



Journal of Politics and Development

ISSN 2632-4911

Volume 14 ■ Number 2 ■ Summer 2024

the rest: journal of politics and development

Previously published as Journal of Global Analysis (JGA)

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the rest: journal of politics and development

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Mind the Gap! Small State Influence within the EU during the Brexit Process: The Case of Slovakia

the rest:
journal of politics and development
2024 | vol 14(1) | 223-237
www.therestjournal.com

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KEYWORDS

Small States,
Brexit,
European Union,
Slovakia,
United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

The United Kingdom has been seen as a balancing element for small states to prevent big states from gaining hegemony in the EU, especially Franco-German. The decision, which was stated to withdraw the UK from the EU with a referendum in 2016, has reawakened the concern of small states. Inevitably, member states have been affected by the outcome of this decision, even though in a different dimension. The Brexit negotiations preserved the dominance of the EU interests so as not to create a chain effect among the other members based on Article 50, which was applied for the first time. In contrast, the EU's implementation of immigration policies has mainly led to the strengthening of anti-EU groups in the member states. Since Central and Eastern European countries are the first boundaries of migration waves, anti-immigration movements are felt in those countries' political and social spheres.

Slovakia faced the Brexit decision at the first Council Presidency after becoming a member of the EU. On the other hand, the Presidency's agenda was not overshadowed by Brexit and focused on the predetermined road map. For this reason, the Council Presidency of Slovakia had not been subject to the shocking effect of any crisis agenda and was relatively moderate. With the immigration policies, which include the general interests of the EU, there was no progress in the asylum and migration title as the point of view of Slovakia is not very compatible.

This article deals with the Brexit process and its impact on Slovakia. The main question of the study is how small states fill in the gap that Brexit might cause and whether small states can take the initiative for the future of the EU, which is discussed in the case of Slovakia.

Received July 1, 2024
Accepted July 30, 2024

Small States in World Politics

Small states adapt to changing conditions to maintain their existence as an actor in the international system and try to direct the threat elements they have faced. In the 20th century, the small states

had chosen to pursue neutrality and hoped to isolate themselves from wars and the danger of extinction. According to Efraim Karsh (1988: 4-5), neutrality should not be considered a typical policy for small states. While the abandonment of the neutrality policy of the big states can change the outcome of the crisis, this will only create a vulnerable profile for the smaller states (Kinik and Tufekci 2018). Therefore, forming alliances may, in some cases, be more attractive as a policy option for small states.

After the Second World War, small states, which were justified by Western countries to gain their independence, increased in number with decolonisation. However, the conflicts in Central and Southern Europe showed that the end of the Cold War was too optimistic. The interaction of various nations in the region led to a chain of crises (Tufekci and Dag, 2022). The disintegration of Yugoslavia paved the way for the European Union, which increased its effectiveness in the region, not limited to Western Europe.

Small states' policy of neutrality in the face of threats has been moved to another jurisdiction with the presence of the EU. Small states take responsibility for self-determination and turn to alliances, particularly security-related challenges, and establishing a coherent political framework would prevent them from being targeted or dragged along in the course of the crisis. Aware of their fragile structures, small states become consumers rather than producers of security by raising people's living standards rather than melting their economies against the high costs of wars (Vandenbosch, 1964: 301). Recent changes in the international system have pressured small states to counterbalance the economic or population-based security gap with great powers by establishing regional or larger alliances.

Small states should follow and advocate the functioning of international institutions within the legal framework. Since the great powers (such as the United States and Britain) prefer policies on bilateral relations (Crandall, 2017; Dag and Tufekci, 2023), small states will likely turn into actors negotiating on a lower level, as they offer attractive cooperation to their respective states in organisations. In addition to the similar characteristics, the social base is different, which leads to differentiation in motivation and foreign policy strategies. Typical small-state behaviour cannot be adopted, and these states create a rapid and flexible movement around various policies (Gigleux, 2016: 27). The differences in the security strategies developed by Scandinavian countries during the Cold War and the post-war period can be cited as examples (Archer, 2014: 95). The development of these strategies does not create a completely risk-free situation; however, it aims to ensure the survival of small states in the system.

