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Sovereignty to the Leader: Visegrad Four Eurosceptic Narratives on the Future of the European Union

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Summary

The European Union gives rise to competing claims regarding the nature of sovereignty and democracy. While some view European integration as a source of non-democratic domination against sovereignty, others see sovereignty and democracy reinforced by integration processes. The former views have been made vocal by some political actors in the Visegrad countries – Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. Via analysing how sovereignty and democracy are narrated by Eurosceptic actors in parliamentary debates on the future of the EU between 2015 and 2019, we identify an archaic, absolutist, pre-parliamentary, and pre-popular view of sovereignty by Eurosceptic actors that, when linked to democracy, opposes EU integration. This narrative, present particularly but not exclusively in Hungary, fosters a ‘discursive differentiation’ in the EU that fails to be captured by the more traditional inter-governmental narrative, whereby state sovereignty is contrasted to further EU integration, and recognizes the extent to which the partisan leader-centric approach can prevail.

Keywords: Future of the European Union, Parliaments and Parliamentary Discourse, Euroscepticism, Sovereignty, Democracy, Visegrad Four

Introduction

Sovereignty features prominently in debates on European Union (EU) integration.¹ If sovereignty is tied to the state, the increase of competences of EU institutions would appear to diminish it (Góra *et al.*, 2025; Tekin, 2005). However, amidst growing global risks including autocratization (Angiolillo *et al.*, 2024), the climate emergency (Moriarty and Honnery, 2021), and pandemics, confining sovereignty to the state as a black box is an illusion. EU integration has been built on the idea of strengthening sovereignty of each participant, and with that, their future resilience to these risks (Haack, 2006).

The four ‘Visegrad’ EU member states (Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) have shaped debates on the future of the EU, in which sovereignty features prominently. Hungary and pre-2023 Poland have been chief proponents of ‘sovereignist’ visions of EU integration (Zielonka and Rupnik, 2020; Fabbrini and Zgaga, 2024; Góra and Zielińska, 2024). Moreover, many of the parties from the CEE region became active in European party groups defending ‘sovereignism’, such as Patriots for Europe and Europe of Sovereign Nations. While the 2023-2024 Slovak and Polish elections heralded a change between ‘two dancing partners’, the election results need not undermine the ‘growing divergence between [a] “sovereignist narrative” [...] and the moderate “pragmatic line”’ (Nič, 2016, p. 282).

Different visions of EU integration surfaced in this debate in the V4, with the concept of sovereignty invoked frequently. Eurosceptic parties were particularly vocal. National parliamentary debates served as arenas for articulating statements, and may be indicative of broader public discourses. Understanding the latter is essential in exploring narratives that can foster the development of the EU in line with constitutional values.

Therefore, we examine how, in statements voiced in the V4 national parliamentary debates on the future of the EU between 2015-2019, Eurosceptic MPs narrated sovereignty in relation to EU integration. For such a discourse analysis, as we show in Section 1, it is helpful to recognize the linkages between the concepts of sovereignty and democracy. We emphasize this linkage in the data collection that departs from broader research of narratives on the future of the EU (Section 2). In

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Section 3, we present the results in the form of four short case studies as a suitable format for a more in-depth engagement with the country-specific debates. Beyond the state of the art, our findings identify an archaic form of sovereignty in the Eurosceptic partisans' narratives, which goes even further in opposing EU integration than commonly known nation- or state sovereignty-centric narratives that see further integration as a threat to sovereignty. Considering the presence of Eurosceptic voices in all V4 countries, the analysis sheds doubt on significant divides in place between them as regards opposing robust associations between sovereignty and further EU integration and, by extension, 'constitutional models' (Fossum, 2021) thereof.

1. Sovereignty and Democracy: Two Sides of the Same Coin in the EU?

What is sovereignty and who is the sovereign now (Goldstein, 2001)? EU integration has been haunted by these questions. Do member *states* retain their sovereignty by pooling or dividing it (Peterson, 1997; Hamulák, 2016, Ch. 4)? Does a nascent 'European' sovereignty emerge (Avbelj, 2020)? Is sovereignty dispersed in the relations between states and political communities to avoid 'authorial control' over sovereignty that enables 'potential dominat[ion] of all those who are subject to the law and thus restrained by them [sic!] [...] (Bohman, 2009, p. 62)? Notwithstanding these and other questions, sovereignty is a popular concept. '[L]ike so many [...] that straddle the boundary between law and politics, [it] denot[es] a cluster of related ideas rather than one single clearly defined one' (Veitch *et al.*, 2018, p. 49).

We argue that to improve our understanding of how sovereignty features in discourses on the future of the EU, we need to engage with its 'various uses', rather than pre-determined definitions (see Kalmo and Skinner, 2010). This includes questions on how sovereignty is narrated and how it is associated with other key political concepts. Regarding the latter question, we focus on democracy as it shares with sovereignty the potential to oppose dominance in the EU context (Fossum, 2019).

Indeed, sovereignty and democracy appear as mutually reinforcing, undermining or partially independent values. Historically, the religious wars and the influence of Jean Bodin have transformed European socio-political thinking towards the preference of a clearly determinable, centralized and superior source of authority with the ultimate lawmaking power (Grimm, 2015, pp. 13-33). The idea of autonomy and independence from external, foreign interference has generated traction in subsequent political thinking. The transformations supporting the rise of democracies (Keane, 2010) have not led to the abandonment of the centrality of sovereignty, but to its *adjectivisation*. Hence, national sovereignty became distinct from popular sovereignty, in which the people as subjects of laws became their authors as well (Dyzenhaus, 2015, p. 364).

The sovereignty discourse attained particular meaning in the V4 countries after the fall of state socialism. Autocratic leaders violated the fundamental tenets of popular sovereignty, and hence, sovereignty became a chief reference point for regime change and equated with independence (Kopeček, 2019, p. 74). In the 1990s, sovereignty discourse merged with the slogan of ‘return to Europe’, realizing sovereignty via EU integration (*ibid.*). Democracy was a key goal; with Czech President Václav Havel defending the ‘Euro-American notion of democracy’ as key to prevent the ‘return to totalitarianism’.² Post-accession, the two discourses became dissociated with the support of the ideational conflict over the locus of sovereignty of EU member states and their citizens in some of the ‘old’ member states (cf. Hloušek and Fiala, 2021). Conceptions of sovereignty endorsing limits to EU integration and fuelling conflicts (Lorenz and Anders, 2020) between member state communities and the trans/supranational EU institutions proliferated.

The transformation of the discourse on sovereignty correlates with the changing imaginations of democracy. The discourse of alternatives to democracy understood as the absence of dominance appears to have prevailed in the V4. Anti-integrationist forces have been reshaping the image of Central Europe (Kazharski, 2018). The ‘Us’ versus ‘Them’ rhetoric is becoming entrenched at multiple levels (Lamour and Varga, 2020; Steuer, 2019), with ethnic citizens of these countries being presented as superior to others, and specific national ‘ways of life’ being incompatible with fundamental rights and the rule of law. The emphasis on values seems to be vanishing in favour of instrumentalism that defends EU membership only because of the material rewards associated with it (Szczerbiak, 2021).

