja Mugerli, each have three translations in three different languages (both in Hungarian and Italian, Frelih also in Greek and Mugerli in Bulgarian).

An overview of the translations of Slovenian EUPL authors into the 16 languages shows that 10 editions were published in semi-peripheral (Italian) or central (German, French) languages, thus only slightly exceeding the number of translations into peripheral languages (9). All translations were published abroad, with the exception of the two French translations, which were published in Slovenia. Looking at the additional translations beyond the 16 languages discussed here (cf. footnote 11), most were translated into peripheral languages (58%). The translations based on the works of Slovenian EUPL authors account for a relatively small proportion, namely 1.5% of all translations into the 16 languages since 2011.

CONCLUSION

Following Slovenia's accession to the EU, the desire of the Slovenian literary market to promote its literature throughout Europe increased significantly. This can be seen in the rise in published translations in all 16 languages examined, as well as in the wider range of translated authors and literary genres. This trend has been particularly noticeable since the 2000s.

Since 2004, the average number of published translations per year has risen in all languages. This growth has been strongest in German (almost 13 additional books per year), Italian (almost 8 additional books) and Spanish (almost 7 additional books), where translation activity was already strong before 2004. Moderate increases of between one and three additional books per year were observed in Romanian (+1.09), Greek (+1.34), Hungarian (+1.36), Portuguese (+1.62), French (+2.52) and Bulgarian (+2.73). In contrast, the increase was minimal (less than 1 additional book per year) in most peripheral languages (in descending order: Swedish, Dutch, Lithuanian, Latvian, Finnish, Danish and Estonian), which have maintained a modest total number of translations since 1991.

11 In addition to the 16 languages observed, Slovenian EUPL authors were also translated into English (5 editions), Serbian (4), Croatian (4), Czech (2), Polish (1) and Macedonian (1).

12 In addition to the printed book, the French translation was also published as an ebook, both times by the Slovene Writers' Association in Ljubljana.

13 The German publisher of Nataša Kramberger's non-award-winning books *Comparable Hectares* (2021) and *Mauerpfeffer* (*Kdo bo z mano prosil za dež?/Who Will Ask for Rain with Me?*) (2023) reported that the first book sold very well, partly because the author was already known in the network of literary houses after winning the EUPL (Listau, 2023).

The strongest translation activity for Slovenian literature was observed in German and Italian, which can be attributed to the geographical proximity and cultural, historical and political connections between Slovenia and the countries of the target languages, and partly also to the presence of Slovenian minorities in Austria and Italy (cf. Mezeg et al., 2024, 214f.; Rozman et al., 2023). This supports the trend that authors from peripheral languages are often translated into "a cultural centre that is not too dominant and that is geographically 'close to home'" (Heilbron, 2020, 141). However, although Slovenia and Hungary are neighbouring countries, access to the Hungarian book market has proven difficult. According to Senja Požar (2024), it is more difficult to penetrate the Hungarian market than the French one. This difficulty is attributed to the Hungarian perception that Slovenia is too close to Hungary and that Slovenian books are less attractive due to the abundance of similar literature already available in Hungary (Požar, 2024). This perception may have contributed to the decline in translations into Hungarian since the 2010s. Despite these challenges, Požar (2024) managed to sell rights for some adult literature, excluding picture books, in preparation for the 2023 Frankfurt Book Fair. The hypothesis about the influence of geographical proximity on literary exchange is thus only partially confirmed. In most of the languages observed, around a third or less of the translations were published in Slovenia, with Spanish standing out with 42.8% of the translations being published in Slovenia, which indicates strong local initiatives to translate Slovenian literature into this language.

The predominant position of German translations is also due to the Frankfurt Book Fair, where Slovenia was the Guest of Honour in 2023. As part of this initiative, the Republic of Slovenia and EU (through the European Regional Development Fund) provided funding to increase the number of translations into German and promote them in German-speaking countries (JAK, 2019, 25, 31; 2024). Conversely, the translation and publication of Slovenian literature into French largely depends on the efforts of individual translators and other literary intermediaries, rather than a targeted translation policy (Lück Gaye, 2024). In addition, penetration of the French publishing market is hampered by the fact that some Slovenian literary agents do not speak French, and French publishers know little about Slovenia and show even less interest in its literature (Kac, 2024; Kavčič, 2024). Finally, the relatively low level of translation activity for languages of Nordic and Baltic states can be attributed to the lack of translators from Slovenian and the absence of a systematic translation support system (Petrič, 2024).

Translation projects under the Creative Europe programme provide important financial support for the publishing industry, enhancing the publication of translated Slovenian literature and increasing the international visibility of lesser-known Slovenian authors (Copetti, 2024; Kac, 2024). Although translations of works by Slovenian EUPL authors account for only a small proportion of all translations into the 16 languages examined, the prize encouraged their first translations into various target languages. This shows that the EU mechanisms work and effectively promote the dissemination of books beyond their place and language of origin, thus contributing to cultural and literary diversity in Europe.

TRENDI PREVAJANJA SLOVENSKE KNJIŽEVNOSTI V EVROPSKI UNIJI: PRIMERJALNA ANALIZA OBJAVLJENIH DEL V 16 JEZIKIH (1991–2024)

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POVZETEK

Članek obravnava prevajanje slovenske književnosti v 16 jezikov EU od osamosvojitve Slovenije 1991 do junija 2024. Namen raziskave je ugotoviti, ali sta se z evropsko integracijo povečali količina in raznolikost prevedenih del ter ali je na prevode vplivala tudi nagrada EU za književnost (EUPL). Proučevali smo jezike iz različnih delov Evrope (sever, jug, vzhod, zahod). Bibliografske podatke smo pridobili iz COBIB in podkrepili z intervjuji s strokovnjaki. Analiza kaže, da se je po 2004 povečala količina prevodov v vse jezike, zlasti v nemščino (skoraj 13 knjig več na leto), italijanščino (skoraj 8 knjig več) in španščino (skoraj 7 knjig več). Zmerno povečanje (1–3 knjige na leto) smo zabeležili v romunščini, grščini, madžarščini, portugalščini, francoščini in bolgarščini, minimalno povečanje (manj kot 1 knjiga na leto) pa v švedščini, nizozemščini, litovščini, latvijščini, finščini, danščini in estonščini – v teh jezikih je bilo sicer v 33,5 letih objavljenih manj kot 30 prevodov. Trendi zadnjih štirih let kažejo rast prevodov le v centralni nemščini in nekaterih perifernih jezikih. Rezultati delno potrjujejo vpliv geografske bližine na literarno izmenjavo in kažejo, da je bila približno tretjina prevodov ali manj objavljena v Sloveniji, z izjemo španščine (42,8 %), kar kaže na močne lokalne pobude za prevajanje slovenske književnosti. V devetdesetih so prevladovali klasični avtorji in poezija, po 2001 in zlasti 2011 pa proza sodobnih avtorjev in novi žanri (slikanice, pravljice, stripi). Med prevodi so tudi dela štirih slovenskih nagrajencev EUPL, ki sicer predstavljajo le 1,5 % vseh objavljenih prevodov, vendar potrjujejo, da mehanizmi EU delujejo in torej prispevajo h kulturni in literarni raznolikosti v Evropi.

Ključne besede: slovenska književnost, prevajanje, prevodni tokovi, Evropska unija, nagrada Evropske unije za književnost, centralni jeziki, (pol-)periferni jeziki

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Received: 2024-08-18 DOI 10.19233/AH.2024.17

EUROPEAN *BRATSTVO I JEDINSTVO*? SLOVENIA'S BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH CROATIA THROUGH THE LENS OF EU MEMBERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

This article looks at the impact of EU membership on the bilateral relations between Slovenia and Croatia. The analysis centres around policy issues of conflict and cooperation and how they were accentuated, contained, processed, or boosted by the EU membership of both countries. Further, the EU accession process of Croatia and Slovenia is scrutinized as to its implications on bilateral issues and the lessons learnt for EU enlargement in the Western Balkans with regard to the resolution of bilateral disputes.

Key words: Slovenia, Croatia, bilateral relations, cooperation, open issues, European Union

BRATSTVO I JEDINSTVO EUROPEO? LE RELAZIONI BILATERALI DI SLOVENIA E CROAZIA ATTRAVERSO LA LENTE DELL'APPARTENENZA ALL'UNIONE EUROPEA

SINTESI

Questo articolo osserva l'impatto dell'adesione all'Unione europea sulle relazioni bilaterali tra Slovenia e Croazia. L'analisi si focalizza sulle questioni politiche di conflitto e cooperazione e su come queste siano state accentuate, contenute, elaborate o potenziate dall'appartenenza di entrambi i Paesi all'UE. Inoltre, il processo di adesione all'UE di Croazia e Slovenia viene esaminato per quanto concerne le sue implicazioni sulle questioni bilaterali e le lezioni apprese per l'allargamento dell'UE nei Balcani occidentali in merito alla risoluzione delle controversie bilaterali.

Parole chiave: Slovenia, Croazia, relazioni bilaterali, cooperazione, questioni aperte, Unione Europea

INTRODUCTION

Looking at the balance sheet of EU membership, one may draw on several criteria with regard to the domestic impact: economic, financial, political, societal, and perhaps also in terms of domestic perception or awareness. This article, however, draws more on an external dimension: the bilateral relations with Slovenia's southern neighbour Croatia and a set of issues that can be related to the European Union in this regard.

This article deals with the EU context in a broader sense and, where appropriate, also covers the period before Slovenia joined the European Union in 2004. The first section looks at the process of independence from Yugoslavia and moments where the interests of Slovenia and Croatia had been aligned, at odds, or coordinated. The second part covers both countries' differing paths of accession to the EU. The subsequent section deals with bilateral contemporary issues of cooperation and conflict at policy level. The fourth part looks at the transformative power of the EU, and the last heading deals with the positions on EU enlargement in the Western Balkans followed by conclusions.[1]

Historically, it is worth noting that the bilateral relations between Slovenia and Croatia have been embedded in a multi-fold process of transition. For some periods of time in the more recent history, the two entities have been part of larger political units: during the Habsburg Empire from the fifteenth century (with parts of Slavonia under Ottoman rule until the seventeenth century) up until 1918, in the inter-war period (initially the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes before becoming Yugoslavia in 1929), and after World War II as constituent Republics of Socialist Yugoslavia (the late SFRY) until 1991. During the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia, both Republics became independent states in 1991.[2] As from 2004 and 2013 respectively, Slovenia and Croatia have been Members of the European Union (EU), a *sui generis* regional organisation with supranational and intergovernmental elements.

INDEPENDENCE FROM YUGOSLAVIA: DIVERGING INTERESTS, TACTICS, AND A JOINT ACCOMPLISHMENT NONETHELESS

The way to independence from Yugoslavia in 1991 is sometimes seen as inevitable and pre-determined when events are put into perspective *ex post*. To avoid a deterministic view, however, it is useful not to read the unfolding of events backwards as this would make us subject to the phenomenon of hindsight bias[3] thus becoming less able to grasp the atmosphere and the context of the decisions taken at

1 This article is an extended and revised version of this author's contribution on the Slovenian-Croatian bilateral relations in Kaeding & Udovič (2024).

