

Report

‘DiCE Regional Assemblies: what do regional and local governments think of differentiated integration?’

Insights from expert workshops with regional representatives of 7 EU member states organised in the framework of the DiCE project between May and September 2022

Coordinator: Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA)



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Introduction

In the framework of the project '[DiCE – Differentiation Clustering Excellence](#)' TEPSA coordinated, between May and September 2022, seven DiCE Regional Assemblies, with the aim of discussing the research results of the DiCE project cluster with representatives of regional and local governments from selected member states (MS) and collecting their input as to the implications of differentiation for the subnational level of governance. These events were organised in cooperation with selected TEPSA member institutes: the [Institute of European Studies and International Relations, Comenius University](#) (Bratislava, Slovakia), the [New Bulgarian University – NBU](#) (Sofia, Bulgaria); the [Institut fur Europäische Politik – IEP](#) (Berlin, Germany), the [Institute for Development and International Relations – IRMO](#) (Zagreb, Croatia); the [Istituto Affari Internazionali – IAI](#) (Rome/Milan, Italy); the [Portuguese Institute of International Relations at NOVA University of Lisbon](#) (Lisbon, Portugal), and the [Institute of European Studies at Jagiellonian University](#) (Krakow, Poland).

Thanks to its decentralised network and the close cooperation with its member institutes, TEPSA reached out to regional and local representatives from the following member states: Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Italy, Poland, Portugal, and Slovakia.

During the events, researchers from the three projects from the Horizon 2020 cluster on differentiated integration (DI) were invited to present the findings of their research: [InDivEU](#) (Integrating Diversity in the European Union); [EU3D](#) (EU: Differentiation, Dominance and Democracy); and [EU IDEA](#) (EU Integration and Differentiation for Effectiveness and Accountability).

Key objectives

The analysis conducted in the three projects (InDivEU, EU3D, EU IDEA) revealed that one group of stakeholders was scarcely addressed – regional and local authorities. Nevertheless, these actors are in charge of a relevant part of EU policy implementation, they have valuable first-hand experience in applying EU legislation, and they are in close contact with local realities. DiCE, through TEPSA member institutes, has thus reached out to relevant policy-stakeholders from the regional and local levels through small expert workshops to discuss the findings and policy scenarios developed in the three cluster projects, their potential implications for the regions and possible challenges for implementation.

Linking research and policy and considering the different interests and perspectives of citizens, parties and governments is decisive for making informed and constructive policy decisions. DiCE thus tried to build powerful synergies between research, policy and the civil society within the area of differentiation.

Overall, the Regional Assemblies aimed at achieving four main objectives:

1. Raise awareness about the three Horizon 2020 projects InDivEU, EU Idea and EU3D as well as the overarching project DiCE at the regional and local level of governance;
2. Collect feedback as to the implications of differentiation for the regional and local level of



governance in order to feed into DiCE's further work;

3. Assess the scenarios on differentiated integration developed by the three projects EU IDEA, EU3D and InDivEU;
4. Provide insights to EU and national policymakers as to the regions' views of differentiation

Structure of the events

Each regional assembly lasted for a maximum of 2 hours and was structured around three parts: 1) an introduction to the event's objectives, the DiCE project, the concept of differentiated integration and its relevance for the future of the EU; 2) presentations of the main results of the three abovementioned projects on differentiation by key researchers from the projects; 3) a follow-up debate where regional representatives were asked to assess and comment on future differentiation in the EU through interactive polls and an open discussion.

Taking into account the linguistic specificities of the different countries and the English fluency of participants, and with the aim of maximising the event outreach and increasing the level of engagement and the quality of the discussions, some assemblies took place in the national languages (Bulgaria, Italy, Poland).

The number and nature of the participating representatives varied depending on the country. While they mostly included representatives from regions and municipalities, in some cases (such as Italy or Slovakia) representatives of national political parties and regional representations to the European Union in Brussels also participated. Few external participants outside of the target group, such as students or researchers interested in differentiated integration, participated to some of the events as observers.

In light of the ongoing limitations due to COVID-19, the format of the events was adapted from a physical one to hybrid or fully online. This shift proved to be beneficial in reaching out to more representatives, and enabling them to participate to the event, thus increasing the overall audience of the events.

Workshop reports

This section presents a summary of the individual workshops held in seven EU member states between May and September 2022.

