From European dreams to nationalist drift: the state of de-Europeanization in the 2023 parliamentary elections in Slovakia

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ABSTRACT: Democratization and Europeanization research in East-Central Europe is well established and rigorous. These phenomena can be observed in Slovakia, a Central European country that has followed a specific democratic development trajectory, including the experience of authoritarian and totalitarian rule during the 20th century. Since joining the European Union, Slovakia has faced ongoing challenges to its rule of law and democratic standards from national populist and Euroskeptic actors and parties. Academic research is needed on how relevant parties in Slovakia approach reverse Europeanization, also known as de-Europeanization. The article assesses the degree of de-Europeanization present in relevant Slovak political parties during the 2023 parliamentary elections, as reflected in their election manifestos by capturing the state of political parties' positions on the scale of the proposed Index of de-Europeanization. A set of eight policy areas was compiled using a content analysis method, and a quantitative method (Index of De-Europeanization) was used to measure the degree of de-Europeanization of each party. The ID values show that Progresívne Slovensko is the most Europeanized political party, while Republika is the most de-Europeanized. The results indicate consistency between parties' manifestos, image, and rhetoric.

KEYWORDS: de-Europeanization, Slovakia, political parties, parliamentary elections, manifestos

INTRODUCTION

For more than three decades, the concept of Europeanization has become a buzzword for social and political scientists, enjoying a relatively quick adoption despite the growing project of European integration since the 1990s (Hirschhausen & Patel, 2010). Europeanization has been a challenging process for nation states as well as the EU, with all its pros and cons associated with political reforms, alignment of political systems with EU standards (Moravcsik, 1994), economic integration process, transfer of EU standards to institutional settings and policy making (Sandholtz, 1996) as well as shifts in societal values, lifestyle and attitudes (Radaelli, 2002a). Although these processes can be academically traced back to the 1970s, following the growing interest in the European integration project, the vast majority of scientists and theorists have researched Europeanization during the last decade of the 20th century. The discourse on Europeanization has been continuous in the ever-changing nature and evolutionary model of the European integration (Wach, 2016).

While the processes of European integration and Europeanization seemed to be separated areas of social science research, over time, especially after the Treaty of Lisbon, "the two phenomena have developed a reflexive or dependent relationship, necessitating a reconsideration of the research agenda for both" (Ladrech, 2014, p. 15). For this reason, our research will operate within both dimensions since the Slovak political elites, at least a significant proportion, have currently backslid from pro-European to more national and populist oriented policymaking, which can also be framed as the de-Europeanization of the Slovak political discourse in the 2023 elections in Slovakia. In 2004, members of the Visegrad group and six other primarily post-socialist and post-communist states joined the European Union according to their commitment to the EU values and standards. Although the states of East-Central Europe have not shown clear-cut pro-European positions (Bauerová, 2018; Groszkowski, 2018) and have struggled in the line of the domestic-foreign political arena, including the rise of national populism and Euroscepticism, the democratic turnovers in the late 90's have enabled them to fulfil the ultimate goal of the V4 declaration from 1991. The selection of Slovakia as a case study to examine the phenomenon of de-Europeanization is predicated on numerous factors. Slovak political history shows a pattern of fluctuating between democracy and totalitarian systems. Similarly, the last decade of the 20th century marked a period of significant dynamism. Following the onset of the democratic transformation in 1989, Slovak politics deviated from Western values during the early 1990s, interrupting its integration into several international organizations. However, in 1998, this process resumed and culminated in Slovakia's accession to these organizations. Historical analysis indicates that Slovaks have traditionally exhibited a high degree of trust in the European Union, as evidenced by survey results (Mokrá & Kováčiková, 2023). In parallel, a gradual and ongoing process of Europeanization has been observed. However, recent electoral outcomes, specifically the 2023 elections, suggest that anti-European sentiments have gained traction within

Slovak society. The current policy of the Slovak government indicates the potential for alignment with the Hungarian government on several issues, which could, in certain respects, contribute to the complexity of certain developments within Europe. Consequently, it is rational to evaluate the state of de-Europeanization among the pertinent Slovak political parties and potentially discern current developments in the sinusoid as mentioned above.

This article aims to measure the level of de-Europeanization in the election manifestos presented by relevant Slovak political parties for the 2023 parliamentary elections. This analysis is a snapshot of a single moment in time, focusing on the data from the 2023 elections rather than tracking a dynamic, evolving process over time. The de-Europeanization is measured through a newly designed index tailored to Slovak conditions. The individualized state of a given political party is measured with respect to the elections in 2023, and the findings are then confronted with the captured state on the scale of Europeanization vs. de-Europeanization with respect to existing research. This methodological approach enables the analysis of the development trajectory of specific parties or the party system within this context.

Additionally, it facilitates the identification and elimination of emerging barriers, given the inherently dynamic nature of the Slovak party system (see Bardovič, 2023). However, applying the proposed index to monitor developments continuously may pose challenges in several instances. Furthermore, this phenomenon is not an isolated incident (primarily observed in the SMER-SD party), as program documents, with their limited scope, often lack the capacity to measure this index. Consequently, the election year 2023 can be regarded as a suitable input basis for a set of relevant political parties and their program documents for its application to measure the current state of de-Europeanization of individual Slovak parties.

Our data source consists of political party programs and manifestos, and we apply the content analysis of the topics that are further categorized, covering eight sectors.