2 For a comprehensive account of the multiple Yugoslavia, cf. Ramet (2006).

3 Hindsight bias refers to the interpreting of past events as inevitable and logical. Roese and Vohs (2012, 412–413) distinguish three types of hindsight bias: memory distortion, inevitability, and foreseeability.

the time (Bieber, 2014, 3). As regards the dissolution of Yugoslavia, irrespective of the simultaneous declarations of independence of Slovenia and Croatia on 25 June 1991 and a previous solid and long-standing shared concern about the state of the economy and regional development in Yugoslavia, the emancipation from the SFRY was not a joint exercise of Slovenia and Croatia from the very beginning. It is true that allowance must be made for the fact that Ljubljana and Zagreb as economically advanced Republics had become disgruntled over time with the performance of the system of allocation of federal grants as aid for the underdeveloped regions in the country, predominantly in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Montenegro. By way of example, the largest infrastructure project in socialist Yugoslavia, the construction of the Bar-Belgrade railway line and the port of Bar, would have been financed largely by the federal state coffers with an overall cost of around USD 450 million for the 496 kilometres railway line alone (Kežić, 2011). Slovenia and Croatia fiercely opposed the project (it nonetheless came about) which, in their view, was against the interests of the existing Adriatic ports of Koper/Capodistria and Rijeka and also delayed the planned Zagreb-Split highway. It led Slovenia to invest in regional roads rather than the highways between Ljubljana and the border to Austria and southbound (Ramet, 2006, 279–282).[4]

The road to independence, however, was not free of controversy between Zagreb and Ljubljana. After the Communist Party of Yugoslavia's (CPY) Congress in January 1990 (which triggered the end of one-party rule), Slovenia was actively preparing for secession from Yugoslavia managing to win the de facto consent of the leadership of Serbia for secession (Ramet, 2006, 374; Jović, 2008, 265), whilst Croatia initially was wary of Slovenian independence and had no such plans itself, largely because it supported the new federal reform government of Ante Marković, a Croat, saw a Yugoslavia without Slovenia as a considerable weakening of the Croatian position vis-à-vis Serbia (Meier, 1995, 221, 241–242; Jović, 2008, 253), and had been virtually absent from the SFRY constitutional debate in the 1980s (Jović, 2023a).

The intentions behind the joint Slovenian-Croatian confederal proposal of 2 October 1990 remain unclear to this day.[5] Whilst some see it as a tactical move mainly to show good will and buy time (Jović, 2008, 252, 274), others contend it was a sincere offer of a common market including monetary union and also but not primarily to appease the Serbian leadership (Meier, 1995, 280) after the Jugoslav National Army (JNA) had confiscated most of the weaponry of Croatia's Territorial Defence (TO) units[6] (Ramet,

4 For the role of the pan-Yugoslav Highway of Brotherhood and Unity, where 200,000 volunteers contributed to its construction, through the lens of collective identity and architecture, cf. Korolija & Pallini (2020).

5 The unification of Germany on 3 October may yet help explain the date of the proposal.

6 The TO of Slovenia had been under Slovenian command since mid-July 1990 (cf. e.g. Meier, 1995, 282) – a fact that proved crucial during the Ten-Day War in Slovenia in July 1991.

2006, 373–374; Jović, 2008, 259).[7] Unity of Slovenia and Croatia over the joint proposal proved limited and fragile, and the Slovenes were particularly irritated by Tuđman linking a prospective confederal Yugoslavia to border changes in Bosnia-Herzegovina (cf. e.g. his interview in DER SPIEGEL, 8 November 1990[8]), whilst the mood in Zagreb was that Slovenia had been very selfish in preparing its own independence – which would practically also include new border posts, something that might not go down well amongst the population in Croatia (Jović, 2008, 274).[9]

In the end, independence was coordinated between Slovenia and Croatia only at very short notice at the highest political level on 15 June 1991, and the two sides agreed to proclaim independence ten days later on 25 June 1991 (Ramet, 2006, 392; Meier, 1995, 311), whilst Kučan is reported to have been concerned at the low level of preparations in Zagreb (Meier, 1995, 311). After independence, Kučan and Tuđman only met three times until the end of 1999 although regular meeting intervals had been agreed on in the first place (Jović, 2023a). It is important to note, nonetheless, that relations and collaboration at local level on the ground have been very close since.

DIFFERENT TRAJECTORIES OF EU ACCESSION AND THE MOTHER OF DISPUTES

Slovenia was able to almost fully escape the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia save for the Ten-Day War in July 1991. It may be said that Slovenia was able to consolidate its statehood in a relatively short period of time. With regard to EU accession, Ljubljana's road to Brussels proved almost free of bilateral issues, too, with the exception of the dispute over the maritime and land border with Croatia. This territorial dispute, however, was only tackled during Croatia's own accession to the European Union several years later; more on this below.

Nonetheless, in its EU accession process, Slovenia had to face a sensitive bilateral issue with Italy. In 1993, Rome started blocking the opening of Ljubljana's EU accession talks over property seized by the former Yugoslavia after World War II which had also affected Italian citizens in Istria (*optanti*) who had left after the former Italian territories were ceded to Yugoslavia in 1954 (Geddes & Taylor, 2016, 934–936; Bučar & Udovič, 2023, 393). The matter was settled when Slovenia introduced, through an amendment to the constitution, the right for EU

7 In the end, the proposal was only debated in the federal SFRY State Presidency, rejected by 6:2 votes, and thus not forwarded to the federal parliament (Ramet, 2006, 374–37; Jović, 2008, 252). A survey of scholarly assessments of the rationale behind the confederal proposal can be found in Ramet (2008, 38–39).

8 Whilst Tuđman advocated the prospective confederation, he also said that 'if you look at the map, you don't need to be a historian to see that Bosnia forms a geopolitical unit with Croatia. They belong together'.

9 Tuđman himself, however, according to Meier (1995, 311), was surprised that the practicalities of Slovenian independence would include new checkpoints at the border to Croatia.

citizens to purchase property in the country within four years from the beginning of the EU accession negotiations, a requirement of the EU single market rulebook and the free movement of capital which was mandatory for every EU Member State anyway (European Commission, 1997, 16). This right was extended immediately to EU citizens who had resided on Slovenian territory for at least three years, so that the Italian *optanti* were covered at very short notice. The Italian government on its part announced in early 1996 that it would surrender new property restitution claims for the *optanti* who had left Istria after 1954 – a matter that had been resolved anyway by the Italian-Yugoslav Treaty of Osimo in 1975. In June 1996, Slovenia's Association Treaty with the EU was signed and the bilateral issue with Italy thus cleared (Geddes & Taylor, 2016, 936; Bučar & Udovič, 2023, 393).

For Croatia, the path to EU accession was considerably rockier in that it was heavily affected by a violent state-building process: the bitter fighting and bloodshed on its own territory 1991–1995 and also by its involvement in the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina 1992–1995. Croatia only enjoyed full sovereignty over its entire territory since 1998 when the country's state-building process can be regarded as completed with the full reintegration of the territories in Eastern Slavonia (Koska & Matan, 2017, 131, 134). Additional delay in the EU accession process of Croatia was caused by the country's sovereigntist phase under Tuđman who had become a staunch opponent to multi-ethnic political entities, be it Yugoslavia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, or the EU, not least on the grounds that independence from Yugoslavia was a hard-won achievement against a millennium-long history of being part of multinational entities, which had limited or denied national sovereignty (Dolenec, 2013, 131–146; Jović, 2023, 123–124, 139).

Only after the democratic turn in 2000 and the subsequent reform governments of Račan and Sanader[10] did the country embrace the European path. Full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) proved a hard choice between national-identity and legitimacy considerations on the one hand, and the commitment to fulfil the political EU conditionality items for membership on the other (cf. Freyburg & Richter, 2010, 273–275). Accession negotiations with the EU would only start in late 2005 when Croatia was ready to extradite General Ante Gotovina to the ICTY.[11] At that time, Slovenia had already become an EU Member.

10 As of the 2003 Sanader government, representatives of the minorities were part of all Croatian governments until very recently. The Constitutional Law on Rights of National Minorities had been adopted in 2002 by the Račan government *inter alia* extending the number of seats in the national parliament for minorities representatives; cf. Koska & Matan (2017, 134). The established practice of including them in the government partly came to an end with the latest HDZ/DP government taking office in May 2024 when the Serbian minority party was excluded at the request of DP; cf. Euronews (2024).

11 Somewhat face-saving (from the perspective of the Croatian government) was the fact that Gotovina was arrested in Spain thus avoiding a humiliating extradition from Croatia.

Three years later, one particular bilateral issue with Slovenia affected the Croatian accession negotiations very seriously: the dispute about the common state border. Historically, it is a by-product of the dissolution of Yugoslavia where the borders of the SFRY Republics became international borders at the moment of independence.[12] In late 2008, Slovenia decided to take advantage of its veto power as a Member State in calling for a resolution of the border dispute with Croatia. Zagreb perceived this as an act of blackmailing by its northern neighbour, and there is little doubt that the dispute became a loaded issue for both the Croatian accession talks and the bilateral relations. There had been various bilateral attempts to resolve the border dispute between 1993 and 2007,[13] including an initialled agreement from 2002 (known as Drnovšek-Račan or Račan-Drnovšek referencing the then two prime ministers), the ratification of which failed in Croatia after it had been ratified in Slovenia.[14]

In the course of 2009, the European Commission took on a mediating role after a failed attempt by the French EU Council Presidency at the end of 2008 to defuse the situation. Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn and his team came up with the idea of a judicial third-party resolution with a tailor-made mandate: arbitration. Subsequently, the Commission drafted an arbitration agreement (cf. e.g. Cataldi, 2013) and discussed it with the parties. Eventually, with the help of the Swedish EU Council Presidency, Slovenia and Croatia signed the arbitration agreement in November 2009[15] and the blockade of the Croatian accession negotiations was lifted. The arbitration procedure imploded, however, in 2015 (Croatia had joined the EU on 1 July 2013) due to unlawful contacts between the Slovenian government and the tribunal member appointed by Slovenia.[16] In response to this, the Croatian government unilaterally withdrew (based politically on an unanimous vote in the Croatian parliament) from the arbitration procedure.[17] The Tribunal on its part procedurally remedied the violation of the arbitration agreement (by replacing the two party-appointed tribunal members) and handed down a binding award under international law in 2017, which Croatia does not recognize, however.

12 Some sections of the land border between Croatia and Slovenia (and elsewhere between successor states of Yugoslavia) became disputed due to overlapping cadastral records. It must be noted that the borders between the Yugoslav Republics have never been established by any federal or other legal act. The maritime boundary had to be delimited *de novo*, as the SFRY territorial sea had been integrated waters that were not separated by riparian Republics.

13 At a meeting in Bled in August 2007, the two prime ministers Sanader and Janša agreed to submit the dispute to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). However, the negotiations on the mandate for the Court stalled in the bilateral expert group in the following year.

14 For a detailed account, cf. Arnaut (2002), Sancin (2010), Dolenec (2013, 150–151), Bickl (2021, 133–146).

15 The political will and constructive attitude of the two prime ministers Jadranka Kosor and Borut Pahor and their advisors in the second half of 2009 was a key element in this silent-diplomacy operation.

16 The Tribunal consisted of three members jointly nominated by the parties and one party-appointed arbitrator each.

17 Legally, Croatia invoked a breach of the Vienna Convention of the Law of the Treaties (VCLT) (cf. Partial Award 2016, e.g. §85). The arbitration tribunal, however, having the inherent competence to decide on all procedural matters found no reason for the arbitration procedure not to continue.

Fig. 1: Prime ministers Jadranka Kosor and Borut Pahor in 2010. Photo by Stanko Gruden, STA (Wikimedia Commons).

The Slovenian government has subsequently attempted to enforce the arbitration award, but to no avail. It proved impossible to implement the award by means of EU law through an infringement procedure against Croatia before the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) in 2018.[18] In a second attempt, Slovenia had supported the case of Slovenian fishers who, in 2022, had lodged an application before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) for being fined by the Croatian police for fishing in waters that under the arbitration award are under the territorial sovereignty of Slovenia.[19] With the Croatian government welcoming the ECtHR decision and striving for a bilateral agreement on the border independent of the 2017 arbitration award (Croatian Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, 2024), and the Slovenian government insisting on the implementation of the very arbitration award (Slovenian Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs, 2024), the dispute has remained in a legal-political limbo for the time being.

