

Mapping Scenarios of Differentiated EUrope 2025–2035

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ABSTRACT

While the European Commission has tried to embed strategic foresight and scenario-building practices into EU policy-making, future-oriented analyses still remain at the margin of European public discussion and academic debates within political science and EU studies. An exception is the recent body of studies on EU differentiated integration, which developed in reaction to the traumatic Brexit event and the ensuing debate on the future of Europe, collected by the DiCE project through the online portal DifferentiGate. This paper presents the actual mapping of scenario studies included in the portal, considering the 259 projections of possible EU trajectories that are included among the studies under consideration. They are articulated in a period of ten years, approximatively between 2025 and 2035, and variate across various modes of differentiation/integration and policy areas. The scenario mapping is a heuristic tool that aims to provide inputs for scenario-based exercises providing strategic foresight for policy-planners and policy-makers.

European Union | EU integration | Strategic foresight

keywords

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Introduction

Differentiated integration and flexibility have been part of the European integration project since its early days and will remain a necessity if the EU wants to overcome stalemate and improve the functioning of the European integration process. The central question is not, therefore, whether there will be a differentiated Europe, but which kind of differentiation will or should prevail, and along which policy fields.

Indeed, looking at future scenarios and trajectories of differentiated integration has been among the main tasks of three Horizon 2020 projects centred on differentiation and differentiated integration in Europe: *EU Differentiation, Dominance and Democracy* (EU3D), *Integrating Diversity in the European Union* (InDivEU) and *EU Integration and Differentiation for Effectiveness and Accountability* (EU IDEA), which took place between 2019 and 2022.¹ Building upon these scenario exercises and gathering other relevant strategic foresight publications, this article conducts a further mapping and meta-analysis of the scenarios produced therein.²

¹ See the websites: EU3D, <https://www.eu3d.uio.no>; InDivEU, <http://indiveu.eui.eu>; EU IDEA, <https://euidea.eu>.

² Paolo Chiocchetti, "European Landscapes 2035: Four Scenarios for Internal Differentiation", in *InDivEU Policy Briefs*, No. 2021/63 (December 2021), <https://hdl.handle.net/1814/73669>; Paolo Chiocchetti, "Love Thy Neighbour 2035: Three Scenarios for External Differentiation", in *InDivEU Policy Briefs*, No. 2021/64 (December 2021), <https://hdl.handle.net/1814/73670>; Janis A. Emmanouilidis, "Differentiated EUrope 2035: Elaboration and Evaluation of Five Potential Scenarios", in *EU IDEA Policy Papers*, No. 16 (September 2021), <https://euidea.eu/?p=1978>.

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The scenario mapping is a heuristic tool for scenario-based exercises providing strategic foresight for policy-planners and policy-makers. Our objective is to map and organise existing research, as well as to compare and synthesise different studies on future scenarios of EU differentiation. We build upon the pilot methodology for scenario mapping elaborated by Michelangelo Freyrie and Johannes Gabriel,³ updating its framework, categories, information provided and studies under consideration.

The consolidated data presented in this study, including the mapping of the potential developments of European differentiation, should enable policy-makers to draw policy implications taking existing research into account. It focuses on patterns of integration and differentiation in the EU during the 2025–2035 period. Without trying to predict the future, the paper offers policy-makers, experts and citizens a useful tool to systematically think about the uncertain future of the EU and manifold alternatives for the future of Europe.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, it puts the scenario-mapping exercise in the broader context of future-oriented analysis and, in particular, of the emerging practices of strategic foresight and scenario-building within EU policy-making. Second, in order to follow the new academic debate on the future of Europe, the paper presents its pilot methodology for mapping and organising scenarios, trends analyses and other prospective studies on differentiation and differentiated integration in the EU. It defines the body of studies included in the analysis and provides key definitions of the underpinning concepts. Third, the paper conducts the actual mapping of scenarios across modes of differentiation/integration and policy areas. Fourth, the paper also analyses the gaps in projections along internal-external divides, patterns of co-occurrences and epistemological assumptions of the studies. Lastly, the paper proposes a follow-up, namely to use the results of the mapping and explore the potential challenges/opportunities of the various forms of differentiation together with EU policy-makers. The paper is part of the Horizon 2020 project *Differentiation: Clustering Excellence* (DiCE).⁴

1. EU scenarios in context

Human brains automatically predict developments of the external environment, in order to avoid threats and achieve goals. Imagining future scenarios to predict and assess consequences of simple events and individual actions represents an unavoidable aspect of human behaviour. It can be a conscious or unconscious action, comprise simple or complex issues, and involve a spontaneous or highly structured process and methodology.

³ Michelangelo Freyrie and Johannes Gabriel, "Mapping Differentiation Scenarios: An Ideal-Type Methodology for Prospective Studies from the DiCE Network", in *DiCE Deliverables*, No. 3.1 (2021).

⁴ See DiCE website: *About*, <https://www.dice.uio.no/about>.

Within any future-oriented analysis, which means all kinds of theoretical, empirical and practical activities concerned with exploring the future, making predictions or orienting action, scenarios are fundamental tools to think about uncertain futures in a structured way.⁵ Thus, building of scenarios represents a common practice that is widely used to model and predict change, visualise the implications of external developments and stimulate strategic thinking. From military strategy and weather forecasting, to industrial and public policy, distinctive methodologies and traditions have emerged in several disciplines, particularly in the fields of forecasting,⁶ strategic foresight,⁷ and policy analysis.⁸

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that the European Commission has made use of foresight for many years, and now is more and more trying to embed strategic foresight and scenario-building practices into EU policy-making. Strategic foresight in support of EU policy-making was first developed under President Jacques Delors' *Cellule de Prospective*. Since then, strategic foresight and modelling have informed many EU policies. In 1999, the Forward Unit of the European Commission broke new ground by developing, for the first time, five "well-written narrative scenarios" to investigate the future of Europe and possible developments between 2000 and 2010.⁹

Establishing a forward-looking culture in policy-making is now becoming key for the EU to strengthen its capacity to deal with an increasingly volatile and complex environment, and this mindset will be integrated into EU policy-making in all fields over the coming years. Strategic foresight and scenario-building will become integral parts, for instance, of the Commission's ex-ante impact assessments within its Better Regulation toolbox,¹⁰ to ensure that EU policies draw on a clear understanding of possible future trends and challenges. Moreover, strategic foresight and scenario planning will help foster participatory and forward-looking governance, as is currently happening in the context of the European Strategy and

⁵ Paolo Chiochetti, "Models of Differentiated Integration: Past, Present, and Proposed", in *EUI RSC Working Papers*, No. 2022/09 (2022), <https://hdl.handle.net/1814/74191>.

⁶ J. Scott Armstrong (ed.), *Principles of Forecasting. A Handbook for Researchers and Practitioners*, Boston, Kluwer Academic, 2001.

⁷ Thomas J. Chermack, *Scenario Planning in Organizations. How to Create, Use, and Assess Scenarios*, San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler, 2011; Michel Godet and Philippe Durance, *Strategic Foresight for Corporate and Regional Development*, Paris, UNESCO and Dunod, 2011; Patrick van der Duin (ed.), *Foresight in Organizations. Methods and Tools*, London/New York, Routledge, 2016; Angela Wilkinson, *Strategic Foresight Primer*, Brussels, European Political Strategy Centre, 2017, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2872/71492>.

