The Role of Differentiation in EU Foreign, Security and Defence Policy Cooperation with Neighbouring Countries

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Abstract

The EU extensively practices differentiation in its foreign, security and defence policy, both internally and externally towards its neighbours. Neighbouring countries are plugged into the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy and its Common Security and Defence Policy to different degrees, and also cooperate with groups of member states informally outside of the EU framework. The paper focuses on external differentiation in foreign and security policy, undertaking an in-depth assessment of the ways in which Albania, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine and the UK cooperate with the EU in foreign and security policy. The paper focuses on the effectiveness, sustainability and legitimacy of the EU's external differentiation with its partners. Finally, it makes recommendations for how the EU and its partners might deepen foreign and security policy cooperation.
Executive summary

The EU extensively practices differentiation in its foreign, security and defence policy, both internally and externally towards its neighbours. Neighbouring countries are plugged into the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) to different degrees, and also cooperate with groups of member states informally outside of the EU framework. This paper focuses on the EU's relationships with its partners, analysing a selection of the EU's cooperation arrangements with countries in its neighbourhood.

The paper focuses on ten partners drawn from three groups of countries neighbouring the EU: countries which are official candidates for EU membership: Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey; European states that are eligible for membership but are not seeking EU accession: Norway and the UK; and the Eastern Partnership countries that have Association Agreements with the EU: Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine.

The paper assesses the formal and informal arrangements that each partner country has made to cooperate with the EU in foreign, security and defence policy. It looks at when and how countries with differing relationships with the Union align themselves with CFSP, how cooperation works in security and defence, and how the EU's partners cooperate with groups of member states in parallel to EU structures. It also analyses how effective, sustainable and legitimate the different forms of cooperation are.

On the whole, we find that the EU's arrangements for external differentiation in foreign and security policy provide for limited involvement by the Union's partners, with the EU not wanting to compromise its decision-making autonomy. The degree of cooperation between the EU and each partner varies principally depending on the level of political alignment between them. Being a candidate for EU membership or a NATO member does not necessarily lead to a close partnership, as exemplified by how Turkey–EU cooperation has been undermined by political tensions. This implies that the sustainability of cooperation ultimately depends on ongoing political alignment between the EU and its partners.

The paper concludes with some proposals for how the EU can maximise the effectiveness of cooperation by deepening foreign policy cooperation with its partners. By allowing its partners more frequent and early consultation and greater access to EU defence industrial cooperation, the EU would become a stronger actor. It would also reduce the risk that informal cooperation between third countries and groups of member states taking place outside of EU structures may undermine the common foreign and security policy.
Introduction

This paper analyses external differentiation in European foreign, security and defence policy, focusing on the role of neighbouring states with varying degrees of contractual engagement with the EU. Differentiation, defined as "any modality of integration or cooperation that allows states (members and non-members) and sub-state entities to work together in non-homogeneous, flexible ways" (Lavenex and Križić 2019: 3), is an important feature of the EU's foreign and security policy. External differentiation in foreign and security policy encompasses a wide range of arrangements, ranging from legally binding formal ones like that between the EU and Canada to largely informal arrangements, like that between the EU and Norway.

For the EU, cooperating with its partners in foreign and security policy, whether formally or informally, is above all a way to increase the effectiveness of its own policy. Partners have no formal role in EU decision-making but can make valuable contributions, adding diplomatic weight to EU policies and initiatives, providing unique insights and making valuable operational contributions to Common Security and Defence Policy missions and operations. The EU's partners can also contribute, both financially and through the involvement of their defence industries, to the EU's efforts to develop its military capabilities. Moreover, by consulting and cooperating with its partners the EU can make them feel more valued, strengthening bilateral relations and keeping them broadly aligned with its foreign policy. At the same time, some member states cooperate with non-member states in flexible groups outside of the EU framework, such as the E3 grouping France, Germany and the UK or the French-led European Intervention Initiative.

The paper assesses the ways in which third countries in the EU's neighbourhood plug into the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and its CSDP. Our case selection is guided by the varying contractual relations which the neighbouring countries have with the EU. The first group are countries that are official candidates for EU membership: Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey. The second group are European states that are eligible for EU membership but that do not seek accession: Norway and the UK. The third group are Eastern Partnership countries that have concluded Association Agreements with the EU: Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine.