18 The CJEU declared the case inadmissible in 2020. Some scholars, however, argue that the Court has not sufficiently considered the link to the arbitration procedure in the EU Accession Treaty of Croatia (cf. e.g. McGarry, 2020). The European Commission (EC) had stayed neutral after Slovenia had filed the infringement procedure in March 2018 irrespective of the previous position of the EC legal service in July 2017 that the bilateral border dispute had a direct effect on EU law, and therefore the Union had jurisdiction in respect of this matter (European Commission, 2017).

19 The applications were declared inadmissible in May 2024. Croatian fishers had, in the same vein, filed applications for being fined by Slovenian authorities, cf. STA (2023).

Fig. 2: The Slovenia-Croatia land border at the Brezovec - del/ Murišće hamlet according to the arbitration award (Permanent Court of Arbitration, Final Award, 29 June 2017, 135).

CONFLICT AND COOPERATION: INFRASTRUCTURE, FOREIGN-CURRENCY DEPOSITS, ENERGY POLICY

The relevance of the border dispute, however, a frozen conflict politically, has perhaps become less pressing. Croatia joined the Schengen Area (with free movement across whatever border-crossing with Slovenia) and the Euro in 2023 and has thus reached the innermost level of European integration. With regard to

the bilateral relations between Ljubljana and Zagreb in the area of infrastructure projects, there have been no discussions on major joint infrastructure projects recently. Repair work on several bridges in cross-border areas, for instance, cannot go ahead because their cross-border status may be disputed, with no agreement on whether decisions concerning the repairs should be made on a case-by-case basis or adopted as a package. There is an agreement, however, on a new bridge at the Kaštel-Dragonja border crossing, the most frequented one in Istria alongside Jelšane-Rupa further east, where the two sides have shared the repair and construction costs fifty-fifty and completed the works (N1, 2021; author's field notes July 2024). It is worth noting that the border on this part of the Dragonja River has not been in dispute.[20] With regard to both countries' northern Adriatic ports, Koper and Rijeka, cooperation has been limited and competition has been the norm (Barić et al., 2021, 36).

Alongside border disputes, there is another legacy from the dissolution of Yugoslavia: The issue of foreign-currency deposits and the compensation for the illegal use of them by the SFRY to cover its demand for foreign-currency reserves. The deposits were mainly held by citizens working abroad. At the time, these foreign-currency accounts were predominantly deposited with Ljubljanska Banka (LB), the country's largest commercial bank, and its subsidiaries in other Republics of the SFRY. In terms of bilateral disputes with Slovenia from the lens of Croatia, the foreign currency deposits issue was perceived as a major root-cause for bilateral tensions with Slovenia in the first two decades after independence.

It was not before 2014, however, when the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) handed down a landmark judgement in the most prominent case relating to LB and the foreign-currency deposits: In *Ališić et al. v. Slovenia*, the country was ordered to unilaterally cover all claims against LB. The Slovenian government subsequently set up a compensation scheme worth 385 million Euro (cf. Hojnik, 2016). In a previous case (*Kovačić et al. v. Slovenia*) brought before the ECtHR in 2006, the Court found in 2008 that the matter of compensation for so many thousands of individuals be solved by agreement between the successor States.

In two separate judgements relating to Ljubljanska Banka in 2015 and 2020, the ECHtR declared two cases in which Slovenia sought to recover the debt of Croatian companies towards LB inadmissible (cf. Stavridi, 2021). This created a situation in which Slovenia was held liable for the repayment of foreign-currency deposits in LB subsidiaries on the territory of the former Yugoslav Republics while not being able to enforce LB's own debt claims against Croatian and other companies.

20 In the strip of land between the Dragonja-Kaštel border-crossing and the Plovanija-Sečovlje one further to the west, there are three settlements (Škrilje/Škrile, Bužin/Bužini, and Škudelin/Škodelin) on the left bank of the Dragonja historically claimed by Slovenia. The 2017 arbitration award stipulates the Dragonja River as the border.

In the area of energy policy, close cooperation in the operation of the Krško nuclear power plant has been the default mode since the block went into service in 1983.[21] The contract with the US provider Westinghouse dates back to 1974.[22] The plant's electricity production has been shared in equal parts (Croatian Ministry of the Economy and Sustainable Development, 2023; Senior Croatian Civil Servant 2023). Currently, the Krško plant covers 40% of Slovenia's and 17% of Croatia's energy demand (Bičak, 2023).[23] Slovenia has undertaken to phase out coal by 2033 and the current economic situation of the Šoštanj lignite power station with its record losses in operational electricity production has become untenable, so the government will have to step in to avert bankruptcy (STA, 2024). Whatever the consequences for the phase-out of coal in Slovenia or the reliance on energy imports, Slovenia has started preparations for a second reactor (JEK2) at Krško (Slovenian Ministry of the Environment, Climate, and Energy, 2023). Croatia's prime minister announced as early as in April 2022 that Croatia wishes to continue its participation also through the construction and use of the second reactor. This would help meet the country's CO2 reduction targets (Radosević, 2022). Currently, the JEK 2 project is being developed by GEN Energija. According to the Slovenian government, the intention is to continue the cooperation with Croatia and to officially do so at the time of the investment decision.

The future Krško reactor project is currently managed by a dedicated State Secretary at the prime minister's office. The vision is that JEK2 is a promising approach also for the wider region of Southeast Europe in the context of achieving the net-zero goal of full decarbonization of electricity production by combining renewable energy sources with nuclear power (Levičar, 2023). Critics of nuclear power contend that the costs of producing electricity from nuclear will considerably exceed the costs of a large-scale installation of solar and wind power (Kus, 2023)[24] the percentage of which currently is still very low. Slovenia's largest share of renewables to date is from hydropower covering around one third of the country's electricity production (SURS, 2024).[25]

21 However, a temporary cut-off of electricity supply to Croatia on the part of Slovenia between July 2002 and April 2003 was subject to an investor-state arbitration procedure on the financial compensation. The award was handed down in December 2015, ordering Slovenia to cover the financial damage, cf. International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (2015).

22 The contract was signed by the then parent companies Savske Elektrarne Ljubljana and Elektroprivreda Zagreb (International Atomic Energy Agency, 8 November 1974); cf. also next footnote. The contract was backed up by a USD 600 million loan from the US government in 1975 (Pirjevec, 2018, 412).

23 The Krško power plant is owned and operated by Nuklearna Elektrarna Krško (NEK), which is jointly owned by Croatia's Hrvatska Elektroprivreda (HEP Group) and Slovenia's GEN Energija.

24 The production of one megawatt-hour (MWh) from JEK2 would, according to Kus, amount to €170, compared to €55 for electricity generated with large wind farms and solar power plants.

25 In July 2024, the electricity production in Slovenia had the following allocation by source: nuclear 36.1%, hydro 32.9%, coal 18.6%, and solar and wind 12.4% (SURS, 2024). It should be noted however, that during wintertime the share of solar is considerably lower whilst the share of coal and nuclear tends to be higher.

ON EQUAL FOOTING: CAN PARITY OF STATUS HELP SOFTEN TENSIONS?

Notwithstanding the different EU trajectories Slovenia and Croatia have experienced on their way to Brussels (a rather smooth accession here, and a rockier road with a heavy item of transitional justice and a forced resolution attempt for the bilateral border dispute there; more above under the second heading), both countries now enjoy parity of status. At the beginning of 2023, Croatia joined both the Schengen Area and the Euro and is now on equal footing with Slovenia at the same and innermost layer of EU integration.

Whereas the accession to the Euro can be seen as a reward of Croatia's sustainability of its public finances and its previous central bank's ability to defend the Kuna's close alignment with the Euro in the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM II), the accession to Schengen has a strong bearing on the bilateral relations with Slovenia. It can be seen as a win-win situation in several respects: First, the positive impact, albeit largely anticipated, on the bilateral economy. According to the Slovenian Public Agency for Entrepreneurship, Internationalisation, Foreign Investments, and Technology, bilateral trade almost doubled between 2017 and 2022 (SPIRIT, 2023). Second, the end of the controls on what used to be Schengen border-crossings between both countries can also be considered to have become a positive and dampening side-effect on the stretching out of bilateral tensions due to the border dispute: occasionally during tourist seasons, the Slovenian police would replace random checks by (non-mandatory) regular checks for road traffic into Croatia thus causing considerable delays for travellers to holiday destinations with the southern neighbour. By definition, northbound traffic from Croatia into Slovenia now on intra-Schengen crossings is no longer a structural bottleneck.[26] And third, very much in line with the positive effects on travel and tourism, the expiry of the Schengen border between the two countries has been positive for cross-border family relations and for many Slovenes who own property in Croatia.

Whilst it is true that some anxieties stemming from previous disputes, not least related to unequal status, seem to indeed have faded away to some degree, one can acknowledge a more general relaxation of relations at the diplomatic level. This concerns personal relations more recently, both in the technical and the political domain. Allowance must be made for the fact that bilateral conflicts matter less once both countries have joined the EU (Senior Croatian Civil Servant, 2023). Contacts between diplomats from both sides are now described as more comfortable due to Croatia and Slovenia being on an equal footing in terms of EU integration and an increasingly self-confident Croatia (Senior Slovenian Civil Servant A, 2023; Jović, 2023, 138). In some cases, personal relations at the

26 It must be noted, however, that Schengen controls for vehicles entering Slovenia northbound from Croatia were mandatory on a Schengen border, so all traffic from Croatia into Slovenia had to undergo standard checks for each and every vehicle.

political level have become almost amicable, also across party-political affiliations, as is currently the case with foreign ministers Tanja Fajon and Gordan Grlić Radman (Jović, 2023; Senior Slovenian Civil Servant B, 2023).

The more recent geopolitical situation has been of great importance, too. What can boost the internal cohesion of an international organisation such as the EU are external security threats. No matter whether we look at Russia, the Middle East, or China: In the face of a common external threat, internal bilateral conflicts tend to lose relevance in a European context (cf. Schimmelfennig, 2023, 190).[27] The same holds for extreme weather events and disaster relief, for instance. In the Slovenian-Croatian context, we have seen excellent neighbourly relations during the wildfires in the summer of 2022, also with increased multinational regional cooperation (European Commission, 2022), and the heavy floods after several days of torrential rain in August 2023 saw both sides coming together to help one another (Hina, 2023b).

ALL EYES ON THE WESTERN BALKANS: EVERYONE EMBRACING THE NEIGHBOURHOOD?

Croatia and Slovenia have a distinctive expertise with and experience on the Western Balkans region – as neighbours and former members of Yugoslavia in its different settings (1918–1991). With regard to enlargement, both Ljubljana and Zagreb share a pro-enlargement policy line, e.g. as members of the Friends of the Western Balkans Group together with Austria, Greece, Italy, Czechia, and Slovakia (Brzozowski, 2023). When it comes to pursuing national interests in the region, the picture is more nuanced, however. Slovenia has an interest in securing market access for its export-oriented companies, sees itself as a gateway to the region enjoying very good economic and political relations with all Western Balkans countries, and has virtually no unresolved issues with any countries in the region (except for the territorial one with Croatia). Nonetheless, Slovenia's achievement as the host of the 2021 Western Balkans Summit in Brdo pri Kranju, for example, remained limited as the EU Member States would not commit to any timeline for enlargement in the Western Balkans, a fact that still holds at the time of writing. In Croatia, where the economy is also closely integrated in the region, issues of national identity traditionally have a strong bearing, particularly concerning Bosnia-Herzegovina and its Croat community, and concerning Serbia e.g. with regard to missing persons after the 1991–1995 war.[28] In Croatia, EU membership has largely been framed in terms of de-Balkanisation (and de-Yugoslavisation previously) while recognizing that, as an EU member, Croatia actually enjoys more, not less influence on foreign

27 Research on e.g. domestic polarization in the US in the face of external threats seems to provide for more nuanced conclusions, cf. Myrick (2021).

28 For other open bilateral issues in the area cf. e.g. Petrović & Wilson (2021); Bickl (2023).

policy – which is where Europeanisation goes hand in hand with sovereigntism (cf. Jović, 2023, 139).