The ‘new’ member states of Central Europe are among the ‘catalyst[s] to a debate on the EU governance model and its democratic legitimacy’ (Rashkova, 2021, p. 239). Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán appears most successful. Orbán rose to Europe-wide (in)famous status by reconstituting his ‘quest’ as one for ‘sovereign European nations’, which can decide on their own fate without supranational interference (Csehi, 2019). With this strategy, Orbán gained followers within the V4 political elite. ‘Varieties of populism’ remain present here (Havlik, 2019; Vachudova, 2020) and are associated with Eurosceptic rhetoric (Csehi and Zgut, 2021).

Yet, populism and Euroscepticism, while interconnected (e.g., Harmsen, 2010; Bale, 2018; Ruzza, 2009), are different concepts for a reason. According to Rooduijn and van Kessel (2019), they represent ‘two sides of the same coin’, identifiable via ‘feelings of resentment against remote and unresponsive elites, and dislike of undemocratic, complex and untransparent decision-making procedures’. However, Euroscepticism is a narrower concept that pertains to the actors’ position *vis-à-vis*

² <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/the-visegrad-book/havel-vaclav-the>.

the EU, whereas populist positions may be examined without reference to the EU context. Therefore, we employ Euroscepticism as a conceptual category to study how Eurosceptic narratives on the EU's future in national parliaments in the V4 countries relate particular conceptions of sovereignty and democracy to EU integration.

2. Methodology

Understanding sovereignty discourses of Eurosceptic actors in the parliaments has the potential to shed light on alternative imaginations of the EU's future as compared to the established narratives from the literature (Bellamy, 2019; Fossum, 2021). Parliaments play a special role in the future of EU debates, forming arenas where political actors negotiate ideas and proposals representing interests of their respective constituencies and mobilizing mass support. We used a qualitative approach to study political discourse as 'a real, manifest, observable and describable social practice which finds its expression in various documents in the use of oral and written language, images' (Keller, 2011, p. 53). This means that we prioritized the focus on the representations in the discourse and did not attribute equal weight to all references to particular keywords, which limits the replicability of the research but enhances its contextual sensitivity.

Via studying the depictions of sovereignty and democracy in the Czech, Hungarian, Polish, and Slovak parliaments, we cover all V4 countries equally, using parliamentary discourse data rather than the more commonly analysed political parties' (e.g., Kazharski, 2019) or leaders' speeches (Mos, 2020; Kim, 2021). Key debates in the parliament that indicate, and fuel, political contestation, are often normative (Wendler, 2014), and so views on the future of the EU may be identified and tracked more comprehensively. Our analysis stems from broader research of parliamentary discourses on the 'future of Europe' (Fossum, 2019; Góra *et al.*, 2026a). Our intention with this logic is to revisit and expand on existing contributions of the conceptions of sovereignty in the EU context (Coman and Leconte, 2019, p. 867; Góra *et al.*, 2025). For example, Borriello and Brack (2019) distinguished between national, EU, parliamentary and popular sovereignty, while others emphasized European or national parliamentary or popular sovereignty (Brack *et al.*, 2019; Beetz, 2019; Góra *et al.*, 2025). Our paper does not adopt predisposed notions of sovereignty besides particular attentiveness to the linkages between sovereignty and democracy as a reduction of non-domination as presented in Section 1 above.

Our empirical material consists of selected plenary debates related to the future of the EU in Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. A total of 18 debates were selected, four to five in each country (Appendix 1). The selection was performed as a combination of keyword search of references to the future of the EU in com-

bination with a review of the lists of all debate titles, using country expertise of the researchers, from 2015 to 2019, as to which issues were debated in relation to the future of the EU (see Table 1). Particular attention was paid to topics that were driving the debate on the EU in this period, such as migration and asylum, or economic development. Our units of analysis are individual speeches by MPs that we treat as articulations of discourse. While omission of some relevant debates or (more likely) speeches within otherwise unrelated debates cannot be excluded, and the reliance on country expertise of the researchers necessarily limits the replicability of the analysis to some extent (Benoit *et al.*, 2016), the debates selected enable a comprehensive analysis of the Eurosceptic partisans' narratives.

Table 1. Overview of the Empirical Material on V4 Parliaments (2015-2019)

	Czechia	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia
Number of debates	4	5	5	4
Number of merit speeches (excluding procedural interventions by session chairs)	136	200	117	70
– by MPs	113	182	99	48
– by executive actors	22	13	18	4
– by MEPs	1	5	0	18

We focus on V4 countries since they attracted attention because of illiberal tendencies (Zielonka and Rupnik, 2020) and because of their contestation of the directions of EU integration. In our analysis we focused on Eurosceptic actors and their claims pertaining to sovereignty in the context of the future of the EU and EU integration. We used the PopuList database to indicate the Eurosceptic parties in our dataset (Rooduijn *et al.*, 2019) – the overview of all Eurosceptic actors can be found in Appendix 2 (see also Table 2 there).

3. Results

This section contains four subsections on each V4 country, offering a qualitative analysis of the references to sovereignty, democracy and the connections between them by Eurosceptic parliamentarians in each country. This approach helps identify specific narratives, particularly that of the 'discursive differentiation' whereby the Eurosceptic actors not only want to isolate their country or community from the 'corrosive' impact of the EU institutions, but rather to take over and change the direction of EU institutional politics as a whole.

3.1. *Czechia: Sovereignty as the Nation's Struggle to be Heard and Respected*

In the Czech Parliament, sovereignty within the EU appears most prominently in the context of competence diffusion. Debates reflect the effort to preserve member state (MS) competences.³

The Eurosceptic parties see sovereignty as worth fighting for. The Civic Conservative Party (ODS) calls for 'rewinding' the EU integration process 'several kilometres back' (Skopeczek) amidst a deep crisis. EU resources present just a path towards an EU superstate instead of an 'association of at least slightly sovereign countries'. ODS MP Fiala (who became PM of Czechia in 2021) is convinced that the EU apparently weakens the power of its MSs. It is necessary to revise the Lisbon Treaty, so that at the end there is a union with a greater voice of nation-states.

Dawn MPs similarly suggest that all the competences that are not linked to the common market are national, while the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM) maintains that MSs should be given their rights back instead of deepening the EU bureaucracy. For Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD), sovereignty means self-reliance, for instance, in defence. In the context of migration and Brexit, Dawn and later SPD started to call for a referendum on 'Czexit', albeit without any response from other MPs.

Democracy appears less prominently and is presented mainly via the notions of hierarchy and EU dominance. All Eurosceptic parties argue that the Lisbon Treaty should be revised, claiming that it denies the democratic principles in, for instance, having unelected leading positions. Furthermore, the KSCM MPs critique inequality in the EU and call for treaty change to address it. Their statement implies inequality and/or dominance of some over others manifesting itself in the form of threats from the EU level towards the countries that disagree with EU decisions. The threat of illicit influence or dominance of the Germany and France axis surfaced as well. While these interventions do not suffice to structurally challenge the argument that some EU-related debates have been depoliticized in Czechia (Kaniok and Brusenbauch Meislová, 2020), they indicate the ways how selected Eurosceptic parties used them to level critiques against the EU as a whole.

