

Differentiated Integration and Europe's Global Role: A Conceptual Framework^{*}

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In a time of global challenges, rising geopolitical tensions and a weakening of the traditional trans-Atlantic security community, we can expect pressures for Europe to play a more important role in the world. Various initiatives have been taken to strengthen the role of the European Union (EU), but there are also tendencies towards a more complex European governance structure in the making, characterized by a combination of both EU and non-EU (but still European) initiatives. This introductory article presents a framework for studying a European role that includes initiatives taken within and outside the EU framework, but closely interlinked, indicating that the concept of differentiated integration (DI) may help to clarify Europe's role in a changing and volatile global context.

Keywords: Differentiated Integration, Disintegration, EU as a global actor, EU foreign security and defence policy

1 INTRODUCTION

In a time of global challenges, rising geopolitical tensions and a weakening of the traditional trans-Atlantic security community, we can expect pressures for Europe to play a more important role in the world. Various initiatives have been taken to strengthen the role of the European Union (EU), but there are also tendencies towards a more complex European governance structure in the making, characterized by a combination of both EU and non-EU (but still European) initiatives. This introductory article presents a framework for studying a European role that includes initiatives taken within and outside the EU framework, but closely interlinked, indicating that the concept of *differentiated integration* (DI) may help to clarify Europe's role in a changing and volatile global context.

The concept of DI is now widely employed by practitioners and academics alike. Often used to describe the process of European integration which has been a

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key feature ever since the 1950s, it denotes a search for a certain balance between national autonomy on the one hand, and regional integration on the other. In recent years, DI has proven increasingly relevant – for instance, to capture the emergence of a more complex governance structure within the EU. With the introduction of the pillar structure with the Maastricht Treaty, a specific form of DI became institutionalized. After the pillar structure was abandoned in 2009 (with the Lisbon Treaty), the concept has been applied to capture a more complex system of integration with cross-cutting traditional policy areas. This feature of the integration process is particularly relevant for what will be referred to in this article as *the broader field of foreign and security policy* – a combination of policies that are partly intergovernmental and partly supranational, and include various forms of participation.

As yet, the concept has not been applied to the many processes that take place outside the EU but have an impact on the role of the EU, or Europe, in the world. Also informal or non-treaty-based processes of various kinds have been largely overlooked. This introductory article seeks to present a more comprehensive conceptual framework for analysing all these processes and the linkages between them.

In addition to opening up the study of DI to include all these various processes, we are also interested in why a specific type of integration or DI takes place. Employing a series of well-known perspectives, the integration literature has analysed the drivers of integration.¹ A key distinction goes between different forms of structural or agency-based explanations. As we understand interaction as a process, and further that everything that is not full integration (federation) or full disintegration will be some kind of DI, the same explanations may be valid also for explaining differing degrees of DI: thus, there may be varying degrees of DI, or perhaps Differentiated Disintegration, as in the case of Brexit.²

The drivers of DI will vary among the different parts of this comprehensive policy area; they must be determined through empirical analysis. However, we assume that some types of push- and/or pull-factors from various levels of government (EU-level or Member State-level) will be relevant for the kind of integration or DI that evolves. Here we may identify four roles that the various levels of government may take in this process of integration: as leaders, as followers, as laggards, and as disruptors. What motivates them – be it national interests, norms, path dependency or something else – may vary, and must be identified through empirical studies.

¹ L. Hooghe & G. Marks, *Grand Theories of European Integration in the Twenty-First Century*, 26(8) J. Eur. Pub. Pol'y 1113–1133 (2019).

² F. Schimmelfennig, *Brexit: Differentiated Disintegration in the European Union*, 25(8) J. Eur. Pub. Pol'y 1154–1173 (2018).

2 DI AND THE EU AS A GLOBAL ACTOR

The EU has gradually adopted an integrated approach to security, indicating its aim of developing a policy that recognizes the complexity and multi-layered nature of foreign- and security-policy challenges that may ‘threaten our shared vital interests’.³ As this introduces a new and broader security concept, it has also led to more DI. Today this broader policy area of security includes areas where the Commission has a certain degree of competence (such as civil protection, crisis response, and humanitarian aid) and areas where the main competencies remain with the Member States (as with defence). A similar tendency is evident in the over-arching area of foreign policy. In an increasingly globalized world, this area cannot be restricted to Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) alone. To capture the comprehensive role of the EU in international affairs, we also need to include areas within the competencies of the Commission, such as trade and the externalization of European standards and regulations. Thus, it may be argued that this policy area, to some extent, has moved beyond intergovernmentalism in its pure form, and is better seen as some form of multi-level governance – a ‘polity-creating process in which authority and policy-making influence are shared across multiple levels of government’.⁴ In turn, this complexity entails the need for more fine-grained empirical analyses to explain the mechanisms of DI in this area, why and how it occurs and how it impacts the EU as a global actor.