Using evidence from 19 original interviews with EU and national diplomats, members of parliament and experts, plus desk research, the cases assess the formal and informal arrangements that the EU's partners have for cooperation with the Union in foreign policy and security policy. Each case study provides an overview of the relationship and looks at why differentiation takes the form it does. With an eye to assessing the sustainability of differentiation, we also focus on its effectiveness assessment, focusing on explaining the varying degrees of cooperation, and assessing their overall effectiveness and sustainability. The conclusions propose some policy recommendations for how the EU could deepen cooperation with its partners.
1. Turkey

Turkey participated in the meetings of the WEU Council, its working groups and its subsidiary bodies, but without voting rights. It could appoint liaison officers and take part in WEU operations on equal terms with full members. Given its NATO membership, Turkey as an associate WEU member had the right to be consulted on WEU operations, and to be involved in operations using NATO assets (Cebeci 1999, Missiroli 2002: 10-12).

This changed with the WEU's dissolution, after which Turkey's anxiety about being left out of autonomous EU security and defence policy structures increased. Ankara vetoed the establishment of a formal EU–NATO cooperation framework until its key demands were met with the 2003 Berlin Plus arrangements, which stipulated that non-EU NATO members could participate in EU missions using NATO assets. This paved the way to sizeable contributions by Turkey in nine EU-led missions and operations, mainly in the form of troops and personnel, making it the largest contributor after France, Germany and the UK (Müftüler-Baç 2017: 428), and “the largest single third country contributor to CSDP” (European Commission 2020e: 109).

Intensified cooperation lasted until Cyprus’s EU accession. Berlin Plus did not allow for the inclusion of non-NATO and non-Partnership for Peace states in NATO–EU cooperation, to alleviate Turkish concerns regarding the involvement of Cyprus. Nonetheless, after Cyprus’s EU accession, the EU insisted that Cyprus become party to this cooperation (Cebeci 2011: 100). Turkey, in turn, vetoed a NATO–Cyprus security agreement which would lead to Cyprus’s inclusion in the Partnership for Peace and thus in EU–NATO cooperation. Turkey’s veto went together with Cyprus’s veto of the EU–Turkey Security Agreement on the exchange of classified material and of Turkish membership in the European Defence Agency (EDA) (Cebeci 2011: 100).

This double veto, which has lasted to this day, led to the freezing of EU–NATO dialogue and prevents substantial EU–NATO cooperation beyond Berlin Plus. At the operational level Turkey often turns a blind eye to EU–NATO cooperation, but at the strategic and policy levels cooperation is hampered (Aydın-Düzgit and Tocci 2015: 123). Nonetheless, Turkey continues to take part in the EU’s EUFOR Althea with one manoeuvre company and five liaison monitoring teams consisting of 242 personnel, making it the second largest personnel contributor to the operation.

It has also submitted applications to continue contributing to EU civilian missions in Ukraine and Kosovo after its participation was suspended following the 2016 coup attempt (European Commission 2020e: 109-110).
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In 2017 the EU announced Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) as a way to allow willing member states to integrate further in defence (Biscop 2020), thereby launching a new form of differentiation within CSDP, potentially open to third countries. This led to some, albeit very limited, discussion in Turkey on whether this could and/or should be a way to return to formally cooperating with the EU on security (Aydın-Düzgit and Marrone 2018). The prevailing perception across the Turkish political elite that PESCO is a weak initiative, alongside the fact that Cyprus can veto Turkey’s participation, quickly ended the debate (Aydın-Düzgit et al. 2020).

Nonetheless, officially Turkey “continues to request to be involved in EU defence initiatives”, namely PESCO as well as the European Defence Fund (EDF) (European Commission 2020e: 110), while the EU “refuses to even discuss it” (Interview 1).

As a country negotiating EU accession, Turkey is expected to align with CFSP. Its alignment rate with Council decisions and with declarations made by the High Representative has considerably declined since then and stood at 21 per cent in 2019 (Müftüler-Baç 2017: 428, European Commission 2020e: 107). EU–Turkey dialogue on foreign and security issues is formalised through the High-Level Political Dialogue between the EU High Representative, EU Commissioner for Enlargement and the Neighbourhood, the Turkish Foreign Minister and the Turkish Minister for EU Affairs. Foreign and security related issues are also covered in Political Directors’ meetings. Yet, as the low rates of alignment attest, there are growing frictions between the EU and Turkey most notably on the Eastern Mediterranean, Syria and Russia, among other issues.