Regional Assembly Slovakia, 5 May 2022

The Slovak Regional Assembly was co-organised by TEPSA and Comenius University Bratislava.



Lucia Mokra (Comenius University & TEPSA, InDivEU project) opened the event by expressing her gratitude to the Horizon 2020 programme of the European Union for the chance to include the regional level in the discussion on DI.

Stefan Telle (European University Institute, InDivEU project) presented the InDivEU project's results regarding governments and citizens' views about differentiated integration. He defined DI from a legal point of view as differences in the applicability of EU rules across member states (internal) and also to non-EU member states (external). It emerges from the research conducted that the application of DI is mainly caused by member states' heterogeneity regarding policy preferences and administrative capacities. Furthermore, DI could be seen as a tool to overcome decision-making gridlocks. InDivEU found that over time there has been an absolute increase in DI; however, when put in relation with the expansion of the EU and its competences in different policy areas its level seems to be rather stable.

Dr Telle then outlined the main findings concerning political actors' views about DI.

- **Citizens:** There is a growing awareness of the concept of DI combined with a growing support for DI. It can be observed that citizens of MS with more examples of DI are more in support of it compared to those in MS engaged in less DI. Examples of Romania and Bulgaria show however a decreasing support over time. There are also differences based on citizens' political standing.
- **Political Parties:** DI is seen as a pragmatic way to overcome gridlocks; however, it is also seen negatively in relation to increased Euroscepticism.
- **Governments:** The situation is very diverse across the member states. In some, such as Germany, DI is seen as a temporary tool to eventually achieve uniform integration. France is more open to a model of multi-tier DI, with a more integrated core and a less integrated periphery. Slovakia shares France's view, with the ambition to be part of the core. Long-term involuntary opt-outs such as Romania and Bulgaria's exclusion from Schengen are often perceived as unfair.

Funda Tekin (Institut für Europäische Politik, EU IDEA project) defined differentiation as a form of integration which allows states to cooperate in non-homogenous ways. This definition allows for an analysis of EU governance and a multidimensional perspective. EU IDEA looked at what levels and forms of differentiation propels European integration forward, and what forms risks leading to disintegration.

Three criteria have been applied:

1. Effectiveness: flexibility required to enable problem-solving
2. Sustainability and accountability
3. Legitimacy

Dr Tekin distinguished between three factors structuring differentiation:

1. Organizational – procedural across the policy cycle
2. Constitutional – perceived as a challenge for a community or a tool for MS
3. Socio-political – which needs to have broad support from large enough parts of the European demos

An elite survey conducted within the project found a general support by citizens for differentiation, as well as for a development towards a multi-speed Europe. However, results vary depending on the policy areas, e.g. differentiation in the area of security receives support, while there is a general understanding that uniform integration should eventually be applied in the economic and monetary field. The survey

also showed that right-wing Eurosceptics show support for differentiation, which is understood as a means to re-nationalize certain competencies. Furthermore, public opinion polls showed a general support for the concept of differentiation, but also a large lack of understanding of the notion. Sceptical answers were received when it comes to the potential for differentiation as a solution to major challenges faced by the EU. A major finding was that differentiation is a helpful tool for moving ahead in integration.

Dr Tekin finally presented the 5 scenarios for the future of the EU developed by the InDivEU project: 1) status quo; 2) muddling upwards (incremental increase of differentiation); 3) fundamental disruption of differentiation (e.g. implosion of Schengen and end of Euro area); 4) creation of an inner core (coalition of the willing); and 5) new supranational Union (based on an EU constitution).

John Erik Fossum (ARENA Centre for European Studies at the University of Oslo, EU 3D project) presented the still ongoing research of EU3D, which runs until July 2023. The project looks at which forms of differentiation are compatible with democracy, and which ones, on the contrary, lead to dominance. Prof. Fossum made a distinction between differentiated integration, which is about process and dynamics, and differentiation, which is about structure. The EU3D project defined DI as a political system in terms of the politics of EU integration. Special attention is paid to the role of affiliated non-members as well as the role of policy-making: member states may obtain opt-outs or opt-ins from EU rules and policies. Prof. Fossum argued that every system has a differentiation dimension. This has a significant impact on regions in different countries across the EU. Hence, differentiation is a structural component of the system of the EU. He highlighted two dimensions of differentiation: a legal dimension, and a differentiated political system of the EU. A key question is how to organize the EU system to ensure it is democratic. Since all levels of governance are impacted by differentiation, the regional level plays a significant role. Prof. Fossum concluded that differentiation is not only compatible with, but also is necessary for democracy.

