

## The Future of the Slovenian Welfare State: A View from Deliberative Forums

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*European states are facing challenges how to successfully restructure their welfare systems in times of numerous external and internal pressures, among them especially the demographic pressure and the impact of global economic crisis. Slovenia was one of European countries that were hit hardest by the crisis in 2009. Likewise, Slovenia is facing severe challenges regarding population ageing. In the paper, we are interested in people's attitudes toward the existing welfare policies, as well as their preferences for the future development of the Slovenian welfare state and whether the implemented policies differ from people's attitudes taking into account the potential trade-offs between the social protection paradigm on one side and the social investment paradigm on the other. The analysis utilised data gathered with the method of deliberative forums that were carried out in 2015. Deliberative forums allow a 'bottom-up' approach to research. Our analysis shows that there is a discrepancy between ordinary citizens' expectations for the future development of the Slovenian welfare state and the actual direction of the reforms, which could become one of the most salient issues for the legitimacy of the future Slovenian welfare state.*

**Key words:** welfare state, reforms, Slovenia, attitudes, deliberative forum.

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## INTRODUCTION

European states are facing challenges regarding how to successfully restructure their welfare systems; numerous external and internal pressures, especially demographic pressures and the impact of global economic crisis, are creating these challenges. Several authors have analysed the impact of 'great recession' on European welfare systems (Farnsworth and Irving, 2011; Schubert et al., 2016; Taylor-Gooby et al., 2017a). Greve (2011: 334) highlights the 'explosive cocktail' as a combination of high levels of public deficit and demographic change. Among the transformations of the welfare states there is a trend of cutbacks in existing programmes, along with the formation of a social investment model, as this is viewed as a more effective response to the new challenges facing the welfare state (Busemeyer and Garritzmann, 2017).

In this regard, the responses of the Slovenian welfare state in times of economic crises are particularly interesting because Slovenia was among those European countries hardest hit by the crisis in 2009, and it faced one of the most pronounced recessions in the OECD. Its GDP growth rate after 2008 was negative, and the country has been slower to recover than other countries in the EU-28 (Eurostat, 2018). The government's gross national debt (as a share of GDP) has risen sharply, growing from 22% of GDP in 2008 to more than 80% of GDP in the last quarter of 2014 (IMAD, 2015). The crisis has revealed critical weaknesses in Slovenia's pre-crisis economic performance, structural inconsistencies within its welfare system and the country's limited

ability to innovate (OECD, 2011: 17). This was further exacerbated by political instability from the constant shifts in both left- and right-wing coalitions. Likewise, Slovenia is facing population ageing challenges. The old age dependency ratio was 24.4% in 2012, slightly below the EU27 average, yet this number is projected to rise to 57.6% in 2060 (Eurostat, 2018). Several Slovenian governments have adopted important social policy reforms, with some of the cited goals being stabilising public finances (e.g. pension reforms) and improving economic conditions (e.g. labour-market reforms). Furthermore, the year 2012 was marked by a complete reform of social legislation and changes in the regulation of non-contributory benefits,<sup>1</sup> which came into force together with two austerity laws.<sup>2</sup> At this point it should be noted that not all changes that took place in the last decade were a response to recession, but were part of a longer reform process of transition, harmonisation with the EU, as well as a response to demographic and economic pressures.

Up until the economic crisis in 2009 Slovenia had gradualist social policy reforms, which contrasted many other CEE countries. During the transition period following Slovenia's independence, the leftist-oriented political elite opted for gradual reforms of the welfare system rather than the 'shock therapy' that was experienced by some other post-socialist countries (Kolarič et al., 2009; Ferge, 2001). Hence, based on the legacy of the well-developed state socialist welfare system and because Slovenia did not experience the so called 'welfare gap'<sup>3</sup>, the Slovenian welfare system in the transition period was a

<sup>1</sup> The Exercise of Rights of Public Funds Act (2012) and Financial Social Assistance Act (2012).

<sup>2</sup> Act on Additional Intervention Measures for 2012 (2012) and Fiscal Balance Act (2012).

