

# Shaping the EU's Future through Differentiated Integration

by Nicoletta Pirozzi, Matteo Bonomi and Tiziano Marino



## ABSTRACT

The recent evolution of the European Union's politics and policies has demonstrated that differentiation can no longer be treated as an anomaly in the integration process. This has posed a key set of questions to academics and policy-makers on whether, how much and what form of differentiation is not only compatible with but also conducive to a more effective, cohesive and democratic EU. The project EU IDEA – Integration and Differentiation for Effectiveness and Accountability – addresses these issues and try to find viable solutions. This report summarises the results of the international conference that launched the EU IDEA project, which was organised by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), in cooperation with Compagnia di San Paolo, in Rome on 29 January 2019.

*European Union | EU integration | Brexit*

**keywords**

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## Introduction

On 29 January 2019, the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), with the support of Compagnia di San Paolo – International Affairs Programme – hosted a public conference on differentiated integration that marked the launch of “EU IDEA – EU Integration and Differentiation for Effectiveness and Accountability”, an ambitious three-year research project supported by the European Union in the framework of Horizon 2020 programme.<sup>1</sup> The conference offered the opportunity to present the EU IDEA project and discuss the theme of differentiated integration among researchers from the IAI-led EU IDEA consortium, composed of fifteen EU and non-EU think tanks and universities, along with prominent MAECI representatives and a number of practitioners, experts, researchers and journalists.

**Elisabetta Belloni**, Secretary General at MAECI, stressed that differentiated integration is becoming an increasingly topical issue for defining the future of the European Union. During her opening speech and welcome remarks, the Secretary General highlighted how the beginning of the next European institutional cycle, with European parliamentary elections in May, will inevitably open a debate among European partners that should clarify the direction that the EU wants to take. Differentiated integration could play a fundamental role in this debate and help find ways of strengthening the action of the Union in key policy areas, starting from economic governance and migration.

<sup>1</sup> See IAI website: *EU Integration and Differentiation for Effectiveness and Accountability – EU IDEA*, <https://www.iai.it/en/node/9764>.

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the conference “Shaping the EU's Future Through Differentiated Integration” organised in Rome on 29 January 2019 by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation within the framework of the project EU IDEA – Integration and Differentiation for Effectiveness and Accountability.

The vision expressed by the Secretary General of an EU that will become closer and more responsive to its citizens, with solidarity and social inclusion at the core of its action, confirmed that the launching of the EU IDEA research project is topical and well-timed. The IAI-led research consortium has to address the difficult tasks of comparing different views and preferences among European decision makers and stakeholders about the future of the European Union, embarking on a process of thoughtful reflection aimed at better defining possible options on the table and, ultimately, proposing innovative and flexible solutions that can respond to the citizens' needs and ensure the relevance of the EU in the world of tomorrow.



Elisabetta Belloni and Nathalie Tocci

### Presentation of EU IDEA research project

During the first section, the EU IDEA project was introduced and presented by **Nathalie Tocci**, IAI Director, and **Nicoletta Pirozzi**, EU IDEA project coordinator and Head of the EU, Politics and Institutions programme at IAI. The IAI Director expressed the ambition of going beyond standardised approaches to the study of differentiated integration in order to address the fundamental question of what does differentiated integration actually mean for the future of the EU and for its overall political and institutional set-up. This implies that EU IDEA will ultimately try to handle different aspects of differentiated integration in relation to two sets of problems: (1) differentiation as the key to deal with the relationship between unity and diversity within the EU, in order to contain centrifugal forces but also accommodate diversity and facilitate convergence; (2) differentiation as a way to manage the uneasy relationship between the inside and the outside of the EU, especially in light of Brexit.

Nicoletta Pirozzi presented EU IDEA's ambitious overall objectives, project structure, methodology and timeline, and stressed further the necessity that EU IDEA give a comprehensive account of differentiated integration. Namely, the project should be capable of finding answers for three fundamental questions: Why do we need a new idea of Europe? How can differentiated integration be a useful tool in this direction? What form of differentiated integration is needed, acceptable and sustainable for the EU? In line with these objectives, EU IDEA will address not only the legal or regulatory dimension of differentiated integration but also its organisational dimension, as well as the interplay between the two. The IAI-led consortium will put the politics and organisational forms of differentiation at the core of its work, focusing both on the processes leading to different modalities of differentiation and on their implementation in key policy areas such as economic

governance, foreign, security and defence policy, and migration and asylum. The findings will be instrumental in defining the criteria – at institutional, political, policy and societal levels – to assess future scenarios of differentiation as a tool of integration (or disintegration) and develop policy recommendations for EU and national policy-makers for a more effective and accountable Union.