The regional representatives were then asked how they perceive DI in their daily work.

Several representatives noted the major impact of EU policies on regions, as around 80 % of regional funding depends on EU funds. They shared the opinion that regional cross border cooperation would be easier if neighbours also used the Euro. Generally, they saw DI taking place rather on the national than on the regional level. They concluded that, in general, they are in favour of more political decentralization in Slovakia. Other representatives expressed the wish that the different regions could have a greater say during the process of transposing EU law into Slovak law. Others observed that regions are frequently consulted by the national government regarding the implementation of EU law. They underlined the role of the Committee of the Regions, which can act as a forum to comment and be involved in the EU's legislative process. The idea of regions opting out individually from some EU policies was also discussed.

Some representatives noted that Slovakia discusses integration very much focusing on economic policy and Schengen. However, they were convinced that cohesion policy should be paid more attention to. Such attention could help better communicating the benefits Slovakia derives from EU integration. The possibility of applying DI to cohesion policy was also touched upon, but it was underlined that it would be difficult to apply DI to a policy area where solidarity and redistribution play a key role.

Regional Assembly Bulgaria, 12 May 2022

The Bulgarian Regional Assembly was co-organised by TEPSA and the New Bulgarian University.

Paolo Chiocchetti (European University Institute, InDivEU project) gave an overview of the InDivEU project which defines internal differentiation as the case where some rules apply to only a subset of member states. Prominent examples are the Euro, Schengen and the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO). Bulgaria is only partially in Schengen, it is not a member of the Euro area but is a member of EPPO. He highlighted the importance of the concept of differentiation due to the 2017 White Paper by the European Commission. Discussing possible future developments, he presented four possible scenarios for the EU's future by 2035:

1. Highland Europe (uniform integration),
2. Mountainous Europe (differentiated integration),
3. Lowland Europe (uniform disintegration),
4. Archipelago Europe (differentiated disintegration).

He found that the most likely pattern is a development towards more integration with a stable level of differentiation. He furthermore identified advantages and disadvantages of differentiation:

- On the advantages side, the formation of vanguard groups to further integration and the ability to cater for specific problems and preferences;
- On the disadvantages side, a lower overall policy benefit, negative external effects (second class members), cherry picking by influential MS, and the risk of undermining a shared sense of European identity.

Tiziano Zgaga (LUISS University, EU 3D project) presented EU 3D's finding that the EU has become a consolidated political system which is also more internally differentiated due to crises like the Euro crisis, the migration crisis, and Brexit. Hence, the EU3D project assumes an increased internally differentiated EU. They investigate under which conditions differentiation is politically acceptable, institutionally sustainable, and democratically legitimate. Lastly, looking at the results of the Conference on the Future of Europe he noted that several proposals mention DI (especially functional and vertical DI).

Matteo Bonomi (Istituto Affari Internazionali, EU IDEA project) presented the EU IDEA project which looks into policy analysis and the role of narratives. They focused on three policy areas: Economic and Monetary Union and Single Market, Defence and Security, and Freedom and Justice. They were analysing the role of political elites as well as of citizens. For them, the legal approach is only a part of defining differentiation, which they define rather broadly as the form of integration that allows members and non-members to cooperate in a non-homogenous way. Also, their approach would like to mitigate the state-centric focus of DI research by allowing complementing the top-down approach with a more bottom-up perspective. They found that differentiation can facilitate effectiveness but can be problematic in terms of legitimacy. This is reflected by public opinion, and here research findings highlighted a difficulty for citizens in grasping the concept of DI.

The discussion that followed with local representatives touched upon the EU's cohesion policy, Bulgaria's potential place in the EU's concentric circles or different speeds, as well as public attitudes to European integration in times of crisis. The extent to which EU policies affect local representatives in their daily work was also discussed. The general impression was that the EU has an overall positive impact. However, the need to involve local authorities in the design of new policies both at EU and national level



was voiced.

Regional Assembly Germany, 16 May 202

The German Regional Assembly was co-organised by TEPSA and Institut für Europäische Politik.