There is one fundamental point that needs to be taken into account with EU enlargement: seen as a *process*, it offers ample opportunity to every Member State to exert maximum influence by leveraging its EU membership when dealing with Candidate Countries – as demonstrated by the Slovenia-Croatia case. What boded particularly ill more recently was Bulgaria's last-minute blockade of North Macedonia when issues of history, culture, and identity were favoured above the European interest substantially delaying the start of EU accession negotiations (cf. Kamberi, 2023). It is therefore not difficult to agree with Basheska (2022, 226) that 'allowing Member States to redefine enlargement criteria in line with their domestic preferences and politics does not only undermine the rule of law as a fundamental part of [EU accession], but also discredits the entire enlargement process'.

CONCLUSION: SLOVENIA'S EU MEMBERSHIP AND THE LESSONS FOR EU ENLARGEMENT

In a geopolitical context where all eyes are on the EU accession process of Ukraine after the opening of accession negotiations in December 2023, the Western Balkans Candidate Countries are finding themselves yet again in a state of unpredictability and discouragement as for their own accession process. In the face of the non-existence of a timeline for merits-based EU accession, the laborious and often painful reform process will be hard to maintain.

Nevertheless, what then can we learn from Slovenia and Croatia's EU membership and its influence on their bilateral relations? Joint EU membership is undoubtedly a positive undertaking. Being 'in it' together can help decrease the salience of bilateral disputes, particularly when both countries enjoy the same level of EU integration. Second, the Slovenia-Croatia case is a stark reminder that the power imbalance between a Member State and a Candidate Country can be (ab)used to resolve a bilateral dispute in favour of the Member State through coercion and at the expense of sustainability. This can create both alienation and the risk of importing a frozen conflict. Third, although it would seem reasonable not to scrap the current merits-based approach to EU enlargement – also not with regard to Ukraine – it might make sense to avoid a scenario where countries joining one by one can make full use of their leverage of membership as a powerful tool to impose solutions to bilateral issues. It may rather be worth exploring whether it would make more sense to think about having some countries join in groups (which has happened in the past, albeit in much less bilaterally loaded settings), which would make these issues less toxic, giving silent diplomacy the opportunity to try to seek a solution ahead of accession within a robust dispute resolution framework (Bickl, 2021, 297–301).

There can be little doubt that the situation that EU newcomers are facing today is substantially different from the one in 2004 or 2013. Given the geopolitical focus on Ukraine (and Georgia and Moldova) and the de facto Western Balkans enlargement fatigue (which has not disappeared in some capitals despite the official rhetoric to the contrary), the sobering assessment is that the economic and political interests of EU Member States in the region are divergent (cf. Bartlett, 2023, 49–51). Some even argue that 'integration without membership' is becoming a reality (Radić Milosavljević & Petrović, 2024). At any rate, the EU enlargement process bears particular responsibility for improving rather than straining bilateral relations.

EVROPSKO *BRATSTVO I JEDINSTVO*? BILATERALNI ODNOSI SLOVENIJE S HRVAŠKO SKOZI PRIZMO ČLANSTVA V EU

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POVZETEK

Članek obravnava vpliv članstva v EU na dvostranske odnose med Slovenijo in Hrvaško. Analiza se osredotoča tako na pristopni proces k EU kot na sodobna politična vprašanja sporov in sodelovanja. Zgodovinsko gledano je vstop Slovenije v EU potekal precej nemoteno, medtem ko je bila hrvaška pot v Bruselj obremenjena z vprašanjem tranzicijske pravičnosti in, ne nazadnje, z dvostranskim mejnim sporom s Slovenijo. Med političnimi konfliktnimi področji izstopata arbitražni postopek o mejnem sporu in devizne vloge v nekdanji Ljubljanski banki. Kar zadeva sodelovanje, je izrazit primer energetska politika in skupno delovanje jedrske elektrarne Krško. Poleg bilateralnih vprašanj je skupno članstvo obeh držav v EU poskrbelo za splošno sprostitev odnosov na politični ravni. Izkušnje, pridobljene pri širitvi EU na Zahodnem Balkanu v zvezi z reševanjem dvostranskih sporov, vključujejo potrebo po proaktivnem obravnavanju vprašanj in trdni mreži za reševanje sporov v zvezi s tem.

Ključne besede: Slovenija, Hrvaška, dvostranski odnosi, odprta vprašanja, sodelovanje, Evropska unija

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Received: 2024-01-15 DOI 10.19233/AH.2024.18

THE LAST DECADES OF THE STATE OF DUKLJA (DIOCLIA)

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ABSTRACT

The last two rulers of the State of Duklja were knez (Prince) Radoslav and his son, veliki knez (Grand Prince) Mihailo, both belonging to the Vojislavljević dynasty. The reign of Prince Radoslav began around 1142, while the reign of Grand Prince Mihailo concluded no later than 1186. During this period, the state of Duklja struggled for its survival. Its primary adversary was Raška, while Byzantium served as its principal ally. Little is known about these relations, as well as the personalities and events from this period, owing to the scarcity of sources and historians' limited interest in this topic. This paper examines the most significant events of the final period of the State of Duklja based on the available sources and literature.

Keywords: Duklja, Prince Radoslav, Grand Prince Mihailo, Raška, Byzantium

GLI ULTIMI DECENNI DELLO STATO DI DOCLEA

SINTESI

Gli ultimi due sovrani dello Stato di Doclea furono il principe Radoslav e suo figlio il granduca Mihailo, entrambi della dinastia dei Vojislavljević. Il regno del principe Radoslav ebbe inizio intorno al 1142, mentre quello del granduca Mihailo si concluse entro il 1186. Durante questo periodo, lo Stato di Doclea lottò strenuamente per la sopravvivenza, trovandosi ad affrontare il Regno di Rascia come principale avversario, ma potendo contare sull'appoggio dell'Impero Bizantino. A causa della limitata disponibilità di fonti e dell'interesse limitato degli storici per questo argomento, le informazioni sui rapporti, sulle personalità e sugli eventi di questo periodo sono scarse. Questo articolo si basa sulle fonti disponibili e sulla letteratura esistente per analizzare gli eventi più significativi degli ultimi anni dello Stato di Doclea.

Parole chiave: Doclea, principe Radoslav, granduca Mihailo, Rascia, Bisanzio

INTRODUCTION

The history of the State of Duklja (Dioclia) during the reign of the last Vojislavljevićs, *knez* (lat. *knesius,* Prince) Radoslav and *veliki knez* (Grand Prince) Mihailo, remains poorly understood due to the scarcity of sources. This refers to the period from 1151, when Prince Radoslav was last mentioned, to 1189, when *kneginja* (Princess) Desislava, the wife of Grand Prince Mihailo, was last mentioned.

The Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja, as the primary, but controversial, domestic source for the history of the state, concludes with a concise description of events during the reign of "Prince Radoslav and his brothers, Jovan and Vladimir" (*Radaslavi knesii et fratribus, Ioannis et Bladimiri*) (Pop Dukljanin, 2016, 163). Most compilers of this work believe that the Chronicle was created between 1149 and 1215 and that it was written or compiled from several texts from different epochs in Bar by an anonymous Benedictine, a member of the Duklja-Bar Archdiocese (Radoman, 2016, 165–166). The original Chronicle was most likely written in the Slavic script (Glagolitic or Cyrillic) and translated into Latin in the third quarter of the twelfth century (Radoman, 2008, 104). The first reliable data on the use of the Chronicle dates from the middle of the fourteenth century (Kowalski, 2021, 30). Historian Tibor Živković proposed an unusual thesis that the Chronicle was commissioned by the Croatian Ban Pavle Šubić in order to historically legitimize his plan to conquer Bosnia, Travunia, Zahumlje, Zeta, and Raška. Thus, at Šubić's order, the Chronicle was written by the Abbot of Split and then by the alleged Archbishop of Bar, Rudger, originally Czech, between 1295 and 1298 in Split, and supplemented in Bar between 1299 and 1301 (Živković, 2009, 363). Although he acknowledged this work of Živković, historian Wawrzyniec Kowalski believes that there are dubious assumptions and unproven theses in Živković's theory (Kowalski, 2021, 21, 39). Literary historian Aleksandar Radoman completely rejected Živković's thesis. He stated that Živković expressed unsubstantiated views and succumbed to national romanticism (Radoman, 2013, 106–107, 112–113). Radoman pointed out that Živković incorrectly stated that Rudger was the Archbishop of Bar between 1298 and 1301 because at that time the Archbishop of Bar was Martin (Radoman, 2013, 118). On the other hand, Radoman considers that the Chronicle was created precisely at the order of Prince Radoslav, whose reign is discussed in the last chapter of the Chronicle (Radoman, 2016, 174–175). The author of the Chronicle clearly favors Prince Radoslav and his ancestors, yet there is no reliable evidence to suggest that Prince Radoslav commissioned this work.

However, there is no doubt that the last chapters of the Chronicle pertain to the history of Duklja, and, as noted by historian Franjo Rački, they serve as a valuable supplement to the limited Latin and Byzantine sources on Duklja (Kowalski, 2021, 34, 42). That last part of the Chronicle was written as the Duklja Chronicle or the Zeta Chronicle (Živković, 2009, 26). This part contains many details that

were presumably copied from the lost chronicle or history that dealt with Duklja from Prince Stefan Vojislav to Prince Radoslav (Živković, 2009, 271). Although the entire Chronicle was based on earlier texts that did not survive, surely the last chapter of the Chronicle is the closest in time to the anonymous priest of Duklja (Kowalski, 2021, 16). The credibility of the last chapter of the Chronicle is significantly higher than that of other parts of the Chronicle. The historian Jovan Kovačević noted that from Chapter 36, where the Chronicle of Duklja starts, the "historical value of the account" changes and that from this chapter, the Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja "gains credibility as a source" (Bešić et al., 1967, 382). Historians have also pointed to other undeniable values of the Chronicle. Franjo Rački stated that the Chronicle "can be well used for the geography of Upper Dalmatia," Stojan Novaković that its "geographical account is always consistent and faithful," Ferdo Šišić that "the Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja is, first and foremost, a very important and reliable source for the geography of the eleventh and twelfth centuries," and Nikola Radojčić that Dukljanin's geographical information is "more reliable, with some extraordinarily precise details" (Mijušković, 1988, 89-90). Nikola Radojčić also emphasized the "high scientific value of Dukljanin's geographical information" and that the Priest of Duklja had "excellent geographical knowledge and a highly developed sense for differentiating among different territories" (Radojčić, 1927, 22; 1933, 362). This allows events from the reign of Prince Radoslav to be discussed with a greater degree of reliability, although one must keep in mind the obvious ideological ambition of the priest of Duklja (Kowalski, 2021, 42).

According to the Priest of Duklja, Prince Radoslav, after the death of his father King Gradinja (*Gradihna*), went to the Byzantine emperor Manuel I Komnenos (1143–80) who "gave him to rule and govern the entire land, just as his father had done" (*deditque ei totam terram dominandam eamque regendam, sicut teniut pater eius*) (Pop Dukljanin, 2016, 163, 220). This formulation suggests that Duklja was already in a vassal relationship with Byzantium, a notion supported by the fact that King Gradinja ascended to the throne around 1131 after a conflict with King George (*Đorđe*), aided significantly by Byzantium. The Byzantine strategos from Durrës captured the deposed King George and took him to Constantinople, where he eventually died (Andrijašević, 2022, 69). It appears that King Gradinja received support from Byzantium in exchange for entering into vassalage (Pop Dukljanin, 1928, 96). In addition, due to internal conflicts, Duklja weakened toward the end of King Gradinja's reign. The priest of Duklja mentions that Gradinja, during his rule, had to "bear many ambushes and unjust persecutions from wicked people, but God delivered him from all evil" (*diebus regni sui multas insidias et persecutiones iniuste a malignis hominibus, sed ex onjnibus eripuit eum deus*) (Pop Dukljanin, 1928, 102, 374).