The following political parties were selected as relevant for our research: SMER-SD (Direction – Social Democracy), Hlas-SD (Voice – Social Democracy), Slovenská národná strana (SNS, Slovak National Party), Sloboda a Solidarita (SaS, Freedom and Solidarity), Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie (KDH, Christian Democratic Movement), Progresívne Slovensko (PS, Progressive Slovakia), Slovensko (OĽaNO – Ordinary People and Independent Personalities; currently known as Slovakia), and Republika (Republic).

FROM EUROPEANIZATION TOWARDS DE-EUROPEANIZATION: A LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of European integration in terms of the impact of European policies on the institutionalization and democratization of transforming countries of the former Soviet

Union and post-socialist states is one of the well-established and separate areas of political science research (Eriksen, 2009; Schmidt, 2005; Vachudova, 2005). European integration as well as Europeanization have become challenging concepts for national democracies, which have, among other issues, put national policymaking at the crossroads since more decisions are taken at the EU level than ever before (Schmidt, 2016). Scientific literature used to interpret Europeanization as a process of domestic change in the EU member states, not particularly dealing with candidate countries (Cowles, Caporaso, & Risse, 2001; Börzel & Risse, 2000). This has been rejected by other authors who framed the analysis of Europeanization in candidate countries as a separate area of research that has been established especially before the 2004 enlargement (Sedelmeier, 2011; Schimmelfennig, 2010; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2008; Pridham, 2006). Some scholars argue that Europeanization is a relatively new phenomenon, which was accentuated in the 90s (Sedelmeier, 2011; Featherstone & Radaelli, 2003). Previous studies of European integration of candidate countries were not usually referenced as Europeanization in the academic literature, as well as these processes have not created a comprehensive framework for a comparative analysis (Schimmelfennig, 2010; Grabbe, 2003). Europeanization has thus evolved as a meta-theory in the grand theories of European integration according to some (Stanivukovic, 2017; Adshead, 2017; 2005; Howell, 2002). Despite the ambiguous definition of the concept of Europeanization, the authors (Börzel, 2005; Radaelli, 2003; Olsen, 2002; Risse, Caporaso, & Cowles, 2001; Radaelli, 2002b) generally tend to view Europeanization as an impact of the EU on national policies or domestic influence resulting from EU membership (Ladrech, 2014; Grabbe, 2005). However, this definition can broadly be applied to the new Member and accessing countries in terms of the fact that the political conditionality for the integration of new countries was practically incorporated only in the late 1980s, when the strategic democratization and integration aims of the European Union extended to the geographical territory of Central and Eastern Europe (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2020).

The dynamics of Europeanization research have brought new perspectives, so far unknown explanations and arguments on three key theses: understanding and analyzing the impact of international policy at national level (Schmidt, 2004), operationalization of the international governance on a domestic policy (Radaelli, 2002a) and defining relations between the transnational political agenda and a system of changes at national level (Anastasakis, 2005; Radaelli, 2004; Olsen, 2002; Marks & Wilson, 2000). In terms of the interpretation and definition of Europeanization as a research concept, Radaelli notes that Europeanization is not a new theory, but perceives it as an approach that allows us to organize existing concepts and contributes to summary research in the field of political sciences and European studies (Radaelli, 2004). Thus, Europeanization does not represent the final state, but rather the continuous process, e.g., in terms of European integration and national political adaptation (Schneider, 2010; Radaelli, 2003).

Europeanization concerning political science research is a problem or phenomenon, not

an explicit solution. In this sense, Giuliani (2003) argues that Europeanization is not a solution but a research problem. Europeanization also does not provide any solutions for theoretical and empirical concepts. The concept of Europeanization specifically identifies the problem, not as a source of explanation of the problem (Coman, 2014; Grünhut, 2017).

According to Radaelli (2004, p. 3):

> Europeanization consists of processes of construction, diffusion and institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, "ways of doing things" and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public policies.

This definition is based on understanding Europeanization as a concept of an interactive process and not a unilateral European process. Radaelli (2004, p. 4) argues that looking at this process as a simple linear top-down mechanism of EU impact on national policies is not advisable.

Despite the above diverse interpretations of Europeanization, the authors generally start from several basic definitions and typologies, each incorporating different variables. Olsen (2002) identifies five different meanings of Europeanization: process related to territorial expansion of the EU and the relations with third (candidate) countries; adaptation of governance in EU member states to the central European level, the development of European political institutions and their decision-making, the export of the EU political organization and governance beyond European territories, and European unification project. These variables indicate that the concept of Europeanization resembles European integration to a large extent. Featherstone (2003) refers to four different characteristics of Europeanization: historical process, cultural distraction, the process of institutional transformation, and adaptation to politics and political processes. Dančák et al. (2005) base their arguments on an anthropological point of view that Europeanization is closely related to the new level of European integration, which results from reactions to the destructive consequences of two world wars. The later bipolar division of Europe and, in particular, the collapse of the Soviet type regimes, made it possible to replace the Cold War policy with the process of Europeanization.