There are two points concerning the foreign and security relationship between Turkey and the EU over which there seems to be widespread agreement across the Turkish political spectrum. The first is the perception of the EU as a relatively weak foreign and security actor which often fails to “deliver results” (Interview 7). The second is that the EU does not treat Turkey fairly in foreign and security policy issues involving Cyprus and Greece. Although the Turkish opposition is critical of the government’s “style”, pointing at its unilateralism and overreliance on hard power, it does not contest the substance of Turkish claims (Interview 8).

The effectiveness and sustainability of the current EU–Turkey framework for cooperation illustrates some of the limits of differentiation. When Turkey was politically aligned with the EU, cooperation meant the Union was able to benefit from Turkey’s added diplomatic weight. But Turkey has not been as satisfied with cooperation given that the EU has been unwilling to involve Turkey in its defence structures. Since 2003, the interlocking Turkish and Cypriot vetoes have meant that EU–Turkey cooperation and EU–NATO cooperation have been characterised by friction. As shown by the deterioration in cooperation after the emergence of broader EU–Turkey disagreements, differentiation has not proven particularly sustainable. Although the potential for more EU–Turkey differentiated integration is present at least in the institutional sense, with the possibility of Turkey’s involvement in PESCO projects, the EDF and EDA, this does not seem plausible in the near future.

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2. Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia

Cooperation between the EU, Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia offers an interesting example of external differentiation in foreign and defence policy. Cooperation with the four candidate countries is based on the Stabilisation and Association Agreements that the EU has concluded with each of the four countries, which commit the signatories to deepening foreign and security policy cooperation. Within the framework of these Agreements, the EU and each partner country hold regular exchanges on foreign and security policy.


As candidates for EU membership, Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia have an obligation to align with EU foreign policy. Albania, Montenegro and North
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) 9 0 W I V W X V M G X M Z I Q I E W Y V I W E K E M R W X 6 Y W W M E ] Y V S T I E R ‘S Q Q M W W M S R G L I X L V I I countries also regularly align with EU statements at international organisations like
Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia are currently participating in several CSDP missions and operations. Out of the four, the makes the most.

Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia have each concluded an agreement to exchange and protect classified information with the EU (European Commission 2020a, 2020b, 2020c and 2020d). Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia also have concluded Framework Participation Agreements with the EU, allowing them to contribute personnel to CSDP missions, without however having a say in the missions’ planning.

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From the EU’s perspective, the arrangements to cooperate with Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia are effective. The EU has been able to draw on its partners’ resources for CSDP missions and operations, and to maximise the possibility that its partners will be aligned with its foreign policy. Cooperating with neighbours can also enhance the legitimacy of EU foreign policy. From the point of view of the EU’s partners, cooperation is a way to show commitment to obtaining membership and to signal political alignment with the EU, and also to have regular structured discussions to make the EU aware of their views. Meanwhile, participating in CSDP missions is a way of increasing the capability of their own military forces, to gain interoperability with EU forces and become familiar with EU procedures. However, whether cooperation can be sustained depends on whether a country continues to have interest in membership or if the accession process loses momentum, foreign policy cooperation could become patchier. Conversely, differentiated integration could deepen further if relations become closer, with the EU’s partners becoming more involved in PESCO, the EDA the EDF and potentially also cooperating more closely with groups of member states.

3. Norway

8L190 VIP EXMSR WM LMTE[M XL2SV[E]M WERI]E QTPIS]HITMM]IVIRXMEX IHMRXIKVEX MSR in foreign and security policy. Norway does not have a formal cooperation agreement [MXLXL1]9MRJSVIMKRERHWGY VMX[TSPMG]RWXIEHXLIX[SGSSTIVEXISREQ]IMFPIERHEHLSG FEWMW ‘STIVEXMSRWTEVXP]FEWISHRXLVIYVESTIER]GSR SQM G %VIE % Agreement, which calls for strengthening foreign policy dialogue. There are informal exchanges at the ministerial level at the annual meeting of the EEA council. Norway, together with the other EEA states, also holds regular meetings with the EEAS on MWWYIW SJ QXYEPMRXIVWX -RXIVZMI[ %XLWIEQIXMQ12SV[E]LEWI XIRWMSI bilateral cooperation with the EU. There is a biannual dialogue on foreign policy between Norway’s Foreign Minister and the foreign minister of the EU’s rotating TVIWMHIRG]2SV[E] *SVI MKR 1MRMWXIV LEW VIKY PEV Q1XM RKW[M XL XLI,6:4ERH every six months the head of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry meets with the EEAS Secretary General.

