

DiCE “Future of Europe” panel at TEPSA’s Czech Pre-Presidency Conference

“The Future of European Integration: After the Crisis and the CoFoE”

Prague, 24 May 2022



In the framework of the Horizon 2020 project [“DiCE – Differentiation: Clustering Excellence”](#), on 24 May 2022 TEPSA organised a panel on “The Future of European Integration: After the Crisis and the CoFoE” at its Czech [Pre-Presidency Conference \(PPC\)](#), held on the occasion of the incoming Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU which took place in Prague.

The PPC is TEPSA’s biannual flagship event, taking place right before the inauguration of each new Council Presidency. Bringing together academics, think tankers, policy makers, media and civil society, the conference aims to discuss the agenda and challenges of the upcoming Presidency and of the EU more broadly.

The aim of this panel was to answer a number of key questions about the Future of European Integration and the role of differentiation therein, with a special focus on recent crises, the impact of the Conference on the Future of Europe and the extent to which it is a viable tool for European reform, and what citizens and governments want for the future of Europe.

The panel was moderated by **Dr. Jakub Eberle** (Research Director of the Institute for International Relations in Prague, TEPSA Member) and featured four highly distinguished speakers: **Dr. Nicoletta Pirozzi** (Member of the TEPSA Board, Head of European Union Programme and Institutional Relations Manager at the Istituto Affari Internazionali - IAI, member of the DiCE project and EU IDEA Coordinator), **Prof. Dr. Jaap de Zwaan** (former TEPSA Secretary-General and Honorary TEPSA Board Member, Professor Emeritus of European Law at Erasmus University of Rotterdam), **Prof. Dr. Frank Schimmelfennig** (Member of the TEPSA



Board and Professor of European Politics at the University of Zurich, member of the DiCE project cluster and InDivEU Scientific Lead), and **Dr. Ilke Toygür** (Member of the TEPSA Board, Professor of Geopolitics of Europe at University Carlos III of Madrid, and CATS Fellow at German Institute for International and Security Affairs – SWP, affiliated member of the InDivEU project).

Dr. Nicoletta Pirozzi reflected on future EU reform in the wake of two major developments: Russia's armed aggression on Ukraine and the Conference on the Future of Europe. Because of the former, the EU is once again required to deploy innovative instruments that can revive its peace-making role. On the other hand, today the Union can also count on additional legitimacy coming from citizens' participation in the Conference on the Future of Europe. Dr. Pirozzi argued that, if the EU wants to establish itself as a credible actor in the new international (dis)order and respond to the expectations of its citizens, it must complete major reforms, some of which will require treaty changes.

First, there is a need for the institutions to be able to intervene in those areas that are still in the hands of national executives, but which by their nature require shared solutions and a collective response: health, defense, energy. New forms of integration and differentiation must be found, she noted, because a Union of 27 or more cannot function without strengthening flexibility. She highlighted that forms of differentiated integration are already provided for in the Treaties, particularly through enhanced cooperation, and are already part of the European DNA, such as the eurozone, the Schengen area and Permanent Structured Cooperation on Defense. Similarly, the Union could benefit from closer forms of cooperation among those countries that can and want to move forward in specific areas such as foreign and security policy, or migration policy. However, Dr. Pirozzi underlined, these initiatives should keep the doors open for those who can and want to contribute later, and establish stable links with European governance and institutions. However, she underlined, under no circumstances should differentiation be about the founding values of the Union, such as the rule of law or respect for human rights, which open up the risk of excessive fragmentation or even disintegration.

In the face of the ongoing war in Ukraine and the membership applications of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, Dr. Pirozzi argued that the concept of flexibility can take on a different and more strategic meaning, for example by offering multiple models of cooperation between the European Union and candidate, neighbour or partner countries. When it comes to institutional reforms, she argued, the consensus rule will have to leave room for the qualified majority voting procedure, preventing the use of cross vetoes by member states – here, comprehensive reform will require amending the Treaties.

Prof. Dr. Jaap de Zwaan praised the CoFoE exercise for its involvement of citizens across Europe, but warn that substantive treaty changes should not necessarily be expected as a result. Looking at some of the proposals resulting from the CoFoE, he expressed some hesitations about the European Parliament being granted the right for initiative as well as about the practical use of transnational lists. Regarding enlargement, Prof. De Zwaan stressed the need of speeding up that the integration process of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, considering that the three countries are already cooperating closely with the European Union.



In particular, in some areas of common interest, the EU should already support the three countries with funding and foresee their participation with an observer status in some EU bodies. He concluded by commenting that, besides treaty changes, there are many other avenues to be considered in order to make EU decision-making process simplified and more efficient.

Prof. Dr. Frank Schimmelfennig stated that in the past, developments in European integration have usually taken the shape of new treaties. In recent years, the approach has become more bottom-up, with an emphasis on citizen engagement. Looking at recent crises and their impact on European integration, Prof. Schimmelfennig highlighted an event-driven, reactive process, which is policy focused rather than institution focused. One interesting example is the Recovery and Resilience Facility, which has been agreed on using unanimity. Given that the crisis-driven reform process cannot be described as a very conscious and controlled process, Prof. Schimmelfennig, noted, one needs to ask what kind of EU comes out of it. Thus, one could speak of a “crisisfication” of the EU, whereby the EU expands its capacity to react as a response to crises. It could be argued, he concluded, that the EU has been changing from a broad, federalizing institution towards more capacity building through crisis management.

Dr. Ilke Toygür welcomed the CoFoE as a democratic exercise in contrast to a previously rather elite-driven type of governance. It should not be forgotten, she argued, that the EU is not only a forum for member states’ interest-based negotiations, but also a Union of European peoples. She then looked at how the EU can move forward from this exercise. First, it could be advisable to not only build on the CoFoE recommendations, but also to reflect on a more permanent platform for citizens. Furthermore, she highlighted five main policy areas that the EU should focus on more urgently: Democracy and Rule of Law, economic governance, security and defence, enlargement, energy policy. In particular, EU decision-makers should pay attention to the budgetary implications of the pandemic, the financing of Ukraine’s reconstruction, the need for some institutionalized security forum on the European level including the EU’s direct neighbours as a complement to NATO, as well as the need to give willing countries a real accession perspective, including the possibility of advancing the process in a gradual manner. Lastly, considering the new orientation in European energy policy, Dr. Toygür stressed the need to find an alternative for “Wandel durch Handel” or change through trade.

The presentations were followed by a discussion that focused on a number of topics, including: the role of qualified majority voting in future EU reform, potential treaty changes, and internal and external differentiation as a result of further EU enlargement. In their concluding remarks, the panelists underlined the importance of using the momentum created by the CoFoE to increase the EU’s legitimacy towards citizens for upcoming agenda setting. In order to guarantee this, establishing the CoFoE as a more permanent forum could be one option. Talking about differentiation and the role of enlargement of the Union, the panelists concluded that the EU’s fundamental values should never be subject to differentiation, and that Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine has forced the EU to carefully reevaluate its approach to further enlargement.