Almut Moeller (State Councillor and Plenipotentiary of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg) welcomed the participants and noted that DI can not only make a contribution in the area EU foreign and security policy, but also regarding the future of enlargement. In her view, a crucial question is how to ensure unity and at the same time sufficient diversity within the EU. The risk of cleavages is immanent and the issues at stake carry a lot of risk for division.

Funda Tekin (Institut für Europäische Politik, EU IDEA project) outlined the role of differentiation and the many examples of already applied differentiation in the EU and its neighbouring countries. However, she noted, differentiation is not the silver bullet for many of the EU's current problems. DI is again at the forefront in the European political debate, both in terms of internal reforms and in regard to Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova's membership applications, which tackles external dimensions of differentiation. She defined DI as the case where at least one member state is not subject to the same rules as the other member states. So far, she found, DI has rather helped the European integration process. Still, she recommended assessing the usefulness of this tool in the single policy areas.

Paolo Chiocchetti (European University Institute, InDivEU project) highlighted the different examples of differentiation such as Euro, Schengen and the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO), noting that Germany is participating in all of them (however as one of the less active members). He defined internal DI as defined as a form of European integration where some norms do not uniformly apply to all EU member states, but only to a subset of them.

Discussing possible future developments, he presented four scenarios for 2035:

1. Highland Europe (uniform integration),
2. Mountainous Europe (differentiated integration),
3. Lowland Europe (uniform disintegration),
4. Archipelago Europe (differentiated disintegration).

He found that the most likely pattern is a development towards more integration with a stable level of differentiation. He noted that many existing forms of differentiation are only temporary. However, the question arises whether DI is desirable, or whether we should strive for more uniform integration instead. Among the pros of DI, Dr Chiocchetti highlighted that it allows bypassing country vetoes and it allows vanguard groups to move forward in integration. It can also accommodate functional or political problems in specific countries, as well as help when MS have fundamentally divergent conditions; interests or preferences. Among the cons, he underlined that DI yields lower overall functional benefits than uniform integration, particularly in economic areas, and may lead to negative externalities and loss of political influence for the outsiders; as well as to cherry picking by influential member states.

Piero Tortola (University of Groningen, EU IDEA project) noted that DI is traditionally very state-centred, and presented his research on sub-state authorities' networks, which also reach across borders. The EU3D project defines differentiation as any modality of integration or cooperation that allows states



(members of the EU and non-members) and sub-state entities to work together in non-homogeneous, flexible ways. State-centred DI is the most prominent, but not the only form of differentiation.

Subnational authority networks are horizontal, voluntary and independent organisations connecting local and/or regional authorities across borders in a stable manner, with the aim of achieving some common goal and/or producing mutually beneficial services. The EU3D project built a dataset of 96 entirely or partially EU-based networks: 30 urban, 30 regional and 36 mixed. Most of existing networks were established in the 1990s and 2000s, as an effect of a number of policy initiatives from the EU and the UN (Agenda 2021). While most of them are generalist (for example Eurocities), others have a thematic focus: environment, energy, education, culture, transports, and technology. Their main functions include policy learning and innovation, exchanges of know-how and best practices, technical support to local and regional governments, interest representation and lobbying, project formulation, development and implementation, further networking and matchmaking among members. Dr Tortola highlighted three main types of differentiation that can be observed in these cases:

- 1: insider-outsider differentiation;
- 2: Compound differentiation, where the coexistence of many, partly overlapping networks gives rise to different degrees of insidership and outsidership;
- 3: Multi-level differentiation, originating from mismatches at the intersection of network-based differentiation and state-centred DI. It can be internal or external (networks contain cities and regions from the EU but also beyond).

Finally, he offered a few policy recommendations, centring on the need to:

- Strive for inclusion of underrepresented local entities;
- Improve information on these networks;
- Exploit the para-diplomatic advantages of networks in mitigating bottlenecks at the state level.

Some regional representatives were convinced that more differentiation is needed to ensure the EU's unity. They reflected critically on the impact of further enlargement on the EU's effectiveness and unity. In light of the recent Conference on the Future of Europe, some regional representatives voiced their concern that DI might pose a risk of further complicating the EU for citizens.

It was observed that some examples of differentiation are more controversial, such as justice and home affairs, and economics. Here, it was noted that on the one hand DI is often necessary, but on the other hand uniformity in these areas is often wished for by member states.

