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# How Does Identity Relate to Attitudes Towards Differentiation? The Cases of France, Germany, Czech Republic and Turkey

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## Abstract

This paper explores the ways in which national identities shape attitudes towards differentiated integration in two old member states, one relatively new member state and one candidate country – namely France, Germany, the Czech Republic and Turkey. It also observes how the impact of differentiated integration on European identity is perceived in these given countries in terms of preserving European identity (deepening), the dilution of European identity (disintegration) and the territorial/geographic limits of European identity (widening). By employing primary research and discourse analysis, the study finds that there is no single and monolithic national identity which produces a uniform attitude towards differentiated integration in member and candidate states, but rather that competing domestic national identity narratives produce differing attitudes within a state on differentiated integration. These national identity narratives can translate into starkly different policy positions concerning the policy area that is subject to differentiated integration, as well as on how differentiation is expected to impact the future of European integration and European identity.

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# Introduction

The literature on European integration has produced a plethora of works exploring the relationship between national and European identity. Some of these studies have focused on how perceptions of national/European identity play a role in citizens' attitudes towards European integration (Díez Medrano 2003, Fuchs and Klingemann 2011), while others have examined the relationship between nation-state identities and member state positions on European integration (Larsen 1997) or the impact of national identities on member states' positions on selected EU policies such as enlargement (Aydın-Düzgit 2012). In a similar vein, the last decade has seen a proliferation of studies on differentiated integration in the EU, be it in the context of the politics of differentiated integration (Dyson and Sepos 2010), its institutional design (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2016), implications for democracy and legitimacy in the EU (Fossum 2015), its legal repercussions (Kroll and Leuffen 2015, Schimmelfennig and Winzen 2014) and its feasibility, desirability and consequences in select policy areas (Howorth 2019, Keleman 2019, Lavenex 2015).

Despite the growth of research in both streams, there has been relatively little interaction between the literature on national/European identity and that of differentiated integration. In the rare cases where the two met, identity has either been treated as an epiphenomenal variable with little impact on member states' positions on differentiated integration; or as a significant variable with an overall but undifferentiated impact on the member state's overall position on differentiation. In cases where identity was found to have an effect (Schimmelfennig and Winzen 2017), it was argued that those member states with "exclusive national identities" that are generally negatively oriented towards multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism tended to be more in favour of differentiated integration (Schimmelfennig and Winzen 2017). Yet, these studies are conceptually inspired by rational-choice theories in which identity is theorised as a more or less fixed independent variable affecting a state's attitudes towards differentiated integration.

Different to these works, we employ interpretivist lenses which theorise identity as a discursive and a relational phenomenon. Identity is discursive in the sense that it is not fixed or inherent to any entity but is constructed through discourse. Thus identities "emerge out of a process of representation through which individuals [...] describe to themselves and others the world in which they live" (Weldes et al. 1999: 14) and in line with this discursive nature, they remain unstable and fragmented. We conceptualise identity as relational in the sense that the identity of any Self only acquires meaning through its relation to Other(s). Hence identity is unthinkable without its "constitutive outside" (Butler 1993), without its Other(s). Regardless of how minimal the differences tend to be, they are still central in the discursive construction of the identity of the Self (Neumann 1999: 35). From an interpretivist perspective in which social reality is conceptualised as discursively constructed, discourses, including those on identity, do not "cause" but that they can "enable" certain actions by "set[ting] limits to what is possible to be articulated" (Díez 1999: 611).


Applied to the case of national and European identities, this conceptual framework posits that both national and European identities are discursively constructed. Furthermore, as the vast literature on European identity have aptly demonstrated, European identities are heavily contingent on the ways in which national identities are discursively articulated (Marcussen et al. 1999, Larsen 1997, Risse 2010, Díez Medrano 2003, Aydın-Düzgit

2012). In other words, there exists no fixed understanding of European identity that is independent from the way in which national identities are expressed by the national political actors in the EU member states and by way of extension, in the candidate countries. Hence European identities in EU member and candidate states come in national colours and as such, can in turn have an enabling/disabling impact on the political positions taken in these countries towards various aspects of European integration.

In this paper, our goal is to identify the ways in which national identities that are discursively articulated with reference to Europe shape attitudes towards differentiated integration by enabling/disabling proposed policy options in two old member states, one relatively new member state and one candidate country – namely France, Germany, the Czech Republic and Turkey. In turn, we also aim to observe how the impact of differentiated integration on European identity articulated in national colours is perceived in these given countries in terms of preserving European identity (deepening), the dilution of European identity (disintegration) and the territorial/geographic limits of European identity (widening).

We adhere to EU IDEA's common definition of differentiated integration as "a process of integration in which the Member States[, potentially joined by non-EU members,] opt to move forward at different speeds and/or towards different objectives, in contrast to the notion of a monolithic bloc of states pursuing identical objectives at a single speed" (European Commission 1997: 28). We argue in this paper that there is no single and monolithic national identity which produces a uniform attitude towards differentiated integration in member and candidate states, but rather that competing domestic national identity narratives produce differing attitudes within a state on differentiated integration. Furthermore, we also argue that these national identity narratives can translate into starkly different policy positions concerning the policy area which is subject to differentiated integration. In other words, one should not expect a country, or a political group within a state, to have a uniform position on differentiated integration as a whole, but that attitudes may differ depending on the policy area which is being subject to differentiated integration at the European Union level.

In doing that, we focus on the respective political discourses in the four selected states on four distinct events of political differentiation in the EU. The events that are selected are the signing of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union (fiscal compact) in March 2012, the EU migration crisis in November 2015, the Brexit referendum in June 2016 and the establishment of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) in the area of security and defence policy in December 2017. These four cases were selected on the grounds that they are all relatively recent events which sparked considerable national and EU-wide debates on differentiated integration, and because they have led to varied outcomes regarding differentiation in the EU: two cases where concrete outcomes of internal differentiation were reached (fiscal compact and PESCO); one where attempts for internal differentiation failed and led instead to international cooperation with a third (candidate) country outside the EU legal framework (EU–Turkey statement on migration); and one where internal differentiation did not suffice to keep a country



(Britain) as a member and led in turn to further debates on the future of both internal and external differentiated integration in the context of an EU without the UK as well as the UK's future mode of engagement with the EU.

The texts that are subject to analysis consist of national parliamentary debates; statements by officials from the government and the main opposition; and editorials published in the main newspapers which represent the centre-left and the centre-right of the political spectrum in each selected state. Hence our analysis relies on original data drawn from the representation of these events in the discourses of the political actors and key media representatives. In approaching the texts, we focus in particular on a) how attitudes towards specific instances of differentiated integration are discursively justified by these actors in the selected states with reference to their articulated visions of Europe, including the perceived impact of such differentiation on preserving (deepening), dilution of (disintegration) and territorial/geographic limits of (widening) European identity; as well as b) the ways in which these visions relate to various national identity representations which have been identified in the extensive literature on national identities in Europe and beyond (see, among others, Wodak 2004, Larsen 1997, Marcussen et al. 1999). The timeline of the analysis covers three months prior to and three months (six months for the migration crisis) after the selected event of differentiated integration. This is mainly because our discursive approach requires us to focus on a period in which discursive articulations on the select events were intense and the data that is available is considerable, yet also manageable to conduct an in-depth discursive analysis.

In terms of methodology, we conduct a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the texts under scrutiny. CDA is a method of discourse analysis which focuses on the study of the relations between discourse and social and cultural developments in different social domains. It views discursive practices as an important form of social practice that contributes to the constitution of the social world, including social identities and social relations (Wodak and Meyer 2016). In this deliverable, we adhere to the discourse-historical strand of CDA which takes a longer and thus historical view of discourses and is particularly utilised in studying demarcations of identity in texts. This approach entails a closer look at the discursive strategies used in texts to define the Self in relation to Other(s). For the purposes of this study, we focus particularly on two discursive strategies in texts, namely predication and argumentation (Reisigl and Wodak 2001). While a focus on predication will help us in responding to the question of how the national Selves in relation to Europe/EU are named and referred to in the texts, a closer look at argumentation strategies will reveal the central arguments and argumentation schemes that are used in justifying, legitimising and naturalising representations of actors and the selected events in discourse.