The precise period of Prince Radoslav and his brothers' reign is unknown, but it is certain that he ruled after 1142 and before 1151 (Borozan, 2015, 102). The timing and place of Radoslav's visit to Emperor Manuel I is also uncertain.

According to one account, he was in Constantinople immediately following Manuel I's ascension to the throne (Bešić et al., 1967, 402). In Constantinople, he purportedly declared his intention to be a faithful vassal to Byzantium, and the emperor confirmed his rule in Zeta and Travunia, territories previously governed by his father, King Gradinja (Babić & Grafenauer, 1953, 261). He personally received power from the Emperor, and upon returning from Constantinople, he ruled alongside his brothers Jovan and Vladimir. This variant is based on the assertion from the Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja: "After this, Prince Radoslav went to Emperor Manuel and was kindly received by him … Later, Prince Radoslav, upon returning from the emperor, began to rule and dominate the land with his brothers" (Pop Dukljanin, 2016, 163, 220).[1] However, in the Chronicle, it is not stated where Emperor Manuel received Radoslav. According to the second variant, as conveyed by historian Vladimir Ćorović, Radoslav was in the military camp of Emperor Manuel when he led the campaign against Raška in 1149 and subsequently became his vassal (Ćorović, 1940, 159). However, Ćorović did not specify the source of this information, so it is not possible to reliably determine where the meeting between Prince Radoslav and Emperor Manuel took place. Due to the vassal relationship and restricted authority, Radoslav was granted only the title of Prince.

THE STRUGGLE OF PRINCE RADOSLAV FOR THE PRESERVATION OF DUKLJA

Prince Radoslav, aside from entering into Byzantine vassalage, inherited internal adversaries from his father, as the Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja mentions that "some villains, who were old enemies" (*quidam maligni, qui antiqui inimici fuerunt*), rose up against Radoslav (Pop Dukljanin, 2016, 163, 221). They brought Desa, the youngest son of Raška *župan* (Prefect) Uroš I, and entrusted him with Zeta and Trebinje—Travunia (Pop Dukljanin, 1928, 102). It appears that they were direct administrators in Travunia and Zeta, indicating that Desa did not acquire these regions through a war campaign. Instead, the nobility of Travunia and Zeta, opposing Radoslav, handed over these territories to Desa (Živković, 2006a, 142).

According to one account, Desa seized Zahumlje in 1130–1 during King Gradinja's reign (Mišić, 1996, 47). There is a possibility that Duklja lost Zahumlje even before the reign of King Gradinja (Džino, 2023, 174–175). Zahumlje nobles were nominal vassals of the rulers of Duklja during that period, but this relationship was variable and significantly fluctuated after Duklja began to weaken from the beginning of the twelfth century (Džino, 2023, 177).

1 *Post haec Radaslavus knesius perrexit ad imperatorem Hemanuelem et benigne ab eo susceptus est … Postea knesius Radaslavus, veniens ab imperatore, caepit tenere et dominare terram cum fratibus suis* (Pop Dukljanin, 2016, 163, 220).

Desa subsequently took control of Travunia and Zeta around 1144–5 (Živković, 2006b, 458). According to the second account, Desa initially gained control of Zahumlje, which had previously been ruled by Radoslav's brother, Vladimir (Živković, 2006a, 146). At the invitation of a dissatisfied rebellious nobleman, who opposed Radoslav's acceptance of vassalage towards Emperor Manuel I in 1149, Desa assumed control of Travunia and Zeta in 1150 (Ćorović, 1940, 162). After Desa gained control of Zahumlje, Travunia, and Zeta, Prince Radoslav and his brothers remained in the coastal region from Kotor to Shköder (Pop Dukljanin, 1928, 102). Thus, Desa controlled the northern and western parts of the state of Duklja, while Radoslav managed to retain its eastern and southern regions, encompassing areas around the Morača River, Lake Skadar, and the coastal stretch from Kotor to Shköder. According to the Priest of Duklja, Prince Radoslav and his brothers in this war fought "against Uroš's son [Desa] and other enemies, aiming to reclaim the rebellious territory and staunchly defend the one under their rule" (*contra filium Urossi* [*Desa*] *et contra caeteros inimicos, quatenus terram, quae eis rebellaverat, valerent acquirere et eam quam dominabant viriliter defendere*) (Pop Dukljanin, 2016, 163, 221). After these statement, The Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja concludes with the simple Latin phrase "Etc." (and so on) indicating the continuation of this war.

Historian Mavro Orbini, who published the Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja in Italian in 1601 as part of his book "Il Regno de gli Slavi", provided more information on this. Orbini had at least three copies of this Chronicle at his disposal (Živković, 2009, 42). Orbini stated that during the war against Desa, Prince Radoslav sought assistance from Dubrovnik to acquire weapons from Italy (Orbini, 1999, 309). However, this endeavour did not aid him, and Desa went on to rule from Hum to Kotor and Upper Zeta for the remainder of his life, declaring himself a *ban* or a duke. Orbini incorrectly asserts that Hum extended to Kotor and that, at that time, there was an Upper Zeta. Also, Desa was neither a *ban* nor a duke. The likelihood of Radoslav seeking help from Dubrovnik is supported by the fact that Dubrovnik was then under Byzantine rule, and Radoslav himself was a Byzantine vassal.

Information about the subsequent course of the war between Radoslav and Desa is scarce. In a charter from 1151, which historian Ferdo Šišić, but also contemporary authors, claims to be authentic, Desa titled himself as "the Prince of Duklja, Travunia and Zahumlje" (*Dioclie, Stobolie, Tacholmie dux*) (Pop Dukljanin, 1928, 201, 242–243; Džino 2023, 177). This would imply that Desa successfully defeated Radoslav and took control of the entire Duklja. However, Desa is not mentioned in Duklja after 1151. Historian Ivan Marković asserts that Byzantium became involved in the war that same year, expelled Desa from Duklja, and Radoslav "once again ruled over his country", continuing his rule as "a friend and vassal of Byzantium" (Marković, 2014, 89). Marković stated that "from that moment Duklja (had) peace until Stjepan Nemanja" (Marković, 2014, 89). Marković did not specify the basis for this conclusion, but Tibor

Živković also emphasizes that Desa did not rule Duklja after 1153 at the latest (Živković, 2009, 307). Subsequent events confirm this.

The war between Raška and Duklja held broader significance as Duklja was a vassal and ward of Byzantium, while Raška formed an anti-Byzantine coalition with Hungary and the Normans. The successor of Raška Prefect Uroš I was his son Uroš II, who, upon ascending to the throne in 1145, pursued an anti-Byzantine policy with support for Hungary. This stance led to Emperor Manuel I launching a campaign against Raška in 1149, during which he took control over the capital Ras, the fortress Galič, and took many prisoners, but he failed to capture the Prefect (Stephenson, 2008, 683). The Byzantine offensive persisted in 1150, resulting in Uroš II's defeat in the crucial battle on the Tara River near Valjevo. Subsequently, he had to become a Byzantine vassal (Srevojević et al., 1981, 203–204). The triumph of Byzantium weakened Uroš II's influence in Raška, a situation exploited by his brother Desa to overthrow him and assume control as the Prefect of Raška around 1153 or 1154 (Džino, 2023, 178). Ban Borić of Bosnia capitalized on Desa's departure to Raška and seized Travunia in 1153 (Živković, 2008, 57). In the same or the subsequent year, Ban Borić took control of Zahumlje (Živković, 2006a, 147; Džino, 2023, 200–201). Ban Borić was a Hungarian vassal, as Bosnia had come under Hungarian control before 1138 (Ćirković, 1964, 42). As a result, Zahumlje and Travunia, once part of the State of Duklja, came under the control of Bosnia, and thereby fell under the supreme authority of Hungary.

DUKLJA AND GRAND PRINCE MIHAILO WITHIN THE BYZANTINE ORDER IN THE BALKANS

After 1151, Prince Radoslav is not mentioned in the sources. The end of his reign, as well as the circumstances surrounding it, remains unknown. Historian Dane Gruber, citing Mavro Orbini, asserts that Radoslav ruled until 1170, but this claim is considered unproven (Gruber, 2014, 363, n. 2). One present-day author asserts that Radoslav's reign extended until 1162, yet fails to provide a source or evidence to support this claim (Banjević, 2016, 661). Following the death of Prince Radoslav, his son Mihailo assumed power (Borozan, 2015, 105; Andrijašević, 2022, 70). The time and circumstances of Mihailo's ascension to the throne are unknown. Little is known about the history of Duklja during that time, and its position can only be inferred indirectly through the lens of the Byzantine-Hungarian war of 1165–7.

In 1165, during the war against Hungary, Emperor Manuel I gained control of parts of Croatia, Srem, and Bosnia. Later that same year, his commander John Ducas took control of parts of Dalmatia (Ferluga, 1957, 131; Goldstein, 1999, 69; Curta, 2019, 338). According to the account of the Byzantine chronicler John Cinnamus, who referred to Dalmatia in terms of the old Roman province, Byzantium occupied the following cities: Trogir, Šibenik, Split, the people of

Kačić, Klis, Skardin, Ostrovica, Solin, and "others that are in the Dalmatian land—altogether fifty-seven" (Cinnamus, 1652, 270–271; Ostrogorski & Barišić, 1971, 88; Kinnamos, 1976, 187). According to one version of the translation of Cinnamus's work, the "famous city of Dioclea" was also seized, although historiography holds different opinions on this matter (Cinnamus, 1652, 270; Ostrogorski & Barišić, 1971, 88, n. 244; Kinnamos, 1976, 187). However, at this time, Duklja itself had long been an abandoned city, and the name was mentioned only in reference to the state (Ferluga, 1957, 132). Considering that Duklja was a vassal state, it is likely that the Byzantine army entered Duklja at the end of this campaign to assert dominance and reaffirm its vassal status.

This campaign was part of Emperor Manuel I's plan to restore the former Roman Empire (Ostrogorski, 1969, 361–362). This was the last Byzantine military campaign on the eastern Adriatic coast (Goldstein, 1999, 61). Venice, an ally of Manuel in the war against Hungary, provided crucial assistance to Byzantium by deploying a fleet of about 100 ships, contributing to the acquisition of Dalmatia (Stephenson, 2008, 685). Thanks to the help of the Venetians, Byzantium occupied Dalmatia up to Šibenik, while the Venetians controlled Zadar and the northern islands (Komac, 2003, 288). The triumph in the war against Hungary secured Byzantium's dominance in the Balkans. In 1165, Byzantium established a province, known as a ducat, from the areas it had conquered in Dalmatia and Croatia (Živković, 2006b, 460–461). The ducat encompassed the territory from Šibenik to Kotor. Some opinions suggest that Byzantium established two ducats. One was the ducat of Dalmatia and Croatia based in Split, while the other was the ducat of Dalmatia and Duklja (Gruber, 2014, 365). According to this opinion, this constituted the restoration of two Byzantine themes: Lower (Inferior) and Upper (Superior) Dalmatia, which had been established no later than during the reign of Emperor Romanos III Argyros (1028–34) (Ferluga & Ostrogorski, 1966, 169, n. 303). The existence of the Upper Dalmatia theme is evidenced by the fact that around 1040, Duke Stefan Vojislav of Duklja managed to capture the strategos of the Upper Dalmatia theme from Dubrovnik, Katakalon of Klazomenai, and imprisoned him in Ston (Lučić, 1980, 16). Additionally, there are records indicating that Byzantine authority during this period relied on local rulers in Hum, Bosnia, Serbia, and Duklja, who were under the supervision of Byzantine toparchs and strategoi, seated in Zadar, Dubrovnik, and Durrës (Džino, 2023, 171–172). The two Dalmatian ducats have functioned as administrative regions within the distinct theme of Dalmatia since the late ninth century (Barada, 1949, 95). In the Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja, they are identified as White Croatia (Lower Dalmatia) and Red Croatia (Upper Dalmatia) (Pop Dukljanin, 2016, 177). The ducat of Dalmatia and Duklja (Upper Dalmatia) was governed by a *dux* based in Kotor, Bar or Shkodra (Babić & Grafenauer, 1953, 261). The governor of the first ducat was Nicephorus Haluphaus, and of the second Duke Ignatius. However, the Byzantine chronicler John Cinnamus explicitly stated that John Ducas had entrusted the administration of Dalmatia to *dux* Nicephorus Haluphaus (Ostrogorski & Barišić, 1971, 87–88).