Another line of argument on democracy pertains to the specific actions of the EU perceived as discriminating, for example, by the EU pointing at Hungary as a deterrent example despite (allegedly) democratic elections there. ODS MP Novotný claims the legitimacy and authority of the EU representatives is very weak. The way of decision-making and implementation is faulty and as such denies the historical

³ For example: 'The EU should return to the pre-Lisbon treaty, when the states were sovereign' (Marek Černoch, Dawn). The Dawn party also discusses sovereignty as the embodiment of MS freedom.

experience of democratic institutions. Inequality between Eurozone MSs and those that have not adopted the euro exacerbates the disadvantage faced by Czechia and the dangers of undesirable two-speed Europe. Yet, the parties oppose adopting the euro. Instead, they call for strengthening the role of the Council, and a revision of the voting policy to stop any further interventions in the internal affairs of the EU (Fiala). After 2017, the SPD and KSCM claimed to oppose the Germany-France axis as defining a two-speed Europe, alleging a lack of transparency and concluding that only the V4 together can be an equal partner to Germany. Despite all the fears of dominance, ODS and KSCM MPs propose flexible integration, somewhat in contradiction with the fear of a two-speed Europe.

In sum, sovereignty is reflected upon by the Czech Eurosceptic parliamentarians as a struggle to be heard and respected on the supranational level, thereby also being a psychological and/or symbolic extension of the degree of significance/position within the EU. The lack of sovereignty associated with disproportionate integration results manifests in the dominance of the EU institutions over independent national decision-making. This argument is endorsed by ODS and implies the overall insecurity brought about by the post-Westphalian order, blurred boundaries between the national and supranational, and the difficulty to position the country in such an environment.

Democracy and the frequently expressed sense of being dominated by the EU institutions are reflected in the phrases such as the dictate of Brussels, the ruling of unelected bureaucrats in the Commission or exclusion from the dominant axis of France and Germany. At the same time, the EU is being criticized for becoming estranged from its citizens and for its growing inability to solve the crises.

The debates narrate a lack of sovereignty resulting in dominance, calls for 'returning more sovereignty' to the MSs, even if this would require treaty revision. This is accompanied by the majority appeal to prevent joining the Eurozone, in order to maintain the 'last remnants of sovereignty'. These results match with the observation of general prevalence of Euroscepticism in the Czech parliamentary discourse, but with lower frequency of incidences of radically anti-EU positions (Hrabálek and Strelkov, 2015). Yet, the widespread nature of Eurosceptic interventions questions the 'favoured position' of Czechia compared to Hungary and Poland (cf. Vachudova, 2019).

3.2. Hungary: The Leader Opposing Colonialism as Manifestation of Sovereignty

The five 'future of the EU' debates covered in Hungary were all initiated by coalition representatives, frequently with direct involvement of executive actors. Due to the structure of the Hungarian debates, the coalition actors have disproportionate time to present their positions.

The references to sovereignty speak to strengthening national competences. Predominantly FIDESZ–KDNP (Hungarian Civic Alliance–Christian Democratic People’s Party) MPs expressed discontent with any form of federalization (‘United States of Europe’). For example, for the former minister of justice (Trócsányi), Hungary is among those who ‘wish [...] to live in a Europe of nations’.

Far-right Jobbik (Movement for a Better Hungary) MP Z. Kárpát Dániel challenged the coalition’s Schmittian understanding of the world that is ‘black or white, [encompassing] only friend or enemy’. In contrast, Jobbik is ‘capable of thinking in shades’. This distinction becomes the basis of criticizing the deficit of Hungary’s sovereignty caused by the governmental ‘extraction’ of Hungarian resources via non-transparent managerial practices of large corporations.

Most references to sovereignty are connected with dominance. The opening speech of PM Orbán in the debate on the Seventh Amendment to the Fundamental Law presents sovereignty as central for the preservation of ‘Hungarian’ character. Hungary allegedly champions diversity, by opposing those ‘according to whom borders need to be eliminated; for whom the dream is that the world, or at least Europe, melts into one gigantic multitude, which eliminates the national traditions, cultures, languages and laws’. Orbán combines a critique of federalism with an anti-imperial flavour: the opposition to a European empire. Hungary (presented as united) becomes the ‘underdog’, standing up against neo-colonial EU governance.

The claims for the need for Hungarian culture to dominate is enhanced via othering. MP Vejkey argues that the results of the public voting of October 2016 showed that 98% of Hungarians are against ‘forced colonization’ of Hungary by migrants. A defense of Hungarian sovereignty, therefore, requires opposing the EU’s policy. On behalf of the Christian democrats, Vejkey blames the Union for encouraging migration that will lead to ‘corruption of the souls’ by introducing Sharia law to European societies. In turn, domestic opposition parties are blamed for siding with the ‘enemy’ in that they encouraged the people to not participate in the public voting.

A similar ‘anti-colonial’ rhetoric can be traced in the debate on the Sargentini report passed by the EP. MP Kocsis argued that the EP has ceased to respect the EU’s own system; it exemplified readiness to ‘distort, modify it’, just to punish states with counter-hegemonic political positions. While neglecting non-migration-related issues in the report, Kocsis’ statement combines narratives of resistance, national pride, ‘respect towards the rules’, and parliamentary sovereignty.⁴ Here,

⁴ ‘The National Assembly is the most important institution of democracy. The Sargentini report attacked the decisions of the Hungarian parliament [...], and thereby violated Hungary’s sovereignty.’

Hungary is framed as oppressed by a foreign, antidemocratic institution, with the 'crown jewel' of its democracy standing up against that oppression.⁵

The portrayal of Hungary as a country oppressed by the EU hegemony fuels the presentation of a threat to sovereignty. The MPs highlight three issues. One is dominance caused by 'stealth lawmaking' (or 'stealth federalism', MP L. Simon, also MP Tilki). Here, the EU, understood as the 'triumvirate' of 'Brussels, Soros, Strasbourg', is seen as intending to take away the 'Christian identity' of Hungary (Vejkey). Not all EU institutions are equally targeted by the critique.⁶ The Commission receives most of the blame, followed by the EP, with the Council brought up less frequently.

Secondly, illicit hierarchy is claimed to be triggered by the Commission's actions against the history, heritage and identity of Central Europe. For example, MP Levente Magyar argued that the steps against Poland exemplify the betrayal of 'true European values' in favour of an ideology that would lead to Poland ceasing to be 'Polish'. Sovereignty is connected to Christian values and the prioritization of the family. Furthermore, warlike rhetoric is adopted, for example, when it is stated that the Commission is attacking a sovereign country (MP Latorcai, also MP Magyar). The alleged villains behind this are Brussels-based bureaucrats, who refuse to tolerate any alternative EU visions. This debate shows that the Eurosceptic rhetoric travels beyond borders: by 'defending' Poland against the EU, the Hungarian MPs create a new cleavage where the (unified) peoples of Hungary and Poland (Kim, 2021) stand up against the Commission's hegemonic worldview.

