

**What EU Foreign Policy Do We Want?
Differentiated Cooperation in Action Part #2: Foreign Policy
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GLOBSEC**

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**Panel III: Building Resilience and taking an Integrated Approach in the EU's
surrounding regions in the East and the South**

*An Introduction by Matteo Bonomi, PhD, Research Fellow, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI),
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The concepts of flexibility and differentiation are the front and centre of the on-going debate about the future of the European Union, given the manifold internal and external challenges it is currently facing. On our side, at the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) in Rome, we are very much trying to contribute to this debate. Among other activities, since January 2019, the Institute is leading a consortium of 15 EU and non-EU partners in an ambitious three-year Horizon 2020 project named EU IDEA – EU Integration and Differentiation for Effectiveness and Accountability. The project addresses various perspectives and trajectories of differentiated integration. Its overall goal is to define the criteria – institutional, political and social – to analyse future scenarios of differentiated integration (or disintegration), in order to draw up recommendations for European and national institutions on models of cooperation between the EU and its Member States – as well as with accession, partner and neighbouring countries – that are not only compatible with, but are also conducive to a more effective, cohesive and democratic EU. It is therefore really a great pleasure for me to be here today at GLOBSEC to moderate our third panel on how flexible and *ad hoc* forms of cooperation are impacting EU relations with third countries within its Neighbourhood and Enlargement Policies.

The moving of the EU towards a more flexible and differentiated approach with its neighbourhood is, in fact, an increasingly important dimension of differentiation, given the unstable external environment in which the EU has been moving in recent years in both its South and East. This shift towards a more flexible approach in the EU's surrounding regions was already identified as a strategic priority of the Union in the European Neighbourhood Policy Review in 2015, and then confirmed by the EU Global Strategy in 2016. Both documents took stocks from radical changes in a large number of countries surrounding the

EU and foreseen to revamp engagement with neighbours by deploying the EU's available instruments and resources in a more flexible and coherent manner.

This re-prioritisation and an introduction of new flexible ways of working together took place with the aim of helping stabilize many parts of EU's neighbourhood, which was recognized as the most urgent challenge for the European Neighbourhood Policy. At the same time, both documents have also recognized that the causes of instability often lie far beyond the security domain alone. This is why the idea of building resilience in neighbouring countries has been embraced, as a way of comprehensively addressing sources of instability across sectors, including fighting against poverty, inequality, sense of injustice, corruption, weak economic and social development and lack of opportunity. All these factors were identified as roots of instability and fields where the EU should seek greater engagement along *ad hoc* forms of cooperation with its partners.

Against this background, it is urgent to start looking for some preliminary conclusions on how the EU has managed to build more effective partnerships with its neighbours during the current Commission's mandate and start asking about the future of the EU Neighbourhood Policy and EU Enlargement in the Western Balkans. In my view, this means that we have to try to handle two correlated sets of problems that deal with the declared ambition of the EU to develop an external approach to its surrounding regions, that is at the same time flexible but also integrated and coherent.

The first set of problems relates to the quest for flexibility as a way of fostering engagement with third countries. It points at the issue of how forms of flexibility and differentiation are impacting EU sectoral cooperation with neighbouring and enlargement countries. What are today's limits for third countries' participation in the European project and what is the further potential for moving towards a more flexible and modular approach? In addition, how might dynamics of differentiation with other EU third countries, especially in light of Brexit, affect EU Neighbourhood and Enlargement policies in terms of both activities and institutional participation?

At the same time, it is fundamental to ask ourselves what do these forms of flexibility and differentiation actually mean for the overall future of the EU and its surrounding regions. This relates to the second set of problems, regarding how to develop an European integrated and coherent approach. This points to the issue of how different forms of sectoral cooperation

relate to each other to build resilience in EU neighbouring countries, but to a certain extent it even goes beyond that. The quest for a coherent and integrated approach in fact raises the question of the overall coherence of the wide European regional order and architecture and about the EU's ability to act as its centre of gravity. When the European Neighbourhood policy was launched in 2004, following the great success of the eastern enlargement, it had the clear vision of creating a 'ring of friends' along the newly acquired EU borders, but giving today an answer to this question appears much more difficult. The key issue is to understand how forms of differentiated integration relate to the disintegrative pressures that have built up in Europe, and the impact they may have on the European Neighbourhood and Enlargement policies. Does an European integration project that is constructed along more flexible and variable frameworks have the potential to contain centrifugal forces and accommodate diversity in a wider European space, or is it a further expression of fragmentation and division within the EU and across its surrounding regions?

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