One of the first scholarly contributions to the study of DI with respect to the EU dates back to 1996, when Alexander Stubb identified three main categories of DI: temporal differentiation (multi-speed Europe), territorial differentiation (variable geometry), and sectoral integration (*à la carte* Europe). While these categories may be useful for describing different processes of DI and distinguishing among them, they are not very helpful when it comes to analysing the processes and understanding why DI takes place. Today, there is a rather large conceptual and empirical literature on DI; in particular, Gänzle et al. (2020) provide an excellent and comprehensive overview of the history of the concept. It can be argued that a certain level of agreement concerning the main dimensions of DI has emerged: first, that DI has to do with differing degrees of transfer of power from the national to the European level of governance (vertical DI); second, that it may include

³ European External Action Service, *Shared Vision, Common Action. A Stronger Europe: A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy* (June 2016), https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf.

⁴ L. Hooghe & G. Marks, *Multi-Level Governance and European Integration*, 2 (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield 2001).

various types or degrees of participation, with the possibility for opt-outs and opt-ins (horizontal DI).⁵

Relevant empirical case studies can be divided into two main categories: those focusing on how differentiation plays out with regard to specific models of membership (opt-outs) or association (opt-ins)⁶; and those that investigate how these models have been implemented in specific policy areas.⁷ What is missing is an approach that enables us to incorporate the processes that occur in the *broader area of foreign security and defence policy*, which includes areas not traditionally thought of as being part of this specific policy area as well as the processes initiated by a Member State, outside the framework of the Union, but that are closely linked to its policies. The articles in this special issue about European space cooperation (Cross, this issue) response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Svendsen, this issue), clearly shows this.

In EU studies, DI remains a normatively contested concept. While some see it as a highly problematic trend which may increase the dominance of certain Member States and risk undermining the overall democratic legitimacy of the EU,⁸ others see it as a way of overcoming diversities and avoiding the risk of disintegration.⁹ According to the latter view, DI may open up new possibilities for European actorness in international politics. Despite these differing positions, DI is widely recognized as a potentially permanent feature of the EU¹⁰ and European integration more broadly. In turn, DI has been established as a genuine sub-field of European studies.¹¹

⁵ D. Leuffen, B. Rittberger & F. Schimmelfennig, *Differentiated Integration: Explaining Variation in the European Union* (Palgrave Macmillan 2013).

⁶ S. Lavanex & F. Schimmelfennig, *EU Rules Beyond EU Borders: Theorizing External Governance in European Politics*, 16(6) *J. Eur. Pub. Pol'y* 791–812 (2009); *Ibid.*; B. Leruth, S. Gänzle & J. Trondal, *Differentiated Integration and Disintegration in the EU After Brexit: Risks Versus Opportunities*, 57(6) *J. Com. Mkt. Stud.* 1383–1394 (2019); F. Schimmelfennig, *EU Enlargement and Differentiated Integration: Discrimination or Equal Treatment?*, 21(5) *J. Eur. Pub. Pol'y* 681–698 (2014); J. Trondal & N. Kühn, *Governing a 'Post-Brexit' Europe and the Case of Norway: Integration Without Membership in an Affiliated State*, in *Differentiated Integration and Disintegration in a Post-Brexit Era* (S. Gänzle, B. Leruth & J. Trondal eds, Routledge 2020).

⁷ S. Fabbrini & V. A. Schmidt, *Introduction: Differentiation and Beyond*, 17 *Comp. Eur. Pol.* 173–175 (2019); F. Asberaki & E. Markozani, *European Migration Policy: Frontex, Differentiation and Brexit*, in Gänzle, Leruth & Trondal eds, *supra* n. 6; A. Brianson & M. Stegmann McCallion, *Bang-a-Boomerang? Sweden, Differentiated Integration and EMU After Brexit*, *supra* n. 6.