With the annexation of Crimea by Russia, security concerns of small states have come to light, and they have started to reassess their strategies to combat these threatening border changes on the European continent (Vaicekauskaitė, 2017; Tkachuk & Tufekci, 2024; Tufekci, 2017). Being close to the great powers makes small states a springboard against threats. Therefore, strategically using resources at critical points of a geographic location is vital for small states (Demir, 2008: 11-12). As a result of the rapid progress of communication and technology, decision-making mechanisms remain in the public eye at every step. In this way, the influence of the masses has the opportunity to evaluate the weak policies of the strengths within the framework of their strategies.

The rise of non-Western powers in the international system and the regional network of cooperation around them will help review policies in terms of compliance with the new system's requirements (Crandall, 2017; Kirbasoglu and Tufekci, 2020). It is the result of a revolutionary development for small states to have a platform to express themselves, have the same rights as other members, and protect nations and borders in the transparency of international organisations and international law.

Brexit and the Perceptions of Member States

Based on Article 50 of the Treaty of Lisbon, the United Kingdom held a referendum on 23 June 2016 to decide whether to Leave or Remain in the European Union. Voting results showed that with 72.21% participation, the public preferred Brexit, with 51.9% Leave in response to the 48.1% Remain vote. A referendum for the UK was not new since 1975; it was held for the first time to stay in the Common Market (Clarke et al., 2017: 4). The reason behind the “Remain” result in the 1975 referendum was that the economies of the member countries of the period were better compared to the UK. Although EU membership did not have a slowing effect on the economy of the UK, it did not cause any growth and prosperity to be expected while becoming a member (Clarke et al. 2017: 188-190).

According to the data from the results of the 2016 referendum, the majority of Northern Ireland and Scotland voted for “Remain” while Wales and England voted to “Leave”. Some of the Remain advocates asked the Parliament to reject the outcome of a non-legally binding referendum, while others proposed a second referendum. The results showed that the Leavers were more motivated than the Remainers (Clarke et al., 2017: 151, 210). Most of the “Leave” supporters were the workers affected by the 2008 crisis. They were united under the motto “take back control” (Dunt, 2016: 22). Theresa May, who became the Prime Minister after David Cameron’s withdrawal from the Prime Ministry following the referendum, said that “Brexit means Brexit” when Remainers told her to take the Brexit negotiations to slow down (Clarke et al., 2017: 151, 211).

Article 50, prepared by former Italian Prime Minister Giuliano Amato, was added to the Lisbon Treaty after the UK complained about the fact that there was no open door for member states to leave the EU. Amato stated that Article 50 was prepared for any group member who was left to meet difficulties and lose the economic race (Dunt, 2016: 29).

Brexit’s underlying factors did not appear suddenly. For over a decade, people’s perceptions of the EU were shaped by migration following the 2004 enlargement, the National Health System (NHS), and economic concerns. The 2014 European Parliament and 2015 UK general elections also prepared the situation (Clarke et al., 2017: 202-209).

One of the main issues of the Brexit process, the fight against migration, has strengthened rightist parties in other EU members after the referendum in the UK. Marine Le Pen’s “Front National” party in France, “Alternative für Deutschland” in Germany, Norbert Hofer’s “Freedom Party” in Austria, Kristian Thulesen Dahl’s “Danish People’s Party” in Denmark, and Luigi Di Maio’s “Five Star Movement” party in Italy are aiming for a similar referendum process by leading the anti-EU movements that are being structured in the governments of the EU members, and they are on the way to be the potential rings of the Brexit chain (Tufekci 2023). According to Simon Hix, Denmark, Austria, Sweden, and the Czech Republic are the member states where Euroscepticism is widespread and constitutes the riskiest for the integrity of the EU (Patel and Renwick, 2016: 3).

For some members, Brexit was an opportunity to become a new location for London-based sectors of the EU. London is the most influential financial centre in the EU, with the capability of its experts and economic management experience. In this case, Luxembourg was eager to cooperate in sharing this position while Paris had its campaign to be the next (Durrant et al., 2018: 16). On the other hand, the Danish government sought to attract banks to its centre to create a Scandinavian financial centre. The European Medicines Agency, another London-based company, is now based in Amsterdam (Wivel and Thorhallsson, 2018: 11-12). Shipping Minister Panagiotis Kouroumbli’s statement reveals that Greece was also negotiating for new centres of maritime and transport companies in the EU (Tugwell and Nikas, 2017). Malta was trying to maintain the advantage of English as the official language for the EU’s multinational companies and to direct them to the Mediterranean (Haig,

2016). One of the significant changes after Brexit is the transfer of the headquarters of the anti-piracy Atalanta patrols to the port of Rota in Spain. Also, in the Brexit process, the status of Gibraltar was expected more likely to be decided in the interests of Spain (Durrant et al., 2018: 12). In addition, the centre of the Maritime Security Centre Horn of Africa has also moved from London to the port of Brest, France (Times Now News, 2018).