The research on Europeanization of Slovak political parties is well-established and rigorous. Slovakia belonged to the new EU countries or candidate countries at the turn of the millennium and witnessed the impact of the EU on its own process of democratization and liberalization from previous, rather authoritarian rule under Vladimír Mečiar (Schimmelfennig, 2005; Sedelmeier, 2006). In other words, the EU has demonstrated a transformative power towards the Slovak path to democratic and liberal transformation (Leška, 2015; Haughton & Rybář, 2009; Grabbe, 2006). Following the initial exclu-

sion from Euro-Atlantic structures due to Mečiar's nationalist-authoritarianist administration (Deegan-Krause, 2003; Harris, 2004), the Europeanization has brought about the profound democratic changes in the Slovak integration process to the EU (Mokrá & Kováčiková, 2023; Żarna, 2018; Haughton & Rybář, 2009; Harris, 2004). Vachudova (2006) corroborates that the EU's leverage, conditionality, and "gravitational" influence have steered domestic political change onto a liberal democratic trajectory. She characterizes these transitions as "watershed elections", which have occurred in numerous previously illiberal regimes, including Slovakia in 1998. From the standpoint of political parties, EU accession has created a novel arena for discourse surrounding pro- and anti-European stances, contingent on the electoral advantages and consequences of EU membership and "expected to be an uneven process affecting various parties to various degrees" (Haughton & Rybář. 2009, p. 543). The extant literature indicates that Europeanization has exerted influence at all stages of the development of political parties in Slovakia since the conclusion of the association agreement (Leška, 2015; Vachudova, 2006), although the early stages of EU membership had somewhat limited impact on party politics (Haugthon & Rybář, 2009) and only in the pre-entry process the drive of the political parties towards European Union membership has been significant. As Vachudova puts it: "once membership is achieved, the parameters change again—and evidently they become looser" (Vachudova, 2006, p. 2). Similarly to what has been observed and in contrast to national topics contained in political parties´ campaigns in the elections, the salience of EU topics has been dominant in the election manifestos prepared for the EP elections in Slovakia (Kovář, 2015, 2014). Henderson (2009, p. 536) pointed out that "a party position in its domestic field determines how it may act at EU level". The range of topics dedicated to EU issues and the European dimension varies at different levels, while the European element is present in the party programs by default (Karabová & Filipec, 2018). On the other hand, the EU membership and the Europeanization itself have constituted a new wave of political discourse related to the Slovak position within the EU (Octavian, 2008), including political pragmatism, populism, and opportunism related to EU funding schemes (Octavian, 2008; Haughton & Rybář, 2009). Such shifts have also generated new platforms and narratives opposing and countering the EU membership and integration process by domestic political parties and movements to attain public support (Gyárfášová & Mokrá, 2021; Henderson, 2017; Spáč, 2016; Henderson, 2008; Marušiak, 2006).

Although Eurosceptic, anti-European, and EU-critical political discourse has been a prominent feature of Slovak political discourse since the post-accession period, when it was primarily associated with anti-systemic and far-right politicians, it has recently emerged as a political tool employed by mainstream political parties (Marušiak, 2021). When Europeanization is understood as an incremental process of reorientation of national policy-making to EC/EU political and economic dynamics (Ladrech, 1994), it is important to recognize that a reverse gear may be pulled to reduce the EU impact on national policy-making, which constitutes a backward process of Europeanization, also

referred to as de-Europeanization (Radaelli and Salter, 2019). This is in line with the previous research on the Europeanization process when "actors and institutions respond to the altered conditions generated by the development of the EU..., then a single or linear line of response is virtually impossible" (Ladrech, 2002, p. 393).

Given the multifaceted nature of the concept of Europeanization and the inherent ambiguity of the term itself, a similar phenomenon can be observed when deconstructing the idea of de-Europeanization. For instance, Ágh (2015, pp. 5-6) posits a growing number of hybrid/deficit democracies, semi-authoritarian systems, tendencies of national-social populism, and euroscepticism. He applies the term "in-betweeners" to describe political regimes that exist between democracy and non-democracy in East-Central Europe. These regimes combine elements of democracy with elements of hybrid regimes, which, in practical terms, contribute to the de-democratization and de-Europeanization of the region. Tsuladze et al. (2023) refer to de-Europeanization as a changed position and/or relationship of the nation state with the EU, and thus putting the Europeanization process in stake from political as well as discursive perspective, leading to disruption or even reversal of such process (Szymański, 2017). A scenario in which national political elites oppose the commitment to comply with EU rule of law, delegitimize EU norms and values, advance negative positions towards the EU, and utilize a populist-nationalist narrative to protect national interests and sovereignty may arise (Tomini & Seda, 2020). In other words, de-Europeanization follows Europeanization with a different set of trajectories leading to de-Europeanization (Ertugal, 2021), such as dismantling the EU policy on the national level (Burns et al., 2019) and the prevention of downloading, uploading, and cross-loading dynamics as a reverse process of Europeanization (Copeland, 2016). Jańczak (2010, p. 110) distinguishes between de-Europeanization as an erosion of the previous process of Europeanization and counter-Europeanization, which is an actor-based interaction between those Europeanizing and opposing Europeanization. Ágh sees the main failures in Europeanization and Democratization in East-Central European states since they have not taken advantage of "the historical opportunity of the EU membership" (Ágh, 2015, p. 20). Smith puts forward a question whether de-Europeanization is "either a purely tactical device or a more sustained trend in the making of EU foreign policy... whether de-Europeanization is a contingent, a structural or an agent-centred process" (Smith, 2021, p. 640). Other authors distinguish between different forms of de-Europeanization; from "re-nationalisation" protecting national interests and policies, through "disengagement" providing less diplomatic efforts by nation states, and "circumvention" with bypassing EU institutions to "resistance" which constitutes the strongest form of de-Europeanization (Thomas, 2021, p. 620; Müller, Pomorska, & Tonra, 2021). In contrast to Europeanization, the reverse process is less structured and categorized, exhibiting diverse forms and phases, and encompassing frameworks that are also applicable to nationalism, national populism, Euroscepticism, and illiberal democracy. This paper defines de-Europeanization as a discursive and policy-driven process whereby political actors reduce their commitment to EU norms, question the legitimacy