Thirdly, oppositional Jobbik brought up a different cleavage when criticizing CETA as a trade agreement in which 'multinational corporations can sue states at selected courts' (MP Z. Kárpát). This critique argues that public power is falling victim to its privatization.

Four conclusions emerge. Firstly, sovereignty is overwhelmingly understood in a Schmittian sense as the competence to make absolute decisions on one's territory. Parliament itself is clearly not an 'Austinian' sovereign (Bix, 2018); if anything, it serves as an extended forum for articulation of executive demands. Secondly,

⁵ For Mártai, one of the Fidesz MPs and the few debating female MPs, the entire global order is ruled by liberal ideology which 'cannot cope with the illiberal, i.e. communitarian viewpoint that denies the uncontrolled dominance of money, and therefore it wants to destroy this viewpoint. [...] They [...] believe that by destroying communities, family ties, natural gender roles, by deconstructing human dignity, self-respect, natural capacity for self-preservation, and by shifting Europe's population to peoples of different culture, they solve the many problems of Europe and the world.'

⁶ For example, even though the Sargentini report was debated by the EP, the Commission appears as the 'plotter' undermining sovereignty (MP Aradszki).

fears and rejection of 'EU dominance' are a frequent companion to associations of sovereignty and democracy, manifesting particularly in motives of exclusion (Brussels deciding without Hungary) and illicit hierarchy (the EU as a neo-colonial empire eager to strip Hungarians of their freedom and dignity). Thirdly, instances of apocalyptic language, symbolic imaginaries are abundant, with only limited invocations of concrete proposals, empirical data or policy positions. This confirms the gradual radicalization of Hungarian parliamentary discourse on the EU fuelled by 'nationalism, open racism and opposition to the EU' (Ilonszki, 2015, p. 532). The dominance of male coalition MPs' interventions underscore a 'masculine' position of Hungary, adhering to a stereotypical association of strength tied to powerful symbolic speeches. Yet, most of the interventions bring little originality and even signal an outright lack of understanding of the key concepts (e.g., invocations of federalism as if it stood for a unitary state or distorted historical references). Fourthly, the rhetoric of the coalition Eurosceptic parties is similar, but Jobbik has been both less vocal in reframing the concepts of sovereignty and democracy in the parliamentary discourse, and has shown some resistance towards the association of Hungarians to the current government.

All in all, Hungarian Eurosceptic political parties tend not to adopt their own vocabulary when presenting key values and priorities, but rather reframe the vocabulary of the mainstream (Wendler, 2014, pp. 563-564). There are no 'sacred' or 'untouchable' concepts (Steuer, 2025): everything is available for the purpose of constructing the most vocal and definitive argument for the EU as a villain and Hungary, led by its government, as a hero.

3.3. Poland: *The Nation's Sovereignty Above All Other Goods*⁷

The debate on the future of the EU in Poland under the Law and Justice (PiS) government overlapped with a reconfiguration of the debate on EU integration. The financial troubles of the EU (and Eurozone) fuelled the narrative of a weakening of the EU in which only a strong nation-state can be trusted, that was employed by PiS after it took power in 2015. The sceptical assessment of the abilities of the EU to govern was deepened by the 'migration crisis' of 2015/2016 that had a profound symbolic meaning for the society and domestic politics in Poland. PiS utilized anti-immigrant and Islamophobic narratives to sow fear over migrants coming to Poland, strengthening its position as saviour of the nation from this threat (Krzyżanowski, 2017; Thevenin, 2024). The migration crisis strengthened PiS's narrative of a weak and failing EU unable to deal with crises. The party leadership

⁷ The empirical data which serves as a basis for this part was collected and analysed by the team of researchers at the Jagiellonian University: Magdalena Góra, Elodie Thevenin and Katarzyna Zielińska as part of EU3D project.

saw the best response in being a strong nation-state in a reconstituted Union (Góra *et al.*, 2026b; Szczerski, 2017; Tosiek, 2018; 2019).

As a result, since 2015 the EU integration has been a central and contentious issue in domestic politics in Poland. EU integration became politicized – with growing polarization of opinions on integration. The voices rejecting integration on the right wing of the political spectrum (United Poland (SP); National Movement (RN) and KORWiN parties) became clearly visible in the public sphere, having been strategically muted before. PiS also started to clearly follow the Eurosceptic constructions characteristic of British Conservatives. Sovereignism locates the nation-state as a master of integration and claims that sovereignty is the highest value to be protected (Fabbrini, 2015). European institutions shall act to protect it. PiS followed that logic in its evolving views on EU integration and prime minister Mateusz Morawiecki became a significant proponent of such a vision (Fabbrini and Zgaga, 2024; Góra and Zielińska, 2024).

Traditionally, sovereignty has a special status in Poland that stems from the historical experience of long partitions and constant urge for independence. Hence the notion of sovereignty is closely interlinked with independence in Polish discourse and has a sacrosanct character. That produces narrative constructions that put national sovereignty as top value, and even if overused by right-wing parties, it is hardly contested by the center and left side of the political spectrum. There is also a key interrelation with the process of EU integration: integration with Western structures brings security and escape from the geopolitical existential threat, at the cost of curtailed sovereignty. Sovereignty is also – particularly by the right-wing parties – perceived in very traditional Bodinian categories – unitary and indivisible. The nation is the ultimate possessor of sovereignty, thereby producing useful links with nationalist and nativist discourses. Hence, sharing sovereignty with the EU or international organizations is troubling. From this status quo, it is easy to get to claims that the nation – pure and virtuous – is deprived of sovereignty by (alien) elites: Polish, cosmopolitan and Eurocrats.

The zero-sum, indivisible Bodinian sovereignty that belongs to the nation (understood in essentialist terms) characterizes most right-wing Eurosceptic parties' discourse. The differentiating factor is how it interlinks with nationalist or nativist elements – the more right-wing (RN, Konfederacja, Kukiz'15, SP), the more nativist elements prevail and sovereignty is treated as protection of the nation.

PiS – albeit also reproducing such construction – treated sovereignty more as a protection of a strong nation-state with the exclusive ability to protect people. In the debates, the arguments related to sovereignty often came up when migration was discussed (Thevenin, 2024), but also in relation to Brexit (especially in 2016/2017). The typical argument was that the UK's case shows what may happen if the 'na-

tion's aspirations' are suppressed by the EU. While telling this, government representatives and PiS deputies presented themselves as pro-European, involved in the productive discussions within the EU, to rebut the opposition's arguments about their actions leading to the marginalization of Poland and the weakening of the EU.