It was also mentioned that citizens are often unaware of transnational networks and their role for DI. For example, Eurocities as one of the biggest networks is rather unheard of by "the public". More generally, it was noted that the EU has a huge problem of readability for citizens, which translates into a problem of legitimacy – it is already a very complex polity, and DI certainly adds to this complexity.

Finally, it emerged from the discussion that DI poses rather a threat for democratic legitimacy than it is an opportunity, and that climate change is regarded as a policy area where DI should not be applied.

Henrik Lesaar (Head of the European Policy Department, Senate of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg) concluded the event by again pointing out the relevance of DI for the future of the EU, especially for cities and regions. He found very striking that there are several scenarios for further integration also in different policy areas. Very topically, he thinks that the war in Ukraine also causes many questions regarding future common foreign and security policies.

Vittoria Meissner (Institut für Europäische Politik, EU IDEA project) concluded by underlining that DI



represents a long-term if not permanent feature of the EU, and that therefore more should be done to ensure citizens have better understand this concept.

Regional Assembly Croatia, 1 June 2022

The Croatian Regional Assembly was co-organised by TEPSA and the Institute for Development and International Relations.

Hrvoje Butkovic (Institute for Development and International Relations) started the workshop by introducing TEPSA and the project of DiCE regional assemblies whose goal it is to engage with local and regional representatives to translate state of the art research into policy advice that is relevant for EU policy making. Differentiation describes the process where some member states decide to move forward by integrating further while others do not. As Croatia is now at the doorstep of joining the Euro area and is working towards joining Schengen, differentiation is rather tangible and highly relevant for Croatia.

Tiziano Zgaga (LUISS University, EU3D project) started his intervention by noting that the EU has become an increasingly complex political system because the integration process has deepened as well as widened due to enlargement. In addition, the EU has undergone several crises. Recognising this context, it becomes clear that the EU has become increasingly differentiated. The EU3D project's assumption is that there might be some forms of differentiation that can become problematic as there is a potential for arising dominance of certain actors over others. The project set out to look at the conditions under which differentiation is politically acceptable, institutionally sustainable, and democratically legitimate, and the conditions under which it is not. The project analysed internal and external differentiation as well as the discussion about reform proposals (including parliamentary debates in the member states, public perception collected through surveys, as well as institutional actors, including regional actors, and civil society).

Paolo Chiocchetti (European University Institute, InDivEU project) presented the conclusions of the InDivEU project, focusing on some future scenarios and their desirability. In its internal dimension, he explained, differentiation exists where some rules are only applied to a subset of the members. Examples include the Euro, Schengen and the enhanced cooperation within the EPPO. He then presented the four scenarios for the EU's future differentiation, and discussed the main advantages and disadvantages of differentiated integration.

Matteo Bonomi (Istituto Affari Internazionali, EU IDEA project) underlined that differentiation has been an important tool throughout the European integration process. The crisis-driven EU seemed to use more and more differentiation over the years. The EU IDEA project defined differentiation more broadly as any form of non-homogeneous cooperation between states and substate level actors. Their analytical approach included both legal commitments as well as organisational aspects. He also presented the project's findings as to the role of sub-national authorities' networks, characterised by three forms of differentiation: insider-outsider differentiation, compound differentiation, and multi-level differentiation. He noted that public perception about differentiation is marked by confusion and mixed assessment. Public support from non-member states is diverse, but overall rather high, especially towards economic cooperation (highest in Ukraine before the start of the war).



The presentations were followed by a more general discussion with the regional representatives. The reluctance to deepen integration in some policy areas was highlighted as a key driver of differentiated integration – a major example here is the polarisation of the debate in Croatia about the introduction of the Euro.

Some regional representatives also noted that especially municipalities lack the capacity to implement some policies, especially when it comes to providing financial support and giving adequate policy advice. The question of how Croatia formulates its position on EU matters was also discussed. Some regional representatives highlighted that Croatia sometimes coordinating with or looking to the Visegrád countries, but that its position often also reflects the domestic political debate.

It was also highlighted that regional and local authorities often cooperate with their counterparts in other (especially neighbouring) member states (Slovenia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Italy), but that this cooperation is often linked to specific European projects and is rarely formalized. It was concluded that sharing positive experiences and best practices with regions that are less involved in cross-border cooperation is crucial. The representative followed up by confirming that they do work a lot with Italy, and Hungary, they also collaborate with many non-EU members.