⁸ Eugene Bardach, *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis. The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving*, 4th ed., Thousand Oaks, CQ Press, 2012; Martijn Van der Steen, "Anticipation Tools in Policy Formulation: Forecasting, Foresight and Implications for Policy Planning", in Michael Howlett and Ishani Mukherjee (eds), *Handbook of Policy Formulation*, Cheltenham/Northampton, Edward Elgar, 2017, p. 182-197.

⁹ Gilles Bertrand, Anna Michalski and Lucio R. Pench, *European Futures. Five Possible Scenarios for 2010*, Cheltenham/Northampton, Edward Elgar, 2000.

¹⁰ European Commission website: *REFIT – Making EU Law Simpler, Less Costly and Future Proof*, <https://europa.eu/hrHCK7>.

Policy Analysis System (ESPAS) which aims to foster an EU-wide foresight network in an iterative and systematic way.¹¹

And yet, despite these important steps forward in bringing strategic foresight and scenario-building practices into the EU mainstream, future-oriented analyses still remain at the margin of European public discussion and academic debates within political sciences and EU studies. Some clear exceptions to this persisting trend have been provided by three recent events which have somehow pushed the general public and scholars to openly reflect on the future of Europe, questioning common assumptions about the possible future trajectories of the EU integration process and differentiated integration in particular.¹²

First of all, there was UK's vote on leaving the EU in 2016. Brexit together with the rising Euroscepticism across Europe have put into question the perspective that European integration is an irreversible process toward "an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe" – questioning its *finalité*, as expressed by the signatories of the Treaty of Rome in 1957. All this has brought to the fore new critical questions concerning the relationship between the EU and a former member state, and how this could evolve in the future.

In particular, Brexit provided major impetus to the academic debate on EU differentiation and integration, opening a new phase in EU study which has directly addressed and questioned the future of Europe.¹³ Indeed, Brexit as a process and outcome has been immediately understood as a unique instance of differentiated disintegration, posing further questions on the trajectory undertaken by European integration thereafter.¹⁴ Which were the red lines that should have been drawn during EU negotiations with the UK? How to guarantee the integrity of the single market? And how to ensure the long-term sustainability of EU policies and institutions?¹⁵

¹¹ See ESPAS website: *About*, <https://espas.eu/about.html>.

¹² In 2021, a group of academics developed a large series of scenarios for the EU as a whole and ten specific EU policy areas in 2050. Each set of scenarios, predictive, analytic, and built in an expert-led manner with a "social science" methodology, is the result of the possible evolution of external and internal factor over a 30-year horizon; the overall likelihood of each scenario is also assessed. See Chad Damro, Elke Heins and Drew Scott (eds), *European Future. Challenges and Crossroads for the European Union of 2050*, London, Routledge, 2021.

¹³ Benjamin Leruth, Stefan Gänzle and Jarle Trondal, "Exploring Differentiated Disintegration in a Post-Brexit European Union", in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 5 (September 2019), p. 1013-1030, DOI 10.1111/jcms.12869; Nicoletta Pirozzi and Matteo Bonomi, "Governing Differentiation and Integration in the European Union: Patterns, Effectiveness and Legitimacy", in *The International Spectator*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (March 2022), p. 1-17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2022.2038424>.

¹⁴ Brigid Laffan, "Sovereignty and Brexit: From Theory to Practice", in *Brexit Institute Working Paper Series*, No. 5/2021 (2021), <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3788141>.

¹⁵ Jannike Wachowiak and Fabian Zuleeg, "Brexit and the Trade and Cooperation Agreement: Implications for Internal and External EU Differentiation", in *The International Spectator*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (March 2022), p. 142-159, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2022.2030604>.

It was proposed that EU theories of integration and differentiated integration should at least be complemented by the theory of disintegration and differentiated disintegration.¹⁶ More generally, EU studies started to focus on differentiated integration and differentiation, to express the open-ended nature of a multi-status or structurally differentiated EU.¹⁷ EU studies also started to discuss the evolution of manifold models of cooperation within the EU, and between the EU and accession and neighbourhood countries and beyond – an increasingly important dimension for the future of EU differentiation, given the unstable strategic environment of the EU¹⁸ especially after the start of the ongoing Russian war against Ukraine.

A second major trigger of the public and academic discussion on the future of Europe was given by the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome and the *White Paper on the Future of Europe* put forward by President Juncker's Commission.¹⁹ In this context, the White Paper developed five scenarios for the EU in 2025: "Carrying on", "Nothing but the single market", "Those who want more do more", "Doing less more efficiently" and "Doing much more together". Each of the five scenarios offered a short account of the results of different strategic choices of EU leaders over a seven-year horizon, stating the need for the EU to "carve out a vision for its own future".²⁰

In this case as well, the event had a strong impact in stimulating a forward-looking debate and academic discussion. Also, this debate has evolved through the concept of differentiated integration.²¹ Indeed, while the document of the Commission does not refer directly to the term differentiated integration, the concept is implicitly present in the second, third and fourth scenarios. The third scenario, in particular, calls for further differentiation through which "a group of countries, including the euro area and possibly a few others, chooses to work much closer notably on taxation and social matters".²² At the same time, scenarios 2 and 4, which call for a "spill-back" in several policy areas,²³ cannot be grasped as simple "opt-outs", but

¹⁶ Frank Schimmelfennig, "Brexit: Differentiated Disintegration in the European Union", in *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 25, No. 8 (2018), p. 1154-1173, DOI 10.1080/13501763.2018.1467954; Stefan Gänzle, Benjamin Leruth and Jarle Trondal (eds), *Differentiated Integration and Disintegration in a Post-Brexit Era*, London, Routledge, 2020.

¹⁷ Jozef Batora and John Erik Fossum (eds), *Towards a Segmented European Political Order. The European Union's Post-Crisis Conundrum*, London/New York, Routledge, 2020.

¹⁸ Ian Bond, "Brexit and External Differentiation in Foreign, Security and Defence Policy", in *EU IDEA Policy Briefs*, No. 2 (September 2020), <https://euidea.eu/?p=1223>.

¹⁹ European Commission, *White Paper on the Future of Europe. Reflections and Scenarios for the EU27 by 2025* (COM/2017/2025), 1 March 2017, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2775/66626>.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²¹ Vivien A. Schmidt, "The Future of Differentiated Integration: A 'Soft-Core,' Multi-Clustered Europe of Overlapping Policy Communities", in *Comparative European Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (April 2019), p. 294-315, DOI 10.1057/s41295-019-00164-7; Brigid Laffan, "The Future of Europe: Alternative Scenarios", in Chad Damro, Elke Heins and Drew Scott (eds), *European Future. Challenges and Crossroads for the European Union of 2050*, London, Routledge, 2021, p. 202-217.

²² European Commission, *White Paper on the Future of Europe*, cit., p. 20.

