

From Differentiated to “Smart” Integration

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Differentiated integration is one of the important topics in the debate on the future of the European Union. The key question is whether and how the implementation of differentiated integration can contribute to progress in cooperation and policy implementation in different spheres, avoiding bottlenecks and stagnation of the integration process. Already an existing political reality, differentiated integration must be planned and implemented in the most intelligent way in order to deliver positive results for the European Union and its citizens. It would be productive to discuss the management of differentiated integration, under what conditions to apply it, and what means and methods can best make it a tool for positive development of the integration process.

Based on Goal Setting Theory, this brief text proposes to adjust the SMART approach to the application of differentiated integration, ensuring its positive impact on the integration process. If we start from the statement that the goal justifies the means, then the application of differentiated integration in each specific case should have justified goals. Setting clear goals can be related to the Goal Setting Theory applied in management. It is widely recognised as one of the most useful theories of motivation in industrial and organisational psychology, human resource management and organisational behaviour. The theory states that goals and intentions stimulate human behaviour (Locke and Latham 1990). According to George Doran (1981), meaningful goals are the framework for the desired results. The theory of Management by Objectives, developed by Peter Drucker, is largely based on the theory of goal setting. An important principle in this theory is that setting challenging but achievable goals encourages motivation to achieve them. Peter Drucker developed five steps for the practical application of his theory (Drucker, 2007). The first and main step is to determine the strategic goals of the organisation, which derive from its mission and vision. Without setting clear strategic goals, it is not possible to move on to the next steps. The second step is the acceptance of the goals by those who will fulfil them. In fact, according to Drucker, when the SMART method is used, the goals must be acceptable, clearly identifiable at all levels and everyone must know what the concrete responsibilities are. Communication has an important place in this second step. The third step is to stimulate participation in defining the specific goals. This approach increases participation and commitment to achieve the goals. The fourth step involves the creation of a system for monitoring progress, which will identify emerging deviations in achieving the goals. The fifth step is aimed at evaluating and building on the achievements.



This paper sets out to adapt Goal Setting Theory and the SMART approach discussed above, to the management of European integration, and in particular differentiated integration. First of all, there should be clear and specific goals to be achieved in the concrete area through differentiated integration. The goals must be motivating in order to achieve the expected results. Here is what the SMART approach applied to the goals of differentiated integration might look like:

S	Strategic	Clear definition of the overall goals of European integration; Clear definition of the overall goals of European integration; Careful analysis to identify policies which would be more effective at the European than the national level; Developing a strategy for the process of integration and the expected results in the concrete fields.
M	Manageable	Selecting a model that provides appropriate management of the process of achieving the goals.
A	Acceptable	Gaining citizens' support to achieve the goals. Proper level and application of differentiated integration, where it will really contribute to the progress of the integration process;
R	Reasonable	Carefully studying the potential negative effects, benefits and costs.
T	Transparent	Ensure clarity, transparency and legitimacy in decision-making within differentiated integration.
This SMART integration framework can be further developed into a SMARTER integration framework by adding two more features:		
E	Ethical	Setting goals that do not lead to disregard of the fundamental values and principles of the EU and to the erosion of existing legislation at the European level.
R	Resourced	Combining pragmatic differentiation with active solidarity, providing a high level of "permeability" and sufficient resources to prepare countries that "wish to but cannot" join.

Governance theories through goal setting and the SMART approach can help the "smart" application of differentiated integration, ensuring its positive impact on the integration process. This would allow the introduction of new terminology, an updated concept and a new narrative. If it is really implemented in an appropriate way, in accordance with predetermined goals and requirements, if it contributes to the positive development of the integration project, if it overcomes obstacles and solves problems, if it achieves positive results – why not call it "smart integration"?

Five steps to smart integration

First, the common political goal of the European Union should be clearly defined. If the goal of building an "ever closer Union" is confirmed, as stated in Art. 1, para. 2 of the Treaty on European Union, then "opting out" of this goal and of the policies that lead to its implementation should not be allowed. (The systematic non-participation in the main policies of the European Union has in practice led to the complete alienation of the United Kingdom from the integration project and to its abandonment.) Moreover, according to Art. 4, para. 3 of the EU Treaty, "pursuant to the principle of sincere cooperation, the Union and the Member States shall, in full mutual respect, assist each other in carrying out tasks which flow from the Treaties".

Second, on the basis of the general political objective of the European Union, it is necessary to define the specific policies and legislation which should apply to all Member States and for which it is not acceptable to opt out. Only temporary differentiation would be acceptable for countries that are not sufficiently prepared, assisting them to overcome the difficulties. This "foundation" of policies and the corresponding legislation should not be subject to "opting out" by countries which can but do not want to participate. For example, Sweden does not have a non-participation clause in the euro area, as does Denmark, but nonetheless refrains from joining it.

Third, the next step is to carefully identify the areas in which differentiation is acceptable. Differentiated integration should be the “second best solution” and applied only when it will contribute to overcoming obstacles, will be beneficial to the whole integration project and will not lead to the progressive fragmentation of the European Union.

Fourth, the transformation of differentiated integration into “smart” integration implies clearly defined objectives of the policies and a careful study of the potential negative effects on countries that remain outside it. When pragmatism requires its implementation, the ultimate goal of smart integration should be the inclusion of more and more countries and the full participation of all Member States. Achieving this ultimate goal depends on both its successful implementation and the provision of “permeability” by those already involved. Smart integration needs an appropriate institutional model for its implementation, in order not to affect the general interest of the European Union, as well as to ensure transparency in decision-making processes. This type of integration should only be seen as a necessary step in order to make more effective and timely decisions and speed up the integration project.

Fifth, last but not least, a very important step in achieving the goals of smart integration is convincing the citizens and creating positive public opinion. One of the important merits of the SMART approach is that it focuses on goals and stimulates discussion about these goals. After all, part of the value of SMART goals is that they focus people on the act of setting goals and prompt discussion of these goals with others—which in and of itself holds merit (Rubin 2002). Clear, concrete, albeit difficult goals lead to better performance than vague but easy goals. The public opinion should be convinced that this approach is not a way to create first-class and second-class EU membership.

In recent decades, European integration has not only deepened and expanded significantly, but has also become increasingly differentiated. Whether we call it flexible, differentiated or “smart” integration, it must be applied cautiously, intelligently and purposefully in order to see in the future European Union the good face of the two-faced Janus.

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This project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 822622