The UK's membership of the EU was an incentive to prevent the oppression of small member states under a possible German-French hegemony. With Brexit, the gap at one end of the scale is problematic for the member states. In addition to its contribution to the liberalisation of trade in the European continent and the market volume required for small states, the United Kingdom served as an effective roof in defence of the EU for small member states. Small states with close relations with the United Kingdom and want their citizens not to be detained in the UK for the right to live and work have more to lose (Wivel and Thorhallsson, 2018: 3-6). The United Kingdom has a deep-rooted prestige throughout Europe. Thousands of students from member countries apply to British educational institutions, and the British influence on culture and sports cannot be denied (Durrant et al., 2018: 7).

Expectations and Reactions of the Small States in the EU

Small states¹ with close ties to the United Kingdom favoured soft Brexit. According to the survey conducted by Lord Ashcroft, which includes 27 members of the EU, 60% of the people wanted the United Kingdom to stay in the EU, and 10% asked for a separation. According to the survey results, the EU members were divided into six categories. The "Friends & Family" group consists of Estonia, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, Poland, and Ireland, and the common view is that the benefits of UK and EU membership are undeniable. Besides, they were an excellent supporter of UK demands.

Another category, "Willing to Negotiate", included Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, Sweden and the Netherlands. As the name implies, they were conciliatory for unity, and most of them are natural allies of the United Kingdom and generally think differently about the free movement with the EU. Cyprus, Latvia, Slovakia, Hungary, and the Czech Republic's "Ready for Reform" group approached free movement more moderately. They also agreed with the UK on renewal within the EU. Austria, Finland, Slovenia, and Greece were negative toward the EU and the UK. These countries in the "Not in the Mood" category did not support further strengthening of the EU from national parliaments. The best part of becoming an EU member for Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia - the new EU members - is the opportunity to work and travel, and they do not work hard for the interests of the United Kingdom. That is why they were in the "It is Personal" category. Germany, Spain and Luxembourg are uncompromising with the demands of the UK. They argue that the EU has many benefits and the necessity of free movement. They were in the category of "Take it or Leave it" because the continuity of the integrity of the EU is more critical to them (Ashcroft, 2016: 37).

The countries that were expected to be affected most by a hard Brexit were Ireland, Malta, Cyprus, Denmark, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, and Sweden because most of these countries have had closer economic and political relations with the UK. It meant that they had more to lose than other members (Wivel and Thorhallsson, 2018: 7). In particular, it would not be wrong to say that Ireland would, in any case, be on the side of the United Kingdom. For EU members, Ireland has been one of the most critical issues to be addressed in the EU-UK negotiations.

For Atlanticists and the Baltic countries, the UK was the most crucial natural ally in the EU. With Brexit, the further development of military and defence programs showed that these countries would benefit from good defence. With the UK's decision to leave, the EU's defence wall has been further

¹ In this study, population criterion was taken as the first criterion, and after the inclusion of other criteria, the small states in the EU were determined as Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Cyprus, Malta, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, Luxembourg, Bulgaria, Croatia, Ireland.

refined, and in addition to the aggressive attitude of Russia, the questioning of US commitment to NATO led the member states to strengthen their defence further. As a result of that development, PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation) was established in 2017 for the joint development of defence and making it available in EU military operations; it consists of 25 members, not including Malta and Denmark (Durrant et al., 2018: 9). France, Germany and the UK intelligence agencies had jointly called for the continuation of cooperation after the Brexit in February 2018. The United Kingdom has guaranteed that it will not suspend security cooperation for commercial privileges (Durrant et al., 2018: 19-20).

All the EU members are affected in any way by Brexit, but Central and Eastern European countries have been affected more. For instance, the citizens of these countries who live and work in the UK make a tremendous contribution to their economies (Gilchrist, 2017). In addition, the Visegrad Four countries are in seek of developing several relations to ensure the continuity of their citizens in the UK, and while doing this, they need to ensure their share in the next EU budget (Durrant et al., 2018: 4). And also, the number of British citizens in Malta and the high number of Maltese citizens in the EU also affect Malta (Haig, 2016).