Hungary retaliated in 1166. It reclaimed central Dalmatia and southern Croatia, capturing the *dux* Haluphaus. As a result, the center of Byzantine administration shifted to southern Dalmatia, encompassing a portion of Duklja. Thus, the Byzantine ducat of Dalmatia and Duklja, with its center in Dubrovnik, was formed. At that time, Byzantium likely controlled several coastal towns of Duklja (Ferluga, 1957, 137). It must have taken Kotor, because in the charter on the consecration of the Cathedral of St. Tryphon in Kotor in 1166 it is stated that the ceremony was attended by *kir* (Lord) Izanak (Isaac), *dux* (Byzantine governor) of Dalmatia and Duklja (Preradović, 2014, 32). Given that the name of Emperor Manuel I (Emmanuel) was mentioned in this document, it suggests that Kotor was under the supremacy of Byzantium. It is assumed that Byzantine garrisons were present in Bar and Ulcinj at that time (Ferluga, 1957, 138). In July 1167, the Byzantines successfully launched a counteroffensive, defeating Hungary and gaining control of Srem, Bosnia, and parts of Croatia and Dalmatia (Ostrogorski, 1969, 364; Curta, 2019, 339). The ducat of Dalmatia and Croatia, centered in Split, was renewed, and the name Duklja was omitted. This was considered a temporary measure, as Byzantium directly controlled only a small part of Duklja (Ferluga, 1957, 137). Therefore, the ducat of Dalmatia and Duklja was not mentioned after 1167. From 1170 to 1180, there was no mention of the ducats of Dalmatia and Duklja (Ferluga, 1957, 136). An indicator of Byzantine power in Dalmatia was the journey of Archbishop Rainer (1175–80) of Split and the nobles of Split to Constantinople to swear allegiance to Emperor Manuel, who received them warmly and rewarded them (Curta, 2019, 339).

Byzantium established direct rule in Kotor, while Byzantine garrisons were stationed in the coastal towns of Duklja. Duklja was in a firm Byzantine vassalage but retained its state and dynastic uniqueness while expanding territorially. After Emperor Manuel I took over Bosnia, he also claimed Travunia and, probably, Zahumlje, subsequently returning these territories to Duklja. The proof of this is found in the inscription on the tombstone of Trebinje (Travunian), *жупан Грд* (župan, Prefect Grd), which states that Grd lived "during the time of Grand Prince Mihailo" (*Вь дни кнеза велиега Михоила*) (Stojanović, 1923, 1; Borozan, 2015, 105). Grd died around 1180 during the rule of "the last Prince of Duklja and Hum, Mihajlo" (Bešić et al., 1967, 406). The question of rulership in Zahumlje during this period is debatable. In the group of charters known as the "Lokrum forgeries", nobles in Zahumlje are mentioned, including Prince Hranko, Ban Slavogost, and Ban Rastimir. Their names are likely accurately recorded in these disputed charters and probably date from a broad period between the 1040s and 1170s (Džino, 2023, 177). However, there is no reliable evidence to suggest that any of them were rulers in Zahumlje during the 1160s and 1170s. According to historian Siniša Mišić, Zahumlje was purportedly under the control of *veliki župan* (Grand Prefect) Stefan Nemanja's brother *knez* (Prince) Miroslav circa 1166, during the division of Raška into constituent segments by Stefan Nemanja and his brothers—Tihomir, Miroslav, and Stracimir (Mišić,

1996, 48). However, Mišić did not state the source or evidence for this claim, but only that it was "logical". Historian Danijel Džino assumed that Emperor Manuel entrusted Zahumlje to the brother of Stefan Nemanja, Miroslav, or one of the landlords from the "Lokrum forgeries" around 1161–2 (Džino, 2023, 178). However, this thesis is debatable for several reasons. This could not have occurred before 1167 when the Byzantine-Hungarian war ended, after which Byzantium established supreme power in the central and western Balkans and separated Zahumlje from Bosnia and Hungary. As proof that Miroslav was the Prince of Hum-Zahumlje from the beginning of the 1160s, Džino pointed to the record from the Church of St. Peter in Bijelo Polje, where Miroslav is titled Prince of Hum. Džino referred to the claim of another researcher that the last Cyrillic letters "o" and "x" on the church record denote the year 1161 (Marković, 2012, 25). However, the author of this claim also notes that it is merely an unreliable assumption. This is because the church record omits letters indicating thousands and hundreds, lacks the typical date expression, and the author assumes that this was due to space constraints. Additionally, the author suggests that the reverse order of letters and numbers in the record was used (Marković, 2012, 27–30). According to reliable data, this church was built around 1190, and it was probably completed only around 1195 (Ljubinković, 1959, 97; Janković, 1985, 39). Miroslav was certainly Prince of Hum after 1180, but the record from the church of St. Peter in Bijelo Polje is not proof that he ruled Hum-Zaumlja before that year. In the end, it is unusual for the Byzantine emperor to directly grant a region to a secondary member of the ruling family. It seems unlikely that Emperor Manuel I would have bypassed Stefan Nemanja, the supreme ruler of Raška, in order to entrust Zahumlje to his brother Miroslav. Additionally, it should be noted that the rulers of Raška were unreliable Byzantine vassals, and the emperor had no interest in bolstering their power.

Although there is no solid evidence, the most probable conclusion is that Emperor Manuel ceded Zahumlje, as well as Travunia, to Prince Mihailo of Duklja at the end of the 1160s as his trusted vassal. Academician Miloš Blagojević concluded that Mihailo "governed Duklja and Trebinje, undoubtedly with the consent of Emperor Manuel I" (Blagojević, 2011, 11). Historian Jovan Kovačević points out that Mihailo was, probably, also the ruler of Zahumlje (Bešić et al., 1967, 409). Historian Živko Andrijašević also stated that Mihailo's rule in Zahumlje had a basis, considering that Duklja consisted then of a loose alliance of several separate geographical and administrative areas (Andrijašević, 2022, 70). In that alliance, Zahumlje was the most remote and probably the least controlled area by the ruler of Duklja. The title of Mihailo, the last Grand Prince of Duklja, as the ruler in Travunia and Zahumlje serves as evidence that Byzantium took control of those territories from conquered Bosnia after 1167 and, probably, returned them to Duklja. This can also be interpreted as a strategic move by Byzantium to reinforce its most loyal vassal in the western Balkans. The territorial enlargement of Duklja was the reason for

declaring the ruler of Duklja a Grand Prince. If the notion that Prince Radoslav ruled until around 1170 is accepted, then it is possible that he declared himself a Grand Prince, and Mihailo inherited that title. In addition to Grd's tombstone, this title is evidenced by the charter of Princess Desislava from 1189, in which she states that her husband Mihailo is *magnus comes*—a Grand Prince (Vučetić, 1907, 54). This title literally translates to Great Count, but given that Mihailo held the rank of Prince, the accurate translation would be Grand Prince. Despite this, historian Konstantin Jireček referred to Mihailo as "the last minor ruler of Duklja" (Jireček, 1952, 153). This is an unjustified assessment, given the title of Grand Prince and the territorial extent of the state of Duklja. However, this territorial extent was not accompanied by internal unity, making Duklja highly vulnerable to external adversaries.

During this period, Kotor distinguished itself among the towns of Duklja. Although under Byzantine supremacy in 1166, it maintained a high degree of autonomy. This is evidenced by the 1167 contract between Kotor and Omiš, in which neither the emperor nor the provincial governor is mentioned (Ferluga, 1957, 144). It appears that Byzantium ceded Kotor to Grand Prince Mihailo, making it his stronghold. He supposedly resided in Kotor before departing Duklja (Živković, 2006b, 465).

The vassalage towards Byzantium had an impact on the status of the state church, namely the Duklja-Bar Archdiocese. Given that Duklja did not have full independence and depended on Byzantine authorities, Pope Alexander III made a decision at the end of or no later than 1167 to subordinate the Duklja-Bar Archdiocese to the Dubrovnik Archdiocese (Gruber, 2014, 367; Živković, 2009, 58). At that time, Dubrovnik was under the supremacy of Byzantium, and it is conceivable that this occurred with the consent of the Byzantine Emperor and the pope. Manuel I was actively working on the creation of a church union with Rome to restore the "Justinian's and Constantine's world empire" (Ostrogorski, 1969, 362). Dubrovnik served as an example of the symbiosis between the Roman church and Byzantine rule. At that time, the dioceses in Duklja, Travunia, and Zahumlje were subordinated to the Archdiocese of Dubrovnik, establishing Dubrovnik as a "metropolis for all Upper Dalmatia" (Marković, 2014, 106–107). Nevertheless, the Duklja-Bar Church never reconciled with this change. As a result, the bishops of Bar retained the title of Duklja-Bar bishops until 1199 when they successfully reconstructed the Archdiocese of Bar (Ćirković et al., 1970, 15; Živković, 2009, 60). Another viewpoint suggests that the papal bull issued by Pope Clement III in 1089, which recognized the status of the Archdiocese of Duklja-Bar, was obtained based on inaccurate information. Additionally, it is argued that the papal bulls issued by Pope Alexander II in 1067 and Callistus II in 1124 concerning this status are also considered to be forgeries. This interpretation implies that the Archdiocese of Duklja-Bar was not established until 1199 (Zadro, 2011). On the other hand, historian Katarina Mitrović emphasizes that it is incorrect to refer to these papal documents as

bulls, as this term was only used from the mid-thirteenth century, and that the document from January 8, 1089, is, in fact, a solemn papal privilege (privilegium solemne) (Mitrović, 2017, 66). Mitrović adds that this privilege from 1089 is fundamentally an authentic document, but the circumstances of its creation are disputed, as it was issued by (anti)pope Clement III (Wibert) (1084–1100), although the Roman Church today recognizes all documents issued by antipopes (Mitrović, 2017, 71, 73).

THE DEFEAT OF BYZANTIUM AND THE FALL OF DUKLJA UNDER RAŠKA

Due to the Byzantine predominance in the Balkans, Duklja benefited from Byzantine protection from 1167 to 1180, marking a relatively peaceful period. At that time, Duklja possessed the same territory as during the reign of the last King of Duklja, Gradinja, but lacked its former power. Duklja operated as a Byzantine vassal, relying on the benevolence and power of Emperor Manuel I, particularly on the support of Byzantine troops in coastal cities. For Duklja's security, it was crucial that Raška also served as a (reluctant) Byzantine vassal. Its ruler, Grand Prefect Stefan Nemanja, became a vassal of Emperor Manuel I in 1168, with a brief interruption in 1172 (Blagojević & Petković, 1989, 36). The threat posed by Raška to Duklja's survival became evident in 1172 when, during the Venetian-Byzantine war, Stefan Nemanja turned against Byzantium, leading a faction of his army to attack Kotor (Srevojević et al., 1981, 210). In response, Emperor Manuel I launched an attack on Serbia that same year, compelling Nemanja to submit. This safeguarded Duklja from an offensive by the ruler of Raška. Bosnia occupied a similar vassal position with respect to Byzantium, while Srem was under the direct administration of the Emperor's relatives (Ćorović, 1940, 163). In this way, Manuel I solidified his influence in the western Balkans, exercising direct Byzantine control over Srem, Croatia, and Dalmatia, while maintaining vassal relationships with Duklja, Raška, and Bosnia. Bosnia and, notably, Raška were compelled into Byzantine vassalage due to their adherence to anti-Byzantine and pro-Hungarian politics. On the other hand, for Duklja, Byzantine vassalage was a deliberate strategic choice.