A more moderate stance – still oriented on the protection of sovereignty – treated sovereignty as a commodity that can be pooled and shared with the EU, but is still retained by the nation-state, with the pooling governed by a functional logic. Among Eurosceptic parties, such views were pursued by PiS moderate wing. In such views, the main tenet was that in a highly globalized world nation-states need to pool their competencies to protect their people. Hence the key indicator of what justifies sharing sovereignty was utility-based – it needs to protect the citizens as the sovereign (Góra *et al.*, 2025). However, both PiS and its coalition (except for a minor Euroreject party, SP) as well as pro-EU opposition parties had, in the analyzed period, a similarly negative perception of a differentiated Union. Both sides reject differentiation as a means to further peripheralize the country, thus posing an existential threat. To counter this danger, PiS tended to build coalitions of the willing to push for more intergovernmental integration stressing the role of the Single Market as an antidote to increased differentiation. The opposition suggested closer integration, including fast Eurozone accession. For them, differentiation also implied the marginalization of Poland's position in the EU in terms of both recognition (political and symbolic) and redistribution. The PiS government was blamed for leading the country and even the entire EU in this direction (Góra *et al.*, 2026a).

The issue of remodelling the EU democratic outlook was often raised by PiS politicians. They declared commitment to better democracy protection, but at the same time saw themselves as the protectors against the 'rotten elites'. Their narratives mixed claims to enhance popular sovereignty with giving a greater role to the sovereign state. The often-mentioned reform was to strengthen the role of national parliaments treated as holders of sovereign will. It was perceived as balancing the position and proposals by the European Commission perceived as dominated by ideological bureaucrats. Sovereignty was also used as an argument to pursue a majoritarian democracy conception, stressing that those who won in democratic elections and held the majority have unlimited right to determine the direction of politics with no concern for minority rights. In its core it was an illiberal element strengthened by the sovereignty argument (Bodnar, 2021; Krastev, 2018; Meyer-Resende, 2018).

3.4. Slovakia: Maintaining Sovereignty at the Periphery

Eurosceptic Slovak MPs frequently mention and discuss the concept of sovereignty. Post-2016, MPs from People's Party Our Slovakia (LSNS) or We Are Family (SR)

often referred to national sovereignty in debates stirred mainly by Smer MPs on migration, cultural, and ethical issues. Here, they underscored only the security of Slovak citizens. Paradoxically, in light of the party's later development (Marušiak, 2021), Smer MPs advocated to join the EU core. Yet, they join Eurosceptics in militating again 'cultural integration' as a threat to national sovereignty.

With the strongly Eurosceptic far-right LSNS gaining seats in the Parliament in 2016, voices supporting 'Slovexit' appeared. Democracy has been framed as antagonistic to the supranational level (often referred to simply as 'Brussels' dictate'). However, such comments or critiques were general, vague and abstract, picturing Brussels (Berlin or Paris) as a body that dominates ('dictates to') us, prescribing conduct to 'ordinary Slovaks'. There is practically no mention of sovereignty at the EU level (such as in defence or in foreign policy).

These actors rarely differentiate between specific EU institutions and policy areas, and they seldom acknowledge the unanimous decision-making process in the Council. For them, the EU seems to be a monolithic structure that stands against the sovereign and democratic decision-making (law- and regulation-making⁸) at the national level.

The debate on whether to 'join the core' centred around, essentially, advocating (or at least accepting) differentiation. But MPs, also those in favour of Slovakia 'joining the core', do not provide specifics of how 'the core' might work. It seems to come 'from outside', and the Slovak role is simply to adapt. The support for being in 'the core' while simultaneously claiming that Slovakia has no EU-level impact make Slovakia 'a place of paradoxes' (see Hajdu *et al.*, 2021).

Positions of Slovak MPs in 2012-2016 were consistent with the 'ever-closer-Union' principle, with 2016 general elections serving as the departure point for a transformation of the discourse; an 'Overton window' has moved gradually after 2016. Hardline Eurosceptics such as LSNS gained seats in the 2016 elections, becoming vocal critics of the EU, occasionally even advocating for an 'exit' from the Union that has become too liberal and multicultural, as well as anti-national and anti-Christian. The EU is portrayed as a 'dark force' behind all the directives and regulations that are being 'imposed from above' on 'ordinary' Slovak citizens. The parliamentary discourse seems to have shifted, therefore, largely thanks to these hardline Eurosceptics who have been successful in vocally opposing and criticizing the EU, although without much substance and without comprehensive alternative proposals. Political consensus on ongoing integration ('ever closer Union'), with the major differences between the relevant parties being of technical nature rather

⁸ That also applies to some MPs' positions towards the EP; one Slovak MP even deemed it an 'unnecessary institution'.

than of substance (see also Brusenbauch Meislová and Hloušek, 2025), has been weakening since 2016.

Eurosceptic (or as they portray themselves, Eurorealist) MPs, mainly from Freedom and Solidarity (SaS), were usually the champions of ‘constructive criticism’ of the EU. They did not advocate any radical change, let alone exiting the Union; rather, they tended to support the ‘status quo’ or endorse technical, specific aspects of integration. That generally cannot be said about the active MPs from LSNS or SR, whose criticisms tended to be vague, used exaggerations, apply straw-man fallacy and strategy of ‘cherry-picking’, mix facts with assumptions, make bold historical comparisons (e.g., comparing the EU to the Soviet Union).

Specific, analytical contributions that would reveal in greater detail what MPs have in mind when they speak of ‘greater integration’, ‘maintaining status quo’, or – and that is common in the Slovak Parliament in the given period – when they call for Slovakia to ‘join the *core* of the EU’, are largely missing.

In sum, Slovak Eurosceptic MPs remain vague and unconstructive in their critiques of the EU. The hardline Eurosceptics present it as a monolith, without nuance towards particular institutions. ‘Discursive differentiation’ manifests in simultaneous calls for unity and equality among MSs and acceptance of (or even support for) differentiation in particular areas. Yet, over time the ‘Overton window’ has been moving towards harsher critiques of the EU, without these being accompanied by constructive proposals to address its shortcomings. Slovak Eurosceptic MPs increasingly voiced calls *to do something*. It remains a mystery what exactly they think should be done.

Conclusions

The analysis of selected parliamentary debates on the future of the EU in the V4 countries demonstrates that ideas of sovereignty are represented in the Eurosceptic constructions of the EU and commonly connected with understandings of EU democracy, albeit in a vague manner without policy specificity.

Compared to the existing literature, this analysis shows that sovereignty can be taken ownership of and reshaped by Eurosceptic actors. Rather than defending sovereignty in isolation from the EU, these actors advocate for advancement of their conception of sovereignty, at times even demanding of the whole EU to transform in line with this conception. Albeit incoherent and infused with factual deficiencies on the functioning of EU institutions, the ‘discursive differentiation’ through narrating sovereignty indicates that the constitutional models envisioned for the reform of the EU from a scholarly perspective – intergovernmental, federal, and cosmopolitan-regional (see Fossum, 2021) – do not capture the visions presented by V4 Eurosceptic parliamentarians. Even the intergovernmental model falls short of the extent

of re-reading the EU foundations and values (at times with extensive historical and symbolic references) by the MPs. The discourses do not present a coherent model, but need to be understood in order to develop more comprehensive responses towards the challenges raised by Eurosceptics to the functioning of EU institutions.

