

Representations of Europe and the European Union in Parliamentary Discourse from a Corpus-Assisted Perspective

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Abstract

This article examines how Europe and the European Union are represented in parliamentary discourse across three contrasting European political trajectories: the United Kingdom, Slovenia, and Ukraine. Using the ParlaMint 5.0 corpora — uniformly encoded, linguistically annotated, and enriched with sentiment and topic metadata — the study applies a longitudinal, cross-linguistic corpus-assisted discourse approach. Mentions of the EU and Europe in English, Slovenian, and Ukrainian were extracted through targeted queries, supplemented by sentiment profiling, topic distribution analysis, and collocational comparison across three built-in subcorpora (Reference, COVID, COVID,War). The findings show that although the two concepts can overlap, their discursive functions diverge systematically: Europe appears as a broader cultural and geopolitical frame, while the EU attracts more policy-oriented uses. These differences intensify at moments of institutional change or crisis, with sentiment around Europe displaying sharper fluctuations than sentiment around the EU. Cross-national patterns align closely with each country's EU membership status — past, present, or aspirational — shaping how the EU is invoked, assessed, or contested. The study demonstrates the value of multilingual, longitudinal corpus analysis for tracing the evolution of political concepts and for understanding how parliaments discursively negotiate Europe's shifting institutional and geopolitical landscape.

Keywords: parliamentary discourse, divergence of overlapping concepts, British, Ukrainian and Slovenian corpora

1. Introduction

While the concept of Europe has been extensively examined in intellectual and cultural history (e.g., Delanty 1995; Pagden 2002), attitudes towards Europe in public discourse have increasingly become the focus of interdisciplinary research. It includes but is not limited to investigations of the vocabulary used to construct or deconstruct Europe at the national and supranational levels (Diez, 1999; Heinemann et al., 2022), particular 'national baggages' determining debates on European integration in Britain and Germany (Musolf et al., 2001), metaphors framing views of Europe and the EU during Brexit (Charteris-Black, 2019), academic discourse about the European Union and its antecedents (Rosamond, 2007), or the role of media in public opinion about Europe (Balks, 2016; Le, 2021). However, far less attention has been paid to how contemporary parliamentary discourse linguistically constructs and differentiates Europe and the EU.

The tendency to merge the concepts of Europe and the EU has been identified in the speeches of prominent European politicians and in major EU documents (Krzyzanowski, 2010: 92-94), as well as in the narratives of national states (Konovšek 2025, 415) and in the rhetoric of individual national leaders (Helfrich, 2022). At the same time, alongside these discursive practices of convergence between Europe and the EU, contrasting practices that reveal their divergence within European political discourse are also possible. This distinction is particularly relevant in relation to countries such as Ukraine and the UK,

which are geographically, historically and culturally an integral part of Europe, yet the former remains only a candidate for EU membership while the latter has withdrawn from the EU. In fact, the three selected countries – the United Kingdom, Ukraine and Slovenia – offer contrasting political trajectories and EU membership statuses, making them particularly suitable for examining how institutional positioning shapes discursive constructions of Europe and the EU. Because Europe and the EU can overlap in political communication, a corpus-assisted approach allows us to observe where this convergence occurs and where discursive practices mark a clearer conceptual separation. Parliamentary debates are particularly suitable for this purpose, as they combine institutionalised language use with real-time political positioning.

By combining automated sentiment analysis with collocational and topical profiling, the study does not treat sentiment as a standalone measure of conceptual meaning but as one component in a triangulated analysis of evaluative framing. This mixed-method design enables a more nuanced account of how Europe and the EU are positioned in parliamentary discourse. The paper seeks answers to the following research questions:

- How consistent are similarities and differences in representations of Europe and the European Union in parliamentary discourse over time?
- To what extent does the divergence between the overlapping concepts of Europe and the

European Union in parliamentary discourse relate to a country's EU membership status?

In what follows, I will briefly review quantitative and qualitative approaches to changing attitudes in parliamentary proceedings (Section 2), describe the data and method of this study (Section 3), report results of sentiment analysis, topic analysis and collocation analysis in the selected parliamentary corpora (Section 4), discuss the findings as well as limitations of the results interpretation (Section 5) and offer a brief conclusion (Section 6).

2. Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Approaches to Sentiment and Topic Dynamics in Parliamentary Discourse

Recent research on changing attitudes in parliamentary debates, including towards European issues, spans a wide methodological spectrum, ranging from large-scale computational models to qualitative discourse-analytic approaches, or their combination, focusing commonly on a single parliament. For instance, Pätz et al. (2025) train two machine learning models to assess topic trends based on six topic categories and sentiment dynamics based on the binary positive-negative schema in Bundestag plenary proceedings across parties between 2019 and 2024, whereas Calvo, Bäck and Carroll (2024) classify speeches according to the binary positive-negative schema based on the relative frequency of sentiment-coded words using an automated dictionary method to examine how established parties distance themselves from radical populist parties in the Swedish Riksdag between 2010 and 2022. Grijzenhout, Marx, and Jijkoun (2014) build a gold standard corpus out of transcripts of two randomly chosen plenary meetings in the Dutch House of Representatives in 2009 containing exclusively 'subjective' paragraphs communicating an opinion, judgement or emotion, which are then annotated for positive or negative orientation. Dodé and Falyuna (2024) examine the use of terminology and sentiment in speeches by the governing parties, the opposition and non-MPs government representatives in the Hungarian parliament between 2020 and 2022, adopting a corpus-assisted discourse analytic approach and drawing on data from ParlaMint-HU. Judge and Shephard (2023) provide a detailed analysis of occurrences of the phrase 'national interest' in the Commons Hansard from the UK parliament between 2016 and 2020 based on 11 variables, including party affiliations and executive positions of the speakers as well as speech sentiment and position preference. Marinova (2025) closely

reads stenographic records of five 2025 debates in the newly elected European Parliament to examine how Eurosceptic parties shift agenda through thematic reframing, strategically avoid politically sensitive debates and how they alternate rational argumentation with emotional appeals.

A comparative perspective on changing attitudes in parliamentary discourse appears to be less common, especially when mixed or quality analysis is provided, arguably, *inter alia*, due to limitations in the interoperability and comparability of the datasets available for research. From a bird's-eye view, Economides, Featherstone and Hunter (2024) identify references to EU enlargement in the parliamentary proceedings of eight member states using a combination of automated and hand-coded methods and report a decline in salience, increasingly negative sentiment and a growing emphasis on identity between 1989 and 2019. Mestre-Mestre (2021) compares the lexical expression of emotions in the corpora of proceedings from the Valencian and the Scottish Parliaments during 2020 to find out "whether the lexicons used to identify emotion words in languages other than English are reliable".

3. Data and Method

The data for this study come from three interoperable and comparable corpora of parliamentary proceedings: ParlaMint-GB, ParlaMint-UA and ParlaMint-SI (Table 1), which are uniformly encoded, linguistically annotated and enriched with extensive metadata (Erjavec, Kopp, Ljubešić et al., 2025). In contrast with the older versions of the ParlaMint corpora, the present version 5.0 is additionally annotated for sentiment at the sentence level and topics at the speech level (Pahor de Maiti Tekavčič and Kryvenko, 2026).¹ Both topic and sentiment annotation were performed automatically, using a 21-topic schema supplemented by two additional categories (Others and Mix), and three sentiment scales: a six-level scale, a three-level scale, and a raw numerical output (Ljubešić, Kuzman Pungaršek and Širinić, 2025).

| | ParlaMint-GB 5.0 | ParlaMint-UA 5.0 | ParlaMint-SI 5.0 |
|-----------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Span | 2015-2022 | 2002-2023 | 2000-2022 |
| Speeches | 670,912 | 429,156 | 311,347 |
| Sentences | 5,323,032 | 3,463,779 | 3,876,183 |
| Tokens | 139,686,402 | 51,376,472 | 81,683,385 |

Table 1: Basic statistics of the corpora used

¹ Unlike the other corpora at the time of writing, ParlaMint-SI is also annotated for sentiment at the speech level.

It also needs to be clarified that ParlaMint-GB includes proceedings from both Houses of the UK Parliament; ParlaMint-SI contains transcripts from Državni zbor, or the National Assembly, which is the lower house of the Slovenian Parliament; and ParlaMint-UA consists of plenary transcripts from the unicameral Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, literally the Supreme Council of Ukraine. The British, Ukrainian, and Slovenian corpora were selected because they represent three contrasting EU-related trajectories: the UK's shift from full membership through withdrawal to the post-Brexit period, Ukraine's movement from articulated accession aspirations to candidate status, and Slovenia's progression from pre-accession discourse to full membership.

Methodologically, this paper contributes to the literature on Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies, particularly within their temporal (Partington et al., 2013; Marchi, 2018) and cross-linguistic (Taylor and del Fante, 2020) frameworks, in their application to parliamentary corpora (Kryvenko, 2025a; Kryvenko, 2025b).