8LIVIEVIPWSEVERKIS]EHL SGGSRXEGX[M XL]%7SM EMPEWXIRMSVERH[SVORMK levels and Norway has been invited to brief the PSC. Norway has seconded staff to XLI)%7XS]SVOSR TVSNIGXWMR[LMLGMLXLEWXRXIVWX -RXIVZMI[8LI]MRRZMXIW Norway to align with its statements and restrictive measures, and Norway usually does so. When it does not, this is not normally because underlying views diverge but because aligning with EU positions could hamper Norway’s peace and reconciliation efforts. The EU and Norway cooperate closely in development assistance, mostly on the ground. Norway contributes to the EU Trust Fund for Africa and has regularly SVKERMWIHHSRSVGSRJIVIRGIW[M XL XLI]92SV[IKMER1MRMWXV]SJ *SVI MKR %JEMVW

-RXLHIJIRGI° IPH2SV[E]WM KRIHE*VEQI[SVO4EVXMGTEXM SRS%KVIIQIRXMR XSTEVXMGTEXIMR ‘74QMWWMSR WERHSTIVEXMSRWERH LEW TEVXMGTEXIHMRB
Norway’s involvement in EU security and defence is very deep. Through its membership in the EEA, Norway is an integral part of the EU single market, including the defence field. Norway implements EU defence directives aimed at creating a more open defence market in Europe. The EEA Agreement also means that Norway is formally associated to the EDF and participated in its precursor, the Preparatory Action on Defence Research which ran from 2017 to 2019. Norway will contribute 2.5 per cent of the EDF budget, will have speaking rights and be able to make proposals and voice objections, but not vote. Norway will also be able to participate in PESCO projects and it has requested to join the military mobility project (Siebold and Stewart 2021, Interview 16).

Norway wants to further deepen its foreign policy relationship with the EU. Its “Strategy for Cooperation with the EU 2018–2021” says it wishes to: i) deepen political dialogue and coordination; ii) strengthen practical cooperation; and iii) promote favourable conditions for Norway’s defence industry. Norway seeks early and continuous dialogue with the EU, for example early exchange of information when the EU is deciding on sanctions. Oslo would also like to be involved earlier when the EU is planning a CSDP operation.

The EU’s cooperation with Norway is an effective and sustainable example of differentiated integration in foreign and security policy. By consulting and coordinating with Norway the EU is able to add substantial diplomatic weight and legitimacy to its diplomacy, especially in areas where Norway has specific expertise. Norway’s contributions to CSDP missions can also be valuable. And Norway’s defence industry, while small, is an important component of the European defence industrial base.
the EU are likely to remain closely aligned in foreign policy. Norway wants a closer relationship, but whether the EU is willing to grant this remains to be seen, as Norway already has what amounts to a privileged status amongst the EU’s partners.

4. The UK

The UK–EU foreign policy relationship is a unique instance of differentiation, given that it starts from a process of disintegration. The UK–EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement does not cover foreign policy cooperation. Initially both the UK and the EU believed reaching an agreement on foreign and defence policy cooperation would be easy. The Political Declaration alongside the 2019 Withdrawal Agreement talked of “ambitious, close and lasting” security cooperation (European Union and United Kingdom 2019: 188). Based on this, the EU produced a draft agreement similar to the EU–Japan Strategic Partnership Agreement. EU officials argued that in some areas, like sanctions, the agreement gave the UK a lot of influence (Interview 3). The draft agreement also allowed for intensified information exchange during the planning stages of CSDP missions as well as coordination of development assistance, allowed for the UK’s involvement in the EDA’s activities and facilitated the exchange of intelligence (Bond 2020).

However, during the post-Brexit transition period, Boris Johnson’s government became uninterested in formal cooperation. British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab limited contacts with the EU and sought to de-emphasise Europe, saying that the government aimed to build partnerships in the Indo-Pacific. The UK thought that the EU’s proposed agreement did not reflect its political importance and that most European foreign policy coordination happened outside the EU anyway, in NATO or in small groups like the E3, which has led European diplomacy towards Iran. Johnson’s government was also sceptical that EU defence initiatives such as the EDF would be successful, and the EU was only willing to offer British firms limited access to these initiatives anyway (Bond 2020, Whitman 2020). Finally, the UK did not want to appear subordinate to the EU by simply being invited to align with CFSP (Interview 2).