⁸ E. O. Eriksen, *Political Differentiation and the Problem of Dominance: Segmentation and Hegemony*, 57 *Eur. J. Pol. Res.* 989–1008 (2018).

⁹ A. Kölliker, *Bringing Together or Driving Apart the Union? Towards a Theory of Differentiated Integration*, 24 (4) *West Eur. Pol.* 125–151 (2001); T. P. Taylor-Gooby, B. Leruth & H. Chung, *After Austerity: Welfare State Transformation in Europe After the Great Recession* (Oxford University Press 2017).

¹⁰ European Commission, *White Paper on the Future of Europe. Reflections and Scenarios for the EU27 by 2025* (Brussels 2017).

¹¹ Leruth et al., *supra* n. 6; Gänzle, Leruth & Trondal eds, *supra* n. 6.

Even though DI has always been central to the integration process and discussions among EU Member States, the first real political discussion on the matter came in 1976, with the Tindemans Report. It was not until 1992, however, with the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty, that DI became a key feature of the EU. For the first time, uniform (market) integration was supplemented with a form of cooperation that acknowledged differing levels of integration in various policy areas (the pillar structure) and recognized the right of Member States' to opt out of participating in the integration process in certain areas.

Today, DI has become a key and (perhaps) permanent characteristic of European integration, owing to the various crises the EU has faced over the past decades. This became evident in 2017, when the Juncker Commission's White Paper on the future of Europe explicitly acknowledged 'differentiated integration as a viable option for the future of the EU'.¹² With this, the integration process seemed to have moved from what Frank Schimmelfennig has referred to as pragmatic and short-term 'instrumental differentiation', to 'constitutional differentiation' – which is more long term, aimed at accommodating more persistent diversity.¹³ Regardless, DI was still most likely to take place in areas with low levels of integration, where there was an urgent need to develop a stronger role for the EU. In Schimmelfennig's words: DI 'remains a promising instrument to facilitate further enlargement and kick-start integration in new policy areas'.¹⁴

This has also been confirmed empirically as the CFSP, introduced with the Maastricht Treaty, opened up for a certain degree of horizontal differentiation by allowing Denmark to opt out from the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).¹⁵ Later, it also permitted opt-ins by closely associated non-members, like Norway. Additionally, it allowed for vertical differentiation, permitting certain Member States to move forward with higher levels of integration, as with the establishment of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). Many of these specific processes have been widely studied.¹⁶ There has also been a special focus

¹² European Commission, *supra* n. 10.

¹³ F. Schimmelfennig, *EU Crisis and Reform: Is Differentiated Integration the Answer?*, Groupe d'étude géopolitique working paper 2 (2017).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, at 12.

¹⁵ J. Howorth, *Differentiation in Security and Defence Policy*, 17 *Comp. Eur. Pol.* 261–277 (2019); N. Groenendijk, *Flexibility and Differentiated Integration in European Defence Policy*, 389 *L'Europe en formation* 105–120 (2019).:

¹⁶ See for instance S. Blockmans & D. Macciarini Crosson, *Differentiated 'Within PESCO – Clusters and Convergence in the EU Defence*, CEPS Research Report 4 (2019); S. B. H. Faure & A. Schmith, *Differentiated Integrations Lessons from Political Economies of European Defence*, 6(2) *Eur. Rev. Intl. Stud.* 3: 3–17 (2019); S. B. H. Faure et al., *The Differentiated Integration of Defence Companies in Europe: A Sociology of (Trans) National Economic Elites*, 6(2) *Eur. Rev. Intl. Stud.* 135–162 (2019); Howorth, *supra* n. 15.

on the implications of Brexit for horizontal as well as vertical differentiation.¹⁷ Nevertheless, when the focus of study has been security and defence policy, this has often been limited to the more specific field of CSDP. Also in this special issue, we have contributions that give an up-to-date picture of how DI plays out in this policy area.¹⁸

Although this area is still primarily dominated by intergovernmentalism and national autonomy, there has been a move towards greater involvement of the EU level (European External Action Service and the Commission). This was highly contested for a long time but is now increasingly seen as necessary to make the EU a more capable actor in today's increasingly uncertain geopolitical context. Even though integration in CSDP has become deeper, it is unlikely that we will ever see a full transfer of EU competence in this specific area. Instead, a certain degree of vertical differentiation is more likely to be the norm – a mix between intergovernmentalism and community policy.