<sup>3</sup> By welfare gap we refer to the withdrawal of the state from the provision of welfare benefits and services (see Kolarič et al., 2009; Ferge, 2001).

dual model, combining the elements of the Esping-Andersen (1990) typology from a conservative-corporatist model and the social-democratic model. First, showing the characteristics of the conservative regime, the compulsory social insurance systems are the primary instrument for the provision of social protection for employees and their family members. On the other hand, similar to the social-democratic regime, the strong public and state sector maintained the status of the main service provider of all types of services to which all citizens are equally entitled (Kolarič et al., 2009). Bohle and Greskovits (2007) claim that the neo-corporatist regime established after Slovenia's independence has exhibited a firmly institutionalised balance between marketisation, that is, liberalisation, privatisation and market-oriented institution building, and social protections (based on a welfare system and economic protectionism). This balance differs markedly from the neo-liberal brand of capitalism that emerged concurrently in the Baltic and Visegrád states. The newer policy reforms have continued to support social investment policies in children (e.g. child-care), while social investment in labour market (e.g. active labour market policies) and old age policies (such as long-term care) have been slowly developed, while social protection policies have been somewhat limited (see Rakar and Filipovič Hrast, 2017, Ignjatovič and Filipovič Hrast, 2017).

The focus of the article is the trade-offs between social investment and social protection policies from the perspective of people's attitudes toward priorities the welfare state should have. As Busemeyer and Garrizmann (2017: 872) state, there is very little research on how citizens perceive and react to this kind of policy trade-offs and whether the direction of reforms is connected to people's attitudes or there is

a disconnection where policy changes result from increasingly binding constraints. The literature reveals that people's attitudes toward the welfare state do matter and are important in explaining the developments of the welfare state (see Svallfors, 2010; Roosma et al., 2014; Guo and Gilbert, 2014). Hence, public support for welfare state policies is at the core of the main theoretical perspectives of (welfare) state development (Pierson, 2001). Attitude studies enable researchers to map responses to current pressures and potential new directions in support of welfare state policies (Taylor-Gooby et al., 2017b). However, as noted by Naumann (2017), there is little knowledge about whether and how people change their attitudes towards the welfare state over time and particularly how people react to increased reform pressures such as the financial crises, rising public deficits or population ageing.

In this article we address these questions by looking at people's attitudes toward the future development of the Slovenian welfare state. The analysis of people's attitudes regarding the development of the welfare state in the field of social protection and social investment will be based on a method of deliberative forums that were carried out in 2015. These are an innovative methodological tool for observing people's views and attitudes toward the welfare state, with an orientation toward the future. The forums function as an addition to the presently predominant methodology of public opinion surveys. Deliberative forums allow a 'bottom-up' approach to research, meaning that we can examine the process of discussion and potential attitude formation. Attitudes are treated as a social construct of discussions rather than independent individuals' opinions (Taylor-Gooby et al., 2017b). Our aim of analysis is twofold: firstly, we examine how people

understand the changing pressures on welfare states and secondly, how they would like that the welfare policies to develop in the future. Hence, the main contribution of the paper is its analysis of the current developments of the Slovenian welfare system from the view of ordinary citizens and what they believe is needed in future social policy direction, and discerning divergences and similarities between the direction of ongoing reforms on one side and the aspirations of people for the future Slovenian welfare state on the other.

### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

With the start of the economic crisis in 2008, European welfare states were on the 'unforeseen' path of restructuring. The question regarding how the crisis has impacted these welfare states has been recently researched by many social policy scholars (Farnsworth and Irving, 2011; Schubert et al., 2016; Taylor-Gobby et al., 2017a). Research into European welfare states' responses to the Great Recession shows these have mainly consisted of retrenchment, activation, risk prevention and increased selectivity (Schubert et al., 2016; Borosch et al., 2016; van Kersbergen et al., 2014). For example, Van Kersbergen et al. (2014) distinguish as possible responses to the crisis expansion of social protection or social investment, retrenchment and cost containment, emphasizing therefore that retrenchment and cost containment were not the only possible answers.

Although the challenges of the economic crisis hit the welfare states in different ways and to different extents and the reactions of the welfare states differ, we

can identify some common trends or directions, which are seen in the transformations labelled by Bonoli and Natali (2012) as 'contingent convergence'. In most countries discussions evolved around necessary cuts and austerity measures, placing more emphasis on individual responsibility as a retreat from an interventionist state, in line with neo-liberalism. However, this was accompanied by the new forms of interventionism, such as reassertion of neo-Keynesianism, social investment, pre-distribution, fightback and welfare chauvinism (see Taylor-Gooby et al., 2017a). In Slovenia the Great Recession has led to several structural reforms along with *ad hoc* solutions for the stabilisation of public finances, which together with the austerity measures went into direction of neoliberal reforms pursuing austerity, cuts, and cost containment through greater means-testing and selectivity, especially in the area of social protection policies (see Filipovič Hrast and Rakar, 2017).