UK–EU cooperation is likely to be very limited in the immediate term. The British government is unwilling to have formal links with the EU and is denying the EU delegation to the UK the diplomatic status EU delegations are normally afforded elsewhere in the world. One exception is sanctions policy: in December 2020 the UK and EU concluded an agreement on exchanging classified information, which will make coordination easier.

The effectiveness and sustainability of such limited cooperation arrangements are doubtful. The EU will find it difficult to coordinate with the UK and will be unable to count on the UK for added diplomatic, military and defence industrial weight. But the UK is also unlikely to be satisfied. Without regular dialogue, it will find it difficult to find out what member states and EU institutions think and to influence them. Member states are only likely to involve London when it is in their interest to do so. And if EU defence tools like the EDF become more successful, British defence firms may be gradually excluded from the European market, even if in theory they could make coordination easier.

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The lack of a formal UK–EU agreement means that for the foreseeable future the UK will rely on informal consultations with member states to influence European foreign and security policy. The UK will try to deepen bilateral partnerships, especially with France and Germany. The UK will also continue to be involved in cooperation formats involving small groups of member states, instances where internal and external differentiation in EU foreign and security policy intersect. The most prominent example is the E3, but the UK is also involved in France's European Intervention Initiative, designed to foster a common strategic culture and made up of 12 EU member states (including Denmark, which has an opt-out from CSDP), plus the UK and Norway. The UK also has longstanding links with the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland and the Baltic states, which form the Joint Expedition Force.

Such small-group informal cooperation outside of the EU can be effective for the UK and for those member states involved. However, it risks undermining EU foreign policy, especially if the largest member states find that acting through the EU is difficult and ineffective and turn to cooperation with the UK in informal frameworks instead. This would generate disunity, as smaller member states were not happy with the E3 even when the UK was an EU member. With the UK no longer in the EU, friction will be higher. In theory then, it would be in the interests of both the EU and the UK to conclude a formal foreign policy agreement. But while the EU wants to, the UK is unwilling. Nevertheless, a future British government might change its mind about having formal ties with the EU. And, depending on the overall state of the UK–EU relationship, the EU might be willing to offer the UK a deeper relationship than it did in its original draft agreement.

5. Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine

Though there are six countries in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), only Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine are actively seeking a perspective of EU membership. Foreign and security cooperation between Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine is another interesting example of foreign and security policy differentiation. Cooperation between each country and the EU is based on Association Agreements, each of the three countries has an annual Association Council with the EU, where they are represented by the Prime Minister, the EU by the High Representative and the Commissioner for neighbourhood policy (Interview 11). Alone of the three, Ukraine holds an annual summit with the EU in addition to the Association Council. Ukraine’s Foreign Minister is sometimes invited to meet EU Foreign Ministers when Ukraine is on the Foreign Affairs Council agenda. There are also frequent bilateral contacts at senior levels with the EEAS and the Commission, the EEAS political director and the PSC chair twice yearly to discuss Crimea and the
Donbas, and Ukraine’s first Deputy Foreign Minister holds annual consultations with the EEAS and the Commission on the occupation of Crimea (Interview 14). Georgia has a regular security dialogue with the EU on regional conflicts, cyber security and hybrid warfare, involving the EEAS Deputy Secretaries General for Political Affairs and the Commission on Cybersecurity and Cybercrime. Georgia, in particular, has been involved in discussions on the EU’s response to Russian aggression in Ukraine. For example, Georgia and the EU have worked closely on measures to prevent cyber attacks and to enhance cyber resilience in the region. Furthermore, Georgia has been a key actor in the EU’s efforts to counter hybrid warfare, including by providing training and assistance to European Union Trusted Media Purchaser (EUMTP) in Georgia.

Moldova has sought such a dialogue, but the EU has not yet agreed (Interview 10). Additionally, EaP countries individually or in groups have meetings with the EEAS, particularly on CSDP missions. For example, the Georgian defence ministry holds talks with the EEAS (Interviews 10, 12 and 15).