The findings, albeit limited due to the absence of an exhaustive list of references to sovereignty beyond the selected debates and due to not accounting for developments since 2022 (Hloušek and Havlík, 2024), call for improvements of the classifications of sovereignty discourse. Specifically, the Hungarian regime with fifteen years of Eurosceptic actors in government sees its parliamentarians hailing the central figure of the political leader as the embodiment of national sovereignty. Associated with concepts such as ‘plebiscitary leader democracy’ (Körösényi *et al.*, 2020, following Weber), this set of ideas indicates the (re)emphasizing of ‘executive’ or ‘leader sovereignty’, where the parliament merely assists the political leader in carrying out the will of the people. Popular sovereignty defended by the national parliament steps aside in favour of the parliament becoming an extended hand of the leader who *is* the people.

Further research could help understand who the main presenters of the narratives are, as indicated by a gender divide not only in terms of male MPs leading the charge against further EU integration, but also the EU institutions being portrayed as the ‘weaker, feminine’ party in the process. Furthermore, different policy areas (e.g., Brexit or migration) might fuel competing representations of sovereignty. Considering that most parliamentary parties in the V4 countries in some of the analysed periods are Eurosceptic, the alternative imaginations are unlikely to quantitatively prevail over those reported in the paper. However, they might provide sources of resistance to the monopolisation of the parliamentary discourse on the EU by advocates of a transformation of the EU into an entity foreign to constitutional values. Locating and reinforcing such sources is essential if the EU is to sustain and advance its democratic commitment and to avoid becoming a major challenge to, rather than potential for, strengthening the prospects for democratic futures globally.

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Appendix 1. List of Selected Debates in V4 Countries 2015-2019**Polish Sejm**

2016-10-05	Informacja dla Sejmu i Senatu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej o udziale Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w pracach Unii Europejskiej w okresie styczeń-czerwiec 2016 r. (przewodnictwo Holandii w Radzie Unii Europejskiej) (druk nr 712) wraz ze stanowiskiem Komisji do Spraw Unii Europejskiej (druk nr 714)	http://orka2.sejm.gov.pl/StenoInter8.nsf/0/4D6FCFA93E71D570C1258043006EDA2C/%24File/27_b_ksiazka_bis.pdf
2017-03-23	Sprawozdanie Komisji do Spraw Unii Europejskiej o poselskim projekcie uchwały w 60. rocznicę zapoczątkowania procesów integracji europejskiej (druki nr 1391 i 1394).	http://orka2.sejm.gov.pl/StenoInter8.nsf/0/4E1412BBDD76C840C12580EC007F55F1/%24File/38_b_ksiazka_bis.pdf
2017-10-12	Informacja dla Sejmu i Senatu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej o udziale Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w pracach Unii Europejskiej w okresie styczeń-czerwiec 2017 r. (przewodnictwo Malty w Radzie Unii Europejskiej) (druk nr 1723) wraz ze stanowiskiem Komisji do Spraw Unii Europejskiej (druk nr 1804).	http://orka2.sejm.gov.pl/StenoInter8.nsf/0/290F0B0341A2D875C12581B7007CD43E/%24File/49_c_ksiazka_bis.pdf
2018-09-13	Informacja dla Sejmu i Senatu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej o udziale Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w pracach Unii Europejskiej w okresie styczeń-czerwiec 2018 r. (przewodnictwo Bułgarii w Radzie Unii Europejskiej) (druk nr 2728) wraz ze stanowiskiem Komisji do Spraw Unii Europejskiej (druk nr 2730).	http://orka2.sejm.gov.pl/StenoInter8.nsf/0/D580C61F25713E0BC1258307007CFE54/%24File/68_b_ksiazka_bis.pdf
2019-03-13	Informacja dla Sejmu i Senatu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej o udziale Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w pracach Unii Europejskiej w okresie lipiec-grudzień 2018 r. (przewodnictwo Austrii w Radzie Unii Europejskiej) (druk nr 3145) z komisyjnym projektem uchwały (druki nr 3234).	http://orka2.sejm.gov.pl/StenoInter8.nsf/0/C4AC0EBBED0AB979C12583BD000C6500/%24File/78_a_ksiazka_bis.pdf

Slovak National Council (NR SR)

2017-03-31	Informácia poslancov Európskeho parlamentu, ktorí boli zvolení na území Slovenskej republiky o výkone ich mandátu a o aktuálnych otázkach prerokúvaných v Európskom parlamente	https://tv.nrsr.sk/archiv/schodza/7/14?MeetingDate=31032017&DisplayChairman=false
2017-05-16	Správa o priebehu a výsledkoch predsedníctva SR v Rade Európskej únie/Výročná správa o členstve Slovenskej republiky v Európskej únii – hodnotenie a aktuálne priority vyplývajúce z Pracovného programu Európskej komisie/Správa o plnení úloh zahraničnej a európskej politiky Slovenskej republiky v roku 2016 a jej zameranie na rok 2017	https://tv.nrsr.sk/archiv/schodza/7/17?id=178763
2018-05-15	Výročná správa o členstve Slovenskej republiky v Európskej únii – hodnotenie a aktuálne priority vyplývajúce z Pracovného programu Európskej komisie/Správa o plnení úloh zahraničnej a európskej politiky Slovenskej republiky v roku 2017 a jej zameranie na rok 2018/Správa o činnosti Výboru Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky pre európske záležitosti za roky 2016 a 2017	https://tv.nrsr.sk/archiv/schodza/7/31?id=192331
2019-05-14	Výročná správa o členstve Slovenskej republiky v Európskej únii – hodnotenie a aktuálne priority vyplývajúce z Pracovného programu Európskej komisie/Hodnotenie priorít zahraničnej a európskej politiky Slovenskej republiky v roku 2018 a ich zameranie na rok 2019	https://tv.nrsr.sk/archiv/schodza/7/45?id=208917

Hungarian parliament (*Országgyűlés*)

