

“Differentiated Integration and the Future of Europe”

Panel organised in the framework of the InDivEU project at the TEPSA Slovenian Pre-Presidency Conference, 17-18 June 2021

The poster features a stylized graphic of the Slovenian flag (white, blue, and red) flowing across the top. On the left, it lists the event details: #PPCLJUBLJANA, 17-18 JUNE 2021, Integrating Diversity in the European Union. The central text reads 'Differentiated Integration and the Future of Europe', Plenary Session, 18 June 2021 - 09:00-10:30. On the right, four speakers are listed with their portraits: Dubravka Šuica (Keynote), Sandra Kröger, Matteo Bonomi, and Magdalena Góra. The bottom left includes a small EU flag and funding information.

#PPCLJUBLJANA
17-18 JUNE 2021
Integrating
Diversity in the
European Union

**Differentiated Integration
and the Future of Europe**
Plenary Session
18 June 2021 - 09:00-10:30

Moderator: Prof. Dr. Michael Kaeding
Jean Monnet Professor ad personam,
University of Duisburg Essen

Keynote: Dubravka Šuica
Vice-President of the European
Commission, Democracy and
Demography

Dr. Sandra Kröger
Senior Lecturer, University of Exeter

Dr. Matteo Bonomi
Research Fellow, IAI

Dr. Magdalena Góra
Project Researcher, IES, Jagiellonian
University

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In the framework of the Horizon 2020 project [“InDivEU - Integrating Diversity in the European Union”](#), on 18 June 2021 TEPSA organised a panel on “The Future of Europe” at its Slovenian [Pre-Presidency Conference \(PPC\)](#), held on the occasion of the incoming Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU.

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. Due to the current restrictions in place because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the conference was held in a virtual format.

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



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The panel was moderated by **Prof. Michael Kaeding** (Member of the TEPSA Board, Jean Monnet Professor *ad personam* at the University of Duisburg Essen, Visiting Professor at the College of Europe) and featured a keynote speech by **Dubravka Šuica** (Vice-President of the European Commission for Democracy and Demography). The panel involved outstanding academics working on Differentiated Integration: **Dr Sandra Kröger**, (Member of the InDivEU project and Senior Lecturer at the University of Exeter), **Dr Matteo Bonomi**, (Assistant Project Coordinator of the EU IDEA project and Research Fellow at Istituto Affari Internazionali, TEPSA Member), and **Dr Magdalena Góra** (Member of the EU3D project and Project Researcher at the Institute of European Studies of the Jagiellonian University, TEPSA Member).

Commissioner **Dubravka Šuica** underlined the importance of the ambitions presented by the Slovenian EU Council Presidency that are summed up in three words: ‘Together. Resilient. Europe.’. Ms Šuica then linked these ambitions with her Portfolio on Democracy and Demography, highlighting that bringing citizens to the heart of the EU policy-making reinforces EU democracy and makes it resilient in face of many challenges. She supports the initiative of the Conference on the Future of Europe and believes that it could bring the EU closer to its citizens. Commissioner Šuica added that the EU must address common challenges together, particularly taking into consideration the emerging opportunities of the EU’s green and digital transitions.

Dr Sandra Kröger provided an overview of the main benefits and risks of DI. According to her research, one of the main benefits of DI is the fact that it works as a pragmatic compromise and as a push towards more integration. DI can also provide more efficient policy solutions and overall improves the efficient functioning of the EU. Moreover, DI can be regarded as a potentially fair arrangement that fosters equality by acknowledging that uniform rules and policies may deepen, rather than overcome, inequalities. She continued with presenting the risks of DI and highlighted that DI often sets Member States (MS) on different paths of policy and institutional development, challenges the principle of legal unity and exacerbates legal fragmentation. Furthermore, DI can give rise to domination by creating power asymmetries between MS. It can also undermine democratic self-rule and lead to division between MS which might result in the weakening of mutual trust.

Secondly, Dr Kroger focused on public opinion and political parties’ position on DI. She highlighted that right-wing parties tend to be more supportive of DI than left or the centre parties, and that citizens with stronger support for equality tend to be less in favour of DI. Regarding the geographical distribution of DI preferences, Dr Kroger underlined a gap between Northern and Eastern European citizens on the one hand, and Southern European citizens on the other hand: Greece, Spain and Portugal appear to be by far the most DI-sceptic countries. In her conclusion, Dr Kroger highlighted that whilst in general there is fair support for a more





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flexible Europe amongst the public and party actors, there is very little tolerance for the rule of law to be part of that flexibility.

Dr Matteo Bonomi highlighted a number of reasons why the EU needs reforms, and explained the importance of the Conference on the Future of Europe in this context. He highlighted that citizens' voices must be heard and addressed during, but more importantly after, the Conference. When addressing the question of DI and the Conference on the Future of Europe, Dr Bonomi underlined that differentiation is not a synonym of division but rather a necessary step towards a common political project and a device that can make the EU a more relevant, effective and legitimate actor. According to him, the Conference on the Future of Europe is the right setting to present and delineate such a project.

Dr Magdalena Góra presented the views from national parliaments on EU reforms and DI. Her research is focused on how the national parliaments envision the constitutional-democratic outline of the EU in the future, and how the EU is envisaged in parliaments in terms of the relationship between integration and differentiation and in relation to the question of dominance. These questions were examined in the period from 2015 to 2019, and one of the main conclusions is that the reform processes (concerning the institutional set-up of the EU polity) were less debated in this period. Instead, actors were focused on policies requiring immediate and necessary reforms so, according to Dr Gora, it is expected that the Conference on the Future of Europe will be driven by similar dynamics. She also underlined the risk that populist actors will use this Conference as a vehicle to prove that the EU is impotent. At the same time, the Conference itself can raise hopes and expectations among citizens.

The presentations were followed by discussion that focused on a number of topics, including: possible applications of DI in the fields of human rights and enlargement; the link between the DI and the rule of law; present and future interests of the EU;

In their concluding remarks, all panelists stressed the importance of the EU's representative democracy and called for a stronger link between the EU level and domestic parliaments, as well as between EU policy making and citizens.