# 1. France and differentiated integration: Centrality of the French self in a differentiated Europe

In the case of France, national identity perceptions seem to be closely intertwined with how differentiated integration is discussed in all policy areas under analysis. Regardless of the policy in question, the French debate centres almost always on the centrality of the French Self and its Republican values, seen as central to the healthy functioning of Europe. In turn, the success of European integration is seen as key to maintaining and increasing France's weight on the global stage. With the exception of the migration crisis, differentiation is generally welcome as long as France remains at the core of the process. In the case of PESCO and the fiscal compact, differentiation is expected to deepen the sense of Europe and European identity, whereas the opposite, hence disintegration, is feared with Brexit and the migration crisis. While there are often considerable disagreements between different political actors on the policy content of differentiation based on their political and ideological stances, we observe that differentiation as a general component of European integration is widely accepted and preferred in the French context.

The following subsections will discuss how each selected case of differentiation, presented in temporal order, has been discursively represented by French policy makers and in the media discourse, in relation to national identity narratives and articulations of Europe.

## 1.1 Fiscal Compact

The fiscal compact was predominantly defended by French government representatives of the time as the key means to help Europe deal with the financial crisis and bring France to the centre of the global stage. France is also accorded a historical responsibility to bring Europe out of its financial impasse. In his opening remarks to the French Parliament's debate on the fiscal compact, Jean Leonetti, Minister of European Affairs from the UMP (*Union pour un Mouvement Populaire*), articulates this:

For centuries, France is a major actor in the world. Our voice counts because we defend universal values. How can France, inheritor of the French Revolution and a founding state of the European Union succumb to calls for de-globalisation? The world is not de-globalising. We will either choose to be a part of it or withdraw. We have chosen action. [...] We have chosen responsibility which rests on solidarity and discipline. [...] The treaties which will be put to your vote are those that will help make France and Europe grow. Those who refuse these steps are running the risk of putting Europe and France in danger. (Assemblée Nationale 2012: 1321-22)

The excerpt above predicates France as a “major [global] actor” thanks to its defender role of “universal values” which derives from its national history and is thus also equated with French values. This national standing bestows a certain responsibility of the part of Europe to be proactive in a situation where the fates of France and Europe are intertwined – and thus justifies its support for the fiscal compact. There is ample secondary literature on the ways in which “Europe” plays a key role in conceptions of the French “Self”. It has widely been argued that a fusion was constructed between the concept of the “French nation” and “Europe”, primarily during the Presidency of Mitterrand in the face of the French political and economic decline of the 1980s (Larsen 1997: 89), which was later to be adopted by the French right in defining the new role of France in the world after the end of the Cold War. In this discursive fusion, Europe is created as a larger France which takes on the traditional tasks and ideals of France, namely its “*mission civilisatrice*”, because France has become too small to project its universal values itself (Wæver 2005: 44). Wæver further highlights that this constructs “Europe” not only as a scene on which France acts in a central position as “Europe’s vanguard, but also as an entity that is ‘French in its form’” (Aydın-Düzgüt 2012: 14).

“Europe” as a replication of the French model at a higher level implies, thus, that it should have “clear borders” and a “hard capable core” standing strong externally as more than “a free trade zone”, and having the “political capacity to act” (Larsen 1997: 89, 104). This is necessary for French interests to be guarded and promoted to prevent France from becoming an “ordinary republic” (Larsen 1997: 112). Yet, in most cases, this also paves the way for the welcoming of differentiated integration with a strong core, so long as this will serve to strengthen France and the European project. Hence Alex Poniatowski, president of the foreign affairs commission from the UMP, argues in the same debate that the Eurocrisis and the ensuing fiscal compact demonstrate the need for Europe to “create strong cores among those states that wish to take new steps in integration” and “progress at different speeds” which could in turn deliver urgent and effective European responses to crises. Hence differentiation through the fiscal compact is perceived in the French discourse as a way of deepening Europe and European identity, in order to save the project from disintegration in the face of crises.

This enthusiasm for differentiation with a strong core does not seem to be shared by the sovereigntist-Gaullist wing of the French centre-right, for which the “sovereign” right of the nation to make the budget cannot be transferred from national parliaments onto the European level.<sup>1</sup> The analysis also suggests that although the content of the fiscal compact is heavily criticised by the French left, and in particular the far left, these segments do not attack these initiatives for promoting differentiation, but mainly for advancing austerity measures. Hence both sides question and/or reject the policy content rather than differentiation itself. Nonetheless, even when criticising the compact for its punitive nature, the representatives of the far left in particular draw from historical analogies with the French national past such as the French Revolution and draw attention to how austerity by abandoning solidarity betrays its

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1 See, for instance, contributions by Jacques Myard (LR) and Nicolas Dupont-Aignan (DLF) in Assemblée Nationale (2012).



legacy and the true French/European Self.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.2 Migration crisis

It is in debates over the migration crisis and the ensuing EU–Turkey migration statement that French and European identities are most explicitly invoked in the French case. The French prime minister, Manuel Valls, in his address to the French national assembly, underlines that the refugee crisis

provides an opportunity for us [the French] to reveal who we are: a strong and generous nation, a nation which has always guided the world and its people towards emancipation, liberty, law, dignity and culture, a nation which welcomes the oppressed while remaining attached to its values: liberty, equality, fraternity and secularism. (Assemblée Nationale 2015: 7300)

Similar to the excerpt above, the French founding values and history, articulated as such, figure prominently as the main drivers of the French response to the refugee crisis. The deictic “we” used interchangeably for the French nation is associated with a positive representation of the French Self around history (sometimes with reference to the French history of migration) and founding values of the Republic. The response to the crisis will hence be shaped by French identity defined around these values as well as (re)affirming such identity through the enactment of the right policies. Europe enters into the debates in terms of what shape these policies must take, often in the form of a call for European solidarity. Nonetheless, different than the other policy areas examined, differentiation is shunned by all political actors when the issue concerns migration. While the suggested policy content may differ across different political party groups, nearly all seem to be united on the need for the inclusion of all European countries, including the establishment of a common migration and asylum policy, in tackling the refugee crisis. In the same speech, Valls refers to Schengen as an “essential element of European identity” and makes a plea for “a more, and not a less Europe” in managing the crisis.<sup>3</sup> Others refer to this particular instance as an “opportunity to build a united and stronger Europe”<sup>4</sup> and/or a test case of “French and European values”<sup>5</sup> (used often interchangeably). Hence the perceived impact of differentiation regarding migration on European identity is overwhelmingly one of dilution, hence disintegration, of European solidarity and identity.

The data, however, suggests that the EU–Turkey statement agreed on 18 March 2016 between the EU member states and Turkey to stop irregular migration flows from Turkey to the EU, delivers a fatal blow to the solidarity rhetoric, with all but the government representatives from the Socialist party condemning it by referring to

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2 See, for instance, contributions by Jean-Pierre Brard (PCF) and Jean-Paul Lecoq (PCF) in the above debate.

3 See also contributions by Phillipe Vigier (UDI) and Valerie Pécresse (LR) in Assemblée Nationale (2015).

4 See, for instance, contributions by Phillipe Vigier (UDI), Sergio Coronado (PE), Jeanine Dubie (MR), Andre Chassaigne (PCF), Bruno Le Roux (PS) and Danielle Auroi (PS).