Regional Assembly Italy, 14 June 2022

The Italian Regional Assembly was co-organised by TEPSA and Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI).

Nicoletta Pirozzi (Istituto Affari Internazionali, EU IDEA project) briefly introduced the concept of differentiation, as well as some of the key terms usually associated with it, such as opt-out, multi-speed, concentric circles, and enhanced cooperation.

Sergio Fabbrini (LUISS University, EU3D project) presented the main preliminary findings of the EU3D project. The project has been investigating whether and under what conditions DI is likely to enhance dominance elements between the member states. In particular, he explained, specific attention was given to the normative element of DI, as to understand whether differentiation enhances the democratic element or rather alienates it from the European governance. He presented their analysis on DI dominance patterns in policy making and within the EU institutions (i.e. whether Eurozone member states manage to impose their positions on non-Euro ones). A central question in this sense was understanding whether this form of dominance is directly linked to the concept of inter-governability. He explained that one of the most essential aspects concerns the role of the European Council, and why and how hierarchical models have been forming inside this institution. A further element that has been researched is the relationship between differentiated integration and differentiated disintegration, linking it to the analysis of the concept of sovereignism and its main traits in some member states. The research showed that tendencies linked to sovereignism are relevant in the sense that they prelude a possible evolution of differentiation towards a model of disintegration. Another element of the research were also constitutional models around Europe, in particular understanding what could be viable ones for a union of states reflecting differentiation processes.

Paolo Chiocchetti (European University Institute, InDivEU project) presented the findings of the InDivEU project. He explained the concept, modalities, instruments, and fields of application of differentiated integration, and touched upon the relevance of DI in the treaties and in the academic debate on the



reform of the European Union. He then presented four possible scenarios for the EU's future differentiation by 2035 developed by the InDivEU project: two integration scenarios and two disintegration ones. According to the results of their research, he explained, the balance between uniformity and differentiation is likely to remain stable in the upcoming years. The main open question left at the end of the research concerns how desirable differentiation in the different scenarios is.

Matteo Bonomi, (Istituto Affari Internazionali, EU IDEA project) presented the results of the EU IDEA project. He focused on the main findings of the first phase of the project: the perception of Europe before the crises. In particular, in this first phase the research focused on common practices of differentiation, with a focus on subnational authority networks.

During the following debate, some regional representatives shared their views on differentiation based on their political experience at the regional level. It was highlighted that the experience of the pandemic, with many different national policies and issues linked to the sharing of vaccines between MS, shows that there is a great need for uniform integration at the moment. However, it was noted, this uniform integration should be combined with differentiation at the level of local authorities, in particular municipalities. In this case, differentiation based on the knowledge of these local actors of their social realities would be beneficial in channelling a positive and effective response to the actual needs of the citizens. A vertical differentiation at the level of local communities, similar to European subsidiarity, might be the most virtuous way to give more space to these realities. The importance of communicating and mainstreaming the positive outcomes of integration to citizens beyond the most known policy areas was also stressed widely.

These was also discussed in light of surveys conducted by the EU IDEA project, which showed that citizens are generally favourable to uniform integration in areas such as health policies, while in others, such as migration, they seem to prefer differentiation between member states.

Regional representatives also underlined how subsidiarity is important in relation to DI, in particular in bringing institutions and citizens closer with the involvement of regions and municipalities.

The question of how to ensure citizens' engagement in an even more differentiated Europe was also discussed. It was stressed that the more complex a society become, the higher the need to develop local or regional forms of government, the more differences between communities appear. In this sense, it was underlined that differentiation is now a structural concept of our societies. This is closely linked with the concept of multiple identities: it is essential not to make this differentiation aggressive, and to build a pluralism of identities while, at the same time, finding a way to reconcile them. National interest, it was concluded, is a composite one, and it has to be combined with a common, unitarian one.

Finally, the discussion touched upon the importance of building a trust relationship between local populations and the administrations, especially in those areas where a lower level of governance is essential.

Regional Assembly Portugal, 27 September 2022

The Portuguese Regional Assembly was co-organised by TEPSA and the Portuguese Institute of International Relations at NOVA University of Lisbon.