Even though policies are never purely *protective* or *investment-oriented* (Nolan, 2013), we will utilise these terms as useful analytical tools.<sup>4</sup> The latter emphasises the importance of the welfare state's activities in societal development through its investments in human capital via education, lifelong training and active labour-market policies (Greve, 2015). Following Vandembroucke and Vleminckx's (2011) distinction of 'old' and 'new' welfare spending, we relate the first to 'old social risks' and to a social protection paradigm (including old age and survivor pensions, healthcare and cash benefits for the working-age population) while the latter is linked to new social risks and a social investment paradigm

<sup>4</sup> We readily concede that the dichotomy of social protection or social investment only partially overlaps with old and new social risks; we also concede that there is no clear correlation, as for example, old social risks can be addressed by social investment policies or *vice versa* (see Borosch et al., 2016; Vandembroucke and Vleminckx, 2011; Nolan, 2013).

(including childcare, primary and secondary education, parental leave, eldercare and active labour-market policies). Our interest is in comparing people's views on the future development of the welfare state in the field of social investment and social protection policies. Even though the latter are persistently supported (Breunig and Busemeyer, 2012), so is the popularity of the former (Busemeyer, 2012). However, research has shown (Busemeyer and Garritzmann (2017) that while support for both seems to be strong when asked generally, people's support for social investment policies decreases significantly if their expansion is due to higher spending, and even more if it is due to cuts in other parts of welfare state and its transfers.

General research has confirmed that people are strongly supportive of the welfare state, often despite being critical of its performance (see Roosma et al., 2014). In social democratic countries the majority of people are supportive of it and evaluate its performance positively, while in post-communist countries people are in general very supportive of it, but are also critical of its performance (ibid.). The capability of welfare state to address the old and new risks effectively is therefore strongly linked to its legitimacy. In post-communist countries its poor performance is "clearly a risk for welfare state legitimacy" (Roosma et al., 2013: 209). This is based on the idea that "attitudes towards the welfare state are rooted in more general value systems regarding the proper relationship between the individual, the state and other institutions" (Blekesaune and Quadagno, 2003: 416). Additionally, a crucial element explaining why individuals support public welfare provision has proved to be the current care provision – both in terms of quality and quantity (Chung and Meuleman, 2017; Ellingsæter and Gulbrandsen, 2007).

Roosma et al. (2014) identify two dimensions of welfare state support, one of which is linked to the attitudes toward the actual performance of the welfare state, and the other to the beliefs of what welfare states should do. Apart from the overview analysis of people's perceptions of the existing policies, our article will focus in particular on this second dimension, on what are the perceptions regarding what the welfare state should do and whether it should strengthen social protection or social investment policies.

## **CITIZEN'S VIEWS ON THE FUTURE OF SLOVENIAN WELFARE STATE**

### **Methodology**

The data were gathered within the Norface Welfare State Futures project 'Our Children's Europe'. The project aims to understand the aspirations of the ordinary people regarding future welfare policy and uses the qualitative method of deliberative forums. Contrary to other forms of qualitative research, such as focus groups, the deliberative forums approach stresses the importance of a high degree of control being retained by the group rather than the researchers. Differing from a top-down approach of a pre-designed survey questionnaire as well as from prestructured interviews and focus groups, the forums allow for a 'bottom-up' approach to research in order to examine the priorities of individuals without any pressure towards issues identified by academic researchers and contained in the question-format of a structured questionnaire, so that researchers can examine the process of discussion and potential attitude formation (Taylor-Gooby et al., 2017b). The main question examined in the deliberative forums was 'What should be the government priorities

for the benefits and services in 2040?' Hence, besides examining people's attitudes on current policy developments, our interest was also in the future aspirations of what kind of welfare state participants wanted. The deliberative forums in Slovenia were carried out on 14th and on 28th of November 2015 in Ljubljana. The recruitment was done in two phases: first, potential respondents filled out the screening questionnaire on the Web. An invitation was sent to 3857 persons (18 to 70 years old from the central Slovenia region). In line with the screening criteria, 55 respondents were contacted over the phone, 39 respondents were recruited and 37 came to the event on both days. The participants made up a mini-public and consisted of people of different genders, ages, ethnicities, occupations and political orientations. The deliberative forums were conducted according to the main principles of democratic discussion and were led by a moderator.