Thus, in the EU's security and defence policy, DI is here to stay. The recent decision to activate enhanced cooperation or PESCO with greater use of qualified majority voting for certain decisions within this group, and the establishment of a European Defence Fund (EDF) within the Commission, are concrete examples of differentiated vertical integration in the area of CSDP (see Blockmans & Crosson, this issue).

In the Union's broader foreign policy, however, DI has been increasingly institutionalized. A greater role for EU diplomacy and EU foreign policy was secured through the Lisbon Treaty, the establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the strengthening of the mandate of the High Representative for CFSP, who now also holds the position of Vice President of the Commission. These changes show a move towards a greater role for the EU level in a policy area where the main decisions still are taken by the Member States. Thus, the Union's foreign and security policy must be understood as a mix of CFSP/CSDP, as well as of the areas that are developed and implemented by the Commission alone or in cooperation with the EEAS and the Member States. In the field of crisis management or crisis response, this is referred to as the Union's integrative approach – an approach that has been developed as a consequence of a changing international and geopolitical context where there no longer are clear-cut borders between internal and external policies. This also means that the borders between the areas where the Commission has a high degree of competence and

¹⁷ Gänzle, Leruth & Trondal (eds), *supra* n. 6; Ø. Svendsen, *Brexit and the Future of EU Defence: A Practice Approach to Differentiated Integration*, 41(8) J. Eur. Integration 993–1007 (2019); Ø. Svendsen & R. Adler-Nissen, *Differentiated (Dis)integration in Practice: The Diplomacy of Brexit and the Low Politics of High Politics*, 57(6) J. Com. Mkt. Stud. 1419–1430 (2019).

¹⁸ Blockmans & Macciarini Crosson, *supra* n. 16; Sitter, this issue; Batora, this issue.

power (development and humanitarian aid, civil protection, and crisis response) and areas where the Member States still have the final say (e.g., major foreign policy decisions, deployment of CSDP missions) have become increasingly inter-linked (see Svendsen, this issue).

However, even such an integrative approach may not be sufficient to capture the EU's global role. Ideally, we should include external relations more broadly, incorporating the external dimensions of various internal policies such as the internal security cooperation¹⁹ and the internal market dynamics, which has been referred to as the Union's regulatory power.²⁰ This has also been called the 'Brussels effect', referring to the EU's power and competence with regard to harmonizing global standards and regulations (e.g., GDPR²¹, environment, etc.), and how this contributes to a multi-faceted and differentiated EU foreign policy.²²

For a deeper understanding of DI in EU foreign policy, we need to take a full holistic approach. This entails making not only the defined 'integrated approach' the object of study, but including the whole field of the EU's role in international politics. Only then will we be able to capture the true character of DI in the Union's broader foreign and security policy. This is a huge task, but one that is increasingly recognized as important for grasping the EU's real capacity as a global actor.

3 MOVING BEYOND THE EU *STRICTO SENSU*

What is less often recognized is the importance of including processes that are not formally part of the EU. Whereas that is not relevant when the aim is to understand the EU's capacity on the global stage, it is crucial if we want to capture the *broader European capacity* on the global stage. In a period of rising geopolitical tensions, this capacity may well be worth studying. But to capture this broader European role, we need to take an additional step and study how the processes in the EU relate to the various initiatives and processes taken by key Member States outside the EU framework, and whether this increased complexity in European responses means weaker or stronger European global actorness (see Cross, this issue; Rieker, this issue).

The distinction between formal (treaty-based) and informal (not treaty-based) processes of DI is inadequately studied. While the importance of including this

¹⁹ S. Wolff, *The External Dimension of EU's Internal Security*, in *International Relations and the European Union* (C. Hill, M. Smith & S. Vanhooacker eds, Oxford University Press 2017).

²⁰ A. R. Young, *The European Union as a Global Regulator? Context and Comparison*, 22(9) *J. Eur. Pub. Policy* 1233–1252 (2015).

²¹ General Data Protection Regulation.

²² A. Bradford, *The Brussels Effect: How the European Union Rules the World* (Oxford University Press 2020).

distinction has been highlighted,²³ it has still been largely overlooked in most empirical analyses. The reason probably that *formal differentiation* is easier to identify, as it involves flexible formats of integration that are specified in agreements or treaties. *Informal differentiated integration* may include many different processes and can therefore be more difficult to single out.

