Summary and Keywords

Despite having fought for their bare survival against hostile foreigners, after finally reaching their independence and international recognition in 1991/92, paradoxically, even before fully assuming statehood Slovenians were eager to engage in yet another international integration—the European Union. This historical and societal wager, rather than merely political elites’ driven perspective, dominates as the prevailing reason for pursuing EU membership; thus security assurance to a small geopolitically transit state, economic benefits of a larger common market in conditions of economic globalization, and cultural proximity of Slovenian to European society explain Slovenian general identity-related elements favoring membership in the EU. There is also a more immediate time-space related explanatory factor for this, namely, the collapsing of the socialist Yugoslavia starting by the end 1980s and a view of assuring the democratic political life and market-lead economy via integration with Western European countries rather than South Slavic nations or following other alternative scenarios like full liberalization with all partners’ strategy. Authors critically evaluate where and why during the effort of becoming an EU member state and performing excellently as one during the first four years, the state fell short of capability-building and/or seizing the opportunities of EU membership. As the latter has been most brutally exposed via the effects of the 2008–2014 economic and financial crisis, of key importance for Slovenians currently stands a self-reflection of its development strategy, enhancing competitiveness, and the state’s role within the European family of nations. The main challenge is how to overcome the small state hindrances and more effectively formulate and project national interest to the EU level; with that in mind, the central questions for Slovenians remain assurance of social security to citizens, upgrading economic union to face more effectively global challenges and inter-state solidarity, refreshing enlargement policy for the remaining Western Balkans non-member states and ensuring Slovenian participation in the group of core states leading the European integration.

Keywords: Slovenia, European Union politics, transition, Europeanization, development strategy, foreign policy, accession process, presidency to the Council of the EU, economic crisis, future membership challenges
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