Participants were first asked to identify the most important issues for the future development of welfare policy, which was discussed on the first day of the deliberative forums. On the second day the discussions were based around predefined topics made by the researchers. On the last day, participants had to define concrete priorities of the future welfare state, and the forum concluded with voting on the priorities<sup>5</sup>, which are presented in the next sections. The data were coded in Nvivo using a comparative coding set. We analysed the participant's views within the policy areas such as labour market, social assistance and poverty alleviation, family and work-life balance, old age and pensions.

## Identified problems and priorities

In this section, the main discussions linked to social investment and social protection policies will be presented. These are linked to the four policy fields discussed by participants: labour market, social assistance and poverty alleviation, family and work-life balance, old age and pensions and the main priorities people listed for the government to focus on in the future. The priorities and discussions are analytically divided into social protection and social investment discussions, and we are particularly interested in the perception of the potential trade-offs between the two policy paradigms when discussed in terms of financial constraints.

### *Social protection discussions*

One of the most discussed themes at the deliberative forums was the problems in the Slovenian labour market; the problem of the unemployment (in particular of the young and the old) was recognised as one of the most important for the future of the welfare state. In line with the changes in the Slovene labour market, increasing flexibility and self-employment were seen as negative developments in the current labour market. In the field of income protection, the focus of discussion was on minimum wage. It was understood as a way to increase equality, reduce poverty and decrease undeclared work, which was seen as something people were often forced to do to survive.

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<sup>5</sup> Voting process for all priorities was held at the end of each discussed topic in the forum and all the priorities were read by the moderator and respondents voted for each one separately. Each respondent was given red and green coupons, and if they agreed with the policy, they put a green coupon in the box, if they didn't they put a red one.

*And if the minimum wage is high enough, you'll go to work more, but it should provide at least something because for the majority, if they don't have a place to live, you can't survive on minimum wage (participant no. 88, female, 43 years old).*

The concern for the working poor, as one of the exacerbated trends in the recent period (Leskošek et al., 2013), was raised, and the raising of minimum wage was seen as a way to ensure a decent standard of living, provide motivation for work and reduce income inequality.

*The point is to provide the people with the basics, so that they'll really have all they need for basic living, if there's something more, well, that's their problem (participants no.81, female, 59 years old)*

Financial social assistance was seen as important; however, people often expressed worries that it reduced incentive to work, which was seen as somewhat problematic. Furthermore, the issue of the abuse of the welfare state, as well as the failed initiatives to work were often part of discussions, showing the importance of the deservingness criteria (van Oorschot, 2000), such as beneficiaries' "attitude" or "gratefulness", as well as "reciprocity" in the sense of willingness to do something in return, e.g. find work or participate in the active labour market policies.

*That's a different story altogether; I know a case: they receive social support and have nice cars, purchased with leasing, which are not theirs – control should be better enforced in this area. Or people entitled to social housing: I know a case of a restaurant owner, she owns a few restaurants, she was building her own house, and she lives in social housing. Because on paper, she registered her mother as the owner of all her property (participant no. 71, female, 42 years old).*

*My personal opinion is that if you receive social benefits that amount to, I don't know, EUR 270 – I'm not sure exactly but I know that it's a bit under EUR 300, and you have this alternative, or, I don't know, that you go and get a job somewhere for a minimum wage, where you work like crazy, I understand those that rather go and receive 270... (participant no. 88, female, 43 years old).*

Social protection benefits were perceived as important; however, the discussion also revolved around the abuse of unemployment benefits, as it is evident in the next quote:

*I think that the state should somehow limit the solidarity principle. This should apply to the elderly, the pensions, health care. By solidarity principle I mean that everyone – and this way of thinking has been around for some time and will remain for some more time – oh, I'll just register as an unemployed person. We were talking about the calculative mentality between choosing whether to work or not. I think that it should give more stimulation to finding employment. It should still be more profitable for people to work and not to receive benefits on the account of those who do work (participant no. 67, male, 67 years old).*

A new transfer, which is currently being frequently discussed in several countries as well, is a potential introduction of universal basic income. This was something that the participants were not well-informed about and therefore it was not discussed by all participants. Nevertheless, it seemed that there was some potential for this option to be accepted, and it was proposed as one priority with relatively high support. However, it is unclear whether all participants understood the concept.