2015-09	A message to the EU leaders This debate concerns an MP initiative aimed at highlighting the responsibility of EU leaders for the ‘migration crisis’ and requesting the government to strengthen its stance in view of protecting ‘the nation’. H/5984 Üzenet az Európai Unió vezetőinek	https://www.parlament.hu/web/guest/orszaggyulesi-naplo-elozo-ciklusbeli-adatai?p_p_id=hu_parlament_cms_pair_portlet_PairProxy_INSTANCE_9xd2Wc9jP4z8&p_p_lifecycle=1&p_p_state=normal&p_p_mode=view&p_auth=cvFGDHVX&_hu_parlament_cms_pair_portlet_PairProxy_INSTANCE_9xd2Wc9jP4z8_pairAction=%2Finternet%2Fcpls%2Fogy_irom.irom_adat%3Fpckl%3D40%26p_izon%3D5984
2017-12	Against the resolution of the European Parliament on the execution of the Soros-plan (December 2017) The ‘Soros plan’ is an expressive reference to the EP resolution of 16 November 2017.⁹ It provides a particular interpretation of the resolution, among others alleging that it empowers domestic anti-Hungarian organisations to undermine the state via supporting uncontrolled migration. It also appeals on the executive that it ‘does not succumb to the pressure of the EP and the European bureaucracy, protects the rights of our homeland from the Union treaties, rejects the Soros-plan [...]’. H/18817 Az Európai Parlament Soros-terv végrehajtásáról szóló határozatával szemben	https://www.parlament.hu/web/guest/orszaggyulesi-naplo-elozo-ciklusbeli-adatai?p_p_id=hu_parlament_cms_pair_portlet_PairProxy_INSTANCE_9xd2Wc9jP4z8&p_p_lifecycle=1&p_p_state=normal&p_p_mode=view&p_auth=u2pR4nD0&_hu_parlament_cms_pair_portlet_PairProxy_INSTANCE_9xd2Wc9jP4z8_pairAction=%2Finternet%2Fcpls%2Fogy_irom.irom_adat%3Fpckl%3D40%26p_izon%3D18817

⁹ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/PV-8-2017-11-16-ITM-007-04_EN.html.

2018-02	On supporting Poland against the pressure executed by Brussels The extraordinary debate appeals to the close relationship between Hungary and Poland and aims to condemn the EU institutions for ‘illegal and unjust’ attacks on Poland that are supposed to threaten the freedom of all member states and nations of Europe. Connections are made to the resistance to the state socialist dictatorship in the context of the initiation of the Art. 7 procedure. H/19861 A Lengyelország melletti kiállásról Brüsszel nyomásgyakorlásával szemben	https://www.parlament.hu/web/guest/orszagguylesi-naplo-elozo-ciklusbeli-adatai?p_p_id=hu_parlament_cms_pair_portlet_PairProxy_INSTANCE_9xd2Wc9jP4z8&p_p_lifecycle=1&p_p_state=normal&p_p_mode=view&p_auth=OLJK2fKv&_hu_parlament_cms_pair_portlet_PairProxy_INSTANCE_9xd2Wc9jP4z8_pa irAction=%2Finternet%2Fcplsql%2Fogy_irom.irom_adat%3Fp_ckl%3D40%26p_izon%3D19861
2018-06	The seventh amendment to the Fundamental Law of Hungary This is an important debate that introduced several party-driven changes to the Fundamental Law, notably a clause on the protection of Hungarian constitutional identity and one on the prohibition of ‘forced colonization’ of Hungary by migrants.¹⁰ The amendment arose in the aftermath of an unsuccessful referendum (only 40 % of eligible voters supported the proposed declaration) (Pállinger, 2019). T/332 Magyarország Alaptörvényének hetedik módosítása	https://www.parlament.hu/web/guest/felszolalasok-keresese?p_p_id=hu_parlament_cms_pair_portlet_PairProxy_INSTANCE_9xd2Wc9jP4z8&p_p_lifecycle=1&p_p_state=normal&p_p_mode=view&p_auth=u2pR4nD0&_hu_parlament_cms_pair_portlet_PairProxy_INSTANCE_9xd2Wc9jP4z8_pa irAction=%2Finternet%2Fcplsql%2Fogy_irom.irom_adat%3Fp_ckl%3D41%26p_izon%3D1487

¹⁰ The question had to do with the imposition by the European Union of ‘mandatory settlement of non-Hungarian citizens in Hungary without the support of the Hungarian parliament’ (Uitz, 2019, p. 20).

2018-10	On the defense of Hungarian sovereignty and the rejection of defamatory statements against Hungary This is a five-page resolution that the parliament discussed after the EP adopted the Sargentini report. It summarizes the Hungarian governmental position against open borders and the EU's approach to migration. It invokes the need to defend 'Christian values' and respect Hungarian sovereignty. It contains an appeal to the executive to resist the 'black-mailing' from European institutions and utilize available legal avenues to challenge the claims presented by them (for instance, it considers the EP report invalid by a particular interpretation of Art. 354 TFEU). It promotes the 'Europe of nations', 'free political thinking and right to decision making' of member states, and the 'legality' of the operation of EU institutions. H/1487 A Magyarország szuverenitásának megvédéséről és a Magyarországgal szembeni rágalmak viszáztasításáról	https://www.parlament.hu/web/guest/felszolalasok-keresese?p_p_id=hu_parlament cms_pair_portlet_PairProxy_INSTANCE_9xd2Wc9jP4z8&p_p_lifecycle=1&p_p_state=normal&p_p_mode=view&p_auth=u2pR4nD0&_hu_parlament cms_pair_portlet_PairProxy_INSTANCE_9xd2Wc9jP4z8_pa irAction=%2Finternet%2Fcplsql %2Fogy_irom.irom_adat%3Fp_ ck1%3D41%26p_izon%3D1487
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Chamber of Deputies – Parliament of the Czech Republic

2015-09-17	Vládní návrh, kterým se předkládá Parlamentu České republiky k vyslovení souhlasu s ratifikací Dohoda o přidružení mezi Evropskou unií a Evropským společenstvím pro atomovou energii a jejich členskými státy na jedné straně a Ukrajinou na straně druhé /sněmovní tisk 310/ – druhé čtení	https://www.psp.cz/eknih/2013ps/stenprot/031schuz/bqbs/b15112901.htm
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2016-06-30	Informace předsedy vlády k situaci v Evropské unii po referendu ve Velké Británii o vystoupení z Evropské unie	https://www.psp.cz/eknih/2013ps/stenprot/048schuz/bqbs/b13621701.htm
2017-05-18	Informace členky Evropské komise Věry Jourové o Bílé knize o budoucnosti Evropské unie	https://www.psp.cz/eknih/2013ps/stenprot/057schuz/bqbs/b08733902.htm
2018-09-13	Víceletý finanční rámec EU na období 2021-2027	https://www.psp.cz/eknih/2017ps/stenprot/019schuz/bqbs/b08807601.htm

Appendix 2. Details on Eurosceptic Parties Included in the Analysis

In the Czech National Assembly, in the 2013-2017 period, the following Eurosceptic parties were represented: KSCM (*Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy*, Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia), UPD (*Úsvit přímé demokracie*, Dawn of Direct Democracy) and ODS (*Občanská demokratická strana*, Civic Democratic Party).¹¹ In the 2018-2020 period, they were: KSCM, SPD (*Sloboda a přímá demokracie Tomio Okamura*, Freedom and Direct Democracy Tomio Okamura) and ODS. All mentioned parties were in the opposition during the whole period of 2015-2019, although KSCM signed a ‘tolerance patent’ in 2018 with ANO, an agreement of mutual support in selected areas, which they revoked in April 2021.

In Hungary, the Eurosceptic party category includes the governmental parties in the studied period (third Orbán government for 2015-2018 and fourth Orbán government since 2018). In addition to the coalition parties of FIDESZ and the Christian democrats (KDNP), the far-right opposition party Jobbik was represented as well.