In the first five months of 2020 Ukraine aligned with 81 per cent of CFSP declarations; in the first ten months of 2017 (the last period with comparable figures) with 88 per cent (European Commission and HRVP 2017 and 2020b). Moldova aligned with 68 per cent of declarations in 2018 and 69 per cent in 2017 (European Commission and HRVP 2018 and 2019). Georgia aligned with 61 per cent in 2019, but only 56 per cent in 2018 (European Commission and HRVP 2020a). The three also align on an ad-hoc basis with EU statements in international organisations. According to the authors’ calculations, in 2020 the EU issued 63 declarations. Georgia aligned itself with 36, Moldova with 42 and Ukraine with 50. When countries do not align with EU actions, there are sometimes obvious reasons. For example, neither Georgia nor Ukraine aligned with EU sanctions on Turkey, because both see good relations with Ankara as important given their conflicts with Russia (Interviews 11 and 12).

Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine all have Framework Participation Agreements with the EU governing their participation in CSDP (European Union and Ukraine 2005, European Union and Moldova 2012, European Union and Georgia 2013). Ukraine contributed to EU operations in Bosnia in the early 2000s and to the EU’s anti-piracy operation off Somalia in 2014. It took a break from deploying forces to EU operations after Russia’s annexation of Crimea and invasion of the Donbas but will send troops to Operation Althea in Bosnia later this year. Participation in CSDP operations is a way for Ukraine to show it can contribute to the EU’s security and a learning opportunity for its personnel (Interview 13). Ukraine has also provided personnel to EU Battlegroups and maintained its commitments despite the fighting in the Donbas (Turner 2011, Mission of Ukraine to the EU 2017, EUMS 2015, 2017 and 2019, Interview 14). Moldova is contributing to the EU missions in Mali and the CAR (Interview 10). Meanwhile, Georgia is currently the largest contributor per capita to the EU operation in the CAR and has attached troops to the EU training mission in Mali and to the EU Advisory Mission to Ukraine.

Alone of the three, Ukraine has an Administrative Arrangement with the EDA (EDA and Ministry of Defence of Ukraine 2015). Ukraine is likely to ask to take part in PESCO projects that are of interest to it and where it has expertise. Georgia is seeking a similar agreement with the EDA and hopes to participate in PESCO projects after 2026 (Interview 15). Moldova’s defence industry is small, and it does not expect to be involved in PESCO unless a member state invites it for political reasons.
Apart from the official cooperation formats between the EU and the three countries, there are informal frameworks involving some or all of them and groups of member states. Each year Visegrád foreign ministers meet with their counterparts from the six Eastern Partnership countries, with the Commission and the EEAS invited. Lithuania holds meetings on security and defence with the three, inviting the EEAS, the Commission and some member states (Interview 12). And Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine formed the “Lublin Triangle” in July 2020 to coordinate on foreign policy and bring Ukraine closer to the EU and NATO (Bornio 2020).

From the EU’s perspective, cooperation with the Eastern Partners is effective. Through consultations the EU ensures it is aware of what its partners think and maximises the chances that they are aligned with its own foreign policy. Partners’ alignment, explained above, is based on the principle that non-members cannot undermine the EU’s decision-making autonomy. The EU benefits from its partners’ expertise, and from their material resources when they contribute to CSDP missions and operations. Consultations are a way for the EU to make partners feel that their views are being considered, even though they do not always feel the Union takes their views seriously: other than in relation to the unresolved conflicts on their territories, the EU does not seek their input. Some of the Union’s partners, particularly Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, want deeper cooperation with the EU – something the EU is not keen on for now. Differentiation may deepen in the future, for example if countries become involved in PESCO projects, or their firms involved in the EDF. But ultimately its sustainability depends on the degree to which Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova maintain cooperation with the EU.

6. Comparative assessment

The case studies analysed differentiation in foreign and security policy between the EU and a wide range of partners in its neighbourhood. The different relationships relationship, to highly institutionalised, in the case of the EU’s relationships with Albania, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Ukraine. And the EU’s relationship with Turkey is an example of an institutionalised relationship that has severely suffered due to broader disagreements. However, despite their different characteristics, all of the arrangements are based on the principle that non-members cannot undermine the EU’s decision-making autonomy.