Nicoletta Pirozzi (Istituto Affari Internazionali, EU IDEA project) presented the results of the EU IDEA project. She explained the relevance of differentiation by pointing out that it has become common practice for Member States to use opt-outs or enhanced cooperation. Defining differentiation as any form of integration which allows states and non-state actors to cooperate in non-homogenous, flexible ways, the project conducted research on the role of sub-national authority networks. Overall, they found that those networks, and their involvement at the local and regional levels, showed to be beneficial to the EU. This finding is also supported by the results of a citizen survey they conducted. While there is strong support for differentiated integration, many citizens seem to be indifferent or not aware of these concepts and options (around 30%). So, Dr. Pirozzi concluded, citizens need to be made more aware of the existence of differentiated integration.

Magdalena Gora (Jagiellonian University, EU3D project) presented the preliminary findings of EU3D and highlighted that its research is still ongoing. Their consortium approached differentiation by analysing the concept of power through dominance which is defined as unjust exercise of power. Culminating in the Conference on the Future of Europe, differentiation has always been discussed since the early 2000s. While debates showed very different visions for the future of European integration, ranging from deepening integration among Member States to protecting national competencies, it can be observed that debates are having a significant impact on local levels, for instance during the 2022 Italian elections. EU3D considered three different modes of European integration for its analysis:

1. Intergovernmental integration,
2. Integration on the federal level,
3. Regional-cosmopolitan integration.

In comparison to the other projects, Dr. Gora explained, they defined differentiation very broadly since they included several dimensions such as law-making, functional and vertical differentiation, democratic malfunctioning, and dominance. She then presented their provisional data findings on national debates on reforming the EU. When looking at the around 960 submitted proposals for the Conference on the Future of Europe, a large group of those, around 270, mention or implicitly refer to differentiation. In addition, they observed a heterogeneous field of narratives on European integration: for instance, the intergovernmental narrative is still widespread, and some Member State actors stretch its definition, while some federal narratives appeal still more towards a market liberalized perception of the EU. The least popular was the regional-cosmopolitan narratives.

Stefan Telle (European University Institute, InDivEU project) presented the findings of the InDivEU project. They defined differentiation as a partial adoption of EU rules across Member States and non-Member States. Furthermore, differentiation thus allows Member States to overcome political gridlocks caused by their different preferences and capacities. Over time, this policy-making mode has been used more frequently in absolute terms. However, since the EU has been growing both in terms of the number of its members and the number of integrated policy areas, the relative number of differentiation has been almost stable.

InDivEU's main findings concerned citizens, political parties, and Member States' governments:

- Looking at citizens, over time they observed an increasing awareness about the concept of differentiation. Interestingly, most citizens were comfortable with the level of differentiation in their country, independent of high or low levels of differentiation. Pro-EU citizens were in favour of differentiation since they see it as a driver of integration. On the other hand, differentiation was also

supported by Eurosceptics, especially on the political right, as they see it rather as a way to opt out and nationalize competencies.

- Regarding political parties, they came to mixed conclusions. A reason that could explain this could be that differentiation does not seem to be appealing for voters.
- Member States' governments tend to have stable positions on differentiation, even beyond national elections. Reasons could be of ideological nature, however, they assume that structural characteristics of Member States, such as their size, could play an important role in explaining this.

Lastly, Dr. Telle shared the finding that political elites determine the perception of differentiation in Member States. The elites' position will eventually be picked up by governing political parties and their supporters.

These findings were presented to a group of selected regional representatives from Portugal.

Regional Assembly Poland, 30 September 2022

The Polish Regional Assembly was co-organised by TEPSA and the Institute of European Studies at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow.

The event was held in Polish and simultaneous interpretation into English was provided. In their opening remarks, **Paweł Laidler** (Dean of the Faculty of International and Political Studies at Jagiellonian University), **Krzysztof Koźbiał** (Director of the Institute of European Studies at Jagiellonian University), and **Magdalena Góra** (Institute of European Studies at Jagiellonian University, EU3D project) underlined the importance of keeping an open dialogue between researchers and political actors, especially those from regional authorities. They welcomed both the regional representatives from several regions in Poland as well as the researchers present from the DiCE constituent projects.