In Poland, the key Eurosceptic parties in this analysis were PiS and United Poland (*Solidarna Polska*) – forming the governing coalition United Right since

¹¹ According to Benoit and Laver (2006), and CHES (2010), based on classification and data from <http://www.parlgov.org/>, Dawn does not belong among Eurosceptic parties, but their parliamentary contributions strongly confirm the categorization according to Rooduijn *et al.* (2019), therefore they are listed accordingly among the Eurosceptic parties. ODS, on the other hand, is not viewed as Eurosceptic by the latter database, but the value assigned by the [parlgov.org](http://www.parlgov.org/) dataset (4.456) indicates the tendency of its members towards Euroscepticism, which is again confirmed in their plentiful speeches over the observed period.

2015 until 2023. Agreement (*Porozumienie*) was also a member of the United Right (the party left the coalition in August 2021) but has not been categorized as Eurosceptic by PopuList. The next group of Eurosceptic parties was made of *Konfederacja Nowej Prawicy* (KNP), turned into KORWiN (right wing, libertarian formation), that formed a coalition with the National Movement (*Ruch Narodowy* – ultra right-wing nationalist formation), and since 2019 has been known as Confederation (Konfederacja). Kukiz15' is a movement created by rock star Paweł Kukiz before presidential elections in 2015 with libertarian, anti-elitist and right-wing elements (also in coalition with some of NM politicians). MPs from Kukiz15' were elected to parliament in 2015 and 2019. In the 2023 election, politicians from Kukiz15' started from PiS's electoral list.

Slovak Eurosceptic parties present in the National Council (2015-2019) include (listed in the alphabetical order): LSNS (*Ludová strana Naše Slovensko*, People's Party Our Slovakia), OKS (*Občianska konzervatívna strana*, Civic Conservative Party; as part of SaS), SaS (*Sloboda a Solidarita*, Freedom and Solidarity), SNS (*Slovenská národná strana*, Slovak National Party), and SR (*Sme rodina*, We Are Family).¹²

¹² Three caveats need to be addressed here. Firstly, given that the studied period is 2015-2019, we did not categorize the *Smer* (Direction) political party as Eurosceptic. Before and mostly after 2020 parliamentary elections in Slovakia, *Smer*, headed by long-time Prime minister Robert Fico, changed rhetoric regarding the EU significantly, which would make a case for re-categorization and would most probably deem *Smer* as Eurosceptic. Perhaps a gradual change mainly in the rhetoric of several MPs from *Smer* can be spotted after the 2016 elections (with hardline Eurosceptics gaining seats), but mostly around and after 2020. *Smer* MPs also seem to reflect on an internal, domestic political transformation after the murder of Jan Kuciak in 2018, after which the government of Robert Fico resigned (with some added pressure from Brussels) and was re-constructed by his party colleague Peter Pellegrini. Largely pro-integration, pro-core narratives within this party slowly gave way to more critical and Eurosceptic narratives about the EU, for example its cultural hegemony (consisting of liberalism, multiculturalism, and anti-nationalism). Secondly, regarding *SaS* (Freedom and Solidarity) and *OKS* (Civic Conservative Party; incorporated into *SaS*), their self-portrayal as *Eurorealist* parties rather than *Eurosceptic* needs to be acknowledged. The main difference between these parties – soft Eurosceptics – and hard Eurosceptic parties seems to be in the generally pro-European position of both *SaS* and *OKS*, although not generally (and overall) pro-integration. MPs from *SaS* and/or *OKS* for a given period seem to be the champions of constructive criticism of the EU and – unlike other Eurosceptic parties – seem to provide relatively specific proposals for reform (or specifically call for maintaining status quo, adhering to the agreed-upon rules, etc.). Thirdly, it must be noted that the Parlov database inputs any missing party positions for each dimension by mean values for the respective party family. That means that it does not offer a more nuanced picture on the Slovak political party positions, based on more complex as well as detailed analysis, and can be, at least in the case of Slovakia, only considered as a guideline.

Table 2. V4 Eurosceptic Parties, Status Quo as of 2020

Party	Role in government	Euroscepticism (0 = anti- to 10 = proEU)	Left-Right (0 = left to 10 = right)	European party group affiliation
Czechia				
ODS	opposition	Eurosceptic (4.456)	right-wing (7.36)	European Conserva- tives and Reformists
KSCM	opposition	far left, Eurosceptic (2.46)	left-wing (0.75)	The Left
Dawn	2013-2017 opposition	far right, Eurosceptic	right-wing (7.4)	Not present
SPD	2018-2020 opposition	far right, Euro- sceptic (2.3)	right-wing (8.8)	Identity and democracy
Hungary				
Fidesz ¹³	2010-	Eurosceptic (6.61)	radical right (6.54)	EPP 2004- 2019
Jobbik	opposition	Euroreject (2.3)	radical right (8.8)	NI
KDNP	2010-	Eurosceptic (5.81)	radical right (7.4)	EPP 2004- 2019
Poland				
PiS (<i>Prawo i Sprawiedliwość</i> , Law and Justice) (United Right)	2015-2023	Eurosceptic (5.5)	right-wing (7.7)	ECR 2009-
SP (<i>Solidarna Polska</i> , United Poland) (United Right)	2015-2023	Euroreject (2.3)	radical right (8.8)	ECR 2014-

¹³ These scores no longer reflect the reality of Fidesz' rhetoric. Hence, they will need to be adjusted to account for subsequent developments, particularly after the 2018 Hungarian general elections.

KORWiN/ <i>Konfederacja</i> (Confederation) together with RN (<i>Ruch Narodowy</i> , National Movement)	opposition	Euroreject (2.4)	radical right (9.7)	NI ENF (2009-2014)
Kukiz 15'	opposition	Euroreject (2.3)	radical right (8.8)	Not present
Slovakia				
LSNS (<i>Ludová Strana Naše Slovensko</i> , People's Party Our Slovakia)	2016-2020 opposition	Eurosceptic (2.3)	radical right (8.8)	NI
OKS (<i>Občianska konzervatívna strana</i> , Civic Conservative Party)	2016-2020 opposition (as part of SaS)	Eurosceptic/ Eurorealist (8.7)	6	Not present
SaS (<i>Sloboda a Solidarita</i> , Freedom and Solidarity)	opposition	Eurosceptic/ Eurorealist (8.7)	6	ECR
SNS (<i>Slovenská národná strana</i> , Slovak National Party)	2016-2020 opposition	Eurosceptic (3.838), populist	7	Not present
SR (<i>Sme rodina</i> , We Are Family)	2016-2020 opposition	Eurosceptic (2.3), populist	8.8	Not present

Note: We rely on Rooduijn *et al.* (2019). Anti-/Pro-EU positions of the political parties (0-10 scale mean value in 'EU integration' dimension with data from Benoit and Laver (2006), and CHES (2010), based on classification and data from <http://www.parlgov.org/>).

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