All data for this study was extracted via the noSketch Engine concordancer². The terms *EU* or *European Union* in ParlaMint-GB, *ЄС* or *Європейський Союз* or *Євросоюз* 'EU / European Union / Eurounion' in ParlaMint-UA, and *EU* or *Evropska unija* 'EU / European Union' in ParlaMint-SI were queried to extract references to the EU. The hits for *ЄС* 'EU' in ParlaMint-UA were additionally filtered for quotation marks in a span one to the left and one to the right to control for the name of one parliamentary faction and party whose abbreviation is homonymous with that of the EU in Ukrainian ("ЄС" stands for "Європейська солідарність" 'European Solidarity'). All corpus queries in this study were restricted to contributions made by Members of Parliament, encompassing both regular speakers and those serving in chairing roles, while contributing to debates (e.g., in ParlaMint-UA, chairpersons produced 48.4% of speeches and 24.7% of tokens in the entire corpus). This delimitation reflects the analytical focus on the discursive practices of elected representatives and preserves the institutional coherence of the analysis.

To compare the sentiment dynamics and topical environments surrounding mentions of the European Union and Europe, the corresponding lexical items in English, Ukrainian and Slovenian were queried across the three built-in subcorpora: Reference (covering all data before 30 January 2020), COVID (covering data from 31 January 2020 to 23 February 2022) and COVID, War (covering data from 24 February 2024 onward, marking the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of

Ukraine, as distinct from the beginning of Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014). This periodisation is also particularly useful for examining discursive constructions of Brexit, which was formally concluded on 31 January 2020. To obtain a more nuanced understanding of how the concepts of the European Union and Europe diverge across parliaments, top ten collocates for the corresponding lexical items in English, Ukrainian and Slovenian were extracted and compared. All collocate queries were conducted within a -5/+5 span, requiring a minimum corpus frequency of 3 and a minimum in-range frequency of 2. Selected concordance lines with scores outside the original 0–5 sentiment range were read closely to identify whether MPs expressed their attitude towards the EU or Europe, or whether these terms appeared in a broader context in which praise or criticism was directed elsewhere.

4. Results

This section quantitatively traces how references to the European Union and Europe are evaluated, thematised, and discursively patterned across the British, Ukrainian, and Slovenian parliamentary corpora, allowing cross-linguistic and cross-contextual contrasts to emerge from both sentiment and topic distributions as well as from collocational profiles. Sentiment and topic measurements are reported as relative density in text type, an indicator of whether a given value is more or less frequent in the text type than in the corpus as a whole, with values below 100% signalling underuse and those above 100% indicating overuse relative to the baseline. Collocates are ranked based on the Log Dice statistical measure.

4.1 Sentiment analysis

In the British data (Figure 1), sentences containing references to the European Union consistently show higher neutral and lower positive sentiment across all three periods, with neutrality gradually declining and negativity rising most noticeably in the COVID, War subcorpus.

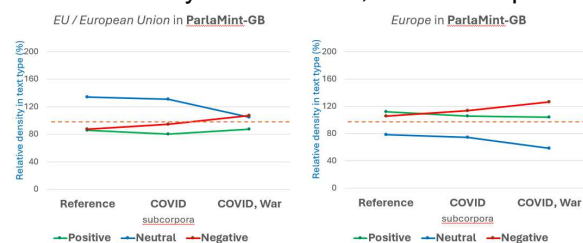


Figure 1: *EU / European Union* (left) and *Europe* (right) in sentences with the sentiment attribute in ParlaMint-GB (relative density in text type)

² The log-in installation of noSketch Engine concordancer at CLARIN.SI was used in this study: <https://www.clarin.si/skelog>

By contrast, sentences containing references to Europe display the lowest neutral values throughout, with positive sentiment remaining comparatively stable and negative sentiment increasing over time.

In ParlaMint-UA (Figure 2), contexts with references to the EU are characterised by consistently high positive sentiment, which rises further in the COVID, War subcorpus, with neutral values declining and negative underperforming consistently. By contrast, contexts with references to Europe display a more mixed evaluative profile: although neutral values remain comparatively low, negative sentiment rises in the COVID subcorpus before receding in the COVID, War subcorpus, while positive sentiment increases markedly after February 2022. The data indicate that while both terms become more positively framed over time, the EU acquires a distinctly stronger and more consistently favourable evaluative load than Europe.