Piero Tortola (University of Groningen, EU IDEA project) presented the results of the EU IDEA project, which was concluded in April 2022. He explained that one of the key premises was to go beyond the traditional definition of differentiation which is usually very state centric. They defined differentiation as any form of collaboration of state and nonstate actors who cooperate in non-homogeneous ways. Looking specifically at the regional level, meaning differentiation from below, they selected a data set on networks built of 96 institutions operating within the EU. Looking at the policy areas these networks operate in, the majority operates in generalist networks with three or more topics or in the environmental sphere. The projects main findings include:

1. Their specific analysis of differentiation itself showed that insider-outsider differentiation is a feature of virtually all networks which has both advantages and disadvantages. Advantages include greater coherence and allowing for pioneering, while on the other hand some disadvantages are the potential of having free riders or indeed excluding actors permanently.
2. They observed compound differentiation where many coexisting networks overlap. Advantages of this include fostering healthy network competition and creating synergies. At the same time, there might be too much duplication and thus a waste of resources.
3. Multi-level differentiation originates from mismatches at the intersection of network-based differentiation and state-centred differentiation. There are internal (problems of



representativeness and effectiveness) and external characteristics (problems of representativeness and accountability) which may have some advantages such as enabling out-of-the-box thinking and spreading EU ideas.

Dr Tortola concluded his presentation by presenting the project's recommendations:

- Underrepresented regional authorities should strive for inclusion.
- Improve provision of information on networks and explain their advantages.

Paolo Chiocchetti (European University Institute, InDivEU project) presented future scenarios for differentiation in the EU as one of the main findings of InDivEU. For their consortium, differentiated integration is every form of integration where some rules do not apply uniformly. While not too well known, the concept is indeed widely used in EU law-making. Often-cited examples include the Eurozone, Schengen, and the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO). The use of differentiated integration and opt-outs can depend on the capacity of Member States as well as on political motives such as the citizens will.

Discussing possible future developments, he presented four scenarios:

1. Highland Europe (uniform integration),
2. Mountainous Europe (differentiated integration),
3. Lowland Europe (uniform disintegration),
4. Archipelago Europe (differentiated disintegration).

The most likely future trend they identified is a middle way, which resembles following the path the EU is on right now and could be identified as a mix of more integration while granting some more exemptions to some Member States. He found it furthermore unlikely that we will experience more differentiation in the future than we experience today.

Dr Chiocchetti pointed out that there were advantages and disadvantages of differentiation:

- Advantages include bypassing country blockages since Member States could opt-out instead of having to veto a decision. Differentiation also grants Member States the option of abstaining from an initiative which does not make sense to them, like Cyprus abstaining from participating in regulation on railways. Similarly, other political reasoning could be taken into account.
- Disadvantages include that many areas of international cooperation may cause costs or the loss of benefits for non-participating members. Also, these non-participants might lose influence on political decision making. Differentiation could be perceived as cherry picking and hence as unfair to some Member States. Others perceive differentiation as a way to weaken the European spirit.

Magdalena Gora (Jagiellonian University, EU3D project) presented the preliminary findings of EU3D and explained that the project is still ongoing. Underlining that the concept of differentiation has been discussed since the early 2000s, she explained their approach focused on the unjust exercise of power or dominance. While debates showed very different visions for the future of European integration, ranging from deepening integration among Member States to protecting national competencies, they observed the significant impact of these European debates on local levels, for instance during the 2022 Italian elections. EU3D considered three different modes of European integration for its analysis:

4. Intergovernmental integration,
5. Integration on the federal level,



6. Regional-cosmopolitan integration.

They defined differentiation broadly as non-homogenous law-making, including functional and vertical differentiation, democratic malfunctioning, and dominance. She then presented their provisional data findings about national debates on reforming the EU, as submitted in the proposals for the Conference on the Future of Europe. When looking at the around 960 submitted proposals, around 270 of those mention or implicitly refer to differentiation. In addition, they observed a heterogenous field of narratives on European integration: for instance, the intergovernmental narrative is still widely spread, while some federal narratives still appeal more towards a market liberalized perception of the EU and the narrative on regional-cosmopolitan integration seemed to be the least popular, Dr Gora found.

Marcin Zubek (Jagiellonian University) moderated the discussion with regional representatives. There was a lively exchange about the division of competencies between regional and national levels and one participant identified the potential for more cross-border cooperation on the regional level which today often still takes place through rather informal channels. Another participant added that, from the Polish perspective, moving towards more integration seems logical, while they acknowledged that currently the EU is often seen for its provision of financial support first. Another participant shared the practical observation that many networks of inter-regional, cross-border cooperation would develop very gradually and might expand into additional policy areas over time. For instance, they highlighted the speed with which many networks had been repurposed as a reaction to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.