of supranational governance, and promote re-nationalization in specific policy fields. While party Europeanization may occur across multiple dimensions (Ladrech, 2002), this study focuses on programmatic content as manifested in the 2023 electoral manifestos.

DATA AND METHODS

This article aims to measure the degree of de-Europeanization of relevant Slovak political parties in the context of their official election manifestos for the 2023 parliamentary elections. A research question was formulated in light of the considerations mentioned above: What is the degree of de-Europeanization of relevant Slovak political parties, as reflected in their 2023 electoral manifestos? The data and materials utilized in this research are the official manifestos of political parties in Slovakia that were submitted for the elections held on September 30, 2023. The sample consists of relevant political parties. In particular, these include political parties and movements that have been represented in the national parliament (election period from 2023) and/or in the European Parliament (election period from 2024). For this analysis, we selected parties that met the electoral threshold for either the national or European parliament, which include: SMER-SD, Hlas-SD, SNS, SaS, KDH, PS, Slovensko (OĽaNO), and Republika. The content analysis of party manifestos has limitations. Official party platforms may not fully capture discrepancies caused by candidates from other parties or independents on the same list, a common practice in the Slovak political system. A deeper analysis of candidates' positions would provide a more nuanced understanding, but this was beyond the scope of the research.

The manifestos were analyzed using content analysis, where a single researcher coded the text to identify key party positions and themes. Two independent scholars reviewed the coded data and provided feedback, a standard practice in academic research to validate interpretations and ensure coding standards. To construct our dataset of election manifestos, we monitor the frequency of occurrence of identified keywords on the European Union, its policies, and the position and EU membership of Slovakia.

Subsequently, the meaning and logic of each keyword identified in the electoral manifestos were determined. The following keywords were identified and used for the purposes of this research: European Union, EU, European Commission, European Parliament, EU Council, Schengen, Eurozone, Brexit, Treaty of Lisbon, Maastricht Treaty, European Court of Justice, European Central Bank, ECB, Internal Market, European Monetary Union, EU Enlargement, Eurofunds, and Brussels.

The content analysis and the subsequent assignment of meanings in relation to keywords are conducted in two phases. First, the occurrence of the specified keywords in each electoral manifesto of the selected political parties is identified. However, not every keyword occurrence is included in the calculation to determine the degree of de-Europeanization.

Those that are not used in a context with relevant meaning and do not define the position of a political party on a specific topic or area (e.g., passive reference to the names of documents containing specified keywords) are discarded.

In the study's second phase, we utilize only keywords that define the position or positions of the given political party. For each occurrence, the meaning and logic of the keyword are determined. The five-level scale illustrated in Table 1 has been applied. Each keyword has then been assigned to one of eight sectors: 1) EU political system and justice, 2) Position of Slovakia in the EU, 3) Security and defense, 4) Economic area, 5) Social area and healthcare, 6) Education, science, culture and sport, 7) Foreign relations and international politics, 8) Environmental topics, transport and infrastructure. The Voyant Tools software has been employed for text analysis.

Eight sectors determining the index of (de)Europeanization
1. EU political system and justice
2. Position of Slovakia in the EU
3. Security and defense
4. Economic area
5. Social area and healthcare
6. Education, science, culture and sport
7. Foreign relations and international politics
8. Environmental topics, transport and infrastructure
Explanation of the criteria for determining the degree of (de)Europeanization by sector
1 – rejection of a specific EU policy/position, strong disagreement and clear reservation of the requirement for decision-making at national level.
0,75 – an effort to reform/revision some EU rules/positions with a potential transfer to the national level.
0,5 – neutral position, focus on the use of benefits (Eurofunds).
0,25 – the ambition of unification and deeper adaptation of national policies to European requirements.
0 – open call for deepening integration, pro-European attitudes.

Table 1. The criteria for determining the degree of (de)Europeanization according to the occurrence of individual words and overall sectors

The sectors were determined in a manner that is both thematically relevant and excludes situations in which keywords for particular political parties would be absent. Sectors with no repeated occurrences were identified and then merged with thematically corresponding sectors.

Subsequently, the degree of de-Europeanization is quantified for each political party employing the following formula:

$$ID = \frac{\left(\frac{\sum d_{ws1}}{n}\right)+\left(\frac{\sum d_{ws2}}{n}\right)+\left(\frac{\sum d_{ws3}}{n}\right)+\left(\frac{\sum d_{ws4}}{n}\right)+\left(\frac{\sum d_{ws5}}{n}\right)+\left(\frac{\sum d_{ws6}}{n}\right)+\left(\frac{\sum d_{ws7}}{n}\right)+\left(\frac{\sum d_{ws8}}{n}\right)}{n_{sp}}$$

where ID represents the sought index of de-Europeanization, dws1, dws2, dws3, ... rep-

resent the value of de-Europeanization tied to the relevant keyword in one of the eight sectors, the value n refers to the frequency of occurrences of the keywords in the relevant sector and the value nsp corresponds to the sum of sectors covered by the party.