After Brexit, the small states in the EU did not want their ties with Britain to be harmed, but they followed different paths to sustain this will. On this account, Wivel and Thorhallsson divided the strategies of small states into three categories: hedging, hiding and seeking shelter. The attitudes of small states towards Brexit reflected that they would be a form of seeking shelter strategy in addition to hiding. In this way, they try not to draw attention to their small and fragile structures and continue on their way in a comfortable international environment. Ireland, the Netherlands and Denmark are the countries with a close and strong tie with the United Kingdom, favoured by soft Brexit so much so that the interaction of these states is different from the other small states because they can bring themselves to the forefront when they consider it necessary, in addition to hiding and seeking shelter (Wivel and Thorhallsson, 2018: 14-15).

Although the northern allies of the United Kingdom would like to maintain their ties, these countries have to comply with the policies of Germany and France, even if they are repressive for the unity of the Union. In many governments in these countries, anti-EU views are strengthening, and it is necessary to show that this is not a solution (Durrant et al., 2018). On the other hand, these anti-EU governments try to show that leaving the EU is not the end of the world while allowing the UK to obtain a special agreement. When the trust statistics of the members of the European Union were considered in 2017, the highest trust rate belonged to Lithuania, and the lowest trust rate belonged to Greece. Germany is on the positive side even with a low rate, while France is below 0 with Britain, Italy, Spain and Austria. Migration from the Middle East and Africa leaves EU members and European peoples in a difficult position. Greece and Hungary were the most affected by the migratory series. Germany and France stated that the rule of law and respect for the EU's fundamental values would be considered in migration management (Durrant et al., 2018: 8-12).

Since the UK can no longer contribute to the EU budget, some cracks are expected in the 2021-2027 budget planning because the EU will undertake to make more contributions from the Member States or receive less from the budget. The 27 member states were not keen to fill the gap that Britain created in the budget; Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Sweden were especially unwilling to increase their contribution to the budget. Poland, on the other hand, is the most beneficiary member country of the EU budget and was in favour of the UK's continued contribution to the budget, given its economic relations with the United Kingdom (Durrant et al., 2018: 2). For each member state outside Slovenia, the UK is one of the largest markets. The highest share of exports in GDP belongs to Luxembourg, Malta, Ireland, Cyprus, the Netherlands and Belgium (Durrant et al., 2018: 11-14).

Arrangements in agriculture and fisheries have also been issues to be decided in the Brexit process. The first draft of European Council directives required full access to UK waters in addition to the recommendation for non-tariff trade in agriculture and fishing (European Council, 2018). Currently, EU fleets can access the waters of the United Kingdom, while the United Kingdom is determined to leave the Common Fisheries Policy. French President Macron rejected the decline in the standards of his own country in response to the concerns of members that the standards of agriculture would be reduced by the United Kingdom (Durrant et al., 2018: 15).

Slovakia and Brexit

Slovakia is a new and small member state in the EU that significantly benefits from EU institutions and projects in its relations with the United Kingdom and is aware that the UK is one of the most vital partners in aid funds, budget allocation, security and defence, free movement and common market areas. Slovakia ensures continuity in bilateral relations between cultural and commercial organisations and communities.

In this sense, the British, Czech & Slovak Association (BCSA) was established in the last period of Czechoslovakia, and they are engaged in activities to strengthen the cultural and social relations of these three nations. It is a charity of the British, Czech and Slovak Union, initiated by Alexander Dubcek in 1990. BCSA aims to strengthen the artistic, scientific and historical awareness of the countries in the Union. Various activities have been organised within the organisation since its establishment, including book reviews, recitals and cinema screenings at the Czech and Slovak embassies in London. There is also a publication called “British Czech and Slovak Review”, which is published bi-monthly by BCSA. Also, it has a “School Support Fund”, which started in 2004 is a charity fund for the development of English learning, as well as assistance to Czech and schools affected by the flood disaster in 2002 (BCSA, 2019).

BRITCHAM (The British Chamber of Commerce in the Slovak Republic – BCCSR) is another institution established before Slovakia’s EU membership to support and guide Slovakia and British trade relations. BCCSR, founded in Bratislava in 1998, is a non-profit organisation based on establishing and developing trade relations between the UK and the Slovak Republic. For the members of the organisation, both foreign and domestic marketing opportunities and developer solutions are offered. British investments in Slovakia are supported and include companies of various sizes. In this way, it is an encouraging factor in the growth of British-Slovak trade (BCCSR, 2019).

With the Brexit process, any restriction on relations between Slovakia and the UK is of concern. The direction of the EU’s big states, especially the policies of Germany and France, play a decisive role in the distance of Slovakia’s relations with Britain. Slovakia wants to strengthen its relations with the members that it can take as an example within the EU because of being a new democracy and occasionally having turbulent periods in its internal politics. Slovakia is an open and flexible economy that has created a reliable profile within the Union in times of economic crisis. Like many small member states, Slovakia supports the financial advantages of the integration process to the end, but it does not look favourable to the restraint of sovereignty.

Hungary and the United Kingdom have given the most prominent reactions to the EU’s immigration policies, but even though Slovakia has some similar views, it remains somewhat more moderate. The fear of being left out of the Union in the early period of independence outweighs the thought of populism. Slovakia must observe its policies with its neighbours, the Visegrad Group and the EU.

On 16 September 2016, European leaders came together in Bratislava to discuss improving the security of the EU’s internal and external borders and making the necessary arrangements. As the

UK did not already have a plan for Brexit, it must be dealt with so that the EU does not interfere with reform plans. After the Bratislava summit, Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico said Brexit would be painful for the UK, and Slovakia requested the United Kingdom to guarantee that Slovak or other Eastern European citizens in the country will be treated equally with British citizens (Payton, 2016). During the negotiations between the UK and the EU in December 2017, it was agreed that there would be no change in the rights of EU citizens in the UK and the UK citizens in the EU after Brexit (The Slovak Spectator, 2018a).

Inevitably, Great Britain's decision to withdraw from the EU has strengthened anti-EU propaganda also in Slovakia. Notably, the dimension that social media has come from is creating an environment for anti-EU activities to be carried out in various publications with the label "Slovexit".

By Marian Kotleba, the leader of the People's Party Our Slovakia (Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko), which is a far-right party in the Slovak parliament, the EU had been depicted as a Titanic that is sinking, and Slovakia needs to leave as soon as possible (Samaa, 2016). Although it was a newly formed party, it has represented a reasonable percentage of the Slovak parliament since 2016 (Guardian, 2016).

As stated in Article 95(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Slovakia:

"A referendum shall be declared by the President of the Slovak Republic upon a petition submitted by at least 350,000 citizens, or upon a resolution of the National Council of the Slovak Republic within thirty days after acceptance of the petition of citizens or the resolution of the National Council of the Slovak Republic had been received." (International Labour Organisation, 1992)

In other words, there must be at least 350,000 petitions in Slovakia to hold a referendum to leave the EU. For this purpose, there was also a petition that citizens could address to the Presidency of the Slovak Republic as well as the representative Slovexit survey on an unofficial website that is called "slovexit.sk". The questionnaire asked two questions, and citizens were expected to answer yes or no. The first of these questions was, "Do you agree that the Slovak Republic will remain a member of the EU?" and the second was "Do you agree that legally binding acts of the European Communities and the European Union should prevail over the laws of the Slovak Republic?" (SLOVEXIT, 2016). The absence of any restriction to participate in the survey was quite problematic in terms of the objectivity and accuracy of the survey results. As the justification of the referendum request, it is argued in the petition that Slovak citizens were not sufficiently informed about how the process will develop or end when it becomes a member of the EU and that they have the right to think again (SLOVEXIT, 2016).

Overall, it is seen that the people who support the separation of Slovakia from the EU were in the minority. Immigrants, Islam and the slow economic recovery were the common concerns of these people. Predominantly, Central and Eastern European countries' willingness to maintain a common market and, the free movement of people and workers and the large share of aid funds from the EU in the country's economies are also valid and necessary reasons for staying in the EU also for Slovakia. The deeper the EU integration for Slovakia, the longer the continuity in the development of the country. After joining the eurozone in 2009, Slovakia has shown that its alignment in the integration process continues and follows a firm policy that glorifies and protects EU values.

For instance, during the Brexit process, Slovakia had to deal with some significant issues in the country. On 21 February 2018, Slovak investigative journalist Jan Kuciak and fiancée Martina Kúšníková were found dead in their home in Bratislava. Kuciak investigated the fact that Italian organised crime had relations with Slovakia's top executives regarding corruption. According to

Kuciak's claims, businessmen who were members of the Italian mafia 'Ndrangheta was using the EU funds for their own benefit in the eastern region of Slovakia and benefiting from the cooperation with the Fico government (Hosken, 2018).

The public wanted to clarify the murder and to prove that the government was committed to democratic values. The Slovak people organised commemorations and marches for the young couple in various parts of the country. The protests with the tag #ALLFORJAN were a call for freedom of the press and democracy for the Fico government, and it was inevitable that this terrible murder would be on the agenda of the EU and the world public.

Prime Minister Fico reported that the person who brought any information about the murder would be given a prize of 1 million euros (BBC, 2018). As a result of pressure from the Slovak people, Fico was forced to resign three weeks after the murder. Although he resigned from his office, he wanted to continue to be active in the politics of the country. On 22 March 2018, the title of Prime Minister was transferred to Peter Pellegrini by President Andrej Kiska (Davies, 2018). Although Robert Fico, who spent ten years as prime minister, resigned from his post, he is still one of the most influential political profiles in the country.

The new PM Pellegrini stated that he respects the freedom of the press and that his government will support pro-European and pro-NATO policy. Although the Slovak people wanted an early election, the government continued with the tripartite coalition. Pellegrini emphasised the importance and pioneering of its country for pro-European policies and supported the views of French President Emmanuel Macron for the future of the EU (The Slovak Spectator, 2019).

Pellegrini's statement on increasing the contribution rates of member states to close the gap that Brexit will create in the EU budget has indicated that the contribution rates to be made by other states should be considered, but in any case, Slovakia is ready to contribute more (Bloomberg Politics, 2018). Another policy area where the discussions are intense is the quotas for the distribution of migrants. Commenting on this issue, the Slovakian Minister of European Affairs Ivan Korcok argued that it was not right to give mandatory migrant quotas to the member states. Korcok expressed that the immigrants do not come to stay in Slovakia, and shortly after they arrive, they use Slovakia as a transit country and try to find a way to move to countries such as Germany, France and the UK. In addition, Korcok argued that they were not anti-solidarity, but it must be seen that the system of immigrants was not working properly (France 24 English, 2018).

In March 2019, the Slovak people went to the polls for the presidential election. Zuzana Caputova, a lawyer from the Progressive Slovakia / Progresivne Slovensko party, founded around liberal and pro-European ideology, won the presidential election in two rounds against Maros Sefcovic, a member of the left-wing Smer-SD and vice-president of the European Commission (CBS News, 2019). Caputova received 40.57% of the vote in the first round of the election, while his opponent Sefcovic received 18.66%. Zuzana Caputova won more than 1 million votes in the second round and became Slovakia's fifth president and first female president with 58.40% (Statistics, 2019).

The recent growing populist rhetoric of Smer-SD, the corruption scandals and the murder of journalist Jan Kuciak led to Robert Fico's resignation and his government's fall. Caputova considered the presidential election as a struggle between good and evil. The campaign was carried out with the slogan "Postavme sa zlu, spolu to dokazeme", which means "stand up against evil, together we can do it" (Cameron, 2019). As President Andrej Kiska stated earlier, "The EU is not the problem, The EU is the solution." (The Slovak Spectator, 2018b), and he supported Caputova during the election, stressed that Slovakia was in a period of moral crisis and that a president like Zuzana Caputova was needed (France 24 English, 2019).

The people of Slovakia have shaped their choices around pro-European views as a result of the Smer and Fico governments delivering the country to the crisis. As Prime Minister Pellegrini and President Caputova have clearly stated, Slovakia will remain committed to shared values in its relations with the EU in the future.

Slovakia strives to restore stability in its internal affairs and to present a democratic policy agenda to the public while at the same time trying to maximise the benefits of being a member of the EU. It has been criticised for its non-compliance with the democratic conditions in its accession process to the EU and will not want to be exposed to the same criticism as the years after it began to form a strong profile within the EU. On the other hand, these high-level changes that have been made to prevent the country's profile from being smudged are also evidence that the government should take immediate steps to avoid the fear of the loss of sovereignty that the Slovak people share as the basis for their anti-European views.