*If we said all this income, all this relief would be suspended and everyone would*

*be getting this basic universal income. But basically it would all be more transparent ... There'd be no more hiding, it wouldn't pay for that private business owner to hide, so that they'd have free kindergarten, and so on. Those would be the benefits (participant no. 69, male, 43 years old).*

Social protection policies were recognised as important in the discussions of family policies (e.g. child benefits), however to a much lower degree than social investment policies. Lower priority is also evident in the fact that these were not put forward within any of the priorities (see Table 1, next section). This might also be linked to the worries expressed regarding the abuse of these benefits, as illustrated in the citation below:

Another thing, for example one files an application at the social work centre, for child allowance, whatever: all the applicants withdraw money from the accounts and hide their property. Which leads to the harder you work, the more the state will take from you. That's how things are today (participant no. 65, male, 29 years old).

The main problem identified by participants in social protection policy related to old age was the problem of low pensions and poverty among the elderly, who have the highest poverty rate in Slovenia, well above the average population (Eurostat, 2018). Therefore, not surprisingly, the proposed priorities followed the identified problems (see Table 1), stressing the need to increase pensions, set higher minimum pensions and even have pension equalisation.

Guaranteed minimum pension. You shouldn't have less than that, 500 or 600 should be the lowest pension. Even if you worked for fewer years or had a lower salary (participant no. 82, female, 44 years old).

The role of state was emphasised as the guarantor of a decent standard of living in old age, while individual responsibility was less pronounced in the discussion. Individual savings were listed as a possible solution and potential priority for the welfare state; however, the low number of positive votes indicates that it was not strongly supported by participants (see Table 1). This is in line with the notion that, especially in regard to the policies toward the elderly, the state is still perceived as the most responsible for their well-being, since the elderly are seen as one of the most deserving groups; firstly, due to the reciprocity principle, as they have contributed to the society all their life and secondly, according to the principle of need. On the other side, the principle of self-interest was also present, since we will all be old one day.

*The state should take care of the disabled, the ill, above all those, the elderly, because for the young we can still say: he could work but won't for minimum wage. But for the elderly really – in this field the state should take care, for the handicapped or otherwise, the disabled, with mental and mobility issues, for this – I'll say the most vulnerable group of people, here the state should take care (participant no. 88, female, 43 years old).*

To sum up, social protection policies were highlighted as very important in the future as well, with main emphasis on providing the minimum standards (such as minimum wage, minimum pensions), however, often the discussion of benefits was linked to worries about their abuse.

### ***Social investment discussions***

The focus on social investment policies was pronounced in the area of work-life balance and family policies, with child care and parental and sick leave policies being

in the forefront. This might have been somewhat influenced by the framing of discussions under gender equality; however, child care was recognised as one of the vital topics to be discussed in the sessions where the participants were free to choose the topics themselves.

In line with the Slovenian tradition of well-developed work-life balance policies in terms of childcare and parental leaves, and high levels of women participation in the labour market, child care services were recognised as vital for integrating women into the labour market. It is interesting that this was the main framing of the discussion while, for example, its role in equalising children's opportunity was not at the forefront, showing the predominance of the economic arguments in terms of social investment policies. The child care services were somewhat criticised as not being flexible enough to allow for the longer working hours quite common in today's labour market, again indicating the focus on productivity and the economy.

More flexibility of kindergartens, that means that the kindergartens, the work time of kindergartens, I'm talking about state kindergartens, it should be adjusted. To these work hours which vary in this country. Some people start work at this hour, finish at that, some start and finish later. Or later still. While the kindergarten is only open until four, half past four, right. So, these kindergartens should be adjusted to the work hours (participant no. 80, male, 67 years old).

One of the proposed solutions here was child care organised by companies. Additionally, some participants emphasised the so-called freedom of choice that could be interpreted as a positive or negative re-familialisation trend (see Blum et al., 2014). The negative elements of defamilialization pursued by social investment policies are

for example the abolition of benefits that enabled mothers of small children not to work. While on the other side, the positive re-familialistic family policy measures are in line with a traditional freedom of choice paradigm, as the measures enable parents (mainly mothers) to have a choice to opt out of employment when children are small (Blum et al. 2014).

*I think that by 2040, I'd want for the family to have the option to decide, the option to have a normal life with one parent being at home. Even though that doesn't completely fit under equality, but at the moment, it's something you can't even think about. In so and so many years I wish the standard was high enough that I could afford being home with the children, raising the quality of life significantly and at the same time having a normal life (participant no. 86, female, 25 years old).*

The second topic discussed within social investment policies was the issue of parental and sick leave. Here, there was a general agreement that there are good legislative arrangements; however, people also stressed that legislative arrangements could often be violated in practice (e.g. parents not being allowed to take sick leave by their employers).