5 See contributions by Elisabeth Guigou (PS) and Daniella Auroi (PS) in the above debate.



it as “illegal”,<sup>6</sup> “in contravention of the foundations of Europe and the Republic”, and a “disgrace to the country [France]”,<sup>7</sup> with the culprit being the “lack of solidarity in Europe”.<sup>8</sup>

## 1.3 Brexit

In the French debates, with the exception of the French far right (*Front National*) which celebrates it and calls for a “Fraxit”,<sup>9</sup> Brexit is very often represented as an existential crisis for both France and the European integration project. As with the fiscal compact and the migration crisis, this is also an instance in which the future of the French nation and that of Europe, which is central to the understanding of the French national Self, is at stake, and thus requires urgent action, with France taking the initiative to save itself and Europe from destruction, as expressed by prime minister Valls in his speech to the national assembly in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum:

Every time the essence of Europe is at stake, France has to respond [...] because we are France, a country which is respected, listened to, heard! Because we are a founding country! [...] The question which France faces is not to leave Europe, but to re-found the European project. (Assemblée Nationale 2016b: 4767)<sup>10</sup>

This central role accorded to France is not contested, where the French fate is tied once again to the fate of the European project. Brexit is heavily perceived in the French discourse as a development with the potential to dilute the European project by triggering further disintegration. To prevent the dissolution of Europe, a “certain conception of Europe” which means much more than a single market, but stands for “social protection”, “protection of borders” and the “protection of a cultural model” should be defended (Hollande 2016).<sup>11</sup> Hence a deepening of European identity is pushed for in the face of the threat of disintegration. There are significant differences among the political actors concerning the content of the policies which should inform such a Europe, with the left leaning strongly against neoliberalism, austerity and even globalisation as the main root of people’s grievances with the EU,<sup>12</sup> and the right placing a strong emphasis on the protection of borders.<sup>13</sup> Yet, almost all converge on the view that “more Europe” is required; Brexit can be seen as an opportunity to that effect and differentiation is welcome so long as France remains at its core and effective solutions are found: “[Europe] today is too large to allow all of its member

6 See contributions by Brigitte Allain (EELV) in Assemblée Nationale (2016a: 2645, 2653).

7 See contributions by François Asensi (PCF) in the above debate.

8 See contributions by Philippe Gomes (UDI) and François Asensi (PCF) in the above debate.

9 See “Brexit: les réactions politiques en France”, in *Les Echos*, 24 June 2016, <https://www.lesechos.fr/2016/06/brexit-les-reactions-politiques-en-france-210519>.

10 See also, among others, Bruno Le Maire (LR) in the same debate.

11 See also Manuel Valls (PS) in Assemblée Nationale (2016b: 4767-4770).

12 See contributions by Bruno Le Roux (PS), André Chassaigne (PCF) and François De Rugy (PE) in the above debate.

13 See contributions by François Fillon (LR) and Laurent Wauquiez (LR) in the above debate.

states to move forward at the same time. This is why we think that the Eurozone constitutes the most appropriate level of action and that France must take initiatives within it very quickly.”<sup>14</sup>

Even in the discourses of those who prioritise national sovereignty, subsidiarity is called for together with a Europe of “variable geometry” with a strong France leading at the core to prevent disintegration as expressed in the following: “Subsidiarity and variable geometry must prevail in place of the current uniformity. [...] Europe is a place of power where the strong nations impose their rhythm on others. When France is weak, Europe suffers; when it is strong, it drives it.”<sup>15</sup>

## 1.4 PESCO

The data suggests that PESCO, as a specific modality of differentiated integration which was in fact originally a French-driven proposal (together with Germany), is widely supported by the French political elite. It is perceived as a significant response to the need for European “strategic autonomy”, deriving from a Gaullist vision of Europe sitting comfortably with the dominant narrative of French national identity which sets France as an important military power in the EU, yet separate from the US. The French Minister of Defence, Florence Parly (2018), highlights that to affirm its place in the world, “France has to turn to Europe”. In a report prepared and authorised by the Commission of European Affairs in the French National Assembly on European defence and its relations with NATO, it is underlined that the response to multiple global geopolitical challenges facing Europe – such as an assertive Russia, the Syrian civil war, election of Trump to the Presidency in the US and the growing transatlantic rift, as well as international terrorism – “has to be a European one [...] which does not duplicate NATO, but realise[s] the conditions of European strategic autonomy” (Anglade and Pueyo 2018: 2). Yet, PESCO is also seen to be insufficient, where a “truly European defence policy” is needed (Anglade and Pueyo 2018: 22). This is the point at which differentiated integration in the field of defence is further encouraged in, for instance, building common operational capacity, and is explicitly contrasted with the German vision of “inclusivity” (Anglade and Pueyo 2018: 23). This should also be considered in the context of the potential competitive advantage that the French defence industry expects to enjoy in the EU market in the case of further (differentiated) integration in the field of defence. Hence overall, differentiation in the field of defence is seen as key to deepening European identity in the French case, where there is caution expressed with respect to the territorial/geographic limits of differentiation in this field, and hence the widening of European identity through defence initiatives such as PESCO. This is also highlighted by President Macron (2017), who calls explicitly for a “multi speed Europe” in defence, alongside other, policy matters.

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14 Bruno Le Roux (PS) in the above debate. See also contributions by Philip Cordery (PS) in the same debate.

15 François Fillon (LR) in the above debate. See also contributions by Roger-Gerard Schwartzberg (PRG) in the same debate.

French national identity also figures strongly in the way in which French foreign policy priorities are externalised onto the proposed differentiated initiatives in this field such as a stronger focus on Africa and the Mediterranean, where “NATO lacks the experience which France possesses” (Anglade and Pueyo 2018: 34). While there are some objections to the policy content of the proposed initiatives, notably by the far left which contests external power projection,<sup>16</sup> there is general agreement on the need for further differentiation for a stronger defence policy with France in the driving seat.

## 2. Germany and differentiated integration: Self-Identification as “good Europeans” and shifting views on differentiation

In the German political discourse, differentiation has gained an entirely different meaning in the course of the last ten years. Originally, the identity of Germany was tied to its identity as good Europeans who take part in all the advanced forms of integration, and differentiation was understood as useful tool for bypassing the more Eurosceptic member states. The mantra that differentiation begets more differentiation also meant that the increasingly different speeds of integration were understood as natural and not harmful. If this logic was ever challenged, it was only on the question of how the decisions about further differentiation should be reached and whether actions taken outside the framework of EU treaties were permissible. With the migration crisis and even more strongly with Brexit, the stress on differentiation was replaced with solidarity and unity as the central notions. German self-understanding as good Europeans suddenly meant not advancing the integration process as quickly as possible, without giving much attention to the laggards. Instead, the danger of the EU’s fragmentation and break-up became an oft-discussed possibility. Differentiation thus became a sensitive topic. The paradigmatic change was that divergence had to be replaced with convergence, listening and unity. As the analysis of the German discourses surrounding PESCO attests, even when differentiated integration takes place, it is re-interpreted as steps leading to more unity and the EU speaking with one voice.

As far as the three dimensions related to differentiation are concerned, i.e., widening, deepening and disintegration, only two come into play in Germany. It is widening that is entirely left out and the discussion about differentiation thus oscillates only on the axis from deepening to (the concerns about possible) disintegration. While originally, with the fiscal compact, differentiation was still seen as preferable, with the migration crisis and the case of Brexit the fear that disintegration might be imminent became the strongest factor and the extent of suitable differentiation started to be measured by the degree to which it contributes to or prevents the fragmentation of the EU. The same logic is also visible in terms of how European identity is conceived: A shift

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16 See, among others, contributions by André Chassaigne (PCF) in Assemblée Nationale (2018).

has taken place from seeing the more deeply integrated as the true Europeans, to a more inclusive understanding of European identity. Differentiation thus partly loses its normative status and instead becomes a pragmatic tool for accommodating differences among EU member states.

## 2.1 Fiscal Compact

In the German case, the fiscal compact and the preceding crisis are strong examples of how identity and differentiation are linked. However, there is not one simple narrative that would derive the German attitude towards the fiscal compact from German identity. Rather, German identity is layered, with deeper elements of this identity shared across the political spectrum. Disagreements exist but they are linked to more superficial differences of how German identity should be enacted in each particular case.

Hence, the near consensually shared framing of the German position is based on the understanding that Germany is a thrifty state that always pays its debts and expects others to do so as well. The underlying tenor is well captured by the argument of State Secretary Steffen Kampeter: “More debts produce less trust and decreased trust only produces more problems” (Deutscher Bundestag 2012a: 18890-18892). This basic paradigm is almost never challenged in the German political discourse. Hence, any argument in favour of further differentiation (in particular in the field of monetary integration) has to be shaped in such a way as to make it compatible with this overall understanding of the German role.

However, sharp differences among political actors emerge once the question arises whether this German position can be imposed on other EU member states. As SPD’s Klaus Barthel argued, the argument about frugality (which is not doubted) hides a different policy, that of austerity (Deutscher Bundestag 2012b: 22242-43). Once austerity comes into play, the consensus about Germany’s preferred political course entirely disappears. Being frugal is fine as this is part of German identity; imposing austerity measures on others, however, is unacceptable for the opposition as it sharply deviates from what Germany is and what it should be. This is expressed succinctly in: “Madame Merkel acts as if the whole Europe spoke German” (Deutscher Bundestag 2012b: 22242).