Here we may distinguish among at least four main types of *informal differentiated integration* that relate to vertical and horizontal integration: First, opt-outs in the form of *non-compliance* with EU rules by certain Member States in highly integrated areas (understood as informal opt-outs). Recent examples can be found in some policy choices made by Poland and Hungary, choices not in accordance with EU rules, norms and values (see Sitter, this issue).

Second, differing views of the *long-term objectives* of the EU as a foreign policy actor or its *finalité*. This situation, common in the history of European integration, has often resulted in vague compromises, with a certain degree of ‘constructive ambiguity’ in official documents and official EU discourse which allows for differing interpretations, and thus some kind of informal opt-out. Here we may note the various interpretations of the development of a ‘European security and defence capacity’, which means one thing in Sweden, and something quite different in France (see Rieker, this issue).

Third, we find examples of *informal opt-ins* in cases where non-members decide unilaterally to sign foreign policy declarations or follow EU policies, as Norway does with regard to the EU’s CFSP.

And fourthly, there are cases where certain Member States push for *integration initiatives outside the EU structure*, seeking to kick-start a process seen difficult to agree on within the Union. Such initiatives are often taken by one or several Member States (sometimes also together with closely associated non-members), with the implicit or explicit aim of either integrating the area into the Union at a later stage (Schengen, St. Malo process) or supporting the EU in strengthening Europe’s role on the global stage (European Intervention Initiative, E3 negotiations processes) (see Rieker, this issue; Whitman, this issue).

Including processes initiated by one individual or a group of Member States outside the EU also means that we will include processes such as those taken within the E3 format²⁴ – for instance, the various initiatives taken by Germany on migration and France on defence (EI2). Additionally, there are some key initiatives taken by smaller

²³ S. S. Andersen & N. Sitter, *Differentiated Integration: What Is It and How Much Can the EU Accommodate?*, 28(4) J. Eur. Integ. 313–330 (2006).

²⁴ In 2003, France, Germany and the UK launched negotiations attempting to limit the Iranian nuclear programme, which led to the Tehran Declaration of 21 Oct. 2003 and the voluntary Paris Agreement of 15 Nov. 2004. In 2014, at the request of the Italian PM Matteo Renzi, Foreign Minister Federica Mogherini was named High Representative of the EU as the negotiations approached conclusion, resulting in the elaboration of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in 2015.

Member States, such as the initiative for a greater focus on conflict prevention taken by Sweden some after the turn of the millennium, which has now become a key feature of EU's foreign and security policy,²⁵ or the more recent defence initiatives taken by the Nordic countries, the Benelux, the V4, etc (see Rieker, this issue; Sitter, this issue). All these initiatives have had an implicit or explicit intention of contributing to a strengthening of the European capacity to act. This is also the case for the processes aimed at strengthening the European pillar in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).²⁶ Thus, all these initiatives contribute in different ways to a more differentiated, but potentially also stronger, European capacity in the field of foreign and security policy. If there continues to be widespread reluctance to transferring competence to the EU level in this area, we are likely to see more DI, rather than less. Thus, a broad approach is essential if we want to capture the foreign-policy role of the EU in the current international context.

In addition to including the various internal EU processes that contribute to the EU as a global actor, we will need to consider various non-EU processes that in one way or another contribute to a strengthening of European joint capacity in in the field of foreign and security policy. How can this be done?

4 A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR STUDYING DI AND EUROPE'S ROLE IN THE WORLD

To be able to provide a clear definition of DI, we need to start by specifying what we mean by *integration*. Regarding the various European processes described above, it can be useful to apply a somewhat broader definition than what is usually provided in EU studies. In this article we apply the definition provided by James G. March: integration as *the idea that the world consists of a set of interconnected parts and that integration is a result of some type of closer relations among some of these parts*.²⁷ Thus, integration signifies some measure of the density, intensity, and character of the relations among the constitutive elements of a system.

From this generic definition, integration can be understood as a process or a continuum with full disintegration at one end and full integration (federation) at the other. Everything in-between the two will then be DI. By adding the dimension of uniformity, as Schimmelfennig²⁸ suggests, we can also distinguish between different types of Differentiated (Dis)Integration (see Table 1).

²⁵ P. Rieker, *Europeanization of National Security Identity: The EU and the Changing Security Identities of the Nordic States* (Routledge 2006).

²⁶ Howorth, *supra* n. 15.