*On one side, sick leave is being taken advantage of, on the other, they're sending half-ill children to the kindergarten. The mother should have the option to take sick leave for 14 days until the child is completely healthy (participant no. 87, male, 52 years old).*

The need to increase the take-up of parental leave by men was also discussed, as well as the need to extend paternal leave with the goal of reaching higher gender equality, which is still far from achieved, as the take up rate of fathers is still very low (Stropnik, 2017). Still, there was less consensus on this point because some parti-

cipants held more traditional views and put forward the argument of choice, which is in line with the survey findings on people's attitudes on family policies in Slovenia (Rakar et al., 2010), where the main reasons for low participation of fathers were found in the traditional division of tasks within the family, as well as the employers' expectations regarding male employees.

Social investment policy was also recognised as relevant in the labour market, mainly in emphasising the link between education and employment, stressing especially the economic benefits of such policies. In this sense, the work done by the employment agency was criticised, some saying that it should be more proactive in enabling people to reintegrate into the labour market, as follows:

*Requalification training for another profession. To have an opportunity to acquire qualifications for another occupation. Because many of us are eager to work, but are unable to find a job in your profession and cannot afford to pay for training for a new job. But what the employment agency does is send you to 200 trainings to teach you how to write so called job applications (participant no. 53, female, 55 years old).*

In the field of old age policies and long-term care, the focus was on institutional care and the development of home care. However, their affordability was a concern, while the solution was linked to social protection policies, i.e. higher pensions:

*Let's see, the elderly home costs 1500 EUR for people who are chained to the bed. I think that is the price. So the person should receive 1500 EUR pension, end of story) (participant no. 62, male, 44 years old).*

From the social investment perspective, the value of the elderly was emphasised in

the discussions, and there was a concern that insufficient recognition was given to the role of the elderly in transferring knowledge and experience (also in the workplace) to the young.

*And not that the elderly would take the work from younger people, but that there's no opportunity for them to pass their rich knowledge on the younger generations. Because people simply cut them off - go retire, bye, you go and then the knowledge is lost because there's no opportunity for them to pass it on (participant no. 84, female, 36 years old).*

### **Policy priorities: discussion**

The purpose of attitudes studies is also to examine the priorities that people set in order to understand future patterns of welfare state support. Table 2 summarises the agreed priorities and shows how consensual these were in the end in terms of voting<sup>6</sup>. In general, all suggested priorities were supported by the majority of the participants. The only two rejected priorities were 'equal pensions for all' and 'encouraging individual savings for old age'. In addition, three policies received only marginal support - only 20 of 38 votes - and these were 'encouraging studies in the field of ageing', 'defeminisation of professions' and 'longer paternity leave'. In sum, the discussions about the priorities in individual policy fields encompassed both social protection and social investment policies. Only in the field of poverty alleviation the social investment policies were not seen as relevant; however, they might be linked to social investment policies in other areas, which also indirectly targets poverty alleviation (e.g. in the labour market field).

<sup>6</sup> See the section on methods

Table 1:  
*Proposed policy priorities by field and type*

	<b>Social protection policies</b>	<b>Social investment policies</b>
Labour market	Security and flexibility of labour market (31 Y)	Improving the link between education and economy (37 Y)
	Raising minimum wage (36 Y)	Proactive role of employment service (32 Y)
Social assistance and poverty alleviation	Raising minimum wage (36 Y)	
	Change of taxes – more tax brackets (37 Y)	
	Higher taxes for luxury (35 Y)	
	Universal basic income (30 Y)	
Family and work-life balance		Longer paternity or parental leave for fathers (20 Y)
		Flexibility in childcare (31 Y)
		Childcare provision within enterprises (27)
Old age and pensions	Raising minimum pension (34 Y)	Home care services, development of services for elderly (35 Y)
	Raising pensions in general (28 Y)	Mentorship, cooperation with young and old (35 Y)
	Encouraging individual savings (16Y)	Subsidies for institutional care (26 Y)
	Equal pensions for all (14 Y)	Studies in the field of ageing (20 Y)

Source: Deliberative forums, Slovenia, November 2015.

Note: The number in the brackets is the number of support votes for the proposed policy (YES) from the total number of participants (37).