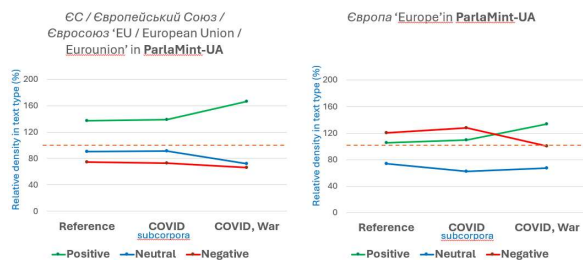


Figure 2: *ЄС / Європейський Союз / Євросоюз* 'EU / European Union / Eurounion' (left) and *Євropa* 'Europe' (right) in sentences with the sentiment attribute in ParlaMint-UA (relative density in text type)

Quite similar to the Ukrainian corpus, the Slovenian data (Figure 3) show that sentences referring to the European Union are characterised by consistently high positive sentiment, rising sharply in the COVID-and-War period, while neutral sentiment remains relatively stable across the first two subcorpuses before declining slightly in the third. EU contexts with negative values underperform throughout entire ParlaMint-SI.

Figure 3: *EU / Evropska unija* 'EU / European Union' (left) and *Evropa* 'Europe' (right) in sentences with the sentiment attribute in ParlaMint-SI (relative density in text type)

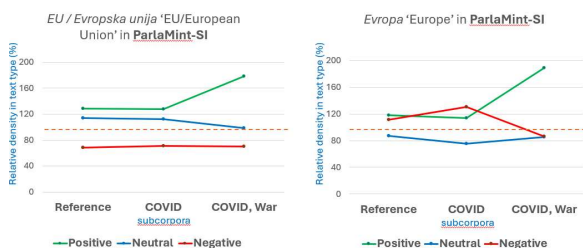


Figure 3: *EU / Evropska unija* 'EU / European Union' (left) and *Evropa* 'Europe' (right) in sentences with the sentiment attribute in ParlaMint-SI (relative density in text type)

References to Europe, however, display a more dynamic evaluative trajectory: positive sentiment increases markedly in the COVID, War

subcorpus, neutral values remain moderate and signal underuse, and negative sentiment peaks during the COVID period before falling substantially thereafter. Overall, the data indicate that while both terms become more positively framed over time, Europe exhibits greater fluctuation in evaluative load, whereas the EU retains a more consistently affirmative profile in ParlaMint-SI.

When comparing sentiment patterns across the three corpora, a common feature is the systematic underuse of neutral sentences containing references to Europe. In both the Ukrainian and Slovenian data, positive contexts for both the EU and Europe increase in the COVID, War subcorpus, reflecting a shift towards more favourable evaluative framing. By contrast, in the UK corpus, the same period is marked by a rise in negative contexts for both the EU and Europe.

4.2 Topic analysis

Regarding references to the EU and their topic associations in the UK parliamentary corpus (Figure 4), foreign trade, international affairs, immigration, agriculture and the mixed category consistently remain the top five topics across all the subcorpuses, with foreign trade dominating throughout and peaking in the COVID subcorpus. For references to Europe, the topic distribution is more dispersed. Immigration and culture are the two topics that appear consistently across the whole corpus. Notably, defence and energy become more prominent in the COVID, War subcorpus, suggesting the geopolitical reorientation of parliamentary debate after February 2022. The only 'shared' topic associated with references to both the EU and Europe across all three periods is immigration.

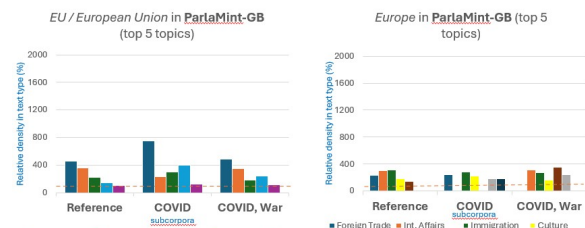


Figure 4: *EU / European Union* (left) and *Europe* (right) in sentences with the topic attribute in ParlaMint-GB (relative density in text type)

The topic profiles for both the EU and Europe in the Ukrainian parliamentary corpus (Figure 5) display a broader and more heterogeneous topical spread compared with the British data. References to the EU are concentrated primarily in the domains of international affairs and foreign trade, although the topics of immigration, environment and, to a lesser extent, technology are also salient. References to Europe are most consistently associated with international affairs, the environment, and energy. In fact, international affairs is the dominant topic linked to both the EU and Europe across all the subcorpuses, followed by

environment. As expected, the salience of defence rises in the COVID, War subcorpus for references to both the EU and Europe, while health surfaces in the COVID subcorpus, although only in contexts referring to Europe.