²⁷ J. G. March, *A Learning Perspective on the Network Dynamics of Institutional Integration*, in *Organizing Political Institutions* 129–155 (M. Egeberg & P. Laegreid eds, Scandinavian University Press 1999).

²⁸ Schimmelfennig, *supra* n. 2.

Table 1 Differentiated (dis)Integration as a Function of Levels of Integration and Uniformity

		<i>Integration</i>		
		Low	Medium	High
Uniformity	High	Harmonization	Differentiated Integration	<i>Federation</i>
	Medium	Cooperation	Differentiated Integration	Differentiated Integration
	Low	<i>Conflict/competition</i>	Differentiated (Dis)integration	NA

While Table 1 gives an overview of the ‘differentiated area’ and the main types of Differentiated (Dis)Integration it is not detailed enough to capture all the specificities in each category. For this, it may be useful to supplement with the conceptualization of integration provided by Jim March, which uses the following dimensions of integration: the level of *causal interdependence* among the parts, the level of *consistency/coherence* among the parts, and the level of *structural connectedness* (a sociometric network vision of integration, including political integration).²⁹ These three aspects of integration are crucial, but not necessarily strongly correlated: there may be high levels of integration in some dimensions and less in others.

From these three general dimensions of integration, we can develop a model that can be applied to the study the level of integration/disintegration in various policy areas. Such a model may prove particularly useful for studying the level and character of integration in the broader field of European foreign and security policy.

According to March, a fully integrated system will require high scores on all three dimensions. Consequently, integrated systems can be understood as a continuum with disintegration at one end and full integration at the other. Everything in-between the two may then be characterized as some type of DI. While most processes will fall somewhere in the middle (see table above), a framework with different dimension makes it possible to say something more about the different forms of DI (see Table 2) which is not only a function of the level of integration and the level of uniformity.

²⁹ March, *supra* n. 26, at 134–135.

Table 2 Dimensions of Differentiated (dis)Integration

DI
Disintegration <—————> Integration
Interdependencies:
<input type="checkbox"/> Economic
<input type="checkbox"/> Political
Consistency:
<input type="checkbox"/> Common rules
<input type="checkbox"/> Common values
<input type="checkbox"/> Common objectives
Structural Connectedness:
<input type="checkbox"/> Contacts and meetings
<input type="checkbox"/> Common resources
<input type="checkbox"/> Common institutions
<input type="checkbox"/> Transfer of competencies

This more generic definition of integration incorporates both the vertical/horizontal dimension, the formal/informal dimension, as well as the inclusive/exclusive dimension of the integration processes. This means that it can readily be applied for specific studies of processes within the EU, as well as for broader processes, including those that go beyond the EU as such but that could still be defined as European integration.

With such an approach, DI will be applied as a purely *analytical concept* that can be used to capture the dynamics of today's increasingly complex European integration process, characterized by opt-outs and opt-ins, enhanced cooperation, and various forms of multi-level governance, as well as processes outside the EU institutional structure, but still closely linked to it.

4.1 INTRODUCING THE ROLE OF AGENCY

Although these different dimensions of the integration process or continuum are useful and can facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the concept of DI, they cannot help us to understand what drives these processes forward, what slows them down or what might reverse them. To be able to answer such questions, we need to introduce the role of agency. In other words, we also need to study how different levels of government address further integration – whether promoting or trying to prevent it. In some areas, Member States may take control and initiate

(differentiated) integration processes – as France has done in the area of defence. In other areas, it is Commission that takes the lead – as with humanitarian aid and civil crisis response, and various forms of rules and regulations. Moreover, there are states that actively search for ways to slow down, prevent or even disrupt the processes of integration. The contributions to this Special Issue analyse the role of the various actors involved, discussing whether they act as leaders, followers, laggards or disruptors in the processes of integration and DI.

4.1[a] *Leaders and Followers*

This category covers actors that drive the processes of integration forward, including the EU institutions themselves. For instance, both the Commission and the EEAS propose ways of proceeding. Additionally, there may be a combination, as with the many joint initiatives that often come from the High Representative and the Commission. This may occur in areas where the Commission has a certain degree of independent competence, or in intergovernmental fields. Regarding the latter, the Member States must first adopt the initiative, and may then choose to block or change it. However, as many of these initiatives have been successfully adopted, it shows that the agenda-setting power of EU institutions is not insignificant (see Riddervold and Bosilca, this issue).

Certain Member States often take the lead. In the area of security and defence, France has played a particularly important role – alone or together with other members. For instance, the French collaboration with the UK on the St. Malo declaration in 1998 was a crucial part of the process towards what later became the ESDP/CSDP. France has also cooperated with Germany, as with the recent initiative to activate PESCO and establish a European Defence. Additionally, France has initiated several processes outside the EU, with the intent of contributing to a stronger European defence capacity. Here we may note the various attempts to strengthen the European pillar within NATO, or independent initiatives taken to strengthen multilateral defence cooperation among the European allies and partner countries, such as the European Intervention Initiatives (see Rieker, this issue). Initiatives to strengthen bilateral defence cooperation/integration should also be mentioned, such as the Lancaster House Agreements with the UK from 2010 or the Aachen agreement with Germany from 2019.

4.1[b] *Laggards or Disruptors*

Progress can take time, because many Member States view integration processes (in general) with considerable scepticism. These countries are the laggards. While

some (like Denmark, the Netherlands, Poland, and Hungary) fear that a stronger role for the EU may undermine NATO and the trans-Atlantic relationship, others (like Germany and Sweden) worry that France might push the EU in a more militaristic direction and undermine the softer-security identity of the EU.

Finally, some Member States are more than merely sceptical: they may call into question the normative foundations of the EU (Poland and Hungary) or be poised to leave the EU (the UK). These disruptors may represent a greater challenge than the laggards, as they may have a more transformative impact of the processes (Sitter, this issue; Whitman, this issue).

5 THE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

The case studies presented here cover different aspects of the broader field of EU foreign, security and defence policy. Some study this field from the perspective of a Member State, a group of Member States or associated non-members, others from the level of the EU. Although this special issue cannot cover all the aspects of DI in this wide-ranging field, it is hoped that the case studies will expand what is known about the *mechanisms of differentiated integration in the broader European integration process*. Further, we hope that these analyses may inspire more case studies of the various aspects of the comprehensive, and increasingly differentiated, foreign and security policies of the EU.

Studying different parts of this field from the perspective of different levels of government requires empirical research that can provide answers to the three following questions:

- (1) What kind of DI characterizes this specific part of the EU's broader foreign, security, and defence policy? What explains this particular outcome?
- (2) What are the roles of the actors and levels of governments involved in the various DI processes? Why did they take on such roles?
- (3) To what extent does DI in this area facilitate or constrain European and/or EU actorness?

This special issue also includes articles that analyse different parts of DI and Europe as a global actor. These studies offer various explanations for the emergence of a specific type of DI, and the potential implications for the global role of EU.

Øyvind Svendsen offers insights into the European Commission's global coronavirus response from the perspective of DI. He shows how the constant struggle for competence plays into the politics of European integration and considers its potential for expression in formal transfers of competence in the area of global health. *Mai'a Cross* analyses the origins

and development of the relationship between the European Space Agency (ESA) and the EU space programme, showing how this area has become a case of informal (i.e., outside of EU structures) DI. *Marianne Riddervold* and *Ruxandra-Laura Bosilca* examine the relationship between exogenous crises and internal, formal DI in EU maritime foreign and security policy, and argue that crises may serve as drivers of EU uniform integration. *Jozef Batora* presents PESCO as bringing about two different but mutually complementary dynamics of integration: organizational field formation and segmentation: that there is a particular – segmented – kind of DI in the field of EU defence industries. This special issue features a second article on PESCO. *Steven Blockmans* and *Dylan Macchiarini Crosson* examine the expressions of formal and vertical DI in EU defence, asking whether PESCO is developing in the way that Germany envisaged, or that France wanted. Which Member States are the frontrunners, and which ones have been lagging behind? Is there any scope for ‘informal’ DI in the realm of PESCO? And which forms of horizontal cooperation are envisaged with non-EU countries? In the final three articles, the focus shifts towards the role of certain EU Member States and a former member. *Pernille Rieker* shows how the French initiative of establishing a European Intervention Initiative (EI2) is best understood as an integrated part of a more flexible and differentiated European security framework. *Nick Sitter* offers a comparative assessment of the Visegrad 4 (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) and their capacity to distinguish between their conflict with the European Commission over the rule of law on one hand, and their commitment to collective security on the other. Lastly, *Richard Whitman* identifies and examines the possible logic of (dis)integration and a logic of autonomy at work in EU–UK foreign, security and defence policy relations.