

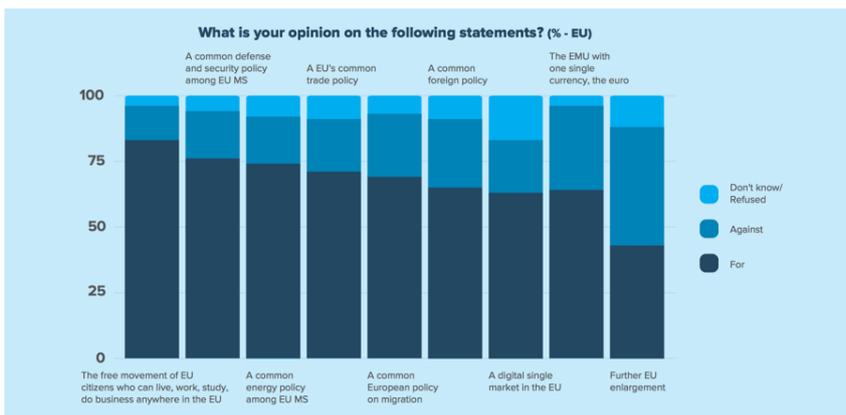
Summary Report
DIFF GOV City Talk #2

Europe and its Neighbours: What future for the European Neighbourhood Policy?

What is the role of Central Europe in EU foreign policy initiatives? Is the Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) in certain areas of the EU's foreign policy needed and achievable? How do external (the return of geopolitics) and internal (the European Parliament elections) factors influence the EU's relations with its neighbours? What is the future of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP)? What is the role of the EU in the Western Balkans? Will we be witnessing EU enlargement any time soon? Those were some of the questions raised during the second DIFF GOV City Talk. Interestingly, during the online pool conducted during the event, the participants were positive about the fact that nowadays we are witnessing a multi-speed Europe.

The event brought together the expert community and the candidates for the European Parliament (EP), which made a discussion interdisciplinary and at the same time very lively. Speakers were the following: Ján Cingel from GLOBSEC Policy Institute, Miriam Lexmann, candidate for the EP elections and representing also the International Republican Institute, Matej Navrátil from Comenius University, Michal Šimečka, candidate for the EP elections, Ivan Štefanec, Member of European Parliament, and Ondřej Zacha, from Stratpol. The discussion was moderated by Zuzana Kovačič Hanzelová, journalist from Slovak daily - Dennik SME.

The discussion kicked off with discussing both the strengths and weaknesses of EU Foreign policy. On the one hand, in general, EU citizens support the EU common foreign policy, which is a good thing for the proponents of the EU “speaking with one voice.” Almost two-thirds (65%) are in favour of “a common foreign policy of the 28 Member States of the EU” and only 25% are against, according to the latest Eurobarometer polls.



Source: Standard Eurobarometer 90, Autumn 2018

On the other hand, Member States' foreign policies, given the profoundly divergent interests rooted in the still fresh historical experiences, are not consistent. According to the panelists, EU foreign policy exists predominantly in theory and not in practice, letting other actors such as Russia

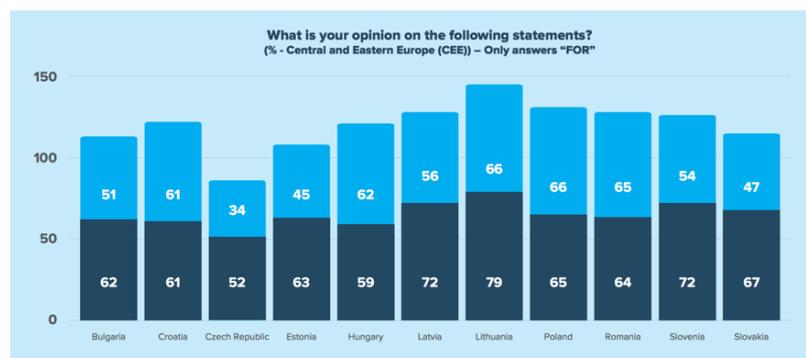
or China drive a wedge between them. What follows, the EU is not capable of playing a stronger role in the world stage (recent examples ar Syria, Ukraine, and technology). In order to be more influential externally, according to some, the EU needs a strong leadership and a systemic change, namely to introduce Qualified Majority Voting in certain areas of the EU's foreign policy.