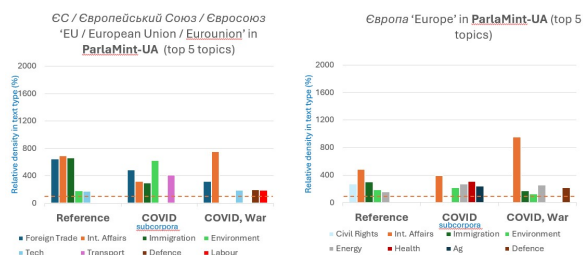


Figure 5: *ЄС / Європейський Союз / Євросоюз* 'EU / European Union / Eurounion' (left) and *Європа* 'Europe' (right) in sentences with the topic attribute in ParlaMint-UA (relative density in text type)

The Slovenian data (Figure 6) show even greater topical heterogeneity, with no single topic strongly associated with both the EU and Europe across all three periods. The most consistent is the topic of international affairs, which becomes especially prominent in the COVID, War subcorpus for both the EU and Europe. Other recurring associations, though less stable, include technology, immigration, and energy, each appearing for both concepts but not in every period. Defence emerges only for Europe in the COVID, War subcorpus, while health appears for both the EU and Europe but at different points in time and with limited overall salience.

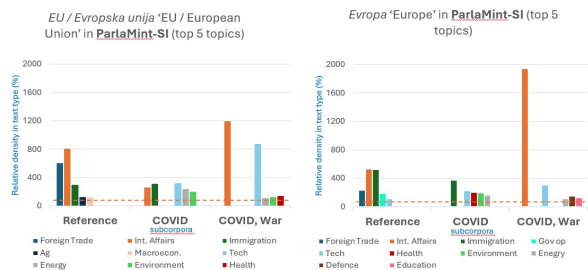


Figure 6: *EU / Evropska unija* 'EU / European Union' (left) and *Evropa* 'Europe' (right) in sentences with the topic attribute in ParlaMint-SI (relative density in text type)

4.3 Collocation analysis

In this section, references to the EU and Europe are compared across the three parliamentary corpora by examining their ten strongest collocates, providing a concise cross-linguistic overview of how MPs in each setting linguistically frame the two concepts.

In ParlaMint-GB (Table 2), the collocates of *EU / European Union* are dominated by Brexit-related vocabulary (*leave*, *exit*, *withdrawal*, *law*, *agreement*, *trade*, *from*), indicating that references to the EU occur primarily in discussions of the UK's departure and negotiations of its terms and conditions with the

EU as well as Brexit's legal, political, and economic consequences. By contrast, the collocates of *Europe* point to a much broader geopolitical and cultural framing. Terms such as *eastern*, *western*, and *continental* situate Europe as a geographical region and political space, while *across*, *rest*, and *largest* reflect comparative or spatial perspectives. It is also notable that UK appears among the top collocates of EU, whereas Britain collocates with Europe, suggesting that MPs tend to frame the EU in relation to the United Kingdom as a political entity, while Europe is invoked in broader geographical and cultural terms.

| R | Collocates of EU / European Union | Log Dice | Collocates of <i>Europe</i> | Log Dice |
|----|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------|----------|
| 1 | leave | 11.44 | eastern | 9.40 |
| 2 | uk | 10.38 | across | 9.32 |
| 3 | exit | 10.23 | council | 9.11 |
| 4 | citizen | 10.06 | rest | 8.88 |
| 5 | law | 9.81 | western | 8.76 |
| 6 | withdrawal | 9.77 | largest | 8.37 |
| 7 | with | 9.58 | continental | 8.17 |
| 8 | agreement | 9.41 | refugee | 8.15 |
| 9 | trade | 9.40 | relationship | 8.13 |
| 10 | from | 9.39 | britain | 8.07 |

Table 2: Top ten collocates of the EU / European Union and Europe in ParlaMint-GB (MPs only)

The Ukrainian data (Table 3) show a clear divergence between the collocational profiles of *ЄС / Європейський Союз / Євросоюз* ('EU / European Union') and *Європа* ('Europe'). References to the EU are strongly institutional and integration-oriented, with top collocates such as *директива* 'directive', *асоціація* 'association', *членство* 'membership', *інтеграція* 'integration', *угода* 'agreement', *вступ* 'accession', and *адаптація* 'adaptation'. The presence of *нато* 'NATO' among the top collocates further underscores how discussions of EU integration in the Ukrainian parliament are closely intertwined with aspirations for NATO membership.

