



Country Issue: Slovenia



## The Relaunch of Europe

Mapping Member States' Reform Interests

Europa

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Europäische Politik

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Institut für Europäische Politik (Institute for European Politics, IEP) is one of the leading foreign and European policy research centres in the Federal Republic of Germany dedicated to the study of European integration.

Further information on the project can be found here:

[www.relaunch-europe.eu](http://www.relaunch-europe.eu)

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# THE RELAUNCH OF EUROPE

## MAPPING MEMBER STATES' REFORM INTERESTS

*The Relaunch of Europe. Mapping Member States' Reform Interests (RelaunchEU)* is a project conducted by the Institut für Europäische Politik (IEP) on behalf of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) that surveys the implementation prospects for twelve concrete reform proposals. It covers the policy areas of Social Union, Economic and Monetary Union and Defence Union as well as asylum and migration policy and the EU's institutional set-up. Furthermore, it analyses the support for flexible integration and the positioning towards the five scenarios presented in the European Commission's »White Paper on the Future of Europe« of spring 2017. It covers the positions of national governments and of relevant progressive political parties, which received a minimum share of 5 % of the votes in the previous European or national elections.<sup>1</sup>

The study follows two main objectives: (1) It demonstrates the scope of action for prompt reforms of the EU in the selected policy areas while also taking into account which member states would, under certain conditions, be willing to implement the specific proposals. (2) It empirically determines which member states could belong to an avant-garde group willing to deepen integration.

Researchers from think tanks and research institutions in the member states of the EU-27 compiled information to determine the position of governments and progressive political parties towards the twelve reform proposals. This qualitative analysis reflects the country experts' views and is based on documents such as coalition agreements, government or party programmes, position papers, press releases, interviews, op-ed pieces, and official documents. It presents a snapshot of the discussions within the governments and parties. In order to keep the country issues short, internal debates and deviating opinions cannot be covered in detail. Positions are subject to change, especially following elections and the formation of new governments. The snapshot was taken at the end of September 2017. More recent developments could not be included. Notable exceptions are the country issues of Austria and Germany, which were updated following the latest coalition negotiations.

The study's results are published in English on the website [www.relaunch-europe.eu](http://www.relaunch-europe.eu). It presents maps for every actor and reform proposal, 27 country issues and an analytical paper. The paper compares the positions of all actors in all member states of the EU-27 on the twelve concrete reform proposals and presents five flagship-projects, which bear the chance for a relaunch of Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> If a party fulfills this criterion, but is not a relevant actor in the national public debate anymore, it was deleted from the sample based on the judgement of the projects' country expert.

# SLOVENIA

As of September 2014, Slovenia is governed by a centre-left coalition between the liberal centrist party *Stranka modernega centra* (SMC), the *Demokratična stranka upokojencev Slovenije* (DeSUS) and the social democratic party *Socialni demokrati* (SD).

The government is struggling with low popularity rates especially due to the migration influx in 2015/2016, internal divisions and its weakness to implement structural reforms in the aftermath of the 2008/2009 global financial and economic crisis.

## Support of the Slovenian Government and the SD for Deepening EU Integration



## SOCIAL UNION

In Slovenia, there is substantial support for the idea of **upward convergence of national social security systems**. However, the country's social security scheme has recently been put under high pressure, as Slovenia was hit hard by the global financial and euro zone crises. Therefore, the government and the SD plead for the adoption of European minimum standards for national security schemes, which are aimed at diminishing disparities between member states. EU-wide minimum social protection measures should guarantee e.g. basic income security, minimum standards for housing, and provisions for a safe and healthy working environment. Thus, the government and the SD consider a European pillar of social rights as proposed by the European Commission as a step towards a more social Europe. In addition, EU level monitoring of social security systems, health sectors and labour markets can be integrated into the European Semester. Nevertheless, the principle of subsidiarity in terms of flexibility and how to achieve common objectives by each member state has to be respected. Although lacking a more specific stance, the government and the SD support, in general, the **European coordination of national minimum wages**. In Slovenia, minimum wages are considered as an important instrument in order to provide a decent level of income especially in the service sector, which often faces downward wage pressure. However, the level of minimum wages cannot be the same across the EU. Although the government and the SD support a **new balance between social rights and internal market freedoms**, in general, two specific measures in this direction have faced strong criticism: When Austria adopted a law, which aims to prevent social and wage dumping, the government and the SD considered it disproportionate and discriminatory against Slovenian businesses in the Austrian market and incompatible with the principle of free and fair competition in the Single Market. Moreover, both actors are not generally opposed to the revision of the posted workers directive (96/71/EC), but concerned that it could undermine the freedom of movement of workers and services. Support for ideas linked to rebalancing internal market freedoms and social rights are conditioned upon the development of a more comprehensive approach at EU level and concrete policy proposals that will have to respect the principle of proportionality. Considering these conditions, too, the SD is willing to upgrade the protection of social rights to a status equal to internal market freedoms.

## EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND MONETARY UNION

Overall, the government and the SD are in favour of **fighting against tax fraud and tax evasion on a European level**. It is considered to be necessary to increase cooperation and swift information exchange between tax authorities. A fair tax burden for companies depending on where profits are earned would be particularly advantageous. To this end, the government considers a Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base (CCCTB) an efficient tool.

However, its implementation is considered to be substantially and procedurally very demanding for smaller countries such as Slovenia. The government supports efforts for more transparency, such as the Commission's proposal to amend Directive 2011/16/EU concerning access of taxing authorities to anti money laundering information. It is also in favour of strengthening Europe-wide cooperation on financial transaction taxes. However, it is opposed to proposals in this regard that exclude certain transactions, preferring comprehensive rules instead. Again, both actors stress that any measures must be proportionate to the expected tax revenues. In order to complete the EMU, the government supports the creation of a new **fiscal capacity for the euro zone**. Structural and long-term reforms in member state economies combined with a fiscal union are necessary to safeguard the stability of the common currency and increase fiscal sustainability. However, the government does not provide any specifics on how to establish the fiscal capacity for the euro zone, but it will most likely go along with proposals that have sufficient EU support. Nevertheless, a new fiscal capacity has to be linked to a stronger political union. The SD favours measures aimed at structural reforms, economic convergence and the creation of jobs. Neither the government nor the SD has recently taken a stance on the **mutualisation of public debts** within the EU. However, in the aftermath of the 2008/2009 financial crises that brought Slovenia close to a bailout in 2013, the country was nevertheless not supportive of any attempts to mutualise public debts due to its very strong exposure to the Greek bailout.

## EUROPEAN DEFENCE UNION

The government and the SD support the further development of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), e.g. through an **extension of EU military planning capabilities**. Active commitment to security cooperation within the EU and NATO is considered to be vital for Slovenia, as it is faced with security threats and instabilities in its neighbourhood, especially in the Western Balkans, and due to its own very limited defence capacities. Hence, the establishment of the permanent Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) was welcomed, as it is considered necessary to establish a direct link between the mission command and EU decision-makers. Similarly, EU headquarters would improve communication, effectiveness of decision-making and conduct, while also providing a better overview of missions and operations at EU level. Slovenia is in favour of strengthening cooperation with strategic partners such as NATO or the OSCE, as well as third countries, especially from the Western Balkans. In addition, the government supports the pooling and sharing of capabilities within the EU, which has to be complementary to NATO structures. The development of defence capabilities supervised by the European Defence Agency in order to provide political and operative autonomy to the EU within the political framework of multinational cooperation has also been welcomed. Both the government and the SD have been sceptical, but not taken a concrete position on the establishment

of an **EU army**. This reform proposal is considered to be too vague and rather a political idea launched to stimulate a debate in the media and wider public. Furthermore, Slovenia would not be able to meet commitments to both NATO and an EU army. The government prefers to strengthen the strategic partnership with NATO based on principles such as complementarity, autonomy and reciprocity between both organisations. Thus, any duplication of NATO structures and planning capabilities at EU level is rejected.

## ASYLUM AND MIGRATION

For Slovenia, the functioning of the Schengen area is of key importance, especially as the country has been a main point of re-entry for refugees crossing the Western Balkans from Greece and greatly struggled to control incoming migration flows. Thus, the government and the SD welcome EU measures aimed at further deepening the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). The establishment of a **pure quota system for the relocation of asylum seekers** in the EU should be based on the lessons learned from the current temporary mechanism adopted by the Council of the EU in 2015, which still needs to be fully implemented. As the SD favours a holistic, effective and humane EU migration and asylum policy based on burden sharing, the current Dublin system needs to be reformed. Though the SD is, similarly to the government, supportive of a permanent pure quota system without defining any details, it states that the capabilities and circumstances in each member state have to be taken into account. EU proposals to externalise the migration issue to third countries through e.g. bilateral repatriation agreements and to improve border control, e.g. the adoption of a joint EU list of safe countries including Turkey and the Western Balkan countries, are also supported by the government. The government's urge to close the Western Balkan route, even by setting up a fence at the border between Greece and Macedonia, has been criticised by several SD members. The government, including the SD, does not go into details about the **European Border and Coast Guard Agency (EBCG)**. However, it supports an integrated system of effective border management, including an EU agency that has more competences than Frontex. It should be able to monitor the situation at the external borders and intervene in case of crises, especially when member states cannot control or manage parts of the external borders on their own. However, the government considers the control of external EU borders to be primarily the obligation and responsibility of the member states concerned. Apart from that, Slovenia is still committed to contributing to sea rescue operations such as Triton.

