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**“How Differentiated Integration Can Work Best for the EU”**  
**Europe 2035: Differentiated integration and the Conference on the future of**  
**Europe, European Policy Centre**  
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Between 2035 and 2022 there is the difference of 13 years.

It is like like a distance between 2022 and 2009.

In „normal” times, we could say that this time frame has a predictive value.

But you probably remember that 2009 was the year Barack Obama was inaugurated and American body politics looked as a healthy one, aspiring to Lincoln’s „better angels of our nature” – and then... Trump happened.

You might also remember that on Jan.1, 2009, Russia closed down gas supplies to and through Ukraine due to a dispute over a debt of \$2.4 billion to Gazprom. And we did not draw adequate conclusions from this political gesture that already had a gestation of what happened later.

So Janis Emmanoulidis took up quite a challenge.

But, wisely, he underlined at the beginning that „future crises might force Europe in another direction”.

He wrote his report before the war and very soon, the full scale invasion of Ukraine indeed compelled EU to reject the business as usual attitude, to say the least.

The epistemological question to consider is then whether this mighty Ukrainian factor substantially changes the vision of the EU future, as proposed by Janis and, if so, how.

And this is my first point.

I think that the Ukraine war upended any possibility of linear thinking about the EU future.

This unprecedented geopolitical situation with all sorts of consequences of long duration, with huge uncertainties and long list of unknowns, pushes my mind toward a „mosaic-like” landscape, resembling, in fact, the scenario of „muddling upwards”, but with many known and unknown unknowns that could change the picture suddenly.

And the fundamental thing is to realize that Europe’s future will not be just happening, but it will be shaped by European strategic responsibility, its geopolitical strength and thoughtful policy making.

Europe will find itself in a global world where new security order will have to be designed and enforced after one of five members of the UN Security Council, supposed to be the guardian of global peace, waged an insane war.

And we do not know who will sit around the table for this new security order.

Consequences for global economy are still to be seen but will be enormous in areas that matter strongly for Europe’s economic dependencies and strategic responsibility both internally and in the world.

I imagine we can assume that all options Janis presents can happen as there are so many uncertainties both in the EU and around.

As Janis notes, that Europe will be differentiated, one way or the other.

And this is my second point.

Europe is a democratic constructs internally differentiated based on the diversity of subjects that decide to integrate.

Moreover, if you look at the group of the current candidate countries and if you add Ukraine to it, you can see that this initial differentiation can only grow.

We all know as well that the process of identifying what unites us, what is our glue has always been a living process.

This glue is evolving now. We are back to European security issues and it's worth listening to what Denmark, Finland and Sweden are saying.

It is also true that in the last 3-4 years we have seen a lot of movements toward closer integration, new budgetary instruments, advancement on legislation in many policy areas, moving toward a new economic governance, toward defense capabilities, new trade policy agenda, geographical expansion of the EMU, unprecedented movement within European democracy toolkit in the context of the COFE and engagement of citizens.

One can say that the Brexit, the Covid, the war have been strengthening European unity and appetite for more Europe.

We might see changes to the scope of what is today differentiated integration.

We might see different relationship between the one best way of doing things paradigm and the differentiation reflected in a changing, lighter approach to law making, specificities might be allowed and used to improve outcome without blocking the move forward.

So my third point is about the rationale behind differentiation.

With seven enlargements Europe has been integrating what is differentiated, doing it within an institutional, political and policy frameworks, based on shared values, community of law and one size fits all approach.

We needed decades of integration based on one size fits all principle to make basic frameworks work. Here and there we still need it and will need it, in particular to avoid national options and discretions in the single market.

And we can see in the historical picture of differentiated integration that more politically sensitive policies, associated with sovereignty, autonomy, political and sometimes even partisan interests proved resistant to communitarianization.

We also know that crises were helping to identify new common European goods.

For decades there has been shared understanding that differentiation does not touch fundamentals, values, rule of law. As we know this has been upended recently by nationalistic anti-European politicians.

What I want to say is that, indeed, differentiation has always been linked to political preferences.

The years to come can bring changes to this logic.

There is a chance we might understand that national politics can bring risks of compromising the entire political system of the Union.

Also, with empowering of citizens which is a growing trend, focusing differentiated integration on politically sensitive policies raises the issue of equality of citizens across Europe.

There is also a role played by unanimity in pushing toward differentiated integration.

When there is no time to wait for the unanimity based progress in some areas, the choice of those who want to move forward, is to do it.

When unanimity is more boldly gone from our playbook and when citizens empowerment which is progressing will matter more, certain incentives for differentiated integration linked with politicization will float away.

Of course, beyond politics, differentiated integration can be a response to inefficiency of the paradigm of one best way to address challenges.

There might be situations when opening a differentiated path to a common goal can make differentiation work for European integration.

The question will be how to manage this positive category of differentiation that is not undermining the general interest and the common European good nor facilitating Europe á la carte.

And my last point.

Europe must remain a democratic space, with shared values and goals, there must not be any differentiation when it comes to fundamental rights and values, or where non participation generates negative externalities, social, economic dumping.

The „muddling upwards” scenario, combined with a new positive differentiated integration paradigm has to be played right on all aspects of differentiated integration governance.

When we look at it from this perspective of mosaic or upward muddling – the central issue will be sustainability of that process, keeping it under control, checking constantly its temperature.

Eliminating from the leger of differentiated integration policy areas sensitive to politicization would change the substance of the differentiated integration and would give real meaning to the direction of muddling upward.

But the crucial issue will be whether after this war experience the Union will be united enough to terminate or at least seriously reduce the main reason for bad, politicized or national politics sensitive differentiated integration.

This reason is the well known fact that at European level we cope mostly with policy issues while politics remains basically at national level.

This is the truly weak spot of the Union and in this new emerging world order, when the race between democracies and autocratic regimes is still to be won, assertive

version of muddling clearly upwards might allow us to avoid a fundamental disruption and maintain sustainability of that scenario.

The only way to achieve it is to continue moving toward political union, beefing up the legitimacy and democratic accountability of the EU.

We need to mobilise democratic resources and the chance comes with citizens engagement in the European decision making process in line with the recommendations in the COFE, hopefully leading to Treaties change.