By contrast, the collocates of *Європа* point to much broader and more heterogeneous associations. Some items relate to international organisations (*асамблея* 'assembly', *парламентський* 'parliamentary'), while others evoke geographical or cultural framings (*східний* 'eastern', *світ* 'world'). A notable subset reflects sports discourse (*чемпіонат* 'championship', *футбол* 'football', *фінальний* 'final') referring to the final tournament of the 2012 UEFA European

Football Championship for men's national football teams co-hosted by Ukraine and Poland.

| R a n k | Collocates of ЄС / Європейський Союз / Євросоюз 'EU / European Union / Eurounion' | Log Dice | Collocates of Європа 'Europe' | Log Dice |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------------|-------------|
| 1 | директива | 10.57 | асамблея | 10.75 |
| 2 | асоціація | 10.26 | парламентський | 10.25 |
| 3 | нато | 10.22 | асамбль | 9.95 |
| 4 | членство | 10.04 | чемпіонат | 9.53 |
| 5 | інтеграція | 9.68 | східний | 9.16 |
| 6 | угода | 9.62 | світ | 9.13 |
| 7 | країна | 9.24 | європа | 9.12 |
| 8 | вступ | 9.23 | футбол | 9.11 |
| 9 | між | 9.08 | країна | 8.99 |
| 10 | адаптація | 9.01 | фінальний | 8.96 |

Table 3: Top ten collocates of ЄС /
Європейський Союз / Євросоюз 'EU /
European Union / Eurounion' and Європа
'Europe' in ParlaMint-UA (MPs only)

In the Slovenian parliamentary corpus (Table 4), references to the EU centre on institutional, legal and membership-related language, whereas references to Europe cluster around geographical, regional and, to a lesser extent, institutional terms, revealing two rather distinct conceptual framings. In particular, the collocates for the EU such as *članica* 'member state', *vstop* 'accession', *direktiva* 'directive', *država* 'state', *predsedovanje* 'presidency', and *institucija* 'institution' suggest that the EU is framed primarily as a regulatory, membership-based political entity. The Europe collocates instead foreground a geographical and regional framing. Terms such as *vzhoden*, *zahoden*, *jugovzhoden*, and *srednji* ('eastern', 'western', 'south-eastern', 'central') show Europe being conceptualised through spatial and geopolitical subdivisions. Collocates like *svet* 'council/world', *skupščina* 'assembly', *konvencija* 'convention', and *združen* 'united' point to Europe as a broader political and organisational space, extending beyond the EU's institutional boundaries. It should be emphasised that *svet* is a polysemantic word in Slovenian. Further querying showed that in nearly 60% of its occurrences within a span of five words to the left and five words to the right of *Evropa*, it appears as part of the named entity *Svet Evrope* 'Council of Europe'.

| R a n k | Collocates of EU / Evropska unija 'EU / European Union' | Log Dice | Collocates of Evropa 'Europe' | Log Dice |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| 1 | članica | 11.42 | svet | 9.89 |
| 2 | vstop | 10.31 | evropa | 9.50 |
| 3 | direktiva | 10.03 | cel | 8.83 |
| 4 | država | 9.80 | vzhoden | 8.70 |
| 5 | povprečje | 9.35 | zahoden | 8.70 |
| 6 | predsedovanje | 9.31 | jugovzhoden | 8.36 |
| 7 | institucija | 9.03 | srednji | 8.23 |
| 8 | znotraj | 8.97 | skupščina | 8.12 |
| 9 | evropski | 8.96 | konvencija | 8.05 |
| 10 | slovenija | 8.91 | združen | 8.02 |

Table 4: Top ten collocates of EU / Evropska
unija 'EU / European Union' and Evropa 'Europe'
in ParlaMint-SI (MPs only)

To sum up, across the three corpora, the collocational patterns of EU versus Europe show a consistent divide between institutional-political framings on the one hand and broader geographical-cultural framings on the other. In all three languages, references to the EU cluster around legal, regulatory, and membership-related vocabulary, while references to Europe attract more heterogeneous associations tied to geography, culture, or wider international organisations. At the same time, each corpus reflects its own political context: Brexit dominates the UK data, integration and security concerns shape the Ukrainian patterns, and the Slovenian corpus shows a clear separation between EU-institutional language and Europe as a spatial or organisational frame.