## POLITY

Both the government and the SD are in favour of **increasing the democratic accountability of the euro zone governance** and strengthening the political dimension of the EMU. Though not going further into details, the

government's approval for reforms in this policy area is under condition: 1) Non-euro zone members should not get an equal voice in order not to impede the EMU's efficiency; 2) national parliaments should be stronger involved in the European Semester, and 3) the EU does not need to establish new institutions or mechanisms for the EMU and its democratic accountability. Instead, it suggests making use of and reinforcing already existing ones. Although Slovenia has substantial experience with direct democracy, neither the national government nor the SD have proposed any concrete reforms regarding the **European Citizens' Initiative (ECI)**. Their general attitude towards referenda is sceptical, as they can be used to veto specific legislation. Moreover, they assume that the ECI would not significantly strengthen the voice of Slovenians in the EU, which is in contrast to the otherwise rather strong identification with EU citizenship.

## WHITE PAPER PROCESS

The government and the SD have not been pleased with the Commission's »**White Paper on the Future of Europe**« at all, as it rather demonstrates a lack of confidence in further integration and reveals a drifting apart of the European community. Thus, the government is rather hesitant in choosing one of the five scenarios. Though it states that the EU's future integration course would be a mixture of all scenarios, scenario 3, »those who want more do more«, is considered to be the most likely one, as it already exists. However, the government is much more in favour of a solid and united union consisting of equal member states. The SD especially hopes for a more coherent approach towards scenario 5, »doing much more together«, that envisages a federal Europe of deeper integration. In general, flexible integration is considered as a return to national politics and giving advantages to bigger member states. Furthermore, flexibility could weaken the EU as a whole as well as the community institutions, which are seen as guardians of small member states' interests. However, the government is aware that a multi-speed Europe is already a reality and does not oppose **flexible integration** to manage member states' diverging stances, as long as participation is open to all member states. Moreover, benefits of flexible integration have to go along with responsibilities for member states. Still, the government would prefer to advance within the community method. Using instruments of flexible integration, which are provided by the EU treaties, such as PESCO, is seen as a second best option. The SD rejects flexible integration as a whole, especially criticising the risk of cherry picking.

## Legend

### Actors Covered by the Study in each EU Member State

- *National Government*: including its members from one or more political parties, the Head of State or Government, relevant executive ministers and administration.
- *Progressive Parties*: They include all parties that are represented either in the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D) or that are members of the Party of European Socialists (PES) and have gained a minimum share of 5 % of the votes in the last national or European elections. They also include La République en Marche (REM) in France.

### Concrete Reform Options in Different Policy Areas

#### **Social Union**

1. *Upward Convergence of National Social Security Schemes* to provide Europe-wide protection against social risks and to ensure a decent standard of living for EU citizens.
2. *European Coordination of National Minimum Wages* to ensure a decent income within the EU to prevent in-work poverty, to promote social convergence and to avoid social dumping across the EU.
3. *New Balance of Social Rights and Internal Market Freedoms* to compensate the current precedence of internal market freedoms over national social rights.

#### **European Economic and Monetary Union**

4. *Fighting Tax Fraud and Tax Evasion on a European Level* for a fair allocation of tax burdens among natural and judicial persons.
5. *Fiscal Capacity for the Euro Zone* to provide stabilisation against economic shocks through public expenditure in the euro zone.
6. *Mutualisation of Public Debts* to tackle the problem of a sharp increase in public debts in some member states as a result of the euro zone crisis.

#### **European Defence Union**

7. *Extending EU Military Planning Capabilities* also for executive military missions and operations.
8. *EU Army* establishing a permanent multinational military force under European command.

#### **Asylum and Migration**

9. *Pure Quota System for the Relocation of Asylum Seekers* which would replace the Dublin system.
10. *More Competences for the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (EBCG)* expanding the current EBCG tasks in terms of »shared responsibility« between the EBCG and national authorities.

#### **Polity**

11. *Increase Democratic Accountability of the Economic Governance of the Euro Zone* to make its institutions more responsive to EU citizens.
12. *European Citizens' Initiative (ECI)*: revision of the ECI regulation to make the instrument more citizen-friendly and effective in order to strengthen the participative democracy in the EU.

#### **White Paper Process**

13. *The White Paper on the Future of Europe* by the European Commission presents five possible scenarios for the future course of European integration.
14. *Flexible Integration*: limiting the application of certain rules to certain EU member states.
15. *Preferred Reform Instrument*: Treaty reform, reforms inside or outside the Treaties.

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