The degree of foreign policy cooperation between the EU and its partners depends above all on the closeness of relations and foreign and security policy alignment. Cooperation does not necessarily depend on whether the partner is formally a candidate for EU membership or a NATO member. Turkey is a NATO member and is negotiating EU membership or a NATO member. Turkey is a NATO member and is negotiating EU accession. Albania, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Ukraine have very similar arrangements to cooperate with the EU. Ankara is subject to EU sanctions. Albania, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Ukraine have very similar arrangements to cooperate with the EU. Ukraine also has more consultations.
with the EU than Georgia or Moldova, even though in theory the three have the same status. Meanwhile, Serbia's often difficult relationship with the EU means that foreign policy cooperation is less intense than one might expect given its status as a candidate country. Finally, while Norway does not formally have a deeper foreign policy relationship with the EU than countries in the Western Balkans or the Eastern Partnership, Oslo's foreign policy expertise, diplomatic capacity and close political alignment with the EU mean that Norway has more frequent consultations than most membership candidates. Norway is also the only one of the case studies assessed that seconds staff to the EEAS.

When it comes to security and defence cooperation with the EU, NATO members and ESI's foreign policy relationship with the EU is also not advantaged when it comes to defence industrial cooperation with the EU. For example, Ukraine and Serbia have concluded an Administrative Arrangement with the EDA – unlike NATO members Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Turkey and the UK. The criteria for participation in PESCO projects also mean that being a NATO member does not per se put a country at an advantage, as participation depends on fulfilling stricter criteria about alignment with EU values and making an important contribution to an individual project. As far as the EDF is concerned, the key distinction is between countries that participate in the EU single market and others. Norway, which participates in the single market through the EEA, is formally associated to the EDF. This is a status that is not currently available to countries that are not EEA members, and their defence firms face limits on their access to the Fund, which makes participation difficult for many of them.

Member states also have their own relationships with partners, in parallel to that of the EU. This leads to several instances where internal and external differentiation intersect. Many of these frameworks relate to the UK's involvement in European cooperation projects as well as being a NATO member does not put countries at an advantage.

When it comes to security and defence cooperation with the EU, NATO members and ESI's foreign policy relationship with the EU is also not advantaged when it comes to defence industrial cooperation with the EU. For example, Ukraine and Serbia have concluded an Administrative Arrangement with the EDA – unlike NATO members Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Turkey and the UK. The criteria for participation in PESCO projects also mean that being a NATO member does not put a country at an advantage, as participation depends on fulfilling stricter criteria about alignment with EU values and making an important contribution to an individual project. As far as the EDF is concerned, the key distinction is between countries that participate in the EU single market and others. Norway, which participates in the single market through the EEA, is formally associated to the EDF. This is a status that is not currently available to countries that are not EEA members, and their defence firms face limits on their access to the Fund, which makes participation difficult for many of them.

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Conclusions and recommendations

This paper has analysed external differentiation in the EU’s common foreign and security policy, assessing the EU’s relationships with ten partners in the EU’s neighbourhood. On the whole, the EU’s current arrangements for differentiated integration in foreign and security policy allow for limited involvement by its partners, with the EU not wanting to compromise its decision-making autonomy or create a risk that it may lead to disunity and undermine CFSP and CSDP if member states prefer working with partners outside of EU structures.

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EU IDEA Policy Papers No. 14 17
The Role of Differentiation in EU Foreign, Security and Defence Policy

Cooperation with Neighbouring Countries


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The Role of Differentiation in EU Foreign, Security and Defence Policy
Cooperation with Neighbouring Countries


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Differentiation has become the new normal in the European Union (EU) and one of the most crucial matters in defining its future. A certain degree of differentiation has always been part of the European integration project since its early days. The Eurozone and the Schengen area have further consolidated this trend into long-term projects of differentiated integration among EU Member States.

A number of unprecedented internal and external challenges to the EU, however, including the financial and economic crisis, the migration phenomenon, renewed geopolitical tensions and Brexit, have reinforced today the belief that more flexibility is needed within the complex EU machinery. A Permanent Structured Cooperation, for example, has been launched in the field of defence, enabling groups of willing and able Member States to join forces through new, flexible arrangements. Differentiation could offer a way forward also in many other key policy fields within the Union, where uniformity is undesirable or unattainable, as well as in the design of EU external action within an increasingly unstable global environment, offering manifold models of cooperation between the EU and candidate countries, potential accession countries and associated third countries.

EU IDEA’s key goal is to address whether, how much and what form of differentiation is not only compatible with, but is also conducive to a more effective, cohesive and democratic EU. The basic claim of the project is that differentiation is not only necessary to address current challenges more effectively, by making the Union more resilient and responsive to citizens. Differentiation is also desirable as long as such flexibility is compatible with the core principles of the EU’s constitutionalism and identity, sustainable in terms of governance, and acceptable to EU citizens, Member States and affected third partners.