5. Discussion

As reported in the section above, the quantitative results suggest that the EU and Europe attract distinct collocational profiles in all three corpora, the cross-corpus comparison shows a consistent split between institutional-political framings of the EU and broader geographical, cultural, or organisational framings of Europe, with each national context inflecting this pattern through its own political priorities and discursive preoccupations.

The selected time periods reflect the availability of comparable parliamentary data and capture moments of heightened political salience in each country, including the post-referendum phase in the UK. Although the corpora do not cover identical chronological spans, they allow for a meaningful comparison of discursive tendencies

shaped by different membership statuses and political trajectories.

That said, it is important to note at least three potential limitations that may affect how the results should be interpreted. First, sentences containing any of the search nodes (e.g. EU, *European Union*, *Europe*) and annotated as “Negative”, “Neutral”, or “Positive” do not necessarily reflect the speaker’s stance toward these entities. In the ParlaMint corpora, sentiment is assigned at the sentence level, whereas the present analysis focuses on patterns of use at the word or phrase level. As a result, the quantitative findings must be interpreted with caution, and close reading of selected concordance lines supported by qualitative analysis is essential for understanding how these terms are actually being used in context.

Brief close reading of concordance lines containing references to the EU, which were scored outside the original 0–5 sentiment range, showed that there is might be no direct correlation even between extremely positive or negative sentences mentioning the EU and Eurosceptical or pro-European attitudes in the UK parliamentary corpus, as illustrated in (1) and (2).

- (1) *Does he further agree that the superb work done by the noble Lord, Lord Frost, and his assistant, Oliver Lewis, to try to make the EU understand that Great Britain is not a colony of the European Union but a free and sovereign state is to be applauded?* (Greville Patrick Charles Howard, Conservative Party, 2020-12-14, senti_n 5.271)
- (2) *The covid crisis can no longer camouflage the deep damage that Brexit has done, and the single biggest threat to our recovery remains being dragged out of the European Union, against the wishes of those who live in Scotland.* (Ian Blackford, Scottish National Party, 2021-10-27, senti_n -0.211)

At the same time, although extreme sentiment scores may signal metaphorically rich or ideologically charged contexts, the inclusion of the neutral range is indispensable for parliamentary sentiment analysis, as it provides the necessary scope for capturing how sentiment is constructed in political discourse, thereby enabling more accurate interpretation of parliamentary debates.

Second, differences in topic distributions across the three parliaments should be interpreted with caution as well because the corpora do not cover equivalent time spans, and this is likely to affect how broad or narrow the topical range can appear. The UK data, drawn from a much tighter period, naturally produce a more concentrated set of dominant topics revolving around Brexit, while the Ukrainian and the Slovenian corpora,

spanning longer and more heterogeneous periods, display wider topical dispersion that may reflect corpus design as much as genuine parliamentary divergence. This means that some contrasts in topical breadth or stability may stem from structural differences in corpus scope rather than substantive differences in how each parliament discusses the EU and Europe.

Third, the strongest collocates of EU and Europe in the entire corpus shouldn’t be taken at face value as stable semantic associations without further verification. Some high-ranking collocates, such as the polysemous *sveť* in the Slovenian data or sports-related terms in the Ukrainian corpus, are context-dependent or tied to specific historical events, meaning that their apparent prominence may reflect localised discourse patterns rather than broader conceptual framings. To avoid overinterpreting such items, collocates should be systematically re-queried within each subcorpus, with additional filtering, such as distinguishing capitalised forms or applying other refinements, to determine whether they reflect recurrent associations or arise from specific usages.

For instance, further analysis of collocates of *Європа* ‘Europe’ in ParlaMint-UA restricted to the COVID, War subcorpus returned the following strong collocates: *асамблея* ‘assembly’ (9.06), *горизонт* ‘horizon’ (8.97), *восьмиразовий* ‘eight-time’ (8.47) *субконтинент* ‘subcontinent’ (8.46), *чемпіонка* ‘female champion’ (8.39), *тероризм* ‘terrorism’ (8.03), *харлан* ‘Kharlan (a surname)’ (7.97), *інновація* ‘innovation’ (7.87), *нацизм* ‘Nazism’ (7.82), *північноатлантичний* ‘North Atlantic’ (7.78). Sports-related associations appear strongly in this list as well, now framed by the wider context of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine. During the 2023 World Fencing Championship, Ukrainian fencer Olha Kharlan was initially disqualified after her bout with a “neutral” Russian opponent. Following the sport’s no-handshake policy, Olha offered the customary blade tap instead, but officials issued her a black card, which removed her from the competition.