²³ Such as "regional development, public health, or parts of employment and social policy not directly related to the functioning of the single market". European Commission, *White Paper on the*

should rather be acknowledged as differentiated forms of disintegration, as rightly pointed by Leruth et al.²⁴

Finally, the need for a renewed perspective on the future of Europe has been stimulated by the Conference on the Future of Europe, which should have been the culmination of the process of reflection on the future of the EU27, which started in the aftermath of Brexit. After several delays, the Conference on the Future of Europe was opened on 9 May 2021. Its purpose, according to a March 2021 Joint Declaration from the presidents of the EU institutions, is to “open a new space for debate with citizens to address Europe’s challenges and priorities”.²⁵

Also in this context, the notion of differentiation and differentiated integration appeared pivotal to provide the EU and the member states a sufficient degree of flexibility to accommodate the preferences that could have emerged in this project of consultation, thereby reinforcing the EU’s legitimacy. At the same time, this recourse to flexibility required reflection in order to identify those corrective actions that should be taken to make it not only compatible with, but also conducive to, a more effective and sustainable Union.²⁶

2. Analytical framework

In order to follow these new trends of the academic debate on the future of Europe, we developed a pilot methodology for mapping scenarios of a differentiated EU, including both the internal and external dimension of differentiation. This is a qualitative methodology to map and organise scenarios, trends analyses and other prospective studies on differentiation and differentiated integration in the EU.²⁷

In order to define the corpus of our study we relied on the work done by the DiCE consortium through the DiCE Differentiation Manual.²⁸ The Manual has been set out by DiCE members to take stock of and synthesise relevant research-based knowledge on differentiation, differentiated integration and differentiated disintegration. The Manual thus outlines the relevant analytical dimensions that

Future of Europe, cit., p. 22.

²⁴ Benjamin Leruth, Stefan Gänzle and Jarle Trondal, “Exploring Differentiated Disintegration in a Post-Brexit European Union”, cit., p. 1014.

²⁵ European Parliament, Council of the European Union and European Commission, *Joint Declaration on the Conference on the Future of Europe. Engaging with Citizens for Democracy – Building a More Resilient Europe*, 18 March 2021, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:32021C0318\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:32021C0318(01)).

²⁶ Nicoletta Pirozzi and Matteo Bonomi, “Differentiation and EU Governance: Key Elements and Impact”, in *The International Spectator*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (March 2022), p. 160-178, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0/03932729.2022.2034361>.

²⁷ Michelangelo Freyrie and Johannes Gabriel, “Mapping Differentiation Scenarios”, cit.

²⁸ See DiCE website: *What Is Differentiated Integration and What Is Differentiation?*, <https://www.dice.uio.no/differentigate/what-is-di>.

have been giving direction to DiCE's comprehensive collection and classification of academic literature, entitled "DifferentiGate", publicly available for users in a Differentiation Portal on the DiCE website.²⁹ The Manual has been used to categorise research publications as well as academic experts on aspects of differentiation, which are presented and made available to users through DifferentiGate.

In particular, we relied on one of the four main dimensions that have been used to categorise the various facets of differentiation and provide an easy access to the main theme we are discussing, namely "Future of Europe: Different scenarios/trajectories". This fourth category of the DifferentiGate collects 62 studies that address scenarios or future projections of the Europe's possible developments which have emerged in connection with the new academic debate on the future of Europe and differentiated integration. The studies explicitly refer to aspects of differentiation, differentiated integration and (differentiated) disintegration, across different policy sectors. This body of research and publications addresses proposals, recommendations and research-based advice for Europe's future design, ranging from unified integration to Europe *à la carte*, including intermediary forms with various types and combinations of differentiation.

The DiCE database, however, uses a broader and more inclusive notion of the term "scenario", to include trends and patterns explicitly or implicitly assumed to be relevant to the EU's coming developments, even when they lack the ambition to compose them into proper scenarios. At the same time, the use of the term "scenarios" in a foresight sense is connected to an established methodological tradition, bearing somewhat precise indications on how to compose and develop the scenarios in question. For instance, Spaniol and Rowland describe scenarios as essentially future-oriented, considering the external context of the analysed entity, including narrative descriptions of the analysis and comparatively differentiated among each other.³⁰ In other words, "they are complex perceptual world frameworks of different possible futures based on varied assumptions that are relevant to decision-makers".³¹

As a compromise, we considered all prospective studies, defined as "description[s] of a possible future situation, assembled starting from different economic, social and political trends",³² that included at least two alternative projections of different possible futures. Indeed, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, at the simplest level, a scenario can be described as "a postulated or projected situation or sequence of potential future events". Therefore, among the 62 studies present

²⁹ See DiCE website: *DifferentiGate*, <https://www.dice.uio.no/differentigate>.

³⁰ Matthew J. Spaniol and Nicholas J. Rowland, "Defining Scenario", in *Futures & Foresight Science*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (March 2019), Article E3, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ffo2.3>.

³¹ Thomas J. Chermack and Laura M. Coons, "Scenario Planning: Pierre Wack's Hidden Messages", in *Futures*, Vol. 73 (October 2015), p. 189, DOI 10.1016/j.futures.2015.08.012.

³² Eugenio Dacrema and Michelangelo Freyrie, "La prospective, un instrument de gouvernance pour penser la complexité", in *Le Grand Continent*, 15 July 2021, <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/?p=114143>.

on DifferentiGate, we were able to select 19 studies presenting multiple, alternative projections. This selection of the 19 studies was the result of careful balancing between sticking to the practice and methodology of scenario building within strategic foresight and social sciences, and striving for inclusivity, meant to embrace a body of studies that could be really be representative of latest developments of the academic reflection on the future of differentiation and integration in Europe.

In the end, we identified 259 alternative projections through which we have conducted the mapping of scenarios of a differentiated EUrope. These projections are articulated in a medium-term timeframe, operationalised as a period lasting from 5 to 15 years from the year of each study, although not all studies have a precise timeframe. The earliest projections account for the year 2025, with the *White Paper on the Future of Europe*, and the latest for 2035, with projections that are presented in a number of scenario studies by Chiocchetti and Emmanouilidis.³³ All this creates a time frame for the mapping exercise of a period of ten years, from 2025 to 2035, which should offer sufficient variation among the projections but also ensure that some realism is maintained.

Table 1 | List of studies

Author	Title	Year
Emmanouilidis	Differentiated EUrope 2035: Elaboration and Evaluation of Five Potential Scenarios	2021
Fossum	EU Constitutional Models in 3d: Differentiation, Dominance and Democracy	2021
Chiocchetti	Love Thy Neighbour 2035: Three Scenarios for External Differentiation	2021
Chiocchetti	European Landscapes 2035: Four Scenarios for Internal Differentiation	2021
Siddi et al.	Differentiated Cooperation in the EU's Foreign and Security Policy: Effectiveness, Accountability, Legitimacy	2021
Wachowiak and Zuleeg	Brexit and the Trade and Cooperation Agreement: Implications for Internal and External EU Differentiation	2022
Comte and Lavenex	EU Differentiation in Border, Asylum and Police Cooperation: Drivers, Effectiveness and Crisis	2021
European Commission	White Paper on the Future of Europe	2017
Orzechowska-Wa�awska et al.	The Limits of Voluntary Submission. Dominance Frames in Polish Parliamentary Debates on the EU Accession	2021
G�ora and Zubek	Stuck in ENP Purgatory? An Assessment of the EU's External Legitimacy Mechanisms	2021
Chiocchetti	Models of Differentiated Integration: Past, Present, and Proposed	2022

³³ Paolo Chiocchetti, "European Landscapes 2035", cit.; Paolo Chiocchetti, "Love Thy Neighbour 2035", cit.; Janis A. Emmanouilidis, "Differentiated EUrope 2035", cit.