In Emperor Manuel I's strategic plans, Dalmatia served as a crucial stepping stone for the prospective conquest of northern Italy. The responsibility for implementing this policy fell upon Nicephorus Haluphaus and his successor as the *dux* in Split, Constantine Ducas (Stephenson, 2008, 685–686). Manuel's primary objective in his Balkan conquests was to establish a strategic foothold, creating a network of influence that extended towards Hungary and Italy. The aim was to surpass his main European competitor, the Holy Roman Empire led by Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa (Stephenson, 2008, 685–686). Nevertheless, Manuel's expansionist policies exhausted the resources of the empire, and his successors struggled to uphold the enduring legacy of Manuel's reign.

The death of Emperor Manuel I in 1180 triggered the unraveling of the order he had instituted in the western Balkans, and the ensuing power struggle for the imperial throne ultimately led to the collapse of the Byzantine state on the Balkans (Ostrogorski, 1969, 370). The Hungarian army invaded Dalmatia and took control over Zadar (Curta, 2019, 339). Hungary returned parts of Croatia, Srem, and Dalmatia, as well as Bosnia, where Ban Kulin became its vassal (Ćorović, 1940, 165). Duklja could no longer rely on the protection of Byzantium, which, by the end of Manuel's rule, was economically and militarily exhausted (Ostrogorski, 1969, 367). Stefan Nemanja seized this opportunity to attack Duklja, particularly its coastal cities, in late 1180 and early 1181. The Archbishop of Bar, Grgur, stated that "significant disagreements" erupted between Bar and the Grand Prefect Stefan Nemanja leading to a "major commotion" (Borozan, 2015, 107). Archbishop Grgur also mentioned that (Grand) Prince Mihailo, while concerned about the Duklja Church, might not have been expected to provide assistance. Kotor attempted to safeguard itself by entering into a peace treaty with Dubrovnik in 1181, aimed at countering Stefan Nemanja (Bešić et al., 1967, 410). It is certain that after this Nemanja's attack on Duklja, Zahumlje was under the control of Raška, specifically Nemanja's brother Prince Miroslav (Mišić, 1996, 48).

Mavro Orbini placed these events between 1170 and 1172, asserting that Prince Radoslav and his brother *Ivanish* (John) were still ruling Duklja at that time (Orbini, 1999, 310–311). Orbini states that, faced with Nemanja's attack, Prince Radoslav went by boat from Ulcinj to Dubrovnik. Then Nemanja took all of Zeta with its cities except Kotor, which remained loyal to Radoslav. Radoslav and John took refuge in Durres from Dubrovnik and sought help from Byzantium, but "no province was given to them at the emperor's behest." After that, Duklja remained under Nemanja's rule. During that period, Radoslav's other brother, Vladimir, was in Raška, attempting to overthrow Nemanja through an uprising. However, he was defeated and subsequently fled to Bulgaria. According to Orbini, this marked the end of Duklja and the Vojislavljević dynasty, as Orbini was not aware of Grand Prince Mihailo and his wife, Princess Desislava. Furthermore, Orbini made an error in Radoslav's genealogy by stating that his father was Draginja (*Dragihna*) instead of King Gradinja. The sources from which Orbini derived the description of these events are not known. Historians Stojan Novaković and Dane Gruber believed Orbini (Novaković, 2003, 27–28; Gruber, 2014, 368–369). In contrast, historian Sima Ćirković criticized Orbini's work, pointing out inaccuracies in chronology, events, and personalities. According to Ćirković, Stefan Nemanja took control of Duklja between 1183 and 1186, with the last ruler being Grand Prince Mihailo (Orbini, 1968, 16, 1–19). From Orbini's work, the only reliable information is that the last rulers of Duklja sought assistance from Dubrovnik and Byzantine Durres during their conflicts with Raška.

Stefan Nemanja persisted in his attacks on Duklja between 1183 and 1186 (Ćirković, 1976, 132). The Raška Grand Prefect seized the opportunity during a significant and triumphant offensive by Hungary against Byzantium around

Belgrade and in the Morava River valley in 1183 (Srevojević et al., 1981, 252). The Raška army also initiated a front in Duklja. Fortified coastal cities have long resisted Nemanja's siege. They faced severe punishment for this. After the conquest, the army of Raška proceeded to destroy the cities of Duklja, including Danj, Sard, Shköder, Svač, Ulcinj, and Bar (Ćirković et al., 1970, 3). Nemanja's son, Stefan the First-Crowned, wrote between 1208 and 1216: "And he [Nemanja] left Kotor, fortified it, and moved his court there, where it remains to this day. He razed the other towns, demolished them, and turned their glory into desolation" (Prvovenčani, 1988, 73). Until early 1186, Kotor was occupied, spared from destruction for Nemanja to establish a court there. Nemanja's supporters in Duklja aided in the conquest (Srevojević et al., 1981, 252-253).

The conclusion of Grand Prince Mihailo's reign remains uncertain. Historian Sima Ćirković claims that Mihailo left the country and went to Dubrovnik (Ćirković, 1976, 132; Orbini, 1968, 16). Bar, preserving its autonomy, resisted Nemanja's attacks for the longest period and housed Princess Desislava, the wife of Grand Prince Mihailo (Blagojević & Petković, 1989, 37–38). She departed from Bar no later than mid-1189 and arrived in Dubrovnik, where she issued a charter to the citizens in August of the same year. The witnesses to the charter were Archbishop Grgur of Bar and the *župani* (Prefects) Černeha and Vitalis (Borozan, 2015, 107). This marked the end of the state of Duklja and the Vojislavljević dynasty.

As part of this conquest, Stefan Nemanja specifically targeted the civil and military authorities of the Byzantine Empire in Duklja and Dalmatia. His son, Stefan the First-Crowned (*Prvovjenčani*), stated that Nemanja "exterminated the Greek name", implying that he expelled Greeks from the cities of Duklja and Dalmatia, thereby preventing the resurgence of the Byzantine influence (Ćirković et al., 1970, 3; Prvovenčani, 1988, 73). Stefan Nemanja partitioned the land of Duklja by assigning Zeta and Travunia to his eldest son, Vukan. Vukan was titled "King of Dioclea, Dalmatia, Trebinje, Hvosno and Toplica" (Ćirković et al., 1970, 4). The Serbian biographer Domentijan recorded that in Raška in the mid-thirteenth century, "Duklja" (*Диоклитиа*) was called a "great kingdom from the beginning" (*велико кралиевство от прва*) (Kovačević, 1955, 293; Domentijan, 1988, 157). Vukan adopted this title to preserve the tradition of the independent Dukljan kingdom, which was also his argument in the struggle for the throne against his brother Stefan the First-Crowned (Andrijašević, 2019, 39). Vukan lost this battle but retained the royal title and ruled Duklja almost as an independent ruler. He had his nobility, army, separate revenues, administrative apparatus, and maintained diplomatic relations with the pope and the Hungarian king (Blagojević, 2011, 16). He was succeeded by his son Đorđe around 1208, who also titled himself as King of Duklja until 1217 when Stefan the First-Crowned became the first crowned King of Serbia (Andrijašević, 2019, 40). After that, Đorđe held the title of prince, marking the decline of the tradition of the Dukljan kingdom within the Nemanjić dynasty. However, a Venetian list of

rulers from 1301 mentions that Stefan Dečanski (Stefan of Dečani), the son of the Serbian king Milutin, titled himself as "king of Duklja, Albania, Zahumlje, and coastal regions" (*rex Dioclie, Albanie, Chelmie et maritime regionis*) (Ćirković et al., 1970, 60). As pointed out earlier, Stefan Nemanja's brother, Prince Miroslav, held control over Zahumlje (Ćirković, 1995, 51). Nemanja, entrusted Zahumlje (the land of Hum) to his youngest son Sava around 1190, probably in 1194–5 (Ćirković et al., 1970, 4; Džino, 2023, 179). Consequently, the territory of Duklja was partitioned among the sons of Nemanja, according to the principle of dividing the land into "appanage principalities" (Blagojević, 2011, 15).

CONCLUSION

The reign of Prince Radoslav and his son Grand Prince Mihailo largely coincides with the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Manuel I who pursued an aggressive strategy in the Balkans as part of a broader plan to restore the Roman Empire. His primary adversaries were Hungary and Raška. Following the conquest of Croatia in 1102, extending control over much of Dalmatia until 1133 and Bosnia until 1138, Hungary established a formidable presence in the Balkans, strengthened by dynastic connections to Raška—Jelena, the daughter of Raška Prefect Uroš I, became the wife of the Hungarian King Béla II. As the ally to Hungary, Raška sought to conquer Duklja (Zeta, Zahumlje, Travunia) and a portion of Dalmatia. Nevertheless, Byzantium proved more successful in the decades-long conflicts with Raška and Hungary. Consequently, Emperor Manuel I established a Byzantine order in the Balkans. Hungary withdrew, and Raška was compelled to become a vassal of the Byzantine Empire.

Confronted by the belligerent and pro-Hungarian stance of Raška, Duklja had no alternative but to turn to Byzantium for support. Consequently, what began as vassalage during the reign of King Gradinja evolved into the strategic policy pursued by Prince Radoslav and Grand Prince Mihailo. This policy found justification in the conflicts involving the Prince of Raška and the Prefect Desa, as well as the Prince of Duklja, Radoslav, and later, the Grand Prefect Stefan Nemanja and Grand Prince Mihailo. In these struggles, Byzantine assistance played a crucial role in preserving the Vojislavljević dynasty and the State of Duklja. Devoid of this assistance and considering the backing that the rulers of Raška enjoyed among the leaders of Duklja, particularly in Travunia and Zahumlje, the survival of Duklja would have been significantly challenging. Conversely, Duklja held strategic importance for Byzantium by acting as a deterrent against Raška and Hungarian incursions into Byzantine territories in Dalmatia and the Adriatic. Due to this policy, Duklja gained control over Zahumlje, Travunia, and the most crucial coastal cities of Zeta. The ruler of Duklja assumed the title of Grand Prince, thereby consolidating power comparable to that of the former Dukljan kings. Byzantine dominance ensured peace and security for Duklja during the period of 1167–80. However, this came at the cost of relinquishing some sovereignty, as

Byzantine garrisons were stationed in coastal cities, and the autonomous status of the Duklja-Bar Archdiocese was forfeited. These were the most important events in the final decades of the Duklja state.

Following the death of Emperor Manuel I, and the swift deterioration of Byzantium, Duklja found itself bereft of its crucial political and military backing. Stefan Nemanja capitalized on this situation to achieve his strategic objective—the conquest of Duklja. Nevertheless, this accomplishment was neither swift nor effortless. Between 1180 and 1186, Duklja fiercely fought for its survival. Despite the fierce resistance, the superior resources of Raška enabled Stefan Nemanja, aided by pro-Raška forces within Duklja, to conquer and destroy its cities. The last ruler of Duklja, Grand Prince Mihailo, along with his wife Princess Desislava, the Archbishop of Bar, and the lords of Duklja sought refuge in Dubrovnik. The state of Duklja was subsequently partitioned by the princes of Raška.