The top collocates of *Evropa* ‘Europe’ in ParlaMint-SI restricted to the COVID, War subcorpus include *prebuditi* ‘to awaken’ (9.25), *titanov* ‘titanic’ (9.01), *ruda* ‘ore’ (8.36), *trdnjava* ‘fortress’ (8.35), *rusija* ‘Russia’ (8.13), *ukrajina* ‘Ukraine’ (7.81), *ploden* ‘fertile’ (7.14), *napreden* ‘advanced / progressive’ (7.04). While the collocates *titanov* ‘titanic’, *ruda* ‘ore’ and *ploden* ‘fertile’ (about soil) relate to Ukraine, and *napreden* ‘advanced / progressive’ describes Slovenia, the collocates *prebuditi* ‘to awaken’ and *trdnjava* ‘fortress’ point to two known conceptual metaphors EUROPE IS A HUMAN and EUROPE IS A FORTRESS (Bletsas, 2022: 35-36), as illustrated in (3) and (4).

- (3) *Grob, brutalen napad Rusije na Ukrajino je prebudil Evropo in to je edino, kar je v*

tej zgodbi pozitivnega. (Branko Grims, Slovenian Democratic Party, 2022-03-16, senti_n 3.982) [‘The grave, brutal attack by Russia on Ukraine has awakened Europe, and that is the only positive thing in this story.’]

- (4) *Žalost, ker ko gre za begunce, ki bežijo zaradi taistih vojn Zahoda, so posamezniki, države in trdnjava Evropa neizprosni in pustijo umirati ljudi v rekah, na odprtem morju, če pa pridejo do meja te Evrope, jih pa zapirajo v taborišča in pustijo zmrzovati nekje daleč stran od oči.* (Matej Tašner Vatovec, The Left, 2022-03-09, s.senti_n -0.044) [‘It is tragic that when it comes to refugees fleeing the very same wars caused by the West, individuals, states, and Fortress Europe are ruthless: they let people die in rivers and on the open sea, and if they do reach Europe’s borders, they lock them up in camps and leave them to freeze somewhere far from sight.’]

The use of metaphor is crucial for analysing how overlapping concepts diverge and acquire distinct meanings; however, exploring this dimension in depth exceeds the scope of the present article and warrants a separate study.

Addressing the two research questions, the findings indicate that similarities and differences in how Europe and the EU are represented in parliamentary discourse are broadly consistent across the three corpora, with a stable division between institutional-political framings of the EU and broader geographical, cultural, or civilisational framings of Europe, even though each national context shapes this pattern through its own political agendas and discursive habits. At the same time, the degree to which these overlapping concepts diverge appears only partially related to EU-membership status: while the UK corpus shows a particularly sharp politicisation of the EU linked to Brexit, the Slovenian and Ukrainian corpora also display clear conceptual separation, suggesting that membership alone does not explain divergence, which is additionally shaped by corpus design, topical distributions, and context-specific discourse dynamics.

6. Conclusion

The comparative, temporal analysis of British, Ukrainian and Slovenian parliamentary discourse demonstrates that references to Europe and the European Union evolve in ways that illuminate each country’s European political trajectory. While the two concepts may converge in political discourse, corpus-assisted discourse studies also make it possible to trace their divergence in parliamentary corpora with greater empirical precision.

Although not exhaustive in its approaches or corpus techniques used, this study has shown that references to Europe are typically associated with broader cultural, geographic, or normative frames, whereas references to the EU tend to appear in more explicitly political and policy-centred contexts. This divergence becomes especially visible at moments of crisis or institutional change, with sentiment and topic patterns around Europe showing sharper fluctuations than those around the EU. Cross-linguistic collocational evidence further reveals how MPs embed both concepts in nationally salient debates, from sovereignty and regulation in the UK, to security and integration in Ukraine, and, to an extent, in Slovenia.

Taken together, the findings show that EU membership status – past, present or aspirational – strongly correlates with how the EU is invoked, assessed or contested, while Europe remains a more flexible resource for articulating identity and geopolitical orientation.

The study thus underscores the value of corpus-assisted and multilingual approaches for tracing how key political concepts evolve across time, languages and parliamentary cultures.

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8. Ethical Considerations

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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