Monetary differentiation is thus generally conceived as the appropriate course, and broad agreement also exists as far as further differentiation in the field is concerned. As both Chancellor Merkel and Foreign Minister Westerwelle claim, “Everybody will understand that the countries which are linked through a common currency, will also have to continue working more closely” (Merkel 2012, Traynor 2012), leading to a political union (Westerwelle 2012). How this can be achieved, however, depends on particular party-related narratives: For the right, the German identity of a thrifty manager, who is in a sense responsible for the EU as a whole, trumps the worry about excessive assertiveness; for the left, differentiated integration can successfully continue only if the decision to move forward is taken in the right communitarian way, without bypassing EU treaties as was the case with the fiscal compact.

## 2.2 Migration crisis

In the German political discourse, the lesson from the Eurozone crisis was that differentiation is a good thing as it allows for a flexible reaction to the problems European integration may be facing. However, starting with the migration crisis, differentiation began to be treated in a more cautious manner as the worry emerged that differentiation may lead to fragmentation. This seemed to be confirmed by the subsequent development, Brexit, which thus led to a radical reassessment of differentiation and what it meant for German identity. Differentiation, if approached appropriately, could be readily accommodated within the German self-understanding as a thrifty manager. However, once the framing of differentiation as fragmentation gained the upper hand, it began to clash with an even deeper self-interpretation of Germany as constructively European.

Consequently, the EU ceases to be treated as an increasingly differentiated cluster of various member states, but instead becomes a single whole. This whole sometimes takes on the disguise of a “value Union”<sup>17</sup> or a unified, economically powerful actor.<sup>18</sup> The narrative of the EU as a whole is further reinforced by the stress on the protection of EU external borders which, according to the Foreign Minister, has become the cornerstone of the policy (Steinmeier 2016b). In the end, differentiation is entirely pushed into the background. Solidarity becomes the new keyword, which is seen as antithetical to differentiation and to selective participation.

This turn towards solidarity is in itself more or less undisputed. What is, however, heavily contested is the question of whether the EU–Turkey migration statement is a step in the right direction. First, the question of whether Turkish President Erdoğan was in fact blackmailing the EU while violating human rights in the country is often discussed.<sup>19</sup> Second, the question of the extent of solidarity is also often disputed in the German political discourse. Solidarity within does not necessarily translate into solidarity with the refugees or with the democratic forces in Turkey.<sup>20</sup> To sum up, although the critique of the EU–Turkey statement is loud and multifaceted, solidarity (however defined) remains the central topos in the debates. As a consequence, differentiation starts to be seen as at odds with the identity of Germany as a pro-European, constructive and refugee-welcoming country.

## 2.3 Brexit

As important as both the Eurozone crisis as well as the refugee crisis were for the reconstruction of German identity, Brexit constituted the single biggest shift in the way Germany perceived itself within the broader integration context. Correspondingly, for

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17 Jan Korte (Die Linke) in Deutscher Bundestag (2016a: 16735-36).

18 See Andrea Lindholz (CDU/CSU) in the above debate.

19 See Sevim Dağdelen (Die Linke) and Katrin Göring-Eckardt (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) in Deutscher Bundestag, (2016c).

20 See Claudia Roth (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) in the above debate.

months Brexit dominated the German debates on the future shape of the European Union.

The lesson was unambiguous: Germany's identity is European<sup>21</sup> to such an extent that "the EU is deeply connected to the DNA of the post-war Germany" (Kornelius 2016). But this identity was shaken. Hence, the lesson is that Europe (i.e., EU 27) has to stick together. Focusing on the "core Europe" (*Kerneuropa*) would be a terrible mistake,<sup>22</sup> as this would drive further wedges among Europeans. As the Vice-President of the German Bundestag Thomas Oppermann claimed, "in the long term, Germans will be doing fine when Europe is doing fine. For that reason, let us fight for a better, stronger Europe and let us work together" (Deutscher Bundestag 2016b: 17889).

At the same time, the voices in the governing party stressed that after Brexit, Germans must come to terms with the fact that the EU is a conglomerate of national identities and those must be respected.<sup>23</sup> Before Brexit, differentiation was understood normatively as enacted by the more advanced, and thus taking integration steps ahead of others was seen in a more positive light. After Brexit, however, this attitude became the target of a sharp critique. Even those arguing in favour of differentiation, such as Foreign Minister Steinmeier (2016a), argued that "we want to ensure that the others are not seen as bad Europeans just because they want to proceed more slowly". Hence, the time after Brexit is not a time "to take any big gambles", the goal is instead "to hold Europe together" (Steinmeier 2016a). Federal President Gauck (2016) went as far as claiming that this goal is so important that even "a break" in accelerating integration would be welcome. Similarly, when the Foreign Minister took part in the talks among the six founding members just two days after the referendum, this step was sharply criticised because of its exclusive nature, as "this divides Europe" instead of uniting it (Friedrich 2016).

Differentiation thus gains much more ambivalent overtones than before. Instead of differentiation, flexibility is broadly seen as the way forward, combined with attention to national and regional differences in the way the EU is understood. Differentiation is not any longer an instrument of the more advanced in the EU, but to the contrary, a way of keeping the Union together with all its differences.

## 2.4 PESCO

The new understanding of differentiation became a central point in the subsequent political framing of Permanent Structured Cooperation. Even though PESCO is a clear example of differentiated integration, neither the government nor the opposition drew sustained attention to it. In fact, the government as well as many CDU-CSU deputies very often directly denied the differentiated nature of PESCO, arguing instead that PESCO is a tool through which the EU could speak and act in a unified matter. This

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21 See Göring-Eckardt in Deutscher Bundestag (2016b).

22 See Dietmar Bartsch (Die Linke) in Deutscher Bundestag (2016b: 17886).

23 See Elisabeth Motschmann (CDU/CSU) and Christoph Bergner (CDU/CSU) in Deutscher Bundestag (2016d).



was facilitated by Brexit but it was still striking how the non-participating member states were entirely absent from the political debates, using the argument that 25 member states involved in PESCO was what one “could not dream of”.<sup>24</sup>

Hence, Chancellor Angela Merkel argued that PESCO will allow “Europe” to act decisively, “further strengthening the security and defense policy” (Deutscher Bundestag 2018: 1078). Deputy Henning Otte saw in PESCO a better coordination of the EU’s external policy (Deutscher Bundestag 2017c: 239). Others, such as State Secretary Michael Roth, stressed explicitly that PESCO would make the European Union “speak with one voice in the field of external security as well as defence policies” (Deutscher Bundestag 2017f: 339). The logical consequence of this refusal to see PESCO as differentiated integration was the enthusiastic talk about the expected emergence of a “defence union”: as FDP’s Deputy Alexander Graf Lambsdorff claimed, PESCO would guarantee that “common European defense projects will take place [...] the shift towards a European defense union must succeed now” (Deutscher Bundestag 2017e: 47).

While the reinterpretation of PESCO as a common policy of the entire EU was rendered possible by the British exit from the EU, the changing relation to the United States was even more instrumental here. Hence, German Foreign Minister Gabriel not only hailed PESCO as a milestone in European integration, but also argued that it constituted a big step towards “European independence” (German Federal Foreign Office 2017). Similar arguments in which the alleged European unity in external and security issues was posited against the insecurity of the transatlantic relations were also discussed in the media.<sup>25</sup>

Even the opposition did not primarily focus on the growing differentiation, and thus the increasing gap between the participating and non-participating member states. Instead, the main critique from the left side of the political spectrum (mainly Die Linke, but also the Greens) pointed to the danger of a militarisation of EU foreign policy (Deutscher Bundestag 2017b). Paradoxically, this critique shared the assumption that PESCO represents an overall trend in the EU, not just a process of differentiation. Only seldom did the critical voices mention that fact that PESCO would lead to a “military core Europe” that would marginalise both the non-participating member states as well as those who would decide to leave at a later stage (Deutscher Bundestag 2017a).

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24 Jürgen Hardt (CDU/CSU) in Deutscher Bundestag (2017d: 255).

25 See for instance “EU-Minister beschließen militärische Zusammenarbeit”, in *Zeit Online*, 11 December 2017, <https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2017-12/verteidigungsunion-eu-aussenministertreffen-militaerische-zusammenarbeit>.