Eisl and Rubio	Brexit and External Differentiation in Single Market Access	2020
Comte	Brexit, the “Area of Freedom, Security, and Justice” and Migration	2020
Fabbrini	Which European Union? Europe after the Euro Crisis	2015
Piris	The Future of Europe: Towards a Two-Speed EU?	2012
Piris	It Is Time for the Euro Area to Develop Further Closer Cooperation Among Its Members	2011
Glencross	Managing Differentiated Disintegration: Insights from Comparative Federalism on Post-Brexit EU-UK Relations	2020
Duff	Europe after the Brits	2021
Whitman	The UK and EU Foreign, Security and Defence Policy after Brexit: Integrated, Associated or Detached?	2016

In order to map the prospective studies of the DiCE network, in a first phase we have inductively developed a system for categorisation based on content of all studies (basic assumptions, trends, variables, etc.). The second phase has been deductive, drawing on the epistemological assumptions, theories, level of analysis, and the types of explanations and statements used in the respective scenarios. Finally, the relevant scenarios have been mapped against manifold features and policy fields.

The coding of projections thus consists of two equally important elements: ex-ante and ex-post elements of the analysis of the projections. The detection of all these elements had to rely on a qualitative approach, i.e., the textual analysis of the corpus, and its successive coding. This is, therefore, a qualitative methodology to map the prospective studies.

As ex-ante elements of the analysis, we have used the epistemological and methodological approaches employed by the studies. Prospective analyses, like any social science, are profoundly influenced by the epistemic and methodological approach adopted when conceptualising reality and the objects of study. The choices and omissions made when acquiring data, the definition and categorisation of data points, the frame of reference one adopts to interpret them, and even the choice to investigate a certain phenomenon, all tilt the knowledge produced by scientific inquiry.

Proceeding in this way allowed us to consider the influence of theoretical elements on the studies’ contents, define possible recurring items and better identify potential gaps in the corpus. Thus, after selecting a first set of representative studies, which cover the diverse thematic foci and methodological approaches present in the DiCE database, the researchers conducted a textual analysis to summarise the potential projections described in the studies, as well as the epistemological context in which they are embedded.

Table 2 | Ex-ante elements informing prospective analyses: Epistemological and methodological elements

Epistemological elements
• Epistemological categories of foresight
• Level of interpretative depth (Event, Trend, System, Worldview, Historical)
• How complexity is handled (Complex system, Chaotic system, Complicated system, Simple system)
• Approach to knowledge-creation (Complexity reduction, Understanding of the unknown, Critical reflection on complexity reduction)
Methodological elements
• Methodological categories of scenario analysis
• Conception of the future (Predictable, Evolutive, Malleable)
• Objectives of scenarios or other studies (Explorative, Communicative, Target concretisation, Strategy formation)
• Modes of prospective thinking (Evolutionary, Revolutionary)
• Qualifiers of worthwhile scenarios / scope of analysis (Possible, Plausible, Probable)

Contrary to the epistemological and methodological elements, the identification of the content variables was done ex-post. Projections have been generated through a process of induction, following Max Weber’s concept of “ideal types” method.³⁴ This is an organisational principle of social research whose aim is to allow a significant comparison of diverse phenomena without having to rely on a misleading “average”, instead breaking down a complex research object into “stereotypical” models.

With ideal types, the goal is not to closely describe social phenomena, but rather to allow researchers to deploy the typified form of such phenomena in a rationally constructed scheme where they can search for similarities and patterns. The correspondence between the phenomenon and the ideal type for which it is coded is imperfect, but by consciously “filling the diffuse and discrete in an [abstracted] whole”³⁵ it allows for a qualitative, comparative approach. This approach is necessary also because of the nature of the studied object. In other words, the future, not yet existing, is non-observable, so we literally lack the phenomena we would want to compare.

This is naturally a highly subjective endeavour, which nevertheless helps to categorise and organise the massive number of potential developments present

³⁴ See Michelangelo Freyrie and Johannes Gabriel, “Mapping Differentiation Scenarios”, cit.

³⁵ Johann Dieckmann, “Die Rationalität des Weberschen Idealtypus”, in *Soziale Welt*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (1967), p. 29-40.

in the corpus. This effort takes place in successive textual analyses, where the available studies are scanned and hypothesised, while differentiation projections are coded using the previously generated ideal types.

The scenario mapping is, therefore, a heuristic tool, with the objective of providing a framework to map and organise existing research, as well as to compare and synthesise different studies on future scenarios of EU differentiation. After several rounds of classification, we provided a concrete framework to code and map the potential developments of European differentiation.

These projections have been, first of all, organised across five policy areas, in line with the categorisation offered by the *White Paper on the Future of Europe*. These include: (1) Single Market and Trade; (2) Economic and Monetary Union; (3) Schengen, Migration and Security; (4) Foreign Policy and Defence; and (5) EU Budget.

An additional dimension according to which we have organised the induced projections is the modes of differentiation. As explained by the DiCE Differentiation Manual, the most common term that has long framed the debate on differentiation is “differentiated integration” (DI), which is often used interchangeably with differentiation:

Differentiation is more encompassing than differentiated integration in that it refers to how modern societies have become increasingly differentiated along territorial, functional, social, economic, cultural and political lines. All modern political systems – the EU included – are structurally differentiated, although the EU is a distinctly differentiated system. Differentiation helps to capture the distinctive features of the EU as a multilevel political system; how it functions; how relations between levels of governing are structured and operate; how the EU’s structural make-up shapes demand and supply of differentiated integration; and how the EU interacts with its surroundings, and structures its relations with non-members.³⁶

In order to operationalise this definition, we have relied on work by Lavenex and Križić in the framework of the EU IDEA project.³⁷ The project defines differentiation “as any modality of integration or cooperation that allows States (members of the European Union and non-members) and sub-State entities to work together in non-homogeneous, flexible ways”.

In particular, this definition allowed us to identify three modalities of differentiation for the mapping of projections:

³⁶ See DiCE website: *What Is Differentiated Integration and What Is Differentiation?*, cit.

³⁷ Sandra Lavenex and Ivo Križić, “Governance, Effectiveness and Legitimacy in Differentiated Integration: An Analytical Framework”, in *The International Spectator*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (March 2022), p. 35–53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2022.2035529>.

1. Differentiated integration, that focuses on aspects of the EU integration process, such as multiple speeds; moves towards core Europe; and considers questions of variable geometry. These terms vary with regard to what they imply for the EU. Differentiated integration in terms of multiple speeds can imply that all eventually reach the same destination, or it can mean that some end up in a different place or with a different status. Such notions as core Europe and variable geometry generally refer to permanent differences in member states' status. In addition, differentiated integration focuses on states gaining opt-outs and exemptions or exceptions from EU legal provisions, be they primary or secondary laws, permanent or temporary provisions.
2. Differentiated cooperation, that does not necessarily manifest in different levels of legal integration, but also takes place at an organisational level through non-homogeneous participation in the institutional venues where EU-related policies are designed and implemented, such as in the case of EU cooperation with third countries or informal cooperation of member states in the foreign policy field.
3. Differentiated disintegration, that refers to a process whereby the EU becomes less integrated, albeit in an uneven and differentiated manner. Such centrifugal dynamics could involve structural fragmentation; pressures and actions of rolling back integration in a differentiated fashion; states seeking to alter their status as members through seeking looser permanent affiliations; spill-back; and permanent opt-outs or derogations with binding effects on other members.

To complete the picture, one also needs to consider three other cases of integration explicitly described as not contributing to any mode of differentiation, but rather, uniformity: (i) Homogeneous integration; (ii) Homogeneous disintegration; (iii) Stagnation, where a given item is explicitly described as not contributing to any variation in the mode of differentiation nor direction of integration.

Modalities of differentiation and integration can, additionally, be ordered as follows: (1) Homogeneous disintegration; (2) differentiated disintegration; (3) stagnation; (4) differentiated cooperation; (5) differentiated integration; (6) homogeneous integration.