The resulting value of the de-Europeanization of Slovak political entities, captured through the relevant ID index, is subsequently expressed through five levels as shown in Figure 1, where 0 represents a Europeanized political party within the presented program and, at the opposite end, 1 represents a de-Europeanized political party.

Existing tools, such as CHES or V-Party, rely primarily on expert perception and do not reflect the contextual nuances and rhetorical devices present in party manifestos. Our ID provides a manifest-content-based metric tailored to the Slovak political and discursive environment.

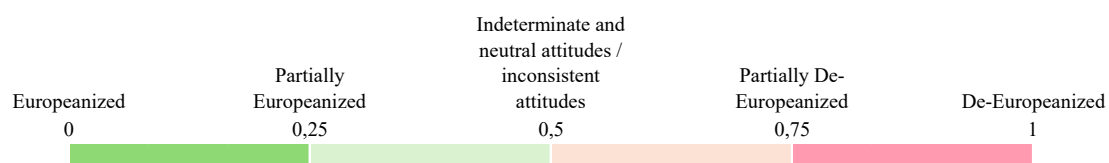| Europeanized	Partially Europeanized	Indeterminate and neutral attitudes / inconsistent attitudes	Partially De-Europeanized	De-Europeanized
0	0,25	0,5	0,75	1

Figure 1. Degrees of de-Europeanization by ID

One of the limitations of employing content analysis of election programs to capture the phenomenon in question is the discrepancy between the party's declared position as set out in the relevant election program and the party representatives' communication at the EU level, as well as the communication they make to Slovak voters. This creates an additional area for research into applying the modified index of de-Europeanisation to the political communication of key party leaders, or subsequently to the behavior of the party in the relevant EU forums. The second limitation is the manner in which political parties approach their electoral programs. The content and scope of these documents vary considerably between parties, with some being more detailed and comprehensive than others. Excessive vagueness or generality of wording is relatively standard. This fact significantly limits the more complex operationalization of the phenomenon of Europeanisation and the more complex reflection of the weight of determined topics captured through individual keywords and their associated meanings. The disparity in manifesto length may affect the keyword frequency and hence the resulting ID. We acknowledge this limitation and encourage interpreting the index alongside manifesto extensiveness.

NATIONAL VS EUROPEAN: MEASURING THE DE-EUROPEANIZATION OF THE SLOVAK POLITICAL PARTIES

The Hlas-SD party has demonstrated a tendency to align itself with the European Union in a largely conformist manner. This is evidenced by its declared pro-Western orien-

tation in all areas surveyed. The EU's policies and practices are subject to significant criticism, particularly in relation to border protection and the management of uncontrolled illegal migration. There is a strong rejection of the mandatory quota system for redistributing asylum seekers. In several instances, Hlas-SD underscores the necessity of decision-making processes prioritizing Slovakia's interests and values. This suggests a nationalist approach to European issues, whereby the interests of Slovakia are placed above those of the EU as a whole.

Furthermore, Hlas-SD advocates for the maintenance of consensus in the Council on matters deemed sensitive. Hlas-SD explicitly adheres to the slogan "Slovakia First" in its approach to selected Europeanisation issues. The ID of the Hlas-SD is captured in Table 2.

Political party	Sector no.	Relevant Keywords	Degree of de-Europeanisation by sector	ID
Hlas-SD	1	9	0,75	0,34
	2	3	0,25	
	3	13	0,75	
	4	2	0,25	
	5	8	0,25	
	6	6	0,25	
	7	3	0	
	8	12	0,25	
Σ		56	Sectors covered	8

Table 2. Index of de-Europeanization of the Hlas-SD political party

While acknowledging the achievements of the SMER-SD party in terms of integration thus far, its manifesto also raises concerns about the perceived loss of credibility of the European institutions. The SMER-SD party program explicitly states that the European Union is currently not being managed in an optimal manner and that a considerable number of its decisions are eliciting public disapproval in Slovakia. In the context of the war in Ukraine, the party has expressed concern about the loss of the European Union's traditionally peaceful nature and the excessive interference in the internal politics of member states. Despite the declared support for EU and NATO membership, the SMER-SD program tends to favor closer cooperation at the V4 level, with foreign policy support on all four sides of the globe. According to SMER-SD, the current deterioration in diplomatic relations with the Eastern powers is a result of EU and USA policies. Furthermore, the SMER-SD rejects the proposal to alter the voting system in the Council, namely the abolition of the right of veto for member states. The sought ID of the SMER-SD is captured in Table 3.

Political party	Sector no.	Relevant Keywords	Degree of de-Europeanisation by sector	ID
SMER-SD	1	6	1	0,57
	2	6	0	
	3	2	0,75	
	4	1	0,5	
	5	2	0,5	
	6			
	7	5	0,75	
	8	2	0,5	
Σ		24	Sectors covered	7

Table 3. Index of de-Europeanization of the SMER-SD political party

The concise three-page document outlining the programmatic priorities of the SNS makes only three references to the relationship with the European Union. The right-wing SNS calls for protection against the excessive centralizing efforts of the European Union, and in its program, refers to the Union's regularly adopted regulations as orders. Like Hlas-SD and SMER-SD, the SNS strongly opposes the quota system for accepting asylum seekers. One of the key pre-election themes that gained prominence in the SNS program was the necessity to enhance the efficiency and equality of conditions for the utilization of EU agricultural subsidy schemes. Table 4 captures the ID of the SNS party.