### 3. Czech Republic and differentiated integration: Should we stay behind or go along?

Our study suggests that there is a significant difference in the intensity of the responses to the four cases of differentiated integration in the Czech Republic. The politicisation of and polarisation regarding differentiated integration is the most intense concerning the fiscal compact and to a lesser extent the migration crisis. Four main interrelated factors can help account for the Czech position towards differentiated integration. The first is related to the fact that the Czech Republic is a country with a deep-rooted identity-based Euroscepticism. This Euroscepticism is partly related to the difficult history of Czech lands and negative experience with “higher” political centres (Vienna during the Habsburg and Moscow during the communist era), and to the connected concept of “Czech smallness”. Such a national identity conception provides an important source of Czech Euroscepticism whereby EU membership is seen as a marriage of convenience, involuntary but inevitable. This rather general Eurosceptic approach towards European integration means, in particular, that the Czech are somewhat cautious about attempts to deepen (political) integration. A second and related factor is that integration in the field of core state powers (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2016, Rittberger et al. 2013) is generally viewed with scepticism, and when differentiated integration concerns core state powers and national sovereignty, most, albeit not all, political actors in Czechia reject it.

The third factor is that this longstanding reserved position towards deepening of European (political) integration co-constituted Czech identity where the Czechs feel that they are perceived by the other member states as negative troublemakers who are blocking advancement of integration and who only know what they do not want but are unable to come up with a proactive, constructive vision of integration in particular policy fields. The final factor stems from Czech economic dependence on the existence of the single market. In the eyes of the less Eurosceptic actors, this constitutes an identity whereby the Czech Republic needs to belong among the “core” member states. In other words, Czechs need to demonstrate their belonging to the core, avoid becoming second-class members subject to decisions made by the core without their participation, and get rid of the ascribed identity as troublemakers by joining initiatives of differentiated integration.

Hence the relationship between differentiation and European identity along the three dimensions of deepening, dilution and widening is also not so clear-cut in the Czech case. Even within the one country all three dimensions of how differentiation relates to European identity are present. In the case of PESCO, the fiscal compact and partially the migration crisis, differentiation is seen as contributing to European identity. In the case of PESCO and the migration crisis, differentiation also showcases the limits of European identity. In contrast, the case of Brexit clearly shows that differentiation can be seen as potentially causing a dilution of European identity and leading to disintegration.

In what follows, we discuss the discursive representations of each of the four selected cases of differentiated integration in the Czech discourse as they relate to narratives of national identity and visions of European integration.

## 3.1 Fiscal Compact

The fiscal compact<sup>26</sup> is the most politicised initiative of differentiated integration in the Czech case. The debate is also clearly the most polarised one, following the cleavage between the clearly Eurosceptic (ODS, government and the president) and the less Eurosceptic, or even EU-optimist, actors (opposition, ČSSD, TOP 09). There are two main strands of the debate in terms of its relation towards national identity. The first is represented by the senior government partner, the Eurosceptic ODS and the then president Václav Klaus. It departs from the identity of the Czech Republic as a country that is proud of its currency and sceptical towards integration of core state powers, including in the field of monetary and fiscal policy. For this reason, the fiscal compact is rejected as an excessive intervention into national sovereignty in fiscal policy and the government therefore supports differentiated integration as a means to not participate. The following excerpt approximates this strand of the debate:

Thank god for flexible geometry in the EU! Do we really want to have completely unified EU where everything is identical and where diversity of interests, traditions, political opinions and historical development in individual member states is not taken into account? [...] To be sure, the club that slowly tends to have 30 members cannot operate without flexible geometry, unless it wants to progressively transform in a degenerative way into basically a unified superstate. I do not want such a Europe. I want to say that the government of the Czech Republic under my leadership makes steps [towards fiscal responsibility] regardless of the existence of any intergovernmental treaty [fiscal compact]. We do not have to be pressured towards it by a similar treaty. (Czech Chamber of Deputies 2011: 552)<sup>27</sup>

The excerpt above is a common example of how fiscal compact and integration in core state powers are rejected based on a specific reading of Czech identity. The Czech government also rejected institutionalisation of the fiscal compact in EU law because it was afraid that it would later be made to join. At the same time, differentiation was supported in order for the Czech Republic to assume a position of cooperative actor which supports integration of “the others” while itself staying outside. As such, it would send a signal to the other member states that Czechia does not want to prevent others from moving forward and by doing so (re)constitute

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26 Under the ODS-led government, Czechia following the UK in 2012 blocked the adoption of the fiscal compact within the EU legal framework and later decided not to ratify the intergovernmental treaty. The new ČSSD-led government later decided that Czechia should ratify the compact, which eventually happened in late 2018. In the meantime, Czechia adopted its own “fiscal constitution” that basically mirrored the fiscal compact.

27 Speech by the Prime Minister Petr Nečas at the plenary meeting of the Chamber of Deputies. For similar arguments see, for instance: Vondra (2012, 2011), Nečas (2012), Klaus (2011).

its identity of a constructive actor.

The other strand of the debate departs from a different perspective. Although Czech identity is based on scepticism towards integration in sovereignty-sensitive areas, it should participate in specific differentiated integration initiatives such as the fiscal compact in order to (re)constitute its identity as a credible, constructive partner and a member state belonging to the integration core, not only because of its economic dependence on this core. Not participating in the fiscal compact would relegate Czechia to a second-class member state status and cast it as a troublemaker vis-à-vis the other member states. The following quote illustrates this strand:

Nevertheless this text [fiscal compact] in my view did not give reasons to state that there is a crossroads towards fiscal union and we need to stay away from it. It is simply part of a train journey, a journey that we are already members of, a train that we have already joined, thus committed ourselves to participate on this journey. [...] We have a commitment to work on that. And we cannot react to the decision of a majority of member states to move forward by putting a spoke in a wheel. That is simply a behaviour that does not belong into a society that has a certain culture of demeanour. [... Our refusal] to participate makes us an unintelligible and obscure partner and creates a feeling that we simply do not trust the Union and that we envisage that by being aside we will not face serious consequences. (Czech Chamber of Deputies 2012: 648)<sup>28</sup>

In the Czech discourse on the fiscal compact, differentiation is seen as contributing to and preserving the European identity (deepening), at least in the first strand of the debate represented by the Eurosceptic ODS and former president Václav Klaus. The second strand of the debate does not relate to European identity much. When it does, it also sees differentiation as contributing to European identity with the main difference that Czechia should take part in this mechanism of differentiated integration.

## 3.2 Migration crisis

The migration crisis, the EU–Turkey Statement and in particular the relocation mechanism were among the most politicised EU issues in the Czech discourse over its entire membership period. However, the debate surrounding the migration crisis and possible differentiated integration exhibited a very low level of politicisation as practically all political actors were in agreement. Migration and asylum are basically viewed as threatening to Czech identity, culture and social cohesion due to the different religious and cultural backgrounds of migrants and asylum-seekers.

In the eyes of the majority, migrants and asylum-seekers should either be stopped from entering the EU or at least be forced to avoid the Czech Republic. Differentiation

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28 Speech of the vice chairman Lubomír Zaorálek at the plenary meeting of the Chamber of Deputies. Similar arguments appeared widely also in the media discourse. See, for instance: Houska (2012c), Sedláček (2011), Houska (2012b), Houska (2012a).

and its relation to national and European identity is therefore less present in the Czech discourse on the migration crisis and the EU–Turkey statement, compared to the case of the fiscal compact, and externalisation of the EU’s migration policy is the most preferred policy option. Intra-EU solidarity expressed by burden sharing was also shunned for risking disunity among member states. Czechia voted against the temporary relocation scheme of September 2015, seeing the scheme as an instrument of fragmentation. Political actors used identity-based arguments on the incompatibility of migrants and refugees, in particular from the MENA region, with Czech society.

Czech identity as sceptical towards integration of core state powers, such as immigration and asylum policy, also played a role. To avoid fragmentation based on enforced relocations, political actors supported a particular kind of differentiated integration. This specific kind of differentiation was dubbed as flexible solidarity. Flexible solidarity as a form of differentiation was promoted in order to not have to participate in a specific initiative (the relocation scheme) while not preventing others from doing so, again in a bid to assume the identity of a constructive actor. Whereas the relocation scheme infringed on Czech sovereignty, flexible solidarity allowed for differentiated solidarity without compromising identity and sovereignty. This strategy was particularly important given that one of the debated responses of some western EU member states to the refusal of Czechia and others to relocate refugees on the basis of the relocation scheme was to create a mini-Schengen to which troublemakers would not be invited. This would not only clearly undermine Czech interests since Czechs value freedom of movement, but also the desired identity of Czechia as a fully fledged member state and country belonging to the integration core.<sup>29</sup>

Hence regarding the relationship between differentiation and European identity, during the migration crisis and in particular after the proposal to establish a relocation mechanism, it was clear that if there was no differentiation in terms of how solidarity can be expressed then the migration crisis would lead to a dilution of European identity (disintegration). At the same time, the Czech discourse also showed clear territorial, geographical, cultural and religious limits to European identity (widening) as Czechia strictly rejected hosting non-Christian immigrants and refugees, including through the divisive relocation mechanism.

### 3.3 Brexit

Brexit has attracted high visibility in the Czech discourse. The identity of the Czech Republic as a country presumably belonging to the integration core as well as a country sceptic towards integration in sovereignty-sensitive policy fields was directly challenged by Brexit. First, Czech actors were afraid that Brexit could lead to differentiation within the EU based on eurozone vs. non-eurozone lines. Secondly, such differentiation would produce centrifugal forces affecting the presumed Czech

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29 As argued, for instance, by the minister of foreign affairs Lubomír Zaorálek (2016). See also: Ehl (2016b), Marjanovič (2016), Bydžovská (2017), Kulidakis (2016a), speech by the prime minister Bohuslav Sobotka at the plenary meeting of the Chamber of Deputies (2016b: 529-535).

belonging to the integration core. Czechia as a small and economically dependent state, however, needs to belong to the core. Hence post-Brexit differentiation and division in the EU was overwhelmingly rejected in the Czech debate; differentiation is to be allowed only if it strengthens the EU, not if it drives it apart. Integration may be based on more flexibility but not two-speed Europe that would create first- and second-class member states, as expressed in the following:<sup>30</sup>

There is a view that integration is not sustainable in the current form for 28 member states with different political culture and history. And that it would need to narrow down the EU to the core, for instance based on Germany, France and couple others, and the periphery where Czechia would belong. (Marjanovič 2016)

But if the EU's core, relieved of the insular weight, unites around the idea of more political integration, it would be a serious challenge for the countries which do not want more integration and would thus sit on the periphery. (Pehe 2016a)

Brexit was thus another instance of differentiation potentially causing a dilution to European identity by presumably creating a two-tier membership (disintegration). Differentiation after Brexit is only to be allowed if it contributes to European identity by providing flexibility while at the same time respecting needs of all member states.

### 3.4 PESCO

The debate surrounding PESCO exhibits similarities to the debate on Brexit. The extent of politicisation of PESCO was also low and so was the level of polarisation. What is different from the Brexit debate is that practically all actors support differentiation in the field of defence. Three main identity-related factors account for the across-the-board support for differentiation in this area. The first is the Czech self-perception as well the alleged perception of Czechia by other member states as a reactive, or even destructive, troublemaker without a clear vision of what it wants to achieve in the EU. Against this backdrop, the support for PESCO was promoted as an instrument of providing a positive vision for European integration and to (re)constitute its identity as a first-class member state belonging to the integration core.

The second factor is related to the timing of the proposal to step up cooperation in defence even at the cost of using means of differentiated integration. Czechia never openly promoted such cooperation before the migration crisis, even though the Lisbon Treaty opened an avenue for enhanced cooperation in defence. As the migration crisis was clearly perceived as threatening Czech identity (see above) by undermining its cultural and religious homogeneity and social cohesion, it enabled open support for deeper cooperation in defence. In light of the migration crisis, political actors argued that the EU needs to deliver in the fields where citizens require

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30 See also, among others: Ehl (2016a), Kulidakis (2016b), Pehe (2016b), speeches by Petr Fiala, Jan Hamáček, Karel Fiedler and Leo Luzar at the plenary meeting of the Chamber of Deputies (2016a), Speeches by Bohuslav Sobotka and Milan Štěch at the plenary meeting of the Senate (2016).

it to. Fortifying the EU against the “migration threat” by stepping up cooperation in defence was claimed to be the exact example of such a field where the EU should deliver. More effective cooperation in defence could be used to protect the EU external borders, to combat migrant smuggling or even to stabilise countries of origin of migration.

The final factor pertains to Czech scepticism towards integration of core state powers in fields such as defence. Politicians argued that integration in defence cannot lead to the creation of a common EU army or any other form of infringement of national sovereignty in defence. Instead, the aim of enhanced cooperation in defence needs to improve capabilities, capitalise on economies of scale and make defence spending more effective without infringing on national sovereignty. The following quotations are typical examples of these three factors at work in the Czech debate:<sup>31</sup>

Strengthening security and defence of the EU are crucial for the future development of Europe. It was the Czech Republic who started the debate about strengthening defence and security, together with other countries. The Czech Republic is heading to the core of European integration thanks to its active approach towards defence and security. (Sobotka quoted in Government Media Centre 2017)

My government managed to change the image of the Czech Republic in the EU vis-a-vis its partners. In the past, we were perceived as a partner with unintelligible opinions. We are a strong representative of Central Europe thanks to the pro-European policy of my government. We have a clear vision; we speak with a loud voice and Europe takes us seriously. (Bydžovská 2017)

The case of PESCO and differentiation in the Czech discourse is a clear case of differentiation contributing to and preserving European identity (deepening). By launching differentiation in defence, European identity will be strengthened by delivering what the citizens of the EU want and thus by providing the feeling of unity and safety. At the same time, by fortifying the EU against the “migration threat” through deeper cooperation in defence and security matters, the Czech discourse on differentiation again highlighted the territorial, geographical, cultural and religious limits of European identity (widening) by linking it to the defence against migration from the wider Middle East.

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31 Other examples include: Sobotka (2017b), Kulidakis (2017), Minister of Defence Martin Stropnický quoted in “Evropa musí dokázat zajistit svoji bezpečnost, znělo na pražské obranné konferenci” [Europe must be able to ensure its security, was stated at the Prague Defence Conference], in *Česká televize*, 9 June 2017, <https://ct24.ceskatelivize.cz/domaci/2146089-evropa-musi-dokazat-zajistit-svoji-bezpecnost-znelo-na-prazske-obranne-konferenci>; Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Jakub Dürř quoted in Denková (2017), Bydžovská (2017), Sobotka (2017a).



## 4. Turkey and differentiated integration: Polarised national identities and differentiation

In the case of Turkey, similar to the Czech case, there is a marked difference in the intensity of responses to the four instances of differentiated integration. While Brexit and the migration crisis seem to have raised substantive discussions in political discourses and the media, PESCO and the fiscal compact are found to garner relatively little attention from these circles. The analysis suggests that this could be attributed to two factors. One is related to the way in which PESCO, when mentioned, is attributed little significance in the eyes of the Turkish policy makers, given the continuing primacy of NATO in the collective defence of the region. The second factor is bound up with the idea that those initiatives like PESCO and the fiscal compact which primarily concern the member states and soon-to-be-member candidates are perceived by Turkish policy makers as of little relevance to Turkey, which is a officially a candidate country negotiating accession but with little credible prospect of joining the EU in the foreseeable future. Since Turkey is the only candidate country across our country cases, this suggests that candidate countries with no immediate prospects of membership may be more vocal on steps towards further differentiation within the EU when and if they perceive a short-term immediate impact from differentiation.

In the Turkish case, each instance of differentiation (with the exception of PESCO where there is very limited data) is overwhelmingly perceived by the government and the pro-government circles as a case of further disintegration within the EU, whereas for the main opposition, this is mainly the case for the migration crisis. For the Turkish main opposition, Brexit even provides a potential for the territorial/geographic widening of the European project and identity by creating alternative paths to, but not excluding the prospect of, membership for a country like Turkey.

The following subsections will discuss how each selected case of differentiation has been discursively represented by Turkish policy makers and in the media discourse, in relation to national identity narratives and articulations of Europe. We find in particular that polarised national identities in today's Turkey, between the pro- and the anti-Western camps, play a key role in the articulation of different policy positions concerning differentiated integration.

