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European Actorness in a Shifting Geopolitical Order

European Strategic Autonomy Through Differentiated Integration

Pernille Rieker
Mathilde T. E. Giske

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Preface

This book is a result of several years of research into the functioning of the European Union (EU) as a security actor and how the EU relates to other European actors and institutions. While one of the authors, Rieker, has been the Principal Investigator, came up with the idea for the book, and is responsible for the conceptual framework, the realisation of this book has been a truly collective endeavour. It builds on work that Rieker initiated in a research project, EUFLEX, that was funded by the Research Council of Norway and finalised in 2021. This work was later further developed, in collaboration with Giske, in a research paper developed for the Horizon Europe project JOINT, led by Riccardo Alcaro at the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) in Rome. Even so, the realisation of this book would not have been possible without further financial support from two projects funded by the Norwegian government—one funded by the Ministry of Defence, called EURODEFENCE, and the other by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ('Norway and the EU towards 2030').

While the Conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2 builds on some of the same ideas that were first presented in the introduction to a special issue in European Foreign Affairs Review (EFAR) in 2021 and in a conceptual paper published withi'n the JOINT project, the framework has been further developed and adjusted in this book. The empirical chapters (3–5) are new work that aims to show how this adjusted analytical framework can be applied to various parts of European foreign, security and defence policy. They therefore contribute to an improved understanding

of Europe's global role (Chapter 3), of Europe's role in defence integration (Chapter 4), and of Europe as a builder of regional security in a new and more challenging geopolitical context (Chapter 5).

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Praise for *European Actorness in a Shifting Geopolitical Order*

"The successive crises the EU has undergone, notably with the pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, have highlighted dramatically how European security includes while spans well beyond defence. Picking up from this cue, this book masterfully expands the notion of European strategic autonomy across different areas while highlighting its fundamental compatibility with the goal of building stronger partnerships beyond the EU's borders."

—Nathalie Tocci, *Director at IAI in Rome*

"*European Actorness in a Shifting Geopolitical Order* is a timely and thought-provoking contribution to the discourse on European strategic autonomy. Rieker and Giske go beyond conventional notions of defence to highlight the pressing need to address the growing risk of hybrid threats. With meticulous research and a nuanced understanding of contemporary debates on European integration and security, this volume presents a comprehensive approach to fleshing out European strategic autonomy. A must-read for policymakers, academic experts and anyone interested in understanding Europe's evolving role on the international stage."

—Mark Leonard, *Director of ECFR*

"Rieker and Giske provide an innovative analysis of how external differentiation can help improve EU actorness and security. This is the first study that systematically brings together two core issues in European integration: external differentiation and strategic autonomy. Building on a broad empirical basis, the book makes an important contribution to current political and academic discussions on Europe's foreign and security policy."

—Frank Schimmelfennig, *Professor, ETH Zurich*

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About the Authors

Pernille Rieker is a Research Professor at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) and Professor (part time) at the Inland University of Applied Sciences (INN). Her research is in the field of European integration and European security with a special focus on France and the Nordic countries.

Mathilde T. E. Giske is a doctoral research fellow at the University of Oslo (UIO). Her research explores and external democratisation of hybrid regimes in the EU's neighbourhood, as well as instances of democratic backsliding and external differentiation.

Abbreviations

AA	Association Agreement
ACER	Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators
CARD	Coordinated Annual Review on Defence
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CIMIC	Civil–Military Cooperation
CPCC	Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
DDI	Differentiated Defence Integration
DI	Differentiated Integration
EASA	European Union Aviation Safety Agency
EDA	European Defence Agency
EDC	European Defence Community
EDF	European Defence Fund
EEA	European Economic Area
EEAS	European External Action Service
EFSA	European Food Safety Agency
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EI2	European Intervention Initiative
EMCDDA	European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EPC	European Political Community
EPF	European Peace Facility
ESDP	European Security and Defence Policy
EU	European Union
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
EUISS	European Union Institute for Security Studies

EUMS	European Union Military Staff
FNC	Framework Nation Concept
FTA	Free Trade Association
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HR/VP	High Representative/Vice President
ICE	Intelligence College in Europe
IR	International Relations
JEF	Joint Expeditionary Force
JHA	Justice and Home Affairs
LI	Liberal Intergovernmentalist
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
MLG	Multi-Level Governance
MPCC	Military Planning and Conduct Capability
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument
NORDEFCO	Nordic Defence Cooperation
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation
PSC	Political and Security Committee
QMV	Qualified Majority Voting
SAA	Stabilisation and Association Agreement
TCA	Trade and Cooperation
TEU	Treaty on European Union
V4	Visegrád Group

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Abstract Over the past decade, the global geopolitical context has changed significantly. We have seen a power shift with a more assertive Russia and China and the rise of a more complex and competitive multi-polar system. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, international and European security has been placed on high alert. Transatlantic relations also seem to be strong—at least for now. Nevertheless, there is a general agreement that Europe must strengthen its capacity to ensure its own security. But how to make sense of European actorness—also referred to as European sovereignty or strategic autonomy—in the current context? The argument we put forward in this introductory chapter is twofold. First, that strategic autonomy ultimately involves much more than building an autonomous European defence structure or an autonomous Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). After two decades of having to deal with different types of crises that have everything to do with European security, but are not necessarily concerned with defence against military threats, this has become increasingly evident. The COVID-19 pandemic is a case in point. Even today, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the main threats against Western democracies are of a hybrid nature rather than of a direct military one. Thus, European strategic autonomy has to include a capacity to protect Europe against of such hybrid threats as well. The second part of the argument is that building European strategic autonomy, in a way that makes Europe better at addressing these challenges, will more likely strengthen rather

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than weaken both transatlantic relations and other types of partnerships with actors that share the same basic values.

Keywords Strategic autonomy · European integration · Security · Differentiated integration

Over the past decade, the global geopolitical context has changed significantly. We have seen a power shift with a more assertive Russia and China and the rise of a more complex and competitive multi-polar system. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, international and European security has been placed on high alert. Transatlantic relations also seem to be stronger than ever—at least for now. Nevertheless, there is a general agreement that Europe must now strengthen its capacity to ensure its own security. But how to make sense of European actorness—also referred to as European sovereignty or strategic autonomy—in the current context?

The implications of the brutal Russian military invasion and war against Ukraine are manifold, