

Contemporary Security Policy

Differentiated cooperation as the mode of governance in EU foreign policy

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Abstract:	<p>While the standard conceptualization of differentiation in the European Union (EU) focuses on differentiated integration, scholars devote less attention to differentiated cooperation. This article argues, on the contrary, that member states' engagement in differentiated efforts in EU foreign policy manifest themselves both in the form of differentiated integration and cooperation. It elaborates an original conceptual framework for exploring differentiated cooperation as a mode of governance. Drawing on the articles in this special issue, this introduction maps empirical manifestations of differentiated cooperation in various areas and dimensions of EU foreign policy. The results of the special issue show that differentiated cooperation has mostly manifested itself in informal patterns of cooperation, with the treaty-based mechanisms being limited. As such, the special issue reflects the differentiation and informalization processes occurring not only in the EU, but also in global governance more broadly.</p>
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58 **Abstract**
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1 While the standard conceptualization of differentiation in the European Union (EU) focuses on
2 differentiated integration, scholars devote less attention to differentiated cooperation. This article
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27 **Keywords:** Differentiated integration; Differentiated cooperation, EU foreign policy; Informal
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29 governance; fragmentation
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Notes on contributor (max 150 words)

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1 While the multiple crises faced by the EU, both at European level and within the member states, over
2 the last decade have recurrently challenged the process of European integration and the European
3 Union (EU) (Fabbrini & Schmidt, 2019; Laffan, 2016), the 2016 decision of the United Kingdom to
4 leave the EU sparked a resurgence of research interest in the issue of differentiation. Differentiation is
5 not a phenomenon occurring only in the EU context. Conceived as an “arrangement in which one or
6 more constituent units opt out of a common policy” (Hooghe & Marks, 2022, p.1), differentiation can
7 occur in any system of governance. Non-central governments recurrently form coalitions in federal
8 regimes. Ad hoc coalitions are also frequent in international organizations (Karlsrud & Reykers, 2020).
9 As EU governance features multiple forms of diversity, differentiation has been largely considered as
10 a qualifying characteristic of the processes of European integration and disintegration (Leuffen et al.,
11 2022; Schimmelfennig et al., 2022; Trondal et al., 2022). Indeed, scholars increasingly considered it
12 as being the “system property of the EU’s institutional polyarchic architecture” (Trondal et al., 2022).
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14 Among other domains, foreign policy is the epitome of the unfolding of differentiation in the EU.
15 Differentiation has accompanied the development of this policy since its inception (Henökl, 2022).
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17 Despite the centralization of member states’ foreign policies introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon
18 (Amadio Viceré et al., 2020; Wessel, 2022), EU foreign policy has remained predominantly dependent
19 on distinctively different national priorities (Meijer & Brooks, 2021). Furthermore, institutional
20 practices in this policy domain have also grown more and more differentiated over the past decade
21 (Alcaro, 2018; Alcaro & Siddi, 2021; Bátorá, 2021; Blockmans & Crosson, 2022; Grevi et al., 2020;
22 Martill & Sus, 2022; Sitter, 2021). The occurrence of “patchwork patterns of cooperation” among
23 member states suggests a fragmentation of the EU foreign policy (Balfour, 2015). In doing so, it casts
24 a shadow on the attempts to further centralize member states’ foreign policies, and thus foster the
25 integration of their key sovereign functions (Genschel & Jachtenfuchs, 2013). Assuming that further
26 centralization of the member states’ foreign policies enhances the Union’s ability to effectively defend
27 its interests and values, any progress in this regard is of importance given the progressive deterioration
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1 of Europe's security environment. Indeed, the security crisis of the recent decade (Sus & Hadeed,
2 2020), and most notably the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, have prompted the EU to assert its
3 geopolitical ambitions and to seek strategic autonomy (Borrell, 2020; Helwig & Sinkkonen, 2022).
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7 To offer a comprehensive assessment of differentiated practices in EU foreign policy, this special issue
8 puts into question the conventional understanding of differentiation, which has focused predominantly
9 on manifestations of differentiated integration (DI). We propose a new conceptual lens which
10 conceives member states' engagement to differentiated efforts in EU foreign policy as manifestations
11 of both DI and of differentiated cooperation (DC). As explained in detail in the next section of the
12 article, DI and DC differ on three main dimensions: the autonomy of EU institutions, based on member
13 states' formal mandate to them; behavioral norms, such as the adoption of deliberation and consensus-
14 seeking practices rather than bargaining; and functioning logic, which can rely either on voluntary
15 policy coordination or on legally binding act (Amadio Viceré, 2020; Schimmelfennig, 2015).
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32 In this special issue, we consciously devote special consideration to the occurrence of DC, which
33 remains largely uncharted territory. Specifically, we define DC as any institutional arrangement that
34 allows EU member states to work together in a non-uniform manner, in which EU institutions do not
35 enjoy discretionary power, member states engage in consensus-seeking, and integration proceeds
36 through voluntary policy coordination. In practice, similarly to instrumental differentiated integration,
37 differentiated cooperation consists of sub-groups of member states recurrently interacting in specific
38 policy domains, such as foreign policy (Bátora & Fossum, 2019). At the same time, it is a form of
39 cooperation, rather than integration. In DC, in fact, interactions in the sub-groups of member states do
40 not proceed through law, but through voluntary policy coordination between national leaders
41 (Fabbrini, 2013). The institutional practices underpinning such interactions can be both formal and
42 informal. At the same time, they can occur both in the internal and external dimensions of EU
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1 There are multiple empirical examples in the field of EU foreign policy that illustrate practices of DC,
2 whose features are not fully grasped by the standard DI's conceptualization. Such examples are evident
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4 both in the internal (in the interactions among EU member states) and external (in the interactions
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6 between EU member states and non-EU actors) dimension of EU foreign policy. Among other cases,
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8 the activation of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) epitomizes a formal manifestation
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10 of DC within the internal dimension of EU foreign policy. Nordic EU member states, in turn, have
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12 engaged in informal differentiated forms of cooperation to influence EU development policies and
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14 practices. DC has also manifested itself as informal groups of member states steering EU response to
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16 the conflicts and crises in Europe's surroundings (Siddi et al., 2022), often in coordination with third
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18 actors within formalized settings of international cooperation (Amadio Viceré, 2023). At the same
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20 time, in the field of migration and asylum, the EU has been cooperating with non-EU countries through
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22 both formal and informal arrangements, triggering the emergence of external differentiated
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24 cooperation (Okuyay et al., 2020). Bearing all this in mind, this special issue maps the empirical
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26 manifestations of various types of DC, to explain their occurrence and assess their implications for EU
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28 foreign policy. To do so, the contributors to this special issue address three research questions:
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- 39 (1) Why and how does formal and informal differentiated cooperation occur in EU foreign policy?
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41 (2) How and why do the modes and the extent of formal and informal differentiated cooperation vary
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43 across EU foreign policy sectors?
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45 (3) What are the implications of formal and informal differentiated cooperation for EU foreign policy?
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51 To address these three main questions, this collection adopts a broad conceptualization of EU foreign
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53 policy, including its security and defense dimension as well as the EU external action. For this reason,
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55 it studies the occurrence of DC not only in the field of defense and crisis management but also across
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57 various aspects of EU external action, including EU's performance in formalized settings of
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1 international cooperation. The special issue consists of six articles. The first four papers tackle the
2 drivers, modes, and implications of DC within and across various sectors of EU foreign policy. The
3 authors examine the emergence of informal groupings in the EU approach to conflicts and crisis
4 management (Amadio Viceré, 2023); explore the structure of delegation from the members states to
5 the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the
6 European Commission and its implications for the agency of the post-holders with regard to informal
7 groupings (Sus, 2023); discuss the only example of treaty-based formal differentiated cooperation in
8 EU security and defense (Martill & Gebhard, 2023); and identify what drives political parties and
9 governments of Nordic countries to support the participation of their countries in EU Battlegroups
10 (Leruth, 2023). The following two papers complement the analysis by reflecting on the driving forces,
11 modes, and implications of DC in multilateral settings. Their analyses focus on the occurrence of DC
12 among EU member states in the United Nations (UN) and in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization
13 (NATO) with regard to nuclear issues (Onderco & Portela, 2023) and on EU member states'
14 cooperation with third countries in the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)
15 (Schade, 2023).

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39 Evidence from these contributions shows that DC in EU foreign policy has mostly manifested itself in
40 informal patterns of cooperation, both in the internal and external dimension of EU governance.
41 Certainly, the treaty-based mechanisms allowing groups of member states to cooperate represent an
42 empirical manifestation of DC as well. Nonetheless, except for PESCO, EU member states and
43 institutions resorted to informal practices rather than to formal mechanism. Indeed, our results indicate
44 that the informal has taken over the formal in EU foreign policy. Such results resonate with existing
45 studies pointing towards the informalisation of global governance, including in international security
46 (Karlsrud & Reykers, 2019; Reykers, 2019). In this context, the special issue demonstrated that internal
47 DC allows member states to overcome the heterogeneity of their preferences, as well the institutional
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1 constraints on the EU collective action. Additionally, it can lead to a division of labor between the EU
2 and subgroups of member states as the case of the Normandy Format indicates (Sus, 2023). External
3 DC, in turn, enables the involvement of non-EU states in the EU framework. In multilateral settings,
4 DC can also foster convergence among various groups in the Common Foreign and Security Policy
5 (CFSP). This notwithstanding, without institutional mechanism channeling its unfolding, informal DC
6 also risks decreasing the consistency and accountability of EU foreign policy.
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14 With this collection of articles, the special issue makes several theoretical contributions to both
15 international relations' and EU studies' literature. Foremost, it conceptualizes DC as opposed to DI in
16 EU foreign policy and proposes an all-encompassing theoretical approach to account for driving
17 forces, patterns, and consequences of DC in EU foreign policy. Since, as mentioned above,
18 differentiation practices can arise in any system of governance, our theoretical framework can be
19 adopted to study the emergence, modes and implications of differentiation patterns on the performance
20 of different political entities (Ayuso, 2022) Furthermore, at the empirical level, the special issue not
21 only systematically addresses the implications of DC for the EU foreign policy but also increases our
22 understanding of policy practices in this policy domain by addressing the ongoing debates about
23 enhancing the EU's capacity to act on the international stage. For this reason, it examines the
24 manifestations of DC practices both in internal and external governance and explores processes
25 through which DC is embedded in and interacts with formal practices of integration in the EU foreign
26 policy.
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49 This introductory article consists of three main parts. We start by conceptualizing differentiated
50 cooperation as a distinct mode of governance from DI, while outlining the shortcomings of existing
51 theoretical approaches employed in the literature to explain the phenomenon. Then, the article
52 elaborates a theoretical framework that accounts for the emergence, modes, and implications of DC in
53 EU foreign policy in both its internal and external dimension. After elaborating the framework, the
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1 article discusses how the special issue's individual contributions applied it and outlines their findings
2 regarding the empirical manifestations of DC across various areas of EU foreign policy. The third part
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4 of the article discusses the implications of DC. It reflects on the contributors' findings, with special
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6 consideration to the effects that DC might have on EU foreign policy. The article ends with a short
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8 conclusion that summarizes the special issue's main findings.
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16 **Differentiated cooperation in EU foreign policy: Conceptual remarks**

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19 In the recent years studies on differentiated European integration, including in the domain of EU
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21 foreign policy, have been flourishing (Héritier, 2021; Hooghe & Marks, 2022; Leruth et al., 2022;
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23 Schimmelfennig et al., 2022; Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2020). Scholarly attention has laid primarily
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25 on differentiation in policies where this phenomenon is made evident by differentiated membership,
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27 such as in the Euro area or the Schengen zone (Leuffen et al., 2022; Matthijs et al., 2019). A minor
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29 strand of studies has been investigating the emergence of *de facto* differentiation, namely of long-term
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31 arrangements bypassing formal rules and procedures (Andersen & Sitter, 2006; Hofelich, 2022;
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33 Holzinger & Schimmelfennig, 2012). In this context, scholars have been addressing differentiation in
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35 the foreign policy field as well (Henökl, 2022; Howorth, 2019; Leuffen, Rittberger, &
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37 Schimmelfennig, 2022). Such an interest in differentiation is not surprising. Despite the proliferation
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39 of initiatives aimed at enhancing the EU's security policies (Dijkstra, 2016; Molenaar, 2021; Sus,
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41 2021) and external drivers such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which trigger increased
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43 coordination among member states, differentiation continues to develop in this policy domain.
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52 As far as EU internal governance is concerned, existing studies analyzed member states' engagement
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54 in differentiated efforts in various sectors of the EU foreign policy domain, such as security and
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56 defense and the area of freedom, security, and justice (Blockmans & Crosson, 2022; Faure & Smith,
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58 2019; Leuffen et al., 2022). Concerning EU external governance, scholarly work increasingly
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1 examined EU member states' selective policy cooperation with non-EU actors, such as with Western
2 Balkan and southern neighborhood countries in the Justice and Home Affairs policy domain (Comte
3 & Lavenex, 2022; Damjanovski & Nechev, 2022).
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8 This notwithstanding, studies offering all-encompassing theoretically informed, evidence-based
9 examinations of differentiated practices in EU foreign policy remain rare. One of the main reasons for
10 such a lack of comprehensive understanding is that existing studies do not explicitly distinguish
11 between differentiation, practices of DI, and practices of DC. The recent special issue edited by Rieker
12 (2021b) provides a relevant example of such a lack of differentiation. Bátorá and Fossum, on the
13 contrary, constitute an exception. Indeed, these scholars stress the need to distinguish differentiation
14 from DI. They argue that “differentiation is not tied to a specific direction of development, whereas
15 differentiated integration is about specific features of a process of coming together” (2021, p. 3). To
16 shed further light on the dynamics that drive the EU’s development, these scholars proposed a
17 complementary term: segmentation. They defined segments as stabilized constellations of public and
18 private actors from various political settings involved in recurrent practices of patterned information
19 exchange and policy formation. In line with this definition, they conceptualized segmentation as
20 pattern and composition of the political system’s functional, territorial, and hierarchical dimensions
21 (Bátorá & Fossum, 2021, pp. 4-6). By conceiving differentiation as “an umbrella term,” Leruth et al.’s
22 *Routledge Handbook on Differentiation in the European Union* (2022, p. 10) offers another valuable
23 exception in distinguishing differentiation from DI. Still, these scholars linked differentiation to
24 “heterogeneous modes of *integration* and *disintegration* [emphasis added] in the EU,” without
25 considering the occurrence of differentiated forms of *cooperation*, which were also not discussed by
26 Bátorá and Fossum. Against this backdrop, we still lack a comprehensive understanding of the
27 emergence, modes, and implications of DC in EU foreign policy. The occurrence of differentiated
28 forms of cooperation in EU foreign policy resonates with the growing informality in the wider global
29 governance dynamics. Focusing on differentiated cooperation therefore also allows to bridge the field
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1 of EU studies and global governance studies. In the following sections, we first explain why it is
2 necessary to distinguish DC from DI as well as from other similar concepts. Then, we present our
3 understanding of the institutional practices captured by the concept of differentiated cooperation.
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10 *Differentiation in EU foreign policy: Integration versus cooperation*
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15 There are two reasons why differentiated cooperation does not simply consist of bilateral and
16 multilateral international cooperation among member states in their capacity as nation states. First, the
17 process of European integration has had important implications for the sovereignty of EU member
18 states. Certainly, in areas corresponding to EU member states' key functions of state sovereignty, such
19 as foreign policy, European integration has occurred mostly through the pooling of sovereignty rather
20 than through its delegation to supranational actors. Still, a "duty of cooperation" applies to member
21 states' conduct of their own foreign policies (Schütze, 2019). If sub-groups of member states cooperate
22 outside of the EU framework, their interactions cannot be merely conceived as an instance of
23 cooperation. As a matter of law, in fact, member states shall ensure the unity of EU foreign affairs
24 (Amadio Viceré, 2023). To this end, member states shall coordinate with other member states and with
25 EU institutions. Of course, they may decide not to do so under certain circumstances. Yet they are in
26 the position to be called to account for their actions. Second, when engaging in the international
27 context, member states generally make use of EU material and ideational resources. Such resources
28 may include EU operational capacities, such as EU economic assets (e.g. EU sanctioning power and
29 the Normandy Format, Amadio Viceré, 2021a; Sus, 2023). In general, however, they always include
30 EU legitimacy and reputation. Indeed, EU member states inevitably make use of EU political strength
31 in the international arena.
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1 From an analytical point of view, the qualifying features of differentiated integration and differentiated
2 cooperation span across three main dimensions: autonomy, behavioral norms, and functioning logic
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4 (Amadio Viceré, 2020; Schimmelfennig, 2015) (see Table 1). Autonomy refers to member states'
5 formal mandate to EU institutions. In differentiated integration, member states delegate policy
6 initiatives and functions to EU institutions. There is ample scope for EU's institutions' discretionary
7 power. Therefore, in differentiated integration, EU institutions are in the position to influence the
8 differentiated interactions among the member states. In differentiated cooperation, in turn, member
9 states devolve limited discretionary power to EU institutions, which are unable to influence
10 interactions among member states (Sus, 2023). Indeed, in DC EU institutions are frequently neglected
11 and relegated to acting as member states' operative branches and administrative support. Concerning
12 behavioral norms, consensus-seeking practices are typical of differentiated cooperation. Bargaining,
13 whether hard or not, is typical of differentiated integration. As for the functioning logic, this can rely
14 either on formal, legally binding acts or on voluntary policy coordination. Differentiated integration
15 generally relies on legally binding acts. Differentiated cooperation, in turn, generally relies on non-
16 binding, voluntary cooperation arrangements.
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46 A reasonable question at this point would be asking whether, and if so when, differentiated integration
47 may turn into differentiated cooperation. In principle, of course, the latter may turn into differentiated
48 integration and vice versa. Indeed, both forms of differentiation may emerge as informal practices
49 within the EU, persist over time and be formalized at a later stage (Heritier, 2007). But these two
50 phenomena should not be conceived as part of a teleological process necessarily leading from one type
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1 of interaction among sub-sets of member states to another, allegedly, more irreversible, binding type
2 of non-homogenous coordination among member states.
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7 Both DI and DC refer to interactions among sub-groups of member states and/or to interactions among
8 member states and third actors. Therefore, they cannot be conflated with concepts used to indicate
9 uniform forms of integration, such as the categories of supranationalism and intergovernmentalism.
10 Additionally, supranationalism and intergovernmentalism are no longer able to capture the complexity
11 of EU institutions and member states' interactions. Although deliberation and consensus-seeking were
12 considered qualifying features supranationalism, after the 1993 Maastricht Treaty and throughout the
13 2000s EU polycrisis, they have become the main behavioral norm also among member states'
14 interactions (Bickerton et al., 2015). In formally intergovernmental domains, such as foreign policy,
15 member states have recurrently engaged in instances of integration without supranationalisation
16 (Amadio Viceré, 2016). In parallel, supranational domains have increasingly witnessed a pre-eminence
17 of intergovernmental practices, as reflected by the European Council's dominance in EU decision-
18 making processes (Fabbrini & Puetter, 2016b).
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39 It is also relevant to note that DI and DC do not necessarily respectively emerge only in policy areas
40 where the supranational method and the intergovernmental method apply. We claim that DC may
41 manifest itself both as a formal institutional arrangement and as an informal one. Therefore, while DC
42 may unfold in formally supranational areas, formally intergovernmental areas may witness the
43 emergence of DI as well. For instance, it was an informal grouping of member states that steered EU
44 humanitarian response to the Syrian crisis, generating an instance of DC in a formally supranational
45 sector (Amadio Viceré, 2023). The formally intergovernmental CSDP, in turn, has witnessed the
46 occurrence of DI in the industrial sector (Hoeffler, 2019). Additionally, DC may span across
47 supranational and intergovernmental areas, serving as an arrangement bridging the two of them. Such
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1 manifestations may equally develop along the internal and external dimension of EU governance. In
2 other words, they may respectively develop among EU member states and between EU member states
3 and non-EU actors. As for internal DC, an informal group of member states acting within the Quint
4 has been bridging the gap between the EU enlargement policy and EU CFSP in Kosovo (Amadio
5 Viceré, 2023). The involvement of non-EU actors in the EU trade and CFSP within the framework of
6 the European Neighborhood Policy, in turn, provides a relevant example of external DC spanning
7 across intergovernmental and supranational sectors.
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10 DC, especially, should not be confused with the intergovernmental method of cooperation.
11 Intergovernmental cooperation is typical of intergovernmental policy domains, such as the CFSP and
12 the CSDP. Certainly, such a method may underpin the emergence and different modes of DC (Siddi et
13 al., 2022). Still, as mentioned above, on the one hand, DC may occur both in supranational and
14 intergovernmental sectors, as well as across them (Amadio Viceré, 2023). On the other hand, DC may
15 also manifest itself in the external dimension of EU governance, namely between EU institutions and
16 member states and, non-EU actors. Such alignment happened EU member states and third countries in
17 diplomatic statements at the OSCE (Schade, 2023). Additionally, while DI generally relies on
18 centralized capabilities at the EU level, DC relies on both centralized EU capabilities and on the
19 pooling of member states' decentralized resources, as well as on a combination of both (Amadio
20 Viceré, 2023; Sus, 2023). The negotiations led by France and Germany within the Normandy format,
21 were accompanied by the activities of the High Representative, who coordinated the sanctions against
22 Russia and monitored the implementation of the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement (Sus, 2023).
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51 These trends, which eroded the EU supranational-intergovernmental divide, are also reproduced when
52 interactions occur in differentiated formats. In the first decades of European integration, differentiation
53 generally happened in conjunction with integration, mostly through treaty-opt outs and temporary
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1 suspensions from the application of the EU acquis. Until July 2022, for instance, Denmark exercised
2 an opt-out from CSDP. As a result, it did not participate in the EU's foreign policy where defense was
3 concerned. The occurrence of differentiated cooperation, however, has become the new normal in EU
4 internal and external governance. In turn, differentiated integration, today, is mostly the exception.
5 Due to the high salience of the EU-related policy issues, there are no conditions for treaty changes and
6 for the activation of treaty-based mechanisms (e.g. enhanced cooperation). DI lately has happened
7 mostly outside the treaty framework, as illustrated by the Fiscal Compact. Considering all of the above,
8 the next section will provide a systematic conceptualization of differentiated cooperation in EU foreign
9 policy.

10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 *Conceptualizing differentiated cooperation in EU foreign policy*

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31 We identify two relevant qualifying features of DC in EU foreign and security policy: its nature as
32 both a formal and an informal phenomenon; and its presence in both the internal and external
33 dimension of EU governance. In the first place, DC may be both formal and informal. DC may be a
34 formal institutional practice, stemming from formal mechanisms that may be treaty-based. Indeed, the
35 Lisbon Treaty enshrines a set of provisions for member states' flexible engagement to differentiated
36 efforts, including in EU foreign policy. Among these, there are the enhanced cooperation (Treaty on
37 the European Union, Art. 2), the implementation of specific task by groups of member states (Treaty
38 on the European Union, Art. 42.5 and Art. 44), and PESCO (Treaty on the European Union, Art. 42.6).
39 While PESCO is the only mechanism that has been activated so far, this arrangement has been *de facto*
40 employed to strengthen cooperation among essentially all member states rather than a differentiation
41 among them (Sus, 2023; Martill & Gebhard, 2023).¹ Furthermore, formal DC may originate from
42 programs of cooperation relying on differentiation (Leruth, 2023). The EU Battlegroups, whose core
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1 tasks are enshrined in Treaty on the European Union, Art. 41.1, are a clear example of this distinctive
2 manifestation of differentiated cooperation (Leruth, 2023). This instrument however, despite being
3
4 formally existent, has never been activated either (Reykers, 2017).
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9 Over time, in fact, DC mostly originated from informal politics in the EU and developed into informal
10 institutions (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004; H eritier, 2007). In these situations, rather than stemming from
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12 treaty-based mechanisms, DC results from informal interactions among EU member states (Sus, 2023)
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14 and occasionally EU institutions (Christiansen & Neuhold, 2013; Kleine, 2013). At the same time,
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16 rather than employing formal arrangements, informal DC works by means of “non-codified and not
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18 publicly sanctioned exchanges” (Christiansen et al., 2003). For instance, EU member states that have
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20 the will and the capabilities of doing so frequently create informal groups to achieve specific foreign
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22 policy objectives in institutionalized international cooperation settings without having received a
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24 formal mandate from EU institutions and/or other member states (Amadio Vicer e, 2023; Sus, 2023).
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26 Nonetheless, the regularity of informal DC and its high level of institutionalization may question
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28 existing assumptions that differentiation in EU foreign policy occurs only on ad hoc basis (Schade,
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30 2023; da Concei o-Heldt & Meunier, 2014; Macaj & Nicola idis, 2014).
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40 This said, there is neither a juxtaposition between EU formal structures and informal DC, nor a
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42 juxtaposition between formal DC and informal DC. On one side, informal DC may assume different
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44 manifestations in relation to EU foreign policy. Take, for instance, informal groupings. Over time and
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46 across different policy issues, they may replace, complement and/or support corresponding EU policies
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48 (Amadio Vicer e, 2023; Sus, 2023). On the other side, formal DC and informal DC may be
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50 interdependent. In fact, informal DC may occur within formalized institutional settings relying on
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52 member states and EU institutions’ differentiated engagement. PESCO is a clear example of such a
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54 combined DC (Martill & Gebhard, 2023). As mentioned above, although PESCO should have served
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56 as a treaty-based mechanism for strengthening member states’ cooperation in the security and defense
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1 field, almost all member states decided to join it. At first sight, PESCO's inclusiveness occurred at the
2 expense of its added value as a differentiated mechanism able to accommodate member states'
3 heterogeneous preferences and capabilities. Still, this mechanism embodies differentiated elements of
4 cooperation in its operational functioning. Such elements include selective membership, project
5 clustering, third-country openness and, relation to non-EU platforms (Martill & Gebhard, 2023).
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12 In the second place, DC may occur in the internal and external dimensions of the EU governance.
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14 When DC emerges in the internal dimension of EU governance it occurs among EU member states
15 and, at times, EU institutions. In any case, it has implications for the agency of other actors working
16 in the field of the EU foreign policy such as the European Commission and the High Representative
17 as a supranational agent (Sus, 2023). At the formal level, internal DC may emerge through the
18 activation of formal mechanisms that envisage member states' differentiated engagements to
19 integrated efforts, such as PESCO (Martill & Gebhard, 2023) or the Battlegroups (Article 5). At the
20 same time, at the informal level, internal DC may also originate from the activity of informal groups
21 of member states, and occasionally EU institutions, in institutionalized international cooperation
22 settings. In the multiple crises of the 2010s, especially, "policy differentiation" became a recurrent
23 feature of this policy domain (Fabbrini, 2021). Relevant examples include not only the UN and NATO
24 frameworks (Sus, 2023; Onderco & Portela, 2023), but also the Berlin Process for the Western
25 Balkans, the Quint (Amadio Viceré, 2023) the Normandy Format (Sus, 2023). In turn, when DC
26 emerges in the external dimension of EU governance, EU member states and institutions cooperate
27 with non-EU actors (i.e., non-EU countries and international organizations) to achieve specific
28 objectives. At the formal level, EU member states and institutions may cooperate with third actors by
29 involving them in specific policy fields through their regulatory commitment and/or organizational
30 involvement (Okay et al., 2020). Indeed, they may participate in EU-led frameworks of cooperation,
31 especially in programs of cooperation relying on differentiation (e.g., EU Battlegroups, Leruth, 2023).
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1 At the informal level, EU cooperation with third actors may occur in multilateral settings of
2 cooperation, such as the OSCE (Schade, 2023).
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6 Along these two dimensions (i.e. internal/external and formal/informal), DC features different levels
7 of institutional embeddedness, albeit to varying degrees (Delreux & Keukeleire, 2017). Indeed, DC
8 occurs both within and outside EU institutional framework while remaining loosely anchored to it
9 (Rieker, 2021a). When occurring within the EU institutional framework, DC allows member states to
10 pursue specific objectives within the EU framework. Groups of member states may try to influence
11 EU decision-making process by acting within EU intergovernmental forums, as in the case of the
12 Visegrad Group in EU migration policy and the Nordic EU member states in EU development policy.
13 When occurring outside of the EU institutional framework, DC allows member states to address
14 specific policy issues while interacting with third actors in institutionalized international cooperation
15 settings (Amadio Viceré, 2023; Leruth 2023).
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31 Table 2 shows the typology of DC instances along the two dimensions of EU governance elaborated
32 above: formal/informal and internal/external.
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37 [Table 2. To be inserted here.]
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41 Overall, the results of the special issue indicate that DC emerged in both the internal and external
42 dimension of EU governance. While the treaty-based mechanisms represent an empirical manifestation
43 of DC as well, DC in EU foreign policy has mostly manifested itself in informal patterns of
44 cooperation. Certainly, we are aware that “pure DI” and “pure DC” are essentially ideal types and that,
45 in practice, these institutional practices are often intertwined. Examining the emergence of PESCO,
46 the contribution of Martill and Gebhard to this special collection demonstrates how the launch of this
47 instrument in EU defense policy brought different forms of differentiation into the picture, and how
48 these different kinds of differentiation relate to one another. The authors also show the extent to which
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1 negotiation and bargaining, the latter of which, as we indicated above, is a distinctive feature of
2 differentiated integration, facilitated the bringing about of complex combinations of various instances
3 of differentiation. This notwithstanding, there are various issues to be addressed that may allow us to
4 further shed light on the emergence of differentiated cooperation as a distinctive institutional practice.
5 Among others, we could examine when and why DC emerges, why and how DC combines with DI,
6 whether and to which extent DC evolves across time and policy issues, whether and to which extent
7 EU supranational institutions may influence DC, and when and why DC's implications for EU foreign
8 policy vary.
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24 **Toward a new framework for differentiation in EU foreign policy**

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27 Before elaborating the original theoretical framework on differentiated cooperation proposed in this
28 special issue, it is necessary to reflect on the existing frameworks and identify their shortcomings.
29 Rieker's (2021) introduction to a special issue on differentiated integration and Europe's global role
30 puts forward a conceptual framework to assess this phenomenon. However, as indicated above, she
31 does not explicitly distinguish between differentiated integration and differentiated cooperation, and
32 hence is not able to fully grasp the complexity of member states' non-homogenous interactions.
33 Moreover, because of the "generic definition" (p. 9) of integration Rieker uses, her conceptualization
34 of DI includes everything that falls in-between full disintegration and full integration. Consequently,
35 she does not operationalize various practices of differentiation in EU foreign policy.
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51 Admittedly, scholars have recently begun to employ the concept of differentiated cooperation as
52 opposed to the one of differentiated integration (Alcaro & Siddi, 2021; Grevi et al., 2020; Klose et al.,
53 2022; Klose & Perot, 2022; Lavenex & Križic, 2019). Still, they do not offer an explicit
54 conceptualization of DC but stumble into a "conceptual stretching" (Sartori, 1970) by adopting other
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1 concepts originating in political science that are however not applicable to this phenomenon. Against
2 this backdrop, the recent attempt by Klose et al. (Klose et al., 2022) to elaborate the concept of DC in
3
4 an explicit and systematic manner constitutes a valuable exception. These scholars see differentiation
5
6 as a general concept encompassing both DI and DC, with the former defined as differentiation taking
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8 place in an integrated policy area (i.e. supranational policies) and the latter in a non-integrated policy
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10 area (i.e. intergovernmental policies). They illustrate their concept by looking, respectively, at
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12 differentiated practices in the Area of Freedom, Security, and Justice (DI) and Common Security and
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14 Defence Policy (CSDP) (DC).
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21 While recognizing the value of their work, we nonetheless argue that their conceptualization is
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23 insufficient to fully capture the complexity of the EU foreign policy's practices. Even though these
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25 scholars relay on the scale of different levels of centralization within the EU originally proposed by
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27 Börzel (2005), they do not operationalize the main dimension of DI and DC. Consequently, they
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29 conflate DI with the supranational method of integration and DC with the intergovernmental method
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31 of cooperation. Also, Klose et al. (2022) do not distinguish between formal and informal
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33 manifestations of DC, a distinction which should not be overlooked. As differentiation in the EU,
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35 including in the domain of foreign policy, has so far mostly been considered as linked to formal
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37 integration, studies pay only limited attention to its informal dimension (Adler-Nissen, 2008; Andersen
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39 & Sitter, 2006; Dyson & Sepos, 2010), with only a few exceptions (Alcaro & Siddi, 2021; Cladi &
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41 Locatelli, 2020; Koutrakos, 2017). Yet differentiated practices in EU foreign policy have mostly
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43 consisted of informal arrangements, while formal provisions have been rare (Delreux & Keukeleire,
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45 2017; Grevi et al., 2020; Jakobsen, 2009; Justaert & Keukeleire, 2012; Siddi et al., 2022). Additionally,
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47 informalization processes have been increasingly occurring in EU foreign policy, both within and
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49 outside the EU framework (Cassarino, 2017; Delreux & Keukeleire, 2017; Okyay et al., 2020).
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1 Our special issue not only makes the explicit distinction between formal and informal manifestations
2 of DC but also shows that DC may occur in both intergovernmental and supranational policy domains,
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4 as well as across them. EU foreign policy is a prime example of a policy field where these two modes
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6 of decision-making logic co-exist, with DC occurring in both areas as well as across them. Internally,
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8 informal groupings of member states may, for instance, steer EU response to a specific conflict by
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10 acting in fields that are formally supranational, as it happened in the EU humanitarian aid response to
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12 the conflict in Syria (Amadio Viceré, 2023). Externally, DC may be firmly anchored in supranational
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14 dimension of EU frameworks for cooperation, as it happened with EU cooperation with the Western
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16 Balkans and the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) (European Commission, 2022).
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23 Furthermore, as the involvement of third countries in the EU integration structures is a crucial
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25 dimension of DI (Rabinovych & Pintsch, 2022), our approach, in contrast to Klose et al., distinguishes
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27 between manifestations of DC in EU internal and external governance. The EU has been increasingly
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29 cooperating with third actors by involving them into its policies through cooperation (i.e. DC) (Okayay
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31 et al., 2020; Trauner, 2009). At times, this cooperation occurred through formal institutional
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33 arrangements, such as the participation of third countries in EU agencies (Damjanovski & Nechev,
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35 2022; Trauner, 2009). Other times, it relied on informal arrangements. Relevant examples are informal
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37 patterns of cooperation on readmission issues with Mediterranean and African countries (Cassarino,
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39 2017), on the police and border cooperation (Comte & Lavenex, 2022), as well as EU cooperation with
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41 neighboring countries in the security and defense field by inviting them joint the civilian and military
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43 operations within the CSDP (Aydın-Düzgit et al., 2021).
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51 Against this backdrop, a comprehensive theoretical model that explains the emergence, mode, and
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53 implications of DC in EU foreign policy while systematically factoring its qualifying features (formal
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55 vs. informal; internal vs. external) is still lacking. The following section of the introduction addresses
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57 this gap.
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Differentiated cooperation in EU foreign policy: Theoretical framework

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4 To theoretically capture the phenomenon of DC in EU foreign policy and to account for the above-
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6 discussed complex dynamics, we deliberately adopt an analytically eclectic perspective (Sil &
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8 Katzenstein, 2010). Such a perspective is underpinned by an intergovernmentalist understanding of
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10 integration outcomes (Leuffen et al., 2012; Moravcsik, 1993, 1998). More specifically, in the
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12 theoretical framework presented in the table below, we build on insights from four distinct strands of
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14 scholarly literature, namely from studies on: differentiated European integration (Schimmelfennig &
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16 Winzen, 2020), on core state powers (Genschel & Jachtenfuchs, 2013), on institutional overlap
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18 (Hofmann, 2019), and on comparative federalism (Fabbrini, 2017). As demonstrated below, from each
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20 of the strands of literature we draw specific analytical tools that, combined, enable us to put forward a
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22 comprehensive theoretical lens for studying the emergence, modes, and implications of DC in EU
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24 foreign policy.
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32 The differentiated European integration literature considers DI as a legal instrument employed by EU
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34 governments to overcome an integration impasse in the case of treaty negotiations or when adopting
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36 new legislation. DI, therefore, allows member states to deal with the heterogeneity of their material,
37
38 ideological or societal preferences and capabilities. As such, it can foster the integration of new policies
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40 and allow member states to cooperate at different levels of integration (Dyson & Sepos, 2010; Majone,
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42 2009). Since this strand of literature offers tools to explore the drivers of DI (e.g., the preferences of
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44 member states, their interdependence, or the institutional context of policymaking), we adopt it to
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46 investigate both the demand and supply of DC. While doing so, we go beyond the solely formal
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48 dimension of differentiation and include informal practices as possible manifestations of DC.
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55 The literature investigating the integration of the core state powers, in turn, allows to consider the role
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57 of both EU member states and of EU supranational institutions as explanatory factors for the various
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59 modes of DC. Foreign policy is related to member states' core state powers and is thus characterized
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1 by relevant “institutional significance for state building” (Genschel & Jachtenfuchs, 2013). Despite
2 the steady progress in both the integration and the DI of core state powers (Jachtenfuchs et al., 2022),
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4 as the example of EU foreign policy shows, majoritarian actors still protect their decision-making
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6 competencies, limiting the Union’s capacity building in this field. The modes of DC, therefore, should
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8 vary according to the actors driving them. At the same time, the literature on institutional overlap, with
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10 its insights into the governance complexity and its ability to examine strategies that member states
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12 have at their disposal in complex institutional settings, allows us to explore the implications of DC for
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14 EU foreign policy as a policy domain. Finally, to assess the consequences of DC on the EU political
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16 system, we draw on comparative federalism due to its ability to reflect on the relations between the
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18 separation of powers and processes of centralization and fragmentation.
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25 The theoretical starting point of our framework is that differentiation can be conceived as a mean to
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27 reconcile heterogeneity in the EU (Stubb, 1996). The demand for integration in core state powers is
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29 generally as heterogeneous as in other domains. Yet, as these areas are characterized by transnational
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31 distributional conflicts, the supply of integration is more likely to be politicized, and hence less likely
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33 to occur uniformly (Rittberger et al., 2013). Under these circumstances, both EU member states and
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35 institutions may supply, through different modes, arrangements that allow them to work together in a
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37 non-homogenous manner. Even though such arrangements may respond to the EU’s need to
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39 accommodate member states’ heterogeneity, they do not necessarily lead to the efficient execution of
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41 EU foreign policy and may eventually generate fragmentation in the EU polity. Bearing all this in
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43 mind, we distinguish three levels of analysis, drawing respectively on insights from the four theoretical
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45 strands considered. For the micro-level, which refers to our minimum unit of analysis, namely
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47 institutional practices, we draw on differentiated European integration. For the meso-level, which
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49 refers to our intermediate level of analysis, that is to say policies, we adopt both the model of core state
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51 powers and of institutional overlap. Finally, for the macro-level, which refers to our maximum unit of
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53 analysis, namely political systems, we draw on the literature on comparative federalism. In this way,
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1 we arrive at a theoretical model that allows us to explore the emergence, modalities, and implications
2 of various types of differentiated cooperation across various policies within the EU foreign policy
3 domain.
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17 [Table 3. To be inserted here.]
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20 In their contributions to this SI, the authors address the occurrence of DC at the different levels of
21 analysis illustrated in the table above. Depending on which aspects of differentiated cooperation in the
22 EU foreign policy the authors examine, they analyze either one or two units of analysis (demand,
23 supply, modes or effects). More specifically, the papers presented in the special issue employ the
24 following hypotheses derived from the selected theoretical roots.
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35 Drawing on the concept of differentiated European integration and specifically following the work of
36 Leuffen et al. (2012) and Schimmelfennig (2019), at the micro-level of analysis our framework
37 explains the demand for differentiated cooperation. Contrary to Rieker (2021), who considers only the
38 agency of EU member states and institutions as the main drivers of differentiated integration, our
39 framework provides a more comprehensive picture. We assume that the demand for DC can be
40 explained by the “international diversity of country size, wealth, and national identity, which result in
41 heterogeneity of integration preferences, interdependence, and state capacities” (Schimmelfennig,
42 2019). For example, member states’ heterogeneous preferences on a given foreign policy issue may
43 prevent the EU from taking unified action and drive the demand for differentiated cooperation. Under
44 these circumstances, in fact, some member states might be tempted to launch an arrangement of DC.
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1 Therefore, at the micro-level of analysis, our the model explains the demand for DC in the following
2 way:
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7 H1a The demand of DC is likely to occur when member states' preferences (material, or ideational,
8 societal, or governmental) are heterogenous.
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11 H1b The demand of DC is likely to occur when member states' capacities are heterogeneous.

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13 H1c The demand of DC is likely to occur when member states' mutual dependence is
14 heterogeneous.
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21 By further engaging with the literature on differentiated integration, we can also explain the supply of
22 DC which is related to various structural conditions, such as the decision-making procedure.
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24 Intergovernmental decision-making dominates the EU foreign policy and is expected to provide room
25 for both flexible arrangements between groups of member states (Faure & Smith, 2019) and opt-outs
26 of individual EU countries which decide not to participate in a specific political project (e.g. Danish
27 opt-out from CSDP until June 2022) (Adler-Nissen, 2008; Schaart, 2022). Against this backdrop, at
28 the micro-level, by explaining the supply of DC, the model allows to elaborate three distinct
29 hypotheses:
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43 H2a The demand for DC results in actual DC when the number of member states engaging in such
44 cooperation is large enough to address the policy issue.
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48 H2b The demand for DC results in actual DC when the activities of the member states participating
49 in such cooperation create more positive than negative externalities for those that do not engage in it.
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53 H2c The demand for DC results in actual DC when intergovernmental decision-making rules are in
54 place.
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1 In turn, at the meso-level, we draw on the theories on the core state powers (Genschel & Jachtenfuchs,
2 2013) to explain variations in the modes of DC. We argue that the mode of DC—meaning whether
3 this form of cooperation occurs explicitly or implicitly—depends on the actors driving it. Since foreign
4 policy issues belong to the core state powers and states are reluctant to share competencies in this area
5 with supranational institutions, we expect that it is the involvement of EU countries as majoritarian
6 actors in the formation of DC that determines its mode. An illustrative example is provided by informal
7 groupings launched by powerful EU countries such as Germany or France to act as crisis managers
8 bypassing the existing EU institutions. Therefore, at the meso-level, by explaining variations in the
9 mode of DC, we posit that:

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24 H3a DC is likely to occur through publicity, through highly visible activities, including by engaging
25 in the arena of mass politics, when it is supplied by majoritarian actors (i.e. member states).

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29 H3b DC is likely to occur through stealth, avoiding highly visible activities, without engaging in the
30 arena of mass politics when it is supplied by non-majoritarian actors (i.e. EU institutions).

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36 At the same time, to reflect on the implications of differentiated cooperation for EU foreign policy
37 field, we draw on theories that deal with institutional overlap (Hofmann, 2019; Schuette, 2022). We
38 expect the preferences among the EU governments and the institutional positions (single, dual, or
39 multiple) of individual European countries that act upon a particular policy issue via the framework of
40 NATO, of the OSCE, of the EU's CSDP, and possibly also via formats of DC beyond the existing
41 institutional structures, to impact the efficient execution of EU foreign policy. Hence, at the meso-
42 level, by explaining variation in the effects of DC for the EU foreign policy's efficient execution, we
43 hypothesize that:

1 H4a Institutional overlap is more likely to hinder an efficient execution of EU foreign policy when
2 governments hold distributional rather than communal preferences, due to the possible stalemates at
3 the political and strategic levels.
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7 H4b Institutional overlap is more likely to hinder an efficient execution of EU foreign policy in case
8 of a dual (or multiple) institutional position of the member-states rather than a single, due to the
9 resulting relative scarcity of resources.
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17 As elaborated in detail below, the contributions to the special issue provide insights into the empirical
18 manifestations of DC regarding the first two levels of analysis, namely the micro- and meso-level.
19 Considering the existing gaps in the scholarly literature concerning the identification of DC in EU
20 foreign policy, in this special issue we decided to start by exploring the drivers of DC and the
21 implications of this phenomenon for the EU foreign policymaking. By doing so, we could collect a
22 wide range of empirical observations to reflect on our proposed hypothesis.
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34 Nevertheless, the macro-level remains an indispensable element of our three-level framework, as it
35 enables a more general reflection on the phenomenon and consequences of DC for the EU as a polity.
36 For this sake, we build on theories of comparative federalism (Fabbrini, 2017). Specifically, we expect
37 the risk of fragmentation to be higher when subnational entities overstep their authority by getting
38 involved in matters that are under central government control as it is the case of foreign and security
39 issues. Furthermore, we argue that the institutional coordination provided by the EU supranational
40 institutions, such as the HR/VP in CFSP matters or the European Commission in matters related to
41 joint defense procurement, reduces the risk of fragmentation. However, further research is needed to
42 address both the factors that could potentially lead to the fragmentation of the EU foreign policy
43 resulting from occurrences of differentiated integration as well as its implications for the EU's political
44 system (Kölliker, 2001; Schimmelfennig et al., 2022).
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2 This said, the contributions featured in the special issue adopt the theoretical framework introduced
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4 above by addressing explicitly or implicitly demand and supply of the DC as well as its modes and
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6 effects for EU foreign policy, specific to micro- or meso-level of our framework. More specifically,
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8 and Sus (2023) both refer to the micro-level of analysis and explain the supply of DC by examining
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10 informal groupings. Amadio Viceré (2023) claims that the combination between the level of
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12 disagreement among EU member states and EU level of capacity over time and across policy issues
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14 determines the specific types of informal groupings. In turn, Sus (2023) focuses on the institutional
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16 dynamics at the EU level and sheds light on the supply of DC resulting from certain delegation
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18 complexities that arise from the institutional aspects of EU foreign policymaking. Furthermore, it
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20 relates to the meso-level of analysis by discussing the implications of certain occurrences of
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22 differentiated cooperation on the execution of EU foreign policy. While Martill and Gebhard (2023)
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24 too explain the supply of DC by looking at the various institutional dynamics that led to the
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26 development of PESCO in the current format. Yet their paper also touches upon the meso-level of
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28 analysis by briefly exploring the implications for EU foreign policy of this specific formal
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30 manifestation of differentiated cooperation. Leruth (2023) too focuses on the micro-level of analyses,
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32 but it assesses the demands for the participation of the Nordic countries in the EU battlegroups. This
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34 article also relates to the meso-level, by analyzing the implications of these programs for the future of
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36 EU foreign policy. Onderco and Portela (2023) look at the non-proliferation regime and provide
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38 another valuable contribution to the micro-level of analysis by identifying change in multilateral
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40 regimes as a driver of DC in the CFSP. Schade (2023) addresses the micro-level of analysis as well.
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42 However, it focuses strictly on the external dimension of DC, considering its supply as the key unit of
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44 analysis. While doing so, it explains the varying patterns of third countries' alignment with the EU's
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46 statements at the OSCE through factors such as third countries' motivation to form part of the EU's
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48 alliance, their institutional proximity to the organization, or their involvement in regional conflicts.
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Implications of differentiated cooperation for the EU foreign policy

Whilst scholars have increasingly devoted their attention to the institutional implications of DI (Bátora & Fossum, 2019; Schimmelfennig et al., 2022), including in EU foreign policy (Bátora, 2021), no examination of the institutional implications of DC has ever been conducted. Additionally, scholars hold conflicting views regarding the implications of differentiation for the EU. Even though existing scholarship on DI is underpinned by the implicit assumption that differentiation has positive connotations (Fabbrini, 2021), there is a growing body of research that considers the possibility that differentiation may eventually lead to a “segmentation” of EU foreign policy (Bátora & Fossum, 2019, 2021).

The insights from the individual papers of this SI provide a mixed picture regarding the implications of DC for EU foreign policy. On the one hand, it has been observed that internal differentiation allows member states to move at different speeds and/or toward different objectives when their material and ideational preferences are not uniform and when the institutional and legal framework prevents the EU from acting (Amadio Viceré, 2023; Sus, 2023). This is obviously not surprising. Yet the contributions to the SI point to a number of benefits that various occurrences of DC can bring. Forms of internal DC, as demonstrated by Amadio Viceré (2023) and Sus (2023), can under certain conditions (e.g., the consistency of policy aims between the formal EU endeavors and the undertakings by the informal groupings), be perceived a complementary to the formal instruments the EU has at its disposal. As such, a division of labor between the undertakings within EU formal foreign policymaking and informal groupings of selected member states can occur (Sus, 2023). Regarding the external dimension of EU governance, DC offers a powerful tool for accommodating non-EU member states within the EU structures, as illustrated by the study on the cooperation between the Nordic countries with regard to the EU Battlegroups (Leruth, 2023). Similar observations have been made regarding PESCO, which

embodies both the internal and the external dimension of EU foreign policy making. Through this instrument, the involvement of third countries into the overall EU defense policy has been facilitated (Martill & Gebhard, 2023). Examining the patterns of cooperation in global nuclear politics, the authors also observe that DC in CFSP cushions the impact of fragmentation, enhancing convergence within differentiated groups (Onderco & Portela, 2023).

At the same time, the special issue shows the risks that DC can entail for EU foreign policy, such as the weakening of the role of the EU in crisis management (Sus, 2023) and the decrease in the overall consistency of EU foreign policy due to lack of coordination among member states (Amadio Viceré, 2023). The authors also pointed out the challenge that DC brings to the democratic legitimacy of the EU foreign policy given the lack of accountability of informal cooperation (Amadio Viceré, 2023). Also, the extent to which external forms of DC hinder the autonomy of the EU institutions remains an open question (Martill & Gebhard, 2023). Overall, as summarized by Leruth (2023), the risks and benefits created by differentiation significantly vary from one empirical case study to another, depending on its temporal, spatial and functional features.

The reflections of the individual papers from this special collection regarding the implications of DC on the EU foreign policy show the need for further research. In particular, the macro-level of our proposed framework may provide further insights in this regard. Indeed, we are confident that this dimension of our framework could shed light on how much differentiation the EU can accommodate (Andersen & Sitter, 2006) and whether differentiation is reshaping “the European polity into what increasingly resembles a multi-layered European Union” (de Neve, 2007, p. 516). These questions have been debated by scholars for decades (Dyson & Sepos, 2010; Olsen, 2007). Due to both the changes within the EU political system and the increase of differentiation practices across various policy domains, they remain valid and important (Kröger & Loughran, 2022; Meissner & Tekin, 2021; Schmidt, 2017). While seeing the need for further research, with this SI we aimed at bringing the

1 debate forward by providing a range of empirical insights into the consequences of various—formal
2 and informal as well as external and internal—occurrences of DC in the EU foreign policy.
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6 **Conclusion**

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10 This introductory article to the special issue on differentiated cooperation in EU foreign policy started
11 with a review of the existing scholarship on differentiation in this specific policy area. The point of
12 departure was the recognition of a widespread “conceptual stretching” (Sartori, 1970) in existing
13 scholarly attempts to study differentiation in EU foreign policy and the lack of a comprehensive
14 theoretical model that explains differentiated practices in this policy field. Against this backdrop, this
15 article proposed a novel conceptualization of differentiated cooperation to capture the ongoing
16 dynamics in the complex area of EU foreign policy, distinguishing it from differentiated integration.
17 Furthermore, it provided a three-level theoretical framework to study the emergence, modes and
18 implications of DC and presented insights into the application of the model by contributors to this
19 special collection. Finally, the article reflected on the implications of the occurrence of various forms
20 of DC for the EU foreign policy and discussed the risk of fragmentation of this policy area.
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39 There are two key reasons why studying DC in EU foreign policy is a relevant endeavor. Firstly,
40 theorizing member states’ engagement in DC with regard to foreign issues advances our knowledge
41 of the extent and the modes of integration in member states’ exercise of foreign policy, and hence of
42 the EU institutional development beyond the regulatory polity model (Genschel, 2022; Genschel &
43 Jachtenfuchs, 2018). Secondly, identifying and mapping the drivers and modes of DC in foreign policy
44 also allows shedding light on the implications of exogenous shocks on the EU activities in international
45 politics. Specifically, the foreign policy domain is a valuable case for assessing EU development
46 against the backdrop of the polycrisis faced by the EU, that put European integration at risk (Fabbrini
47 & Puetter, 2016a). The occurrence of DC may indicate the development of an institutional change
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1 leading to a multi-clustered Europe of overlapping policy communities (Fabbrini & Schmidt, 2019).

2 In light of mounting security threats, of which the Russian war in Ukraine is the prime illustration, it
3 is therefore crucial to study differentiation practices and its implications for the EU foreign policy
4 making.
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10 Against this backdrop, this special issue makes a twofold contribution. On a theoretical level, it aims
11 to provide a systematic, theory-informed analysis of differentiation in EU foreign policy, its drivers,
12 manifestations, and functions. While doing so, the special issue contextualizes this phenomenon within
13 the broader academic debate on differentiation and (dis)integration, as well as within the scholarship
14 on informal governance in security arrangements and institutions. It also elaborates the concept of DC
15 by providing its nuanced definition and by systematically distinguishing it from the concept of DI. On
16 an empirical level, it explores the consequences of differentiation for the conduct of EU foreign policy
17 feeding into the debate about enhancing the EU's capacity as an effective global player. Moreover, the
18 special issue offers a comprehensive understanding of DC occurring in EU foreign policy as it
19 examines a range of topics such as the informal groups in EU crisis management, patterns of formal
20 differentiation practices within PESCO, and challenges of DC within the EU's multilateral
21 performance. The collection shall therefore be of interest to a wide audience, such as researchers,
22 policy experts, and practitioners dealing with various aspects of multilateral cooperation and security
23 and defense issues within and outside the EU.
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47 Finally, due to the universality of differentiation as a phenomenon that can occur in any governance
48 system characterized by diversity (Hooghe & Marks, 2022), the theoretical framework presented in
49 this article can be adopted to other institutional settings. The IR-theories driven framework puts
50 forward a series of hypotheses that can be employed to examine the emergence, modes, and implication
51 of differentiated practices in polities other than the EU.
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ⁱ Twenty-five out of twenty-seven member states participate in PESCO.

Table 1. Differentiated Cooperation and Differentiated Integration: Qualifying Features

	Autonomy of EU Institutions	Behavioural Norm	Functioning Logic
Differentiated Cooperation	Limited Scope for Discretionary Power	Consensus-Seeking Practices	Integration through Voluntary Policy Coordination
Differentiated Integration	Ample Scope for Discretionary Power	Bargaining	Integration through Binding Legal Acts

Source: Own Elaboration

Table 2. Differentiated Cooperation in EU Foreign Policy: Empirical manifestations.

Governance (formal/informal) Dimension(s) (internal/external)	Formal DC	Informal DC
Internal DC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced Cooperation (TEU, Art. 20) • PESCO (TEU, Arts. 42 and 46) • Execution of a Specific Task by a group of member states (TEU, Arts. 42 and 44) • Programs of cooperation relying on differentiation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal groups of member states within the EU framework • Informal groups of member states outside from/loosely connected to EU framework
External DC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU cooperation with non-EU actors in specific policy fields within EU-led framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU cooperation with non-EU actors in international multilateral settings and in ad hoc formats

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 3. Differentiated Cooperation: Analytical Framework

Level(s)	Theoretical root(s)	Unit(s) of analysis	Explanatory factor(s)
Micro	Differentiated European Integration	Demand for DC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constellation of member states preferences • Capacities of individual member states • Mutual dependence among member states
		Supply of DC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group size • Externalities • Institutional context (i.e. decision making rules)
Meso	Core State Powers	Mode of DC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of the majoritarian actors • Role of the non-majoritarian actors
	Institutional Overlap	Implications of DC for EU foreign and security policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governmental preferences • Institutional positions
Macro	Comparative federalism	Implications of differentiated cooperation for EU polity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject matter jurisdiction • Institutional context

Source: Own elaboration.