Political party	Sector no.	Relevant Keywords	Degree of de-Europeanisation by sector	ID
SNS	1			0,83
	2	1	1	
	3	1	1	
	4			
	5			
	6			
	7			
	8	2	0,5	
Σ		4	Sectors covered	3

Table 4. Index of de-Europeanization of the SNS political party

The program of SaS confirms the libertarian character of the party. Across sectors, they call for the harmonization of national legislation with the pan-European one. The main argument is also protection against gold-plating, i.e., the transposition of directives beyond their minimum requirements. SaS accuses the European Union of being too bureaucratic, as well as of non-transparent and politically-lobbyist redistribution of funds. The pre-election program indicates that the current system is designed to distort competition and the competitive environment. In the case of selected sectoral policies, SaS criticizes the preference for centrally planned solutions over market solutions, particularly

in the area of climate goals. Table 5 illustrates the ID values of the SaS party.

Political party	Sector no.	Relevant Keywords	Degree of de-Europeanisation by sector	ID
SaS	1	6	0,75	0,43
	2			
	3	2	0	
	4	4	0,75	
	5	3	0,25	
	6	3	0,25	
	7	2	0,25	
	8	9	0,75	
Σ		29	Sectors covered	7

Table 5. Index of de-Europeanization of the SaS political party

The KDH program articulates profound discontent with the prevailing configuration and prospective trajectory of the European Union. It unequivocally denounces any endeavors to curtail the autonomy of the Member States of the European Union. Furthermore, it excludes the possibility of an imminent renegotiation or amendment of the Treaties on the functioning of the European Union. Rather than representing a mere evolution in integration, it advocates a consolidation (streamlining) of the institutions, accompanied by a heightened emphasis on the principle of subsidiarity. The Christian Democrats' rejection of the proposed revision to the voting method in the Council demonstrates a clear intention to impede the pace of European integration and to reinforce the role of Member States with veto power. Furthermore, the program highlights the assertion that the bearer of culture in the Community is the nation state. The KDH also accuses the European Union of attempting to eliminate and replace national-cultural identity with unspecified foreign values. The program's fundamental objective is to restore Europe's original spiritual richness and ideological diversity. Table 6 illustrates the ID of the KDH party.

Political party	Sector no.	Relevant Keywords	Degree of de-Europeanisation by sector	ID
KDH	1	6	1	0,57
	2	2	0,5	
	3	2	0,25	
	4	5	0,5	
	5			
	6	1	0,5	
	7	1	0,5	
	8	4	0,75	
Σ		21	Sectors covered	7

Table 6. Index of de-Europeanization of the KDH political party

The program of Republika political movement represents an ultimatum to the European Union. The program demands a profound community reform, with the alternative of the Slovak Republic leaving the European Union. Republika refers to the EU's current setting as a dungeon of nations. Republika asserts that Western society is experiencing a cultural decline, characterized by the loss of traditional Christian values. It further claims that the European Union is attempting to suppress the national language. With regard to green policies, Republika rejects the current set, arguing that their aims are merely the result of amateur activism. Table 7 shows the ID of the Republika movement.

Political party	Sector no.	Relevant Keywords	Degree of de-Europeanisation by sector	ID
REPUBLIKA	1	3	1	0,92
	2	2	1	
	3	4	1	
	4	2	0,5	
	5			
	6			
	7	2	1	
	8	1	1	
Σ		14	Sectors covered	6

Table 7. Index of de-Europeanization of the Republika political movement

Slovensko (OĽaNO) movement advocates for a more profound integration across the sectors under review. Concurrently, it calls for reform and streamlining of the current European Union's operational procedures. In its program, the movement advances a policy of euro-realism, with the primary objective of safeguarding the principle of subsidiarity and the existing structure of voting in the Council, which allows Member States to exercise veto power.

Political party	Sector no.	Relevant Keywords	Degree of de-Europeanisation by sector	ID
OĽaNO	1	8	0,75	0,41
	2	1	0,5	
	3	5	0,25	
	4	10	0,25	
	5	5	0,5	
	6	3	0,5	
	7	2	0,25	
	8	4	0,25	
Σ		38	Sectors covered	8

Table 8. Index of de-Europeanization of Slovensko (OĽaNO) political movement

The fundamental demand is for respect for the national interests of Member States in

strategic domains, notably in energy, agriculture, state criminal policy, and cultural and ethnic matters. The movement opposes mandatory quotas for asylum seekers and advocates reform of the European Union's asylum system. The ID of the movement is captured in Table 8.

The program of PS lacks criticism of the policies and institutions of the European Union. It is the only party in the sample that explicitly expressed support for the proposal to change the voting system in the Council to a majority voting system. Across sectors, they also support the completion of major integration projects, an effective and fair migration policy reform, closer cooperation within the Common Asylum Area, and the transformation of Frontex into a genuine EU Coast and Border Service. The party supports the enlargement of the EU to include candidate countries that meet the membership criteria. In the area of defense, they advocate for the deepening of European cooperation, the generation of new capabilities, and the assistance of Ukraine. They also recognize the key role of NATO. The ID of the party is captured in Table 9.

Political party	Sector no.	Relevant Keywords	Degree of de-Europeanisation by sector	ID
PS	1	2	0	0,18
	2	3	0	
	3	2	0,25	
	4	2	0,25	
	5			
	6	2	0,25	
	7	3	0	
	8	3	0,5	
Σ		17	Sectors covered	7

Table 9. Index of de-Europeanization of the PS political party

Figure 2 depicts the resulting ID values on a linear scale, constrained by the two extreme poles: the Europeanized political party status (0) and the de-Europeanized political party status (1). These extreme positions are theoretical and are only intermittently occupied by a political party within the party system.
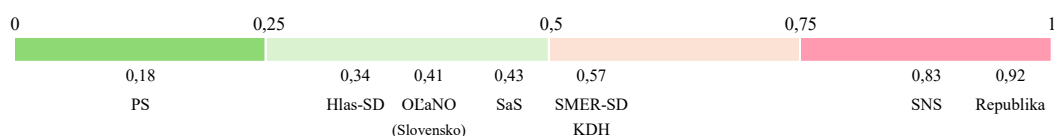

Figure 2. Positions of political parties on a linear scale in the area of de-Europeanisation based on ID

As observed, the most Europeanized political party (PS) and the most de-Europeanized political party (Republika) within the Slovak party system are not unexpected outcomes. There is even a notable consistency between the party program document, the party's

image in society, and the subsequent rhetoric directed at the voters themselves. The inclination towards de-Europeanization is not unexpected, particularly when considering the case of the SNS. The party has historically been situated at the nexus of opposing forces, namely those of the center and periphery. Consequently, any defense of its continued existence and position within the party system is predicated on this fundamental reality. Before establishing the independent Slovak Republic, SNS occupied a position of peripherality in relation to Prague. Following the establishment of the Slovak Republic, the party's position shifted to the center, and its policy has long been based on conflict with Hungarian political parties as a periphery. After this line of conflict faded from the attention of politicians (for a number of pragmatic reasons), the party moved back to a periphery position, where it acts as a defender of national interests against Brussels.

However, the situation is less clear-cut in the case of other political parties. One paradox in this scheme concerns the political parties KDH and SMER-SD. Both entities have been instrumental in Slovakia's integration into the EU. They were part of the governments that secured Slovakia's entry into the EU (KDH) or entry into the Schengen area and the adoption of the euro currency (SMER-SD). However, the current political landscape suggests they are more aligned with de-Europeanization. In the case of the SMER-SD party, this only reinforces the substantive and ideological dynamics inherent in it since its inception. Moreover, the party is highly active in communicating with the electorate through the constructs of "Slovak social democracy" and "sovereign national politics", which serve as powerful crutches for defining itself against a distant Brussels that is perceived to lack understanding of Slovak interests or even US foreign policy. In this regard, despite the similar measured value of ID, the KDH performs differently and is perceived by political actors as falling into the camp that perceives the importance of Slovakia's EU membership.

To some extent, the position of Hlas-SD can also be understood paradoxically. The ID value situates it within the group of the most Europeanized parties in the surveyed set. However, this party has formed a government with subjects that are at the opposite end of this linear scale, creating conditions for divergence between its programmatic focus and its manifestation in government. This underscores the current tendency toward indeterminacy in attitudes and unclear positions on selected topics.

The declaratively liberal SaS party is also a paradox concerning the ideology to which it subscribes. It has long acted as a critic of several EU policies, which is also reflected in the final ID score. Its former chairman has been a strong critic of, for example, migration policy and, more recently, several environmental issues.

The remaining subject captured in this research is in some ways specific. Slovensko (OĽaNO) represents a 'non-party' that does not seek to align itself with any particular ideology or political orientation. Instead, it functions as a loosely organized group of individuals who collectively identify as party members but do not necessarily adhere to the

traditional norms and structures associated with political parties in the traditional sense. The party has no tangible membership base, with the exception of a modest group surrounding Igor Matovič. Its policy agenda and perceived successes are largely attributed to this individual. Consequently, it is challenging to comprehend the party's ideological and value-based stance. However, rhetorically, it aligns with a group that views Slovakia's EU membership as a fundamental aspect of its identity. This resonates with the party's underlying value system.

DISCUSSION

The study of Europeanization in the Slovak context is characterized by the intricate dynamics of the party system, which manifests at multiple levels and takes various forms. A salient limitation in the present context pertains to the evolving composition of the highest legislative body, a transformation that is primarily driven by electoral outcomes. Despite 35 years after the Velvet Revolution, marked by the commencement of the democratic transformation process of society and the state in 1989, and 31 years of the nation's independence, which should have potentially resulted in gradual stabilization of the Slovak party system, the electoral outcomes have been marked by volatility. This was evident in every election, including the early ones in 2023 which have brought new political parties into parliament. The success dynamics of Slovak political parties is captured in Table 10.