The Slovak people do not think much of EU issues as they believe they are not very effective in EU institutions, and they want to ensure a better course than the current situation. During the Brexit process, Slovakia announced that it would pursue a policy compatible with the EU and said that it would be in the interest of Slovakia to reach an agreement in negotiations with the UK. With losing one of the biggest partners in defence, the EU and its members will carry their partnerships with the United States more to their agendas in the face of the threatening and addictive policies of Russia.

While stressing that leaving the EU is not a solution, Slovakia emphasises that member states need to have closer ties in their mutual relations and continue to work for the interests of the Union. While acting within the framework of the common ideas shared by the EU in general, Slovakia advocated a pro-European view in its negotiations with the UK in order not to affect public opinion adversely and continued to take steps to protect EU values.

Conclusion

The European Union diversifies its working areas and broadens its boundaries. European states wishing to become members of the Union must meet specific criteria and apply the necessary regulations to their internal and external policies. In this platform, where small and big states come together, the members have the opportunity to be represented and participate in the decision-making mechanisms in the EU institutions. Here, the distinction between small and big states is gaining importance. Small states come together under the roof of the EU because they have limited resources and budgets, have less developed institutional structures and need regional cooperation. Small states can have relatively solid or weak characteristics in their relations within the Union. Although the regulations cover all members, it is essential that the interests of the big states are not restricted.

Small states that are moving away from fatalism must maintain a balance between observing their national interests and advancing on behalf of the Union in an environment where necessary resources are provided to improve themselves. In this study, the population criterion was taken as the first criterion, and after the inclusion of other criteria, the small states in the EU were determined as Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Cyprus, Malta, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, Luxembourg, Bulgaria, Croatia, Ireland.

Small states in the EU benefit from the economic, social, and military contributions provided by the big states and want to continue to improve and maintain stability in their internal and external policies. With the Brexit referendum in the UK in 2016, the small states within the Union have carried various policies on their agendas and expressed their views around shared concerns. Amongst these members, there are hard and soft Brexit supporters, and it is known that Brexit would

create some inevitable losses for both the EU and the UK. Here, both sides wanted to show how wrong the decision they had made against them by obtaining the highest benefit for themselves. The United Kingdom, which does not want to be involved in the free movement of workers and people, is struggling to maintain its membership in the common market. However, the exclusion of any of the fundamental principles of all EU members is not accepted.

The Baltics and Central European countries support the existence of a strong EU member, such as Britain, in order not to be overshadowed by Russia due to their strategic position. Members with large economies in EU membership have been encouraging for these countries. On the contrary, the UK's negative attitude towards immigration policies was supported by Hungary. With the rise of the rightist parties in the member states, the unity and solidarity of the EU are emphasised by the governments and the message that the separation from the EU will have devastating consequences is given to the public. In the race to attract UK-based investments to their countries, which has been seen as one of the positive results of Brexit, member states increased their cooperation. In order to reduce their costs, companies are moving towards Central and Eastern European countries, which requires countries to organise their resources to develop their own equipment. The most effective use of EU investments will support the relative size of small states at this point.

Another issue on the EU's agenda with Brexit is to fill the gap that would occur in the budget after the UK left the EU. As it is known, Britain is one of the countries that contributed the most to the EU budget and has an important place in the economies of small states. While most governments are concerned that their EU funds would decrease, they do not want to contribute more. The calls for solidarity and cooperation to prevent economic planning, while the member states need to act moderately for the common benefit, on the other hand, raise the question of the thinning of the sovereignty walls of the small states. While small states see Britain as a balancing act against German-French dominance, they will now need a new policy to ensure their voices are not lost in EU politics. They can create limited alliances among themselves, but they can continue their membership by appearing in limited policies under the protection of big states.

Member States expressed their concerns about the UK's demands for restrictions on the free movement of people, and they need to ensure that their citizens' rights would not be exploited. Thousands of EU citizens living and studying in the UK are helping to develop their countries economically and socially. A negative agreement on Brexit would seriously affect these people and harm Britain's image. On the other hand, British citizens are applying to obtain EU citizenship, particularly Irish citizenship, not to lose the benefits of EU membership.