Finally, there are other three important dimensions across which individual projections have been organised. The first is the internal-external divide. Indeed, differentiation is not only or exclusively an EU internal phenomenon. The external differentiation dimension refers to the various relationships the EU has with neighbouring countries, which include both formal and informal agreements that imply third party selective participation in various EU policies. The second dimension is connecting different projections with salient actors of differentiation (supranational and national institutions, political parties, interest groups, citizens). Finally, we must also follow developments over distinctive causes of differentiation, thereby identifying those individual events that could trigger political and institutional reactions that could possibly affect the trajectory of EU integration.

3. Mapping of projections

Considering the 259 projections of possible EU trajectories that are included in the dataset (see Table 3), they are articulated in a period of around ten years approximatively between 2025 and 2035. Most projections, namely 168 out of 259, focus on scenarios of increasing EU integration. This reflects scholars' broad expectations of an EU that will show its resilience and further deepening in the future. However, there are relevant variations across modes of differentiation/integration and policy areas.

3.1 Modes of differentiation

The most common expectations among the 168 projections of “more Europe” do not correspond to differentiated scenarios, but rather match an advancement of the EU toward more homogenous integration (72), namely more integration along with less differentiation.

Among scenarios that foresee more integration going hand in hand with more differentiation, we should distinguish between forms of differentiated integration (46 projections) and differentiated cooperation (50 projections). The former, as explained in the previous section, correspond to classical forms of regulatory and legal differentiation, generally associated with supranational integration. The latter correspond to intergovernmental and informal modalities of integration which, *de jure* or *de facto*, do not imply increased responsibilities by supranational institutions but rather more policy coordination and greater participation in EU institutional venues by a plurality of actors, including EU member states, non-members and even subnational actors.

At the same time, 55 projections foresee less EU integration in the future. This could happen both as homogeneous disintegration (25 projections) or as differentiated disintegration (30 projections), thus as an uneven and differentiated manner of disengagement from EU policies and common institutions.

Finally, 36 projections foresee scenarios of stagnation, where there are no variations in terms of differentiation and integration, reflecting the status quo.

Table 3 | Projections across policy areas and modes of differentiations

Policy area	Mode of differentiation						Total
	Homogeneous disintegration	Differentiated disintegration	Stagnation	Differentiated cooperation	Differentiated integration	Homogeneous integration	
Single market & trade	3	11	12	1	4	15	46
Economic & Monetary Union	7	7	5	5	22	17	63
Schengen, migration & security	8	3	6	8	8	10	43
Foreign policy & defence	6	7	11	33	9	27	93
EU budget	1	2	2	3	3	3	14
Total	25	30	36	50	46	72	259

3.2 Policy areas of differentiation

These projections and modalities of differentiation/integration can be organised across five policy areas, in line with the categorisation offered by the White paper on the future of Europe. These include: (1) Single Market and Trade; (2) Economic and Monetary Union; (3) Schengen, Migration and Security; (4) Foreign Policy and Defence; and (5) EU Budget.

(1) Single market and trade and the (2) Economic and Monetary Union

If we consider together the single market and trade as well as the Economic and Monetary Union, they represent a relative majority of scenarios with 109 projections, reflecting the great amount of attention that scholars have dedicated to these two policy fields and their future dynamics. Single market and trade include 46 possible projections, whereas the Economic and Monetary Union comprise another 63.

For the single market and trade, projections are distributed quite uniformly among scenarios of less integration (14) and stagnation (12), with a small majority of projections going towards scenarios of more integration (20).

Interestingly, differentiation is rarely associated with these trajectories of more integration (differentiated cooperation and differentiated integration, with 1 and 5 projections respectively), but is rather seen as a modality of disintegration for the single market (11 differentiated disintegration projections). This probably reflects the recent Brexit experience, where differentiation has been strongly associated with the risk of disintegration. Cherry picking, in particular, has been perceived to endanger the integrity and long-term sustainability of the single market.

At the same time, stagnation (12 projections) and homogenous integration (15 projections) are most recurrent projections in this area, probably reflecting the high level of supranational integration already achieved in this field and the good degree of homogeneity. Projections of stagnation are generally associated with no or only small changes in EU internal and external environments, such as gradual extension of free trade agreement with third countries. However, stagnation of the single market is also perceived as compatible with scenarios of a selective disintegration of the Union in other policy fields (“Nothing but common market”). The most common scenarios still remain those depicting the single market as moving towards more homogenous integration, as it is foreseen to proceed towards its completion, including in the service, energy or digital sectors.

For the Economic and Monetary Union, projections appear rather divided along the extreme possibilities of more and less integration, with only 5 scenarios for the maintenance of the status quo (stagnation). Most projection see more integration in the future, as forms of differentiated integration (22 projections) or as more homogenous integration (17 projections). Thus, both trajectories foresee more

transfer of power to Brussels in this policy field. This can happen in a differentiated manner, such as with a substantial deepening of various aspects of the Euro-area, or in a homogeneous manner, through a process of de-differentiation and important steps towards a truly federal economic government with single macroeconomic policy and fiscal transfers for the entire Union. Projections that foresee the evolution toward a more differentiated and intergovernmental Economic and Monetary Union are rare, with only 5 projections of differentiated cooperation.

At the same time, the Economic and Monetary Union is also associated with the risk of internal fragmentation and dissolution (14 projections), mainly due to unreconcilable political and economic divergences among the member states, which could lead toward differentiated disintegration (7 projections) and homogenous disintegration (7 projections). The first group of hypotheses (differentiated disintegration) are generally associated with the Euro-exit of some countries or with the creation of "devalued" parallel euro. The second group (homogenous disintegration) is connected to complete suspension of fiscal discipline, such as the permanent suspension of the Stability and Growth Pact or the complete dissolution of the Euro-area.

(3) Schengen, migration and security

For Schengen, migration and security, the most common projections refer to more homogenous integration (10 projections), followed by more differentiated integration (8 projections) and cooperation (8 projections).

More homogeneous integration in this field is predominantly linked to EU internal development, where the member states could converge towards fully harmonised border checks, removal of internal controls and strengthening of European agencies. More differentiated integration is generally associated with a core group of countries deepening their integration on security and justice matters, including moving towards the achievement of a nearly completed common European migration, asylum and refugee policy. At the same time, differentiated cooperation with third countries is seen as pivotal in many regards, from participation in EU agencies such as Europol and Frontex to increased cooperation with neighbouring states on migration issues.

Scenarios of homogeneous (8) or differentiated (3) disintegration of EU integration in this policy field include different steps towards the limitation of free movement of people internally, external dissolution of border control and complete dissolution of the Schengen area in reaction to future migration and pandemic waves.

The maintenance of the status quo includes 6 projections, which reflect the continued reluctance of some member states to cooperate on migration policies, stalled negotiations on common migration, asylum and refugee policies among the members states, and border controls that remain mainly a national prerogative and responsibility.

(4) Foreign and defence policy

Foreign and defence policy is the most addressed policy area among the studies considered, with 93 projections. This reflects great expectations for a stronger EU on the global stage over the next years, something that also echoes views and aspirations repeatedly expressed by EU citizens over time (for instance, as emerges from regular Eurobarometer surveys), as also confirmed at the Conference on the Future of Europe. These issues are even more relevant today in light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, clearly strengthening the importance of common foreign security and defence policy for the European future security architecture.

At the same time, it is not clear which form of integration or modality of differentiation is expected to prevail in this policy field. Expectations of scholars remain deeply divided, among those projections that foresee more cooperation and differentiation on an intergovernmental and ad hoc basis (through different forms of differentiated cooperation, 33 projections), and those that envisage more homogeneous integration on a supranational/federal basis, thus a more federal EU in foreign policy and defence (27 projections).

Trajectories of homogeneous integration in this policy field are generally associated with increased EU-wide activities in foreign and defence policies, enhanced powers for the European Commission and European Parliament, and moving towards qualified majority voting in various fields within EU foreign policy. Projections include a stronger and unified Europe in a multilateral system, a European Minister of Foreign Affairs and steps towards the creation of a European army. Geopolitical competition and stagnating EU enlargement developments are seen as key drivers of this process, with EU institutions and member states as the main actors.

Visions for more differentiated cooperation are based upon future developments of current intergovernmental practices within EU foreign and defence policy, both at the formal level, such as Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), and more informally, such as leading groups and ad hoc coalitions, which are both seen as key to EU future developments. Moreover, possible future trajectories of differentiated cooperation in this area also include the cooperation with non-EU actors, echoing the multilateral vocation of the EU and its contribution to international partnerships and rules-based global order, as well as aspirations to find forms of privileged partnership with the UK.

Less common are projections of forms of differentiated integration in this field (9 projections), which include both groups of member states that might decide to move ahead in deepening EU military cooperation, and member states that opt-out from these developments, perhaps contributing only financially. Another aspect of potential forms of differentiated integration regards the deepening of cooperation with European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries toward their greater involvement and influence in EU decision-making, eventually with the involvement of the UK as well.

Strong path dependency could also affect the evolution of this policy field towards stagnation (11 projections). As a result, there would be no commitment to enhancing Europe's collective security and defence capacities, limited use of PESCO, lack of a shared strategic culture or the persisting of unanimous procedures in the decision making for this policy field.

Scenarios of disintegration, whether differentiated (7 projections) or homogeneous (6), include different forms of internal and external fragmentation. Internal dynamics among bigger and smaller states could trigger a legitimacy crisis, ultimately downgrading the role of a European common approach. Externally, these developments could be matched by further geopolitical competition between blocs.

(5) EU budget

EU budget attracted considerably less attention, even if most projections see there will be an increase in the forthcoming years (9 out of 14 projections). This is seen as a medium-high EU budget increase (> 2 per cent GNI). It could happen along differentiated cooperation modalities (3), where member states cooperate on an ad hoc basis on a specific project, or differentiated integration modes (3), through a deepening of the budget of the Euro area or the EU general budget, with some countries obtaining the possibility to opt-out.

4. Mapping the gaps between projections: Internal-external divides, co-occurrences and epistemological assumptions

4.1 The internal and external dimensions

If we look at the internal and external dimensions of differentiation (see Table 4), most projections are focused on the EU's internal developments exclusively (173/259), leaving potential developments of EU external differentiation largely underexplored. However, there are some relevant variations across modes of differentiation/integration and policy areas (see Table 4).

Single market and trade, as well as the Economic and Monetary Union, seem to involve mostly the internal dimension of the EU (85/109 projections). The single market is generally associated with more homogeneous integration, which is the most common projection (11). The Economic and Monetary Union is often expected to strengthen internally, either through a substantial deepening of the Euro-area (thus, through more internal differentiated integration, 17 projections) or through important steps towards a truly federal economic government with single macroeconomic policy and fiscal transfers for the entire EU (17 projections). At the same time, the Economic and Monetary Union is also associated with the risk of internal fragmentation and dissolution (14 projections), mainly due to

irreconcilable political and economic divergences among the member states. Both the internal and external dimensions are involved in some scenarios for development of single market and trade (6 projections) as well as the Economic and Monetary Union (7 projections). The former is seen as being able to lead to further integration of the EFTA and other countries in the EU's surroundings, the latter as strengthening external representation in multilateral institutions.

Table 4 | Projections across policy areas and modes of differentiations: Internal and external dimensions

Policy area	External or internal?	Mode of differentiation					
		Homogeneous disintegration	Differentiated disintegration	Stagnation	Differentiated cooperation	Differentiated integration	Homogeneous integration
Single market & trade	Internal	2	6	9	1	1	11
Economic & Monetary Union	Internal	7	7	5	2	17	17
Schengen, migration & security	Internal	0	2	5	5	7	9
Foreign policy & defence	Internal	3	2	10	8	3	20
EU budget	Internal	1	2	2	3	3	3
Single market & trade	Internal and External	0	1	0	0	1	4
Economic & Monetary Union	Internal and External	0	0	0	2	5	0
Schengen, migration & security	Internal and External	8	0	1	2	1	1
Foreign policy & defence	Internal and External	0	3	1	8	1	3
EU budget	Internal and External	0	0	0	0	0	0
Single market & trade	External	1	4	3	0	2	0
Economic & Monetary Union	External	0	0	0	1	0	0
Schengen, migration & security	External	0	1	0	1	0	0
Foreign policy & defence	External	3	2	0	17	5	4
EU budget	External	0	0	0	0	0	0

Not surprisingly, the Schengen, migration and security field cuts across both the internal and external dimensions, reflecting the composite nature of the Schengen area, which is constituted by both EU members and third countries as well as broader EU external partnerships. More homogeneous integration in this field is predominantly linked to internal developments within the EU (9 projections), where the member states could converge towards fully harmonised border checks and removal of internal controls. The same holds true for possible projections of differentiated integration (7 projections), where further integration among a core group of countries is seen as key for the achievement of a nearly completed common European migration, asylum and refugee policy. At the same time, differentiated cooperation with third countries is seen as pivotal in many regards, from participation in EU agencies, such as Europol and Frontex, to increased cooperation with neighbouring states on migration issues. Scenarios of the complete disintegration of Schengen are also foreseen (8 projections), due to possible chronic border closures (externally and internally) in reaction to future migration and pandemic waves.

The external dimension is particularly relevant for future projections of foreign and defence policy. In particular, trajectories towards more integration and cooperation involve mostly the internal dimension of the EU, with one main exception, that is, foreign and defence policy. More differentiated cooperation with non-EU actors in

the field of foreign and defence policy represents one of the most common future scenarios of differentiation, probably echoing the multilateral vocation of the EU and its contribution to international partnerships, thus contributing to a rules-based global order. At the same time, this also reflects current practices within EU foreign policy that are characterised by leading groups and ad hoc coalitions, where groups of member states have steered EU foreign policy in cooperation with third countries.

The external dimension and broader international and global dynamics remain extremely relevant in driving further developments in this policy field, whether through integrative or disintegrative, homogenous or differentiated trajectories.

Finally, it is worth noting how the external dimension of the EU budget has remained completely unexplored, despite some important aspects that could evolve in the future. In particular, we can imagine further developments in this policy field in relation to two key issues. One is the important contributions that some non-EU members are already making to the common budget (such as EFTA countries). The other is a further EU budgetary engagement with third countries and enlargement countries in particular, especially in light of the concession of accession candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova.

4.2 Co-occurrence of projections

In order to gather a more granular understanding of the considered studies we can analyse the co-occurrence of projections through co-occurrence matrixes (see Table 5). The matrixes illustrate which projections tend to appear together more often than others, across different policy areas and modes of differentiation/integration. The results should however not be considered as the premise for a statistical analysis, nor should co-occurrence be confused with statistically significant correlation.