### 4.1 Fiscal Compact

Although the EU debates on the fiscal compact are rarely taken up in the Turkish discourse, the analysis suggests that when the issue is mentioned, it is mostly used to lend support to the broader national identity narrative of the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP), which stipulates that Turkey is superior to Europe and thus functions better than Europe in every policy area including the economy (see Aydın-Düzgüt 2016), as in the following contribution from the spokesman of the AKP in the Turkish Parliament:



Today, many EU member states have given up in the face of the global crisis, and some countries are facing bankruptcy. The future of these countries where social explosions are incurred and governments are replaced by technocratic governments, are surrounded by dark clouds...While all this is happening, Turkey with its economy, stability and strong leadership is standing tall. If you ask anyone in Europe today whether they would prefer to live in Turkey or in Europe, most people will probably say "Turkey". [...] The Eurozone is asking for IMF support. Do you see this? It was Turkey who asked for IMF support in the past. [...] This is the state of the European Union today. Today, Europe is under [IMF] custody. [...] We are now at a stage at which EU countries are losing the right to prepare their own budgets.<sup>32</sup>

The excerpt above is a standard example of how Turkey is positively represented in AKP discourse in relation to a negatively represented Europe/EU.<sup>33</sup> While Turkey is predicated with active agency and positive evaluative attributes such as "stability" and "strong leadership", Europe/EU and its member states are predicated as passive actors in loss of sovereignty and agency due to the "custody" of the IMF, "technocratic governments" and the loss of budgetary prerogatives, moving towards an uncertain and gloomy future as expressed through the metaphoric expression of "dark clouds". Hence the Eurocrisis and the ensuing economic measures undertaken by the EU, including the fiscal compact, are perceived as emblematic of a diluted and disintegrating Europe. The binary dichotomy of Europe/EU/member states vs. Turkey (also referred to via the deictic "we") is discursively reproduced over economic and governance standards. As can be expected, such narratives persistently exclude accounts on the fragility of the Turkish economy.

While this representation can be interpreted as an extension of the discursive construction of the Turkish national Self against the European Other in overall AKP discourse (Aydın-Düzgüt 2016, 2018) onto the domestic debates on the Eurozone crisis and the fiscal compact, it needs to be highlighted that the opposition contests this discourse, mainly by pointing to the deficiencies of the Turkish economy.<sup>34</sup>

## 4.2 Migration crisis

Despite the fact that the migration crisis in the summer of 2015 ultimately led to the EU–Turkey migration statement, representation of the events surrounding the migration crisis and the ensuing statement in the discourse of the governing AKP have primarily rested on the articulation of Europe/EU as an essentially discriminatory entity as opposed the normatively superior Turkish Self, as demonstrated in the following excerpt from a speech delivered by President Erdoğan:

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32 Contribution by Bülent Gedikli (AKP) to the Parliamentary debate held on 8 December 2011. Parliamentary debates were accessed at <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/tutanaklar.htm>.

33 For similar examples, see also contributions by AKP members of parliament Mehmet Şimşek and Ali Babacan to the same debate.

34 See, for instance, contributions by Hasip Kaplan (People's Democracy Party, HDP) and Muharrem İnce (Republican People's Party, CHP) in the same debate.

European states are panicking in the face of 150-200 thousand refugees knocking on their door in the last months. They are not poorer than us, they are much, much richer than us. Why are you panicking, why did you panic? They have almost been at each other's throats, they even started discussing the future of the EU. [...] While European states are trying to forcefully return and even sink ships and boats which approach their countries from the Mediterranean, we have saved the lives of 65 000 people at sea. [...] Problems in Syria and Iraq will end one day, we have full faith in this. When they do, the only thing that will be remembered will be Turkey's humanitarian posture and the shameful attitude of Western countries. We will continue supporting our brothers then. We come from a civilization in which those who help are the *ensar*,<sup>35</sup> and those who seek that help are the *muhacir*. (Erdoğan 2015a)

In the excerpt above, Turkey is represented as a normative actor by being predicated with a "humanitarian posture" and as "sav[ing] lives" as opposed to Europe/EU negatively represented with predicates such as "shameful" and "sink[ing] ships", thus killing people. Furthermore, this binary and antithetical positioning of Europe and Turkey is essentialised with reference to a fixed (Islamic) "civilisation" to which Turkey belongs and Europe does not. This is discursively made possible by drawing parallels with the time of Prophet Muhammed when he and the first Muslims around him migrated from Mecca to Medine during the early years of Islam. Hence it is Turkey's essentially religious identity which sets it in opposition to Europe, which in other speeches by the President on this topic is also referred to as "Islamophobic"<sup>36</sup> and "insincere"<sup>37</sup> by nature. The reasons for the lack of burden sharing in Europe, even after agreement on the migration statement, is also mainly sought in essentialist factors such as culture and identity which set Europe normatively apart from and inferior to Turkey.<sup>38</sup>

It has been argued elsewhere that one of the key national identity narratives in which the AKP operates and which it attempts to make hegemonic at home is the discursive construction of Turkey and the Turkish Self as superior to the European Other, not only in policy performance (as seen in the debate above on the Eurocrisis and the fiscal compact), but also in normative terms (Aydın-Düzgüt 2016, 2018). It needs to be highlighted that this representation is not new, but has a long legacy in the history of Turkish political Islam dating back to the late Ottoman era. This representation of Turkish identity in relation to Europe is found to strongly infiltrate the pro-government discourse on the lack of burden sharing in the EU on the issue of migration and the externalisation of the EU's migration policy. It can thus also be argued that the lack of a common European response to the migration crisis is in turn utilised by the

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35 The people of Medine who helped Muslims who migrated there during the time of Prophet Muhammed. Please note that "refugee" in Arabic was used to refer to those Muslims who migrated from Mecca to Medine during the first years of Islam.

36 Erdoğan's interview with CNN International. See Anderson (2015).

37 Erdoğan's speech delivered at Turkey's Young Businessmen Confederation. See Erdoğan (2016b).

38 For similar representations in the media and political discourse, see among others Muradoğlu (2015), Erdoğan (2015b); Nurettin Yaşar (AKP) contribution to parliamentary debate on 23 December 2015.

AKP in bolstering its claim to a national identity (in relation to Europe) within Turkey. The fact that most of these articulations are made to a domestic audience helps to strengthen this argument.

While the opposition is observed to share the government's view on the lack of burden sharing in the EU as well as the EU's lack of normative values, and similarly views the lack of a common response as a clear case of disintegration on the part of Europe, its discourse differs from that of the government in two main ways. One is that it refrains from essentialising a normative difference between Turkey and Europe in their responses to the crisis, and even goes further by problematising Turkey's own normativity. The second major difference is seen in the way in which the EU–Turkey statement is problematised by the main opposition not just for bearing the risk of making Turkey “one big external refugee camp” for Europe,<sup>39</sup> but also for the downgrade which it represents for the EU–Turkey relationship.<sup>40</sup> This is understandable, given the dominant pro-European identity which the main opposition in particular adheres to in its representations of Turkey and its future (Balkır and Eylemer 2016).

### 4.3 Brexit

Similar to the debates on migration, the political discussions on the Brexit referendum are also indicative of how polarised national identities in Turkey give way to different interpretations of a single event related to differentiated integration. The pro-government camp in the country represents Brexit as emblematic of the EU's failure and its disintegration, as expressed in the following by the current spokesman of the President, Fahrettin Altun:

This [the referendum] result points not at the EU's crisis, but its exhaustion. Even though the Westerners in Turkey refuse to accept this, the EU project is at the stage of collapse. The political wave created by the far right is reproducing the “fear of barbarian invasion” in social and political areas. In this process, racism, discrimination, Islamophobia are rapidly spreading in today's Europe. (Altun 2016)

Europe/EU in the excerpt above is predicated as “collapsing” and “exhausted”, and this vision is immediately inverted to domestic political debates with reference to “Westerners” indicating those in Turkey who hold pro-European/Western views and are often opposed to the government. Hence Brexit is utilised to lend support to the pro-government camp's claim that the EU is disintegrating. The Brexit debate also emboldens the argument that Europe increasingly suffers from “racism”, “discrimination” and “Islamophobia”. Both government officials and even the main opposition are observed to express several times their concern with the anti-Turkey and the anti-migrant debates which dominated much of Brexit discussions in the UK.<sup>41</sup> President Erdoğan goes one step further and ties the perceived decay of the

39 Elif Doğan Türkmen (CHP) in the above debate, Veli Ağbaba (CHP) contribution to parliamentary debate on 7 January 2016.