The general conclusion is that participants expressed certain dissatisfaction with the level of social protection, especially with regard to the most vulnerable, and they focused on improving their position by raising the minimum wage, minimum pensions and even new transfers, such as universal basic income. However, the abuse of social protection benefits was commonly present in the discussions, potentially paving the way for cuts in this area. The focus of the participants on social investment

policies was also quite strong. The discussions revealed some dissatisfaction with the services, especially their effectiveness (e.g. employment service), their flexibility (child care service) and their cost (institutional and other care services for the elderly). Therefore, several of the suggested priorities addressed these perceived shortcomings (e.g. flexibility in child care provision and development of services for the elderly).

Overall, one could say that both social protection and social investment policies

received significant attention from people, and both seem to be supported. Currently, the concept of financing benefits through high social security contributions<sup>7</sup> continues to enjoy strong support among Slovenians, according to public opinion polls most Slovenians still feel that the state should provide a safety net. The perception of the state as a 'safety net' increased significantly in Slovenia after the crisis, from 23.4% feeling that the government should provide safety against all threats to 44% in 2012. People also consider that the state is primarily responsible for the well-being of its citizens; in 2013, 53% of the respondents answered that this is primarily the responsibility of the state, while only 17.2% answered that this is primarily the responsibility of the individual (Toš et al., 2014). Furthermore, Slovenians are more supportive of the government responsibility for the social investment policies (such as ensuring job for everyone, childcare policies, paid leave from work to care for dependent family member) than the EU 22 average<sup>8</sup>.

The trade-offs were therefore not clear due to low perception of financial constraints. In this regard it has to be noted that a general impression of the participants' discussions in the forum was that the issue of insufficient resources was not seen as a problem of the Slovene welfare state, therefore the potential trade-offs were not part of the discussion either, as the emphasis was on the problem of redistribution, especially in regard to corruption.

*Here's enough money, it's just not distributed correctly. Stolen. Let them bring back what they've taken out and we'll all*

*live like in Switzerland, I guarantee (participant no. 56, male, 68 years old).*

However, when discussing the priorities of the welfare state also in terms of its financing the social investment policies, education and employment were seen as a particular priority of the future welfare state. Additionally, the link between education and economy was perceived as a core policy priority with the highest voting support (see Table 2).

*And you need to know that you have to produce such services and products that the society can afford them. And we're back at knowledge, the education system, that is. That's why I've said that before. Unless we have knowledge and different products, a different outlook, we'll just go downhill. That's why I'm saying (participant no. 83, male, 45 years old).*

## CONCLUSION

We have analysed people's attitudes on the preferred direction of the Slovenian welfare state in the future emphasizing the trade-offs between social investment and social protection policies. Deliberative forums data was used to disclose policy directions that are favoured by citizens.

As shown in our analysis of deliberative forum discussions on the peoples' perceptions of current policies and the future developments of the Slovenian welfare state, the pursued policies of major cuts in the social protection policies diverge from the people's expectations of their desired future welfare state, as social protection measures were strongly argued for (espe-

<sup>7</sup> In Slovenia, social contributions account for 40.1% of total tax revenue and are the fourth highest in the EU while employees' social contributions are the highest in the EU (Eurostat, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> Own calculations based on the data from ESS Welfare Attitudes (ESS, 2008). The mean for childcare services in Slovenia was 8.15, while for the EU 22 the value was 7.58. For other questions the differences were smaller, but all were higher than the EU 22 average.

cially e.g. minimum pensions and basic income, but they were also seen as relevant in other areas, such as labour market, child care). However, the discrepancies between the people's preferred scenario and the actual reforms are mitigated because of the sheltering of major cuts within more gradual reforms in social investment policies, making some of the cuts in social protection policies more blurred and hence acceptable. In this sense, we could also see how the discourse of social investment has been accepted by people in the deliberative forums; several of the proposed priorities have been in line with the so-called social investment perspective. This can be explained from the view of the long tradition of social investment policies, also indicating a path dependency evident in the pursued crisis reforms. In terms of trade-offs this might point out that changes in the field of social protection are seen as less problematic if accompanied by some development of social investment policies. Furthermore, short-term retrenchment might be acceptable when it ensures the functioning of the economy and contributes to the long-term existence of the welfare state. Hence, people accept cutbacks in order to be protected in the future (Naumann, 2017). On the other hand, research showed that if expanding social investment policies goes along cutbacks in other parts of the welfare state, benefits of social investment policies are not strong enough to outweigh the benefits of social protection policies due to their diffuse nature (see Busemeyer and Garritzmann, 2017). Consequently, the discrepancies between people's preferences and the pursued reforms could even be sharpened. Additionally, several authors have pointed out that social investment strategies are less redistributive and less protective of the most vulnerable (Cantillon, 2011; Cantillon and Van Lancker, 2013; Vandenbro-