Slovakia has the common concerns of most small members. Striving to be a winner in the struggle for independence throughout history, Slovakia has been exposed to the assimilation policies of its current neighbour and has built its current minority and immigration policies rigidly. Having close relations with the Czechs due to their historical and cultural affinity, the Slovaks formed a unified state after the First World War by taking the name Czechoslovakia. As a result of the lack of independence movements during the Second World War, Czechoslovakia continued to exist. With the dissolution of the USSR in 1989, Slovakia began to develop new domestic and foreign policy as a country that gained independence in 1993. In order to catch up with Western European states and become a party to international treaties, Slovakia had to shape its institutions and policies according to specific standards in order to become a member of European organisations.

The most effective element in the transition of Slovakia from communism to democracy was the membership of the European Union. Slovakia, which became a member of both NATO and the EU in 2004, is in the centre of Europe as one of the oldest nations in Europe. The wrong and unstable management of different ideologies in the first elections after independence played an essential role in shaping Slovakia's current EU view. Vladimir Meciar's anti-democratic administration was

rejected in Slovakia's EU application as it did not meet the Copenhagen Criteria. The fear of failure in the Slovak people has led to the division of domestic politics. Conversely, this division has been the driving force in the development of parliamentary democracy. The fear of being pushed out of the evolving order in Europe and weaker policy management than its neighbours led to significant support for EU integration by the Slovak people.

Meciar's unstable and repressive regime ended with the coalition government of Mikulas Dzurinda in 1998, which paved the way for EU membership in Slovakia. The new government and almost all political parties gathered around a single objective and tried to meet the conditions for EU membership. The European Commission invited it to the next negotiating group due to the progress made by Slovakia. In 2004, it successfully became a member of the European Union, did not experience the feared delay and was not postponed to the enlargement group in 2007. It underwent a fast and reliable integration process after EU membership and soon became a member of the Schengen Area in 2007 and the eurozone in 2009.

Slovakia, which proved to be an essential partner with its open and flexible economy and its capacity in the energy sector, began to think once again in the period of crisis when signing the common policies with the EU. It does not tolerate political restrictions despite defence, security, economic assistance and social policy arrangements in cooperation with the EU. The fact that the EU is partly considered an economic project prevents member states from accepting any interference with their sovereignty. As a small EU member, it is thought Slovakia is not very influential in politics, leading the Slovak people to participate in European Parliament elections at low rates.

The inability of Roma minorities to adapt to social policies within the country and the high inequality between different ethnic groups and indigenous populations influenced by new immigration policies affect Slovakia's domestic policies and lead to a more rigid outlook on refugees. The government's occasional criticism of the EU's immigration policies and similar responses from neighbouring states have led to a particular view of regional migrant groups. Most Slovak people are rural, as urbanisation is concentrated in several cities and regions. Failure to distribute industrialisation regularly prevents restructuring and affects employment negatively. In addition, the unemployed minorities reveal the need for more investment in the Slovak economy.

The Brexit referendum in the UK in 2016 brought the Art. 50 to the agenda of EU members for the first time. The decision to leave one of the strongest members of the EU has led to an increase in the rightist views in the member states. On the other hand, as the Slovak government emphasises, EU members should not take the Brexit decision as an example and should now have closer cooperation and solidarity. Slovakia, which took over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2016, managed a more flexible agenda than the presidencies, which faced more significant crises. While hesitating to take necessary steps, especially in migration and asylum policies, prioritised Brexit as little as possible in the EU agenda and prevented the functioning of the EU. The priorities of Slovakia's presidential policies have been a more robust EU economy, the modernisation of the internal market, a stable migrant and asylum policy and a global European policy.

The withdrawal of Britain's support for EU policies raised concerns about the security of borders for Slovakia, the reduction of EU funds, an increase in the contribution to the budget, and the protection of the rights of Slovak citizens in the UK. Slovakia, which has seen its interests in the EU more dominant in its relations with Britain, might be reluctant to make a significant move to continue EU assistance. The governments of the member states do not want to contribute more to the budget deficit created by the UK. However, the Prime Minister of Slovakia, Pellegrini, said that his country is ready to help determine the proportions.

The increasing chaos in Slovakia's recent domestic politics has been reflected in the presidential election results, and Zuzana Caputova, a pro-European liberal-minded candidate, was elected as the first female president of Slovakia. Slovakia, which has acted against the traumatic consequences of corruption allegations, must eliminate the possibility of a new critique of the implementation of democracy after many years. Slovakia should pursue a stable policy to attract EU and London-based investments, taking advantage of the gap created by Brexit.

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ISSN 2632-4911