40 See Özsoy (HDP) contribution to parliamentary debate on 5 January 2016.

41 See, among others, Toprak and Kaplan (2016), Gülsün Bilgehan (CHP) contribution to

EU to the increased need to find alternatives for Turkey:

I think Brexit has just come about nicely. These things can happen in other states in Europe. There are voices in France, from Italy. [...] Here is the thing: Turkey should feel comfortable. It shouldn't say that it is only the EU that matters to me. [...] For instance I say, why shouldn't Turkey be in the Shanghai Five? (Özcan 2016)

In the excerpt above and elsewhere,<sup>42</sup> Brexit is represented positively by the President for furthering disintegration in the EU and paving the way for alternatives for Turkey. In one instance, he calls for a similar national referendum in Turkey, where the voters would be asked to decide on ending Turkey's EU membership bid (Erdoğan 2016a). Nonetheless, the data also suggests that this discourse is mostly seen in domestic debates, whereas in formal international meetings both Erdoğan and other government officials use a more neutral language or express discontent due to the loss of a country which officially backed Turkey's membership.<sup>43</sup> The fact that the anti-European rhetoric determines mostly the domestic tone of the debate in government discourse can be interpreted as instrumentalisation of Brexit in countering rival and pro-European national identity narratives leading to expressions as in the following:

Concerning the EU, we should stick to our very own process, we need to do whatever our process necessitates. [...] If we see opportunity in a situation in which Europe is dealing with its own domestic troubles and adopt an approach such as "let us also leave Europe", this would only hurt us. We need to leave this approach.<sup>44</sup>

Adopting the membership process for Turkey is equated here with "leaving Europe", which for the segments of the opposition that harbour pro-European sentiments is not an option for Turkey. Elsewhere, pro-European commentators from liberal/secular camps are also found to underline the prospects that further post-Brexit differentiated integration may offer for EU–Turkey relations, but not as a substitute for full membership (see, for instance, Özalp 2016).

## 4.4 PESCO

As indicated above, we find very limited discussion of PESCO in the Turkish context. Among the policies selected for analysis in this paper, this is the one that receives the least attention. Where discussed, it is represented by both pro-government and opposition circles mostly as a weak and inconsequential EU initiative which cannot constitute an alternative to NATO's role in the collective defense of Europe (Çetin 2017, Çeviköz 2017). Both sides seem to agree however that PESCO is a clear signal of the growing rift between Europe and the US, with little reflection on what this may

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parliamentary debate on 28 June 2016, Anadolu Agency (2016).

42 See also, among others, Erdoğan (2016a), Çavuşoğlu (2016).

43 See, for instance, Karakuş (2016).

44 Oğuz Salıcı (CHP) contribution to parliamentary debate on 27 June 2016.

imply for Turkey.<sup>45</sup>

## Conclusion

In this paper, we attempted to unpack the relationship between national/European identity and attitudes towards differentiation in four selected countries (France, Germany, Czech Republic, Turkey) through a critical analysis of discourses produced in response to four select instances of differentiation (fiscal compact, migration crisis, Brexit, PESCO). In turn, we have also aimed to observe how the impact of differentiation on European identity is perceived in these given countries in terms of preserving European identity (deepening), the dilution of European identity (disintegration) and the territorial/geographic limits of European identity (widening).

We have seen that national identity representations can both enable/disable certain policy positions on differentiation as well as being (re)produced/enacted through the policy positions adopted on instances of differentiation. For instance, while the Czech national identity narrative as sceptical of sovereignty delegation in core state powers disables a favourable approach towards the fiscal compact, the Czechs enact their preferred self-ascribed identity of belonging to the core by adopting a favourable approach to initiatives such as PESCO where they do not perceive a threat to national sovereignty. Similarly, we observe that the Turkish government uses most cases of differentiation in the EU to (re)affirm the superior and anti-Western identity which it is trying to make hegemonic at home.

Our study has also shown that attitudes towards differentiation can differ across time as well as across different policy areas, where national identity can serve to delimit policy options available to the political elites. For instance, in the case of Germany, attitudes towards differentiation are observed to take a negative turn particularly after Brexit, where the dictates of the perception of the German Self as the “good Europeans” disable the articulation of favourable attitudes towards any form of differentiation that could potentially lead to the dissolution of the European project. One should also not expect a country to have a uniform position on differentiated integration as a whole, but that attitudes may differ depending on the policy area which is being subject to differentiated integration at the EU level. For instance, in the case of France where differentiation is generally preferred as long as the centrality of France is not challenged, the area of migration – which is politically sensitive and speaks to the core of national identity and cohesion – is where the inclusion of all member states under the banner of solidarity is called for.

We have also demonstrated that there is no single and monolithic national identity discourse within any of these national settings which would produce a uniform attitude towards differentiated integration regardless of the policy area in question. We have found instead the presence of competing domestic national identity narratives

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45 Ömer Çelik (AKP Minister for Europe) contribution to parliamentary debate on 18 December 2017.

with the potential to produce differing attitudes within a state on differentiated integration. While contesting national identities leading to starkly differing opinions on differentiation are less visible in the cases of France and Germany, they are particularly strong in settings such as the Czech Republic and especially Turkey where the level of identity-based polarisation is very high.

Finally, concerning the impact of differentiation on deepening, disintegration and widening of Europe and European identity, we have found that the perceived implications in each country case vary considerably depending on the policy area in question. While in the cases of France, Germany and the Czech Republic, the discussions range from deepening to disintegration with little mention of widening, in the Turkish case, Brexit in particular is discussed by the main opposition as a potential opportunity to widen Europe through leading to novel ways of external engagement with the EU. We have also seen that the nature of the policy area has a bearing on how differentiated integration is viewed to impact on European identity in our country cases. In cases where concrete outcomes of internal differentiation were reached (fiscal compact and PESCO), differentiation was generally welcome and viewed as a boost to European identity in three of the countries but not for the Turkish government, which generally represents steps towards differentiation as indicating weakness and disintegration in the EU. The exit of Britain from the EU, on the other hand, was commonly perceived as a potential step towards dilution and disintegration in all four cases, with the exception of the Turkish main opposition which saw an opportunity in it for widening to Turkey. In the case of Germany, the fear was strong enough to lead to a paradigmatic shift on differentiation which was influential in Germany's insistence on inclusivity in the case of PESCO. Finally, the migration crisis where the lack of any form of formal differentiation ultimately led to the EU–Turkey statement was also largely feared in France and Germany for the prospect of disintegration that it heralded, whereas a similar view was not observed in the Czech discourse where differentiation was to some extent welcome and seen by some as an opportunity to deepen European identity by the closing of European borders – demonstrating once again the significance of the “national” on how differentiation is expected to affect the future of European integration and European identity.



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EU Integration and Differentiation  
for Effectiveness and Accountability

**Differentiation has become the new normal in the European Union (EU)** and one of the most crucial matters in defining its future. A certain degree of differentiation has always been part of the European integration project since its early days. The Eurozone and the Schengen area have further consolidated this trend into long-term projects of differentiated integration among EU Member States.

A number of unprecedented internal and external challenges to the EU, however, including the financial and economic crisis, the migration phenomenon, renewed geopolitical tensions and Brexit, have reinforced today the belief that **more flexibility is needed within the complex EU machinery**. A Permanent Structured Cooperation, for example, has been launched in the field of defence, enabling groups of willing and able Member States to join forces through new, flexible arrangements. Differentiation could offer a way forward also in many other key policy fields within the Union, where uniformity is undesirable or unattainable, as well as in the design of EU external action within an increasingly unstable global environment, offering manifold models of cooperation between the EU and candidate countries, potential accession countries and associated third countries.

EU IDEA's key goal is to address **whether, how much and what form of differentiation is not only compatible with, but is also conducive to a more effective, cohesive and democratic EU**. The basic claim of the project is that differentiation is not only necessary to address current challenges more effectively, by making the Union more resilient and responsive to citizens. Differentiation is also desirable as long as such flexibility is compatible with the core principles of the EU's constitutionalism and identity, sustainable in terms of governance, and acceptable to EU citizens, Member States and affected third partners.



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