ZADNJA DESETLETJA DRŽAVE DUKLJE (DIOCLIA)

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POVZETEK

Članek na podlagi primarnih virov, zlasti Letopisa popa Dukljana, ter relevantne literature, izpostavlja najpomembnejše dogajanje v državi Duklja med letoma 1142 in 1186. V tistem času sta regiji vladala knez Radoslav in njegov sin, veliki knez Mihajlo, oba iz dinastije Vojisavljević. Primarni zunanji nasprotnik Duklje je bila Raška, navznoter pa sta glavni izziv predstavljala šibka osrednja oblast in neučinkovit nadzor nad oddaljenimi regijami, kot sta bila Travunija in Zahumlje. Okoli leta 1150 je Desa, župan Raške, prevzel oblast nad velikim delom Duklje, vendar se je knez Radoslav uspel ubraniti s pomočjo bizantinskega cesarja Manuela I. Komnena, ki si je Raško nato podredil. Ta konflikt je bil del širšega spopada med Bizancem in Madžarsko, v katerem se je Raška povezala predvsem s slednjo, Duklja pa z Bizancem. Knez Radoslav je služil kot Manuelov vazal, Duklja pa je imela ključno vlogo kot temelj bizantinske balkanske politike, zato je bilo med Bizancem in Dukljo vzpostavljeno strateško zavezništvo. Zahvaljujoč temu Duklja ni le preživela, temveč je celo okrepila svoj teritorialni položaj. Po uspešni vojni cesarja Manuela I. proti Madžarski v letih 1165–1167, si je Duklja povrnila vpliv nad Zahumljem. Ta dogodek je privedel do tega, da je Mihajlo, zadnji vladar iz dinastije Vojisavljević, prejel naziv velikega kneza. Po smrti cesarja Manuela I. leta 1180 je bizantinska oblast v regiji propadla in Duklja je izgubila svojega zaščitnika. V letih 1180–1186 je to priložnost izkoristil vladar Raške, veliki župan Štefan Nemanja, in osvojil Dukljo. Zadnji člani dinastije Vojisavljević, skupaj s plemstvom in nadškofom Duklje in Bara, so leta 1189 emigrirali v Dubrovnik.

Ključne besede: Duklja, knez Radoslav, veliki knez Mihailo, Raška, Bizanc

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OCENE

RECENSIONI

REVIEWS

DOI 10.19233/AH.2024.19

Paolo Tomasella (a cura di): NELLE CITTÀ DELLA VENEZIA GIULIA. PIANI, PROGETTI, FATTI URBANI 1924–1954.
Ossopo, Paolo Tomasella – Olmis di Claudio Maccheti,
2023, 310 pages

The proceedings of the international scientific conference *Nelle città della Venezia Giulia. Piani, progetti, fatti urbani 1924–1954* (In the cities of Venezia Giulia. Plans, Projects, Urban Facts 1924–1954), which took place in Trieste/Trst on 22 February 2022 and was edited by the Pordenone architect Paolo Tomasella, represents an important contribution to the study of the history of architecture and urban planning on the north-eastern Adriatic coast in the second quarter of the twentieth century, which was under Italian rule, and in the border town of Sušak, which was part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Kingdom of Yugoslavia from 1929). The events that determined the changeability of the north-eastern border in the twentieth century can also be traced through the urban transformations that have taken place throughout Venezia Giulia since the interwar period. The international conference, organised by the Municipality of Montereale Valcellina in agreement with the I.R.C.I. of Trieste, is the inaugural event of the project *From the Cities of Venezia Giulia to the Agricultural Colonization of the Pordenone Plain: Stories, Memories, Urban Facts*.

In 310 pages, exhaustive and multi-layered, the book sheds new light on the subject, which until recently was researched separately in Italy and Croatia. Until the publication of this collection, its accounts and interpretations were presented within the framework of national historiographies. The importance of Tomasella's work is all the greater, because he was the first to bring together a group of invited experts at a conference to complete the picture of urban architecture in Venezia Giulia and Istria from 1924 to 1954. The book was published in Italian, with summaries of individual contributions in Croatian. It is an interdisciplinary publication, because the given period of construction is considered with equal dedication by visual arts and literary historians, architects, urban planners and Church historians.

In Tomasella's work to date, international comparative research predominates over national topics, as can be seen from the titles of his instructive monographs and books he has edited: *Tradition and Romantic Ideals in the Search for National Style in Serbia (1830–1930*) (2002), *La casa degli slavi del sud. Architettura civile ed edilizia domestica in Macedonia (XIX–XX sec.)* (2003), *La Nostalgia Della Casta Bellezza. Victor Asquini Architetto E Le Famiglie Di Majano in Romania* (2010), *Asili e Monumenti ai Caduti della Grande Guerra* (2016), *In luoghi più esposti ad esser veduti. Guida alle ville venete e dimore storiche nel Friuli occidentale* (with Francesca Tominz and Roberta Cuttini, 2018), *L'architettura contesa. Esperienze del moderno nella Venezia Giulia* (ed., 2021). In addition to studying forgotten architectural works and ensembles, Tomasella also distinguished himself in the field of architectural conservation.

Inside this brand new book, after brief introductions by representatives of political and cultural institutions from the region Venezia Giulia (Tiziana Gibelli, Igora Alzetta and Franco Degrassi), the first part of the collection, Urban Transformations and New Architecture, begins with the paper by Ferruccio Canali from the University of Florence, an expert on medieval and Renaissance architecture in Italy, who discusses the contribution of the Royal Geographical Italian Society (Reale Società Geografica Italiana), founded in Florence in 1867 in the planning of the Julian Venetia, Istria and Italian Dalmatia (1915–1925). In addition to promoting Italian geopolitical and commercial goals, the Society also explored the northeastern and eastern areas of the fluctuating borders of the Kingdom of Italy (Istria and Dalmatia), which came to a particular expression after the annexation of Rijeka (Fiume) in 1924. The urban planning of the region, based on morphological and physical characteristics, was precisely based on the accumulated knowledge published in the Bulletin of the Italian Geographical Society (*Bolletino della Reale Società Geografica Italiana*). Geography, ethnography, and demography were combined into a discourse that would promote nationalist ideas even in the field of urbanism.

In the following extensive essay, Julija Lozzi Barković, a prominent researcher of the architectural heritage of Rijeka and Istria, examines the urban transformations between Rijeka and Sušak in the period between the two world wars. As the main factor of transformation, she singles out 1924, when Rijeka was annexed to the Kingdom of Italy and Sušak to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes following the Treaty of Rome. Sušak soon grew into the largest seaport in the country, which stimulated its economic, but also architectural and urban development, while for Rijeka the end of the war also represents the end of its rise. Despite the competition between the cities for prestige and through architecture (Rijeka was built by Italian architects, while Sušak was built by Croatian and other Yugoslav architects), the author notes a similar typology and style of buildings in both cities, adapted to the spirit of the times.

In the next essay, Jasna Ratim Malvić presents rationalist architecture in Rijeka and the Kvarner between the two world wars, with an emphasis on authors who worked outside the fascist "mainstream": Enea Perugini, Giulio Duimich and Yvone Clerici. The author emphasizes that the rationalism in the architecture of these figures was a consequence of their distance from the Roman center of fascist

monumentalism, which was led by the architect Marcello Piacentini. Active and productive, trying to stay outside politics, the aforementioned authors left a deep mark. Moreover, the author concludes that their works were ahead of their time. It is particularly significant (and innovative) that she presents their work through a detailed biographical chronology, accompanied by a discursive consideration. On this occasion, the author best complements her previous essays on the modern architecture of Rijeka, Sušak, Pula and their conservational protection.

Next, Diana Barillari analyzes the skyscrapers designed in Trieste and Rijeka by architect Umberto Nordio, with whom architect Vittorio Frandoli also worked. She believes that the Trieste skyscraper influenced the evolution of high-rise construction in Rijeka. She sees their models in the skyscrapers of Louis Sullivan and the Chicago School. Along these lines, she singles out the De Arbori skyscraper in Rijeka (1938–1942), as part of the architectural experience of Casa Alta and Opiglia-Cernitz (1935–1937) in Trieste. She believes that it offered an interpretation of architectural monumentalism in a "specific" Adriatic key, using innovative covering materials.

Paolo Tomasella presents the work and importance of the Club of Architects of the City of Pula (Circolo polese degli architetti), in the context of its interwar architectural and urban development. During the 1930s, the supporters of architectural rationalism took the lead in it. The club was started by Alfeo Pauletta. The General Regulatory Plan of Pula (1935–1936) by the Roman urban planners (Luigi and Gaspare) Lenzi is also analyzed, as an architectural achievement left by Angiolo Mazzoni, Aurelio Brussi, Benardino Fabro, Guido Bras, Lino Moscheni, Ottmaro Heininger, etc. Biographical units on architects complete this extensive essay.

The second thematic unit, "Places of Faith and Remembrance," is opened by the work of theologian and church historian from Rijeka, Marko Medved, on the new churches in Rijeka in the fascist era (architecture, religion, people and politics). He emphasizes the role of the priest Isidor Saina, who during the 1920s started the construction of several new churches, because the neighborhoods that grew in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were deprived of sacred spaces. After the First World War and the separation of Rijeka from Sušak, the goal was to strengthen the Italian clergy on the borders of the Fascist State. However, according to Medved, granting the status of covenant temples to a few churches compromised Christianity by tying it to nationalistic and militaristic social practices. Church architecture reached its peak with the construction of the churches of St. Romuald (architect Bruno Angheben) and All Saints on Kozala. Attention is also given to the parish churches of Sant' Antonio, San Giuseppe, Regin Apolostorum, Santissimo Redentore, San Nicolò and Maria Ausiliatrice.

Art historian Daina Glavočić, who worked for a long time at the Modern Gallery in Rijeka, presents in her work the architecture and sculpture of memory in Rijeka: funeral monuments of Italian artists at the monumental Kozala cemetery, analyzing monuments artistically shaped by Italian and Croatian sculptors Giovanni Marussi, Nicolo Paquanini, Ugo Terzoli. Giovanni Mayer, Rugger Rovan and Ivan Rendić,

who were joined by a group of stonemasons from Rijeka (Francesco and Giacomo Albertini, Pietro Rizzi, Domenico Rizzo, etc.). On them, she notices stylistic features, including a mixture of academicism, symbolism, the "Italian style" of secession and rationalist modernism.

In the continuation of the thematic block on the culture of memory, Ivan Jeličić from the Department of Italian Studies at the Faculty of Philosophy in Rijeka analyzes the politics of commemoration of the Italian fascist martyr Bruno Mondolfo in Rijeka, who was buried at the Jewish cemetery (1921), and received a monument in 1931. Jeličić also presents historical information about the Mondolfo family and the political engagement of Bruno Mondolfo. He also compares the politics of remembrance with the cases of two more "fascist martyrs of the Jewish prophet". He also points out the change in the glorification narrative, when fascist racial laws were introduced in Italy.

In her article, the historian of Christian civilization Monica Priante discusses the memorialization of the cult of Italian soldiers who died in the First World War in Pula, as part of the interwar political and moral heritage. Remembrance parks and large memorial ossuaries were built. The author focuses on the monuments built at the end of the 1920s and 1930s, which were erected by the fascist government in order to strengthen the feeling of national belonging and legitimize the annexation of historical areas.

Finally, the architect Luka Skansi presents the monuments and memorial units built after the Second World War in Rijeka and the Kvarner in honor of the National Liberation War, the revolution and the memory of the victims who died for freedom. For this purpose, the new socialist government chose sensitive symbolic places, such as battlefields, military hospitals, towns and villages, as well as places of mass suffering. Places of remembrance were arranged throughout the Rijeka area and the Kvarner, including the island of Rab, where the Kampor complex was built according to the project of architect Edvard Ravnikar. In the inner area of Rijeka, Skansi analyzes the memorial places in Matića Poljana, Drežnica and Poduma where high artistic class was expressed by Zdenko Sila, Zdenko Kolacio, Igor Emili, Šime Vulas and Duško Rakić.

This richly illustrated and documented scientific collection opens a new stage in the joint research of the architectural heritage of Venezia Giulia, Istria, Rijeka and the Kvarner, undertaken by the most dedicated historians from Italy and Croatia. The collection is based on known knowledge as well as newly discovered material in the field, in archives, museums, institutes for the protection of cultural monuments and in private archives in Italy and Croatia. The role of Paolo Tomasella as a pivotal factor in that process is of inestimable importance, but future endeavors should include researchers from Slovenia and other former Yugoslav republics, in order to more fully encompass the wider context of this comparative topic. Especially, as each new interdisciplinary interpretation will positively reflect on the civilizational and memory status of the displayed heritage.

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