### Panel I. The concept of differentiated integration: history, vision and narratives

The first panel discussion of the conference was introduced by **Gianni Bonvicini**, Scientific Advisor at IAI and member of the Advisory Board of EU IDEA, and dealt with the history, vision and narratives of differentiated integration. **Piero Tortola**, Assistant Professor at University of Groningen and leader of EU IDEA's first Working Package, stressed that if looking at historical and philosophical roots of the concept of differentiation is not necessarily new or original, this can be done in a fundamentally different way today in the light of unprecedented existential threats to the EU. Piero Tortola noted how the enquiry on philosophical and historical dimensions of the concept of differentiation should focus on its connections with political, institutional and societal crises. This could ultimately allow identifying theoretical and normative questions to be addressed further within the project and guide the analysis of its policy implementation.



Funda Tekin and Piero Tortola

**Funda Tekin**, Director of the Institut für Europäische Politik (Berlin) and leader of the third Working Package of the project, reflected on the concept of “united in diversity” as the overarching narrative of both European constitutionalism and identity. From this angle, differentiation can be perceived either as a challenge/threat to unity or as a tool for managing heterogeneity among member states, thus reconciling diversity, cohesion and unity. The EU IDEA project will therefore try to unpack the ramifications of different degrees and types of differentiation and narratives on European constitutionalism and identity, including an analysis of the effects that these may have on the relations with candidate countries, potential accession countries and associated third countries.

**Giovanni Grevi**, Head of the Europe in the World programme at European Policy Centre (Brussels) and leader of the Brexit Observatory within the EU IDEA research project, highlighted how we can observe three different dimensions of differentiation within the EU, which are not alternative but actually coexist: “differentiation for” – a proactive form of differentiated integration, aimed at moving forward or implementing/creating an integrationist project; “differentiation



from” – a more status quo oriented attitude, sometimes defensive; and “differentiation through” – flexible forms of working together, policy frameworks and arrangements that allow for a degree of flexibility and privileged coordination over more binding forms of cooperation. He believes that today we have entered a new political environment in which there will be more space for “differentiation through”. Despite Brexit, the future will be less a matter of opting in/out and more a matter of opting for how much and calibrating the degree of engagement.



From left to right: Matteo Bonomi, Eulalia Rubio, Juha Jokela

The first panel was concluded by **Ingrid Shikova**, Professor in EU Policies at Sofia University and member of EU IDEA's Advisory Board. Ingrid Shikova compared differentiated integration to the Roman myth of Janus, the god of beginnings, gates and transitions. This fascinating metaphor pointed to the two faces of differentiated integration: a precious tool for increasing the level of cooperation and integration among the most fit and willing, but also a potential driver of fragmentation, exclusion and even disintegration. These notes opened the floor to the public for discussion, in which further concerns emerged about the risks connected to differentiated integration. On the one hand, differentiation could strengthen intergovernmental rather than supranational forms of cooperation, thus increasing the asymmetries among member states. On the other, differentiation along sectoral lines could be disruptive of the overall efficiencies of EU action by underplaying the interdependence between different sector policy areas.

### Panel II. The policies of differentiated integration: security, migration and economic governance

The second panel, moderated by **Matteo Bonomi**, Research Fellow at IAI, shifted the focus to some of the main policies of differentiation: security, migration and economic governance. The first speaker was **Eulalia Rubio**, Senior Research Fellow at Jacques Delors Institute (Paris) and leader of EU IDEA's Working Package on Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and the single market. She pointed to EMU as the paradigm of differentiated integration and one of the most advanced forms of differentiation within the EU. At the same time, Eulalia Rubio warned how the EMU does not constitute a monolithic block but is instead characterised by different institutional arrangements and policy practices of differentiation. There are different degrees of cooperation and integration within EMU countries, including full integration (monetary policy), intergovernmental arrangements (European Stability Mechanism) and “hard” and “soft” mechanisms of coordination (Stability and Growth Pact, European Semester). This imposes the task of looking

in more detail at all these different arrangements and comparing them in terms of effectiveness, cohesiveness, democratic legitimacy and accountability.

**Juha Jokela**, Director of the European Union research programme at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (Helsinki), will lead EU IDEA's work in the field of foreign, security and defence policy. He stressed the importance of looking at how

differentiated integration has contributed to foreign, security and defence policy in relation to the challenges that the EU is facing in its external environment, but also noted the risks that differentiation could entail in this field. According to Juha Jokela, it is in fact a kind of paradox that differentiated integration has been often seen as a very promising tool to be used for advancing integration in foreign, security and defence policy, but the available tools have not really been effectively used. Recently the most interesting development in this field has been in defence, with the launch of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) with the aim of allowing a group of member states to integrate further their defence policies. Nevertheless, PESCO has adopted a very inclusive arrangement and it still remains to be seen to what extent it will increase the ambition of EU defence policy or whether further differentiation within PESCO itself will be needed.