	1990	1992	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2012	2016	2020	2023
Parties defending their position in the parliament	-	3	5	6	4	5	4	5	4	5	4
Parties not in the parliament in previous period	-	2	3	3	5	1	2	1	4	1	4
New parties in the parliament*	-	2	3	2	3	0	2	1	3	1	2
Parties not re-entering the parliament	-	4	1	4	4	2	2	1	2	3	2

*A new party is understood to be entering the parliament for the first time

Table 10. Success dynamics of Slovak political parties since the first democratic elections in 1990

Source: Bardovič 2022; Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2023

The dynamics is also evident within the ideological and substantive perspectives of the selected political parties. For example, the SMER-SD party has undergone an ideological shift, particularly following the establishment of the HLAS-SD platform by a significant portion of its membership in 2020.. SMER-SD has been initially without declared ideo-

logical position enabling shifts towards third way, through social democracy, up to the current state, when the party clearly departs from social democratic policies (Marušiak, 2006; Marušiak, 2021). Such transformations complicate the creation of a universal framework for monitoring the degree of de-Europeanization of political parties in Slovak conditions, which is exceptionally complicated due to frequent internal value changes of political entities. This phenomenon reflects changing voter preferences, party ideological shifts, and adaptation to new conditions. Due to internal dynamics and party system instability, each parliamentary composition must be approached individually (Ondruška, 2022). The Slovak political landscape has been observed as volatile, influenced by ideological shifts and EU pressure, emphasizing the cyclical nature of Europeanization and de-Europeanization (Rybář & Spáč, 2017).

The most visible shift is related to SMER-SD, which was instrumental in Slovakia's EU integration and now shows de-Europeanization tendencies. Marušiak (2021) explores this paradox, arguing that political pragmatism often overrides ideological consistency in Slovak politics. Ágh (2015) argues about hybrid democracies and their tendency towards de-Europeanization, which is consistent with our findings on nationalist-populist tendencies in Slovak parties such as SNS, Republika, but also SMER-SD. The article confirms Henderson's (2009) findings on the rise of Eurosceptic rhetoric among Slovak parties, often as a strategy to consolidate domestic support. Tsuladze et al. (2023) link de-Europeanization to discursive shifts prioritizing national sovereignty over EU integration, which played a considerable role in the 2023 parliamentary elections in Slovakia.

The article contributes to understanding de-Europeanization as a multifaceted and tactical phenomenon, in line with Smith's (2021) argument that it often serves as a short-term political strategy. Quantifying these tendencies provides a robust framework for analyzing policy shifts in Slovakia. Research highlights the interplay between domestic politics and EU integration, echoing Coman's (2014) claim that Europeanization and de-Europeanization are intertwined processes shaped by internal and external factors. The use of content analysis to quantify de-Europeanization through party manifestos is a novel approach, reflecting methodologies in Europeanization studies. However, manifestos vary in depth and clarity, as Filipec and Karabová (2018) found.

CONCLUSION

The article has examined the process of de-Europeanization of relevant political parties in Slovakia. It employs an index (ID) to measure the degree of de-Europeanization of eight relevant political entities. The index is based on their election manifestos for the parliamentary elections in 2023. The initial findings reveal a stark contrast in the approach of the monitored parties to the actual elaboration of the program documents. Significant discrepancies are evident in terms of both the scope and the methodology employed. Some documents are notably brief and general, while others are more com-

prehensive and delve into specific sectors, articulating precise goals and aspirations. This underscores a crucial challenge inherent in the measurement of ID. In documents of limited scope, the likelihood of identifying relevant keywords is diminished, or there may be a lack of coverage in more pertinent sectors. This may, therefore, distort the resulting ID value itself, which may not reflect the party's actual ideological-value anchoring, as presented to the voter. This is evident when comparing the two subjects with the highest and lowest occurrence of the searched keywords. While the party with the lowest number of occurrences (SNS) has only four keywords, the party with the highest occurrence (Hlas-SD) has 56.

The results of the analysis indicate that none of the political parties under consideration exhibit a tendency towards the absolute extremes of the linear ID scale. The party that is most closely aligned with this extreme position (and thus with de-Europeanization) is the political movement whose several key members have left Marian Kotleba (Kotleba's party - ĽS NS) - Republika (ID = 0.92). In contrast, the political party with the most pronounced Europeanization tendencies is the PS, with an ID value of 0.18. From the perspective of the current government parties, a paradox emerges. Of the three governing parties, two lean towards de-Europeanization, with SNS having the highest value (ID = 0.83), followed by Smer-SD (ID = 0.57). In contrast, Hlas-SD, with its strong position in the government, scored an ID value of only 0.34, making it one of the more Europeanized parties in this study. This creates potential conditions for a disparity between programmatic priorities and actual policy performance. The measured values also situate the KDH movement, which was instrumental in facilitating Slovakia's integration into the EU and NATO, within the group of parties exhibiting indications of de-Europeanization.

There is a discrepancy between the value of ID = 0.43 for the declaratively liberal SaS party, which in several cases serves as a critic of the EU and in some instances aligns more closely with de-Europeanized subjects. Similarly, the ambition to protect state interests in the European Union is evident in the case of Slovensko (OĽaNO), which has an ID value of 0.41. While this party declaratively advocates democratic standards and Western structures (EU and NATO), it does not call for further deepening of integration in sectors that it considers to be an internal matter of the member states. The findings indicate that a number of parties are inclined to alter the existing policy flow by transferring greater authority back to national governments or rejecting the transfer of competencies to the center.

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