This would help the EU to speed up the decision-making process resulting in more timely responses to global challenges. Other speakers were more cautious about the above mentioned measure, according to them QMV, instead of improving the state of play, it could create a greater division in the EU.

According to the panel, EU foreign policy appears distant to people as they do not feel their voice counts. They feel decisions are taken in the big European capitals (Paris, Berlin, or London) and are beyond them. It is probably due to the fact that the EU does not act together with one voice on the global stage but consists of a set of multiple separate foreign policy strategies. If the EU is to become more coherent in its foreign policy, the next High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy should be an experienced and recognized foreign policy expert who will be good at bringing divergent Member State's interest together.

The speakers highlighted that Slovakia considers that it would bring more benefits to the EU while being united on the foreign policy front. What is more, Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries contribute to EU foreign policy with their know-how and regional expertise. In the case of Slovakia, it is the Balkan region. This is backed up by statistics, which shows that the CEE favours EU enlargement.

On average, 55% of Central and Eastern Europeans would welcome new EU Member States, which is 10% above the EU average. The most pro-enlargement countries are: Poland and Lithuania (66% each), Romania (65%), Hungary (62%), and Croatia (61%); least favourable are the



Source: Standard Eurobarometer 90, Autumn 2018

Czech Republic (54% against), Slovakia (41% against), and Slovenia (36% against). Central Eastern Europeans are positive about the EU's common foreign policy. The most favorable are citizens of Lithuania (79%), Latvia and Slovenia (each 72%). The most citizens against are in the Czech Republic (39%), Hungary (37%), and Croatia (33%). The panel concluded that when looking at the ENP in general there has been progress, especially in efforts to bring the Balkan countries closer to the EU.

All speakers agreed that the European values such as human rights, freedom, and democracy should play an important role in EU foreign policy. *"We cannot give up the values on which the European project was built on and it should not only be about a self-interest"* one speaker mentioned. This very much applies to the EU enlargement strategy and should be taken into consideration while giving a green light for the accession process, for example to the countries such as Moldova or Northern Macedonia. The later has recently made a great progress and has been asked to join NATO. The EU will follow suit with invitation to EU accession. Learning from past mistakes of the 2004 enlargement, the EU should stipulate clear, but also fair conditions for accessions which include EU values. The EU should not make it too difficult for new countries to join. Despite the fact that the EU should have a realistic approach, it should also act fast not to let big powers such as Russia or China to win the geopolitics competition in the European neighbourhood countries or in the Western Balkan region.

The biggest challenge for the EU foreign policy in the years to come are its relations, foremost trade relation with the United States and China. The EU should think what implications this might have in the near future; and therefore, it should not be only about money but also about state agendas and values. For example, building the 5G network poses a great challenge as decision-makers will have to decide whether they give the contract to either China or the US. The panel concluded that the EU should go with its values because in today's politics "big data equals power." One speaker concluded "I prefer to sleep with iPhone than with Huawei mobile." The panel also touched upon disinformation and concluded that the EU should be quick with initiative to regulate the online space and address threats such as fake news.

When it comes to Slovakia's immediate neighbours, the panel concluded that Bratislava stays committed to the cooperation with Visegrad countries, V4 (Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland). Despite divergent interests and political moods in all countries, Slovakia cannot simply leave this format. According to the panel, V4 cooperation is a crucial regional actor from which all members benefit, in other words V4 is an informal entity which helps Slovakia to pursue its interests in the regional and international scene. What should be done more is to show that Slovakia has a different approach to some topics.

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