The numbers populating the matrixes are counts of every time a given projection appears together with another across policy fields and modes of differentiation. It is clear that the relative “popularity” of one projection will inflate the number. However, despite the imprecise nature of this summarisation, it still allows us to detect and read into potential patterns. A co-occurrence matrix, for example, may reveal that some policy projections are regularly thought of in a bundle with policies in other thematic areas. The projections in some policy area may be conditional on differentiation in other policy areas, or there may be an underlying common assumption about institutional development driving both projections. At the same time, the contrary also holds true; namely, that some possible connections among modalities of differentiation and policy fields have been ignored.

Our matrixes report every single instance of co-occurrence between a specific policy area and differentiation modes.

We can observe that there is a strong co-occurrence between stagnation in one policy field and stagnation in another (and this holds true for all policy areas). Stagnation in one field predominantly leads to stagnation in other fields (domino or spill-over effect). Moreover, stagnation in each policy field co-occurs with changes in other policy areas, as an extreme minority of the scenarios contemplate changes in all policy fields at the same time, confirming the realistic character of the projections that have emerged from our corpus of studies.

If we look at co-occurrence in the field of single market and trade, it is interesting to note how projections moving toward differentiated integration are generally associated with stagnation and disintegrative trajectories in other policy fields. This confirms that scholars attribute a key importance to the integrity of the single market for the future of EU integration in general, across various policy areas, and its sustainability. Looking at patterns of differentiation in the Economic and Monetary Union, co-occurrence appears between disintegrative dynamics in this policy field and the lack of progress of EU integration towards more supranationalism (both homogeneous and differentiated).

For Schengen and migration, there seems to be a certain degree of co-occurrence across different modes of differentiation/integration and patterns of differentiation (integration and cooperation) within Foreign and Defence Policy. At the same time, projections of differentiated cooperation within Foreign and Defence Policy co-occur with a number of heterogenous trajectories in terms of modes of differentiation/integration.

Table 5 | Co-occurrence charted by policy areas and modes of differentiation

		Single Market & Trade					
		Homogeneous Disintegration	Differentiated disintegration	Stagnation	Differentiated cooperation	Differentiated Integration	Homogeneous Integration
Homogeneous Disintegration	Single Market & Trade	0	1	0	0	0	0
	Economic & Monetary Union	0	2	13	1	9	2
	Schengen, Migration & Security	1	0	3	1	5	0
	Foreign Policy & Defence	0	3	1	0	0	0
	EU Budget	1	0	0	0	1	0
Differentiated disintegration	Single Market & Trade	1	0	2	0	3	0
	Economic & Monetary Union	0	3	0	0	1	1
	Schengen, Migration & Security	1	1	0	0	2	0
	Foreign Policy & Defence	1	2	0	0	1	0
	EU Budget	0	1	0	0	1	0
Stagnation	Single Market & Trade	0	2	0	1	6	0
	Economic & Monetary Union	0	1	14	0	1	0
	Schengen, Migration & Security	0	2	8	0	4	0
	Foreign Policy & Defence	1	2	19	0	5	1
	EU Budget	0	0	4	0	3	0
Differentiated cooperation	Single Market & Trade	0	0	1	0	0	0
	Economic & Monetary Union	0	2	2	0	0	1
	Schengen, Migration & Security	0	2	2	0	5	0
	Foreign Policy & Defence	2	2	8	1	5	1
	EU Budget	0	0	3	1	0	0
Differentiated Integration	Single Market & Trade	0	3	6	0	0	0
	Economic & Monetary Union	0	0	0	0	1	0
	Schengen, Migration & Security	0	0	3	0	3	1
	Foreign Policy & Defence	1	2	2	0	3	1
	EU Budget	0	0	0	0	0	1
Homogeneous Integration	Single Market & Trade	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Economic & Monetary Union	1	1	0	0	3	4
	Schengen, Migration & Security	1	3	0	0	1	4
	Foreign Policy & Defence	0	1	0	0	2	2
	EU Budget	0	0	0	0	0	0

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		Economic & Monetary Union					
		Homogeneous Disintegration	Differentiated disintegration	Stagnation	Differentiated cooperation	Differentiated Integration	Homogeneous Integration
Homogeneous Disintegration	Single Market & Trade	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Economic & Monetary Union	0	6	13	3	3	3
	Schengen, Migration & Security	0	1	1	0	4	1
	Foreign Policy & Defence	10	0	3	0	0	1
	EU Budget	1	0	0	0	1	1
Differentiated disintegration	Single Market & Trade	2	3	1	2	0	1
	Economic & Monetary Union	6	0	1	1	0	3
	Schengen, Migration & Security	0	0	1	0	1	1
	Foreign Policy & Defence	2	3	1	0	0	0
	EU Budget	1	2	0	0	1	1
Stagnation	Single Market & Trade	13	0	14	2	0	0
	Economic & Monetary Union	13	1	0	6	0	0
	Schengen, Migration & Security	6	0	22	2	0	2
	Foreign Policy & Defence	19	1	42	4	3	1
	EU Budget	2	0	8	1	0	0
Differentiated cooperation	Single Market & Trade	1	0	0	0	0	0
	Economic & Monetary Union	3	1	6	0	0	2
	Schengen, Migration & Security	10	3	1	0	2	1
	Foreign Policy & Defence	19	3	15	3	9	3
	EU Budget	2	0	3	0	0	0
Differentiated Integration	Single Market & Trade	9	1	1	0	1	3
	Economic & Monetary Union	3	0	0	0	0	1
	Schengen, Migration & Security	1	0	0	0	6	2
	Foreign Policy & Defence	2	2	3	0	8	4
	EU Budget	1	2	1	1	0	2
Homogeneous Integration	Single Market & Trade	2	1	0	1	0	4
	Economic & Monetary Union	3	3	0	2	1	0
	Schengen, Migration & Security	6	6	0	2	1	9
	Foreign Policy & Defence	2	1	1	1	0	4
	EU Budget	0	1	1	0	0	0

		Schengen, Migration & Security					
		Homogeneous Disintegration	Differentiated disintegration	Stagnation	Differentiated cooperation	Differentiated Integration	Homogeneous Integration
Homogeneous Disintegration	Single Market & Trade	1	1	0	0	0	1
	Economic & Monetary Union	0	0	6	10	1	6
	Schengen, Migration & Security	0	3	0	4	3	0
	Foreign Policy & Defence	1	3	2	2	0	2
	EU Budget	3	2	0	2	0	0
Differentiated disintegration	Single Market & Trade	0	1	2	2	0	3
	Economic & Monetary Union	1	0	0	3	0	6
	Schengen, Migration & Security	3	0	0	0	0	1
	Foreign Policy & Defence	1	0	0	2	0	3
	EU Budget	0	1	0	1	0	3
Stagnation	Single Market & Trade	3	0	8	2	3	0
	Economic & Monetary Union	1	1	22	1	0	0
	Schengen, Migration & Security	0	0	0	2	0	0
	Foreign Policy & Defence	5	0	26	9	2	0
	EU Budget	1	0	4	1	1	0
Differentiated cooperation	Single Market & Trade	1	0	0	0	0	0
	Economic & Monetary Union	0	0	2	0	0	2
	Schengen, Migration & Security	4	0	2	0	2	2
	Foreign Policy & Defence	10	0	4	9	7	2
	EU Budget	1	0	4	0	0	0
Differentiated Integration	Single Market & Trade	5	2	4	5	3	1
	Economic & Monetary Union	4	1	0	2	6	1
	Schengen, Migration & Security	3	0	0	2	0	2
	Foreign Policy & Defence	4	3	0	2	5	4
	EU Budget	1	0	0	1	0	2
Homogeneous Integration	Single Market & Trade	0	0	0	0	1	4
	Economic & Monetary Union	1	1	2	1	2	9
	Schengen, Migration & Security	0	1	0	2	2	0
	Foreign Policy & Defence	0	1	0	0	1	4
	EU Budget	1	0	0	1	0	0