ucke and Vleminickx, 2011). As indicated by Hemerijck (2015), the social investment paradigm is a useful tool for political parties wanting to break away from 'failed neoliberal orthodoxy' because it 'serves to positively re-legitimise the role of the state in the (mixed) economy, driving up quality standards in family policy, education, and employment service, to support economic development and social progress in the aftermath of global financial crisis, thus allowing for, what Bonoli calls, "affordable credit-claiming" (2013)' (in Hemerijck, 2015: 254).

Still, social protection policies were strongly put forward by citizens, especially policies targeted at the lowest income groups (such as raising minimum pensions and minimum wages). This most likely reflects the poor financial situation and high poverty rates among these groups and the recognised need by all participants that the state should address this. The focus on maintaining a strong minimum-income universal safety net as social protection and economic stabilisation 'buffets' can be also interpreted as one of the key social investment functions. According to Hemerijck (2015), adequate minimum income protection is a critical precondition for an effective social investment strategy and what he labels as 'Keynesianism through the back door' (Hemerijck, 2015: 248). Also, an increased reliance on the role of the state regarding future investments, which was clearly indicated in deliberative forums participants' preferences in all areas of welfare, is perhaps even more prominent in the former socialist states, where people traditionally perceive the role of the state as a safeguard for their welfare. Svallfors (2012) concludes that on average, people from Eastern European countries ask for the most wide-ranging government responsibility in terms of welfare provision. Rus and Toš (2005)

link this not only to the historical inertia of attitudes, but also to existential necessity because people in the process of transition are exposed to a much higher uncertainty than people in traditional capitalist societies (Rus and Toš, 2005: 75). Hence, the discrepancy between the withdrawal of the welfare state and people's expectations in those countries could become much more pronounced. However, despite the fact that in Slovenia the state is seen as the one that should maintain a strong role in social protection policies, the frequent mentioning of the abuse of social protection benefits in deliberative forums is potentially paving the way for cuts in this area, mitigating the clash between actual reform policy of the 'shrinking welfare state' and people's expectations of the 'all-encompassing welfare state'. However, as shown by Busemeyer and Neimanns (2017), an unbalanced approach in policy trade-offs between social investment policies and social protection might contribute to a more intense resource conflict between different groups of beneficiaries: "Thus, an unbalanced and one sided expansion of particular parts of the welfare state to the detriment of other dimensions could trigger public opposition" (Busemeyer and Neimanns, 2017: 243). Hence, if not addressed sufficiently, this could become one of the most salient issues for the legitimacy of the future Slovenian welfare state.

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### **Sažetak**

## **BUDUĆNOST SLOVENSKE SOCIJALNE DRŽAVE: POGLED IZ SAVJETODAVNIH FORUMA**

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*Europske države suočavaju se s izazovima kako uspješno restrukturirati svoje sustave socijalne skrbi u vrijeme brojnih vanjskih i unutarnjih pritisaka, među kojima posebno valja izdvojiti demografski pritisak i utjecaj svjetske ekonomske krize. Slovenija je jedna od europskih zemalja koje su bile najsnažnije pogođene krizom 2009. godine. Isto tako, Slovenija se suočava s nekoliko teških izazova povezanih sa starenjem stanovništva. Rad se bavi stavovima ljudi prema postojećim mjerama socijalne politike i njihovim željenim smjerovima budućeg razvoja slovenske socijalne države, te analizira razlikuju li se mjere koje se primjenjuju od stavova ljudi uzimajući u obzir potencijalne kompromise između paradigme socijalne zaštite s jedne strane i paradigme socijalnog ulaganja s druge. U analizi su se koristili podatci prikupljeni metodom savjetodavnih foruma koji su provedeni 2015. godine. Savjetodavni forumi omogućuju pristup istraživanju „odozdo prema gore“. Analiza je pokazala da postoji nesrazmjer između očekivanja građana u pogledu budućeg razvoja slovenske socijalne države i stvarnog smjera reformi, što bi moglo postati jedno od najvažnijih pitanja za legitimnost buduće slovenske socijalne države.*

**Ključne riječi:** *socijalna država, Slovenija, stavovi, savjetodavni forum.*