**Elena Sánchez-Montijano**, Senior Research Fellow at the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, dealt with differentiation in the area of freedom, security and justice; she will lead EU IDEA's work in this field. Referring to the four topics of asylum system, Schengen intra-EU mobility, cooperation with third countries and policy cooperation, she noted how these four issues are now among the most important for the EU and how they have become extremely politicised and divisive both within the EU and among different governments and political parties. It is therefore fundamental to analyse these topics in the light of what differentiated integration could bring in terms of managing different views and helping to create a more democratic EU.

At the end of this panel the contribution of **Nicola Verola**, Minister Plenipotentiary at Directorate General for the European Union at Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, welcomed the shift towards a less dogmatic and less teleological vision of the EU suggested by the EU IDEA research project. The key for the future of European integration seems today to be making EU policies work while at the same time preventing the deepening of rifts within the EU and safeguarding its overall coherence.



Nicola Verola and Matteo Bonomi

## Concluding remarks

The conference ended with the closing remarks by **Armando Barucco**, Head of the Analysis, Planning and Historical and Diplomatic Research Unit at MAECI, and **Ferdinando Nelli Feroci**, President of IAI.

Armando Barucco highlighted that the challenges we face today are unprecedented, requiring courage and necessitating reflection on how to study and prepare for all the alternatives. In particular, the main challenge of the European project today is the feeling of distance between the EU institutions and the real life of citizens. We should all consider differentiated integration as the best way to respond to the needs of citizens and to have a more effective Union, able to face the challenges of the future.

Ferdinando Nelli Feroci thanked all the participants and host institutions and summed up the work of the conference in three key challenges that the EU and the EU IDEA project will have to address: how to have an effective balance between differentiation and inclusion; to what extent flexibility and differentiated integration may be an answer to the problem of the growing disaffection towards the EU – whether it could be a positive or negative tool; and to what extent this notion of differentiated integration may help in the search for solutions in the context of the future relations between the EU and the UK, and provide alternative models of cooperation with third countries.



From left to right: Nicoletta Pirozzi, Ferdinando Nelli Feroci, Armando Barucco

*Updated 18 February 2019*

## Conference Programme

Rome, 29 January 2019

### Opening speech

**Elisabetta Belloni**, Secretary General, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), Rome

### Welcome remarks and presentation of the project

**Nathalie Tocci**, Director, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome  
**Nicoletta Pirozzi**, Head of the EU, politics and institutions programme, and EU IDEA Project Coordinator, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome

### Panel I

*The concept of differentiated integration: history, vision and narratives*

- Chair **Gianni Bonvicini**, Scientific Advisor, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome
- Speakers **Piero Tortola**, Assistant Professor of European Politics and Society, Department of European Languages and Cultures, University of Groningen  
**Funda Tekin**, Director, Institut für Europäische Politik (IEP), Berlin  
**Giovanni Grevi**, Head of Europe in the World programme and Senior Fellow, European Policy Centre (EPC), Brussels
- Respondent **Ingrid Shikova**, Professor in EU Policies, European Studies Department, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

### Panel II

*The policies of differentiated integration: security, migration and economic governance*

- Chair **Matteo Bonomi**, Research Fellow, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome
- Speakers **Eulalia Rubio**, Senior Research Fellow in Economic and Social Affairs, Jacques Delors Institute (JDI), Paris, and Associate Professor, Catholic University of Lille  
**Juha Jokela**, Director, European Union research programme, Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA), Helsinki  
**Elena Sánchez-Montijano**, Senior Research Fellow, Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB)



Respondent **Nicola Verola**, Minister Plenipotentiary, DG for the European Union, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), Rome

### Concluding remarks

**Armando Barucco**, Head of Analysis, Planning and Historical Diplomatic Research Unit, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), Rome

**Ferdinando Nelli Feroci**, President, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome

### Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)

The Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) is a private, independent non-profit think tank, founded in 1965 on the initiative of Altiero Spinelli. IAI seeks to promote awareness of international politics and to contribute to the advancement of European integration and multilateral cooperation. Its focus embraces topics of strategic relevance such as European integration, security and defence, international economics and global governance, energy, climate and Italian foreign policy; as well as the dynamics of cooperation and conflict in key geographical regions such as the Mediterranean and Middle East, Asia, Eurasia, Africa and the Americas. IAI publishes an English-language quarterly (*The International Spectator*), an online webzine (*Affarinternazionali*), two book series (*Quaderni IAI* and *IAI Research Studies*) and some papers' series related to IAI research projects (*Documenti IAI*, *IAI Papers*, etc.).

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