Mapping Scenarios of Differentiated EUrope 2025–2035

		Foreign Policy & Defence					
		Homogeneous Disintegration	Differentiated disintegration	Stagnation	Differentiated cooperation	Differentiated Integration	Homogeneous Integration
Homogeneous Disintegration	Single Market & Trade	0	1	1	2	1	0
	Economic & Monetary Union	10	2	19	19	2	2
	Schengen, Migration & Security	1	1	5	10	4	0
	Foreign Policy & Defence	1	1	3	1	0	0
	EU Budget	1	0	3	4	0	0
Differentiated disintegration	Single Market & Trade	3	2	2	2	2	1
	Economic & Monetary Union	0	3	1	3	2	1
	Schengen, Migration & Security	3	0	0	0	3	1
	Foreign Policy & Defence	1	0	3	4	3	1
	EU Budget	1	1	0	0	2	0
Stagnation	Single Market & Trade	1	0	19	8	2	0
	Economic & Monetary Union	3	1	42	15	3	1
	Schengen, Migration & Security	2	0	26	4	0	0
	Foreign Policy & Defence	3	3	0	23	3	0
	EU Budget	0	0	8	3	0	0
Differentiated cooperation	Single Market & Trade	0	0	0	1	0	0
	Economic & Monetary Union	0	0	4	3	0	1
	Schengen, Migration & Security	2	2	9	9	2	0
	Foreign Policy & Defence	1	4	23	0	11	2
	EU Budget	1	0	5	1	0	0
Differentiated Integration	Single Market & Trade	0	1	5	5	3	2
	Economic & Monetary Union	0	0	3	9	8	0
	Schengen, Migration & Security	0	0	2	7	5	1
	Foreign Policy & Defence	0	3	3	11	0	2
	EU Budget	0	1	1	2	2	1
Homogeneous Integration	Single Market & Trade	0	0	1	1	1	2
	Economic & Monetary Union	1	0	1	3	4	4
	Schengen, Migration & Security	2	3	0	2	4	4
	Foreign Policy & Defence	0	1	0	2	2	0
	EU Budget	0	1	1	2	2	0

		EU Budget					
		Homogeneous Disintegration	Differentiated disintegration	Stagnation	Differentiated cooperation	Differentiated Integration	Homogeneous Integration
Homogeneous Disintegration	Single Market & Trade	1	0	0	0	0	0
	Economic & Monetary Union	1	1	2	2	1	0
	Schengen, Migration & Security	3	0	1	1	1	1
	Foreign Policy & Defence	1	1	0	1	0	0
	EU Budget	0	0	0	0	0	0
Differentiated disintegration	Single Market & Trade	0	1	0	0	0	0
	Economic & Monetary Union	0	2	0	0	2	1
	Schengen, Migration & Security	2	1	0	0	0	0
	Foreign Policy & Defence	0	1	0	0	1	1
	EU Budget	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stagnation	Single Market & Trade	0	0	4	3	0	0
	Economic & Monetary Union	0	0	8	3	1	1
	Schengen, Migration & Security	0	0	4	4	0	0
	Foreign Policy & Defence	3	0	8	5	1	1
	EU Budget	0	0	0	0	0	0
Differentiated cooperation	Single Market & Trade	0	0	0	1	0	0
	Economic & Monetary Union	0	0	1	0	1	0
	Schengen, Migration & Security	2	1	1	0	1	1
	Foreign Policy & Defence	4	0	3	1	2	2
	EU Budget	0	0	0	0	0	0
Differentiated Integration	Single Market & Trade	1	1	3	0	0	0
	Economic & Monetary Union	1	1	0	0	0	0
	Schengen, Migration & Security	0	0	1	0	0	0
	Foreign Policy & Defence	0	2	0	0	2	2
	EU Budget	0	0	0	0	0	1
Homogeneous Integration	Single Market & Trade	0	0	0	0	1	0
	Economic & Monetary Union	1	1	0	0	2	0
	Schengen, Migration & Security	0	3	0	0	2	0
	Foreign Policy & Defence	0	0	0	0	1	0
	EU Budget	0	0	0	0	1	0

4.3 Complexity of differentiation modes

Moving on to the epistemological analysis, it may be useful to try to understand the assumptions underpinning the projections presented by the studies. This is not only to show potential blind spots of the dataset, but also to understand the kind of underlying differentiation dynamics presumed to be unleashed by crises or other incidents. The epistemological handling of complexity is crucial, because it explains how single scenarios deal with the unknown.

Table 6 presents the separate modes of differentiation/integration in a single framework, showing how studies are dealing with complexity in different ways. As a reminder, studies can have different emphases on causal mechanisms and the capacity of researchers (and policy-makers) to understand the dynamics at hand.

It would have been interesting if we had noticed that a “simple” depiction of the EU, without any thought about unknown unknowns or unpredicted causal relationships (such as in complex systems), resulted in emphasising integration paths more than disintegration. That was not the case, and in general we can say that most scenarios conceive the EU as a complicated or complex system – which bodes well for the quality of the scenarios.

Table 5 | Handling of complexity (per cent)

Mode of differentiation	Complex system	Complicated system	Simple system
Homogeneous disintegration	0,00	76,00	24,00
Differentiated disintegration	6,67	63,33	30,00
Stagnation	2,78	63,89	33,33
Differentiated cooperation	10,00	68,00	22,00
Differentiated integration	4,35	73,91	21,74
Homogeneous integration	5,56	55,56	38,89

5. Follow-up

The paper has provided a mapping and meta-analysis of the recent literature on scenarios of differentiated European integration. While the European Commission has tried to embed strategic foresight and scenario-building practices into EU policy-making, future-oriented analyses still remain at the margin of European public discussion and academic debates within political science and EU studies. An exception is recent studies on EU differentiated integration, which have emerged in reaction to the traumatic Brexit event and the ensuing debate on the future of Europe, collected by the DiCE project within the online portal DifferentiGate (under the category “Future of Europe: Different scenarios/trajectories”).

Thus, the paper has conducted an actual mapping of scenario studies included in the portal, and has identified 259 projections of possible EU trajectories that have emerged from the body of studies under consideration. These projections are articulated in a period of ten years approximatively between 2025 and 2035, and variate across modes of differentiation/integration and policy areas.

The next step will be to use the current results of the scenario mapping to generate inputs for scenario-based exercises providing strategic foresight for policy-planners and policy-makers. On the basis of the mapping and meta-analysis of scenarios of differentiation, concise descriptions of the raw scenarios, representing negative and positive cases, will be generated in order to engage with policy-planners and policy-makers. Thus, a Scenario Marathon will be set up, as a second DiCE flagship conference, in October 2022. The Scenario Marathon is intended to be a flagship initiative bringing together about 40 stakeholders selected among EU, national and local policy-planners and policy-makers.

The results of the DiCE Scenario Marathon will be carefully evaluated, structured and further developed in a policy paper on strategic foresight for policy-planners and policy-makers, identifying the conditions under which reforms may fail or succeed, thereby guiding relevant stakeholders on the feasibility and legitimacy of different reform proposals. The policy paper will be also disseminated through the Trans European Policy Studies Association's second Pre-Presidency Conferences in 2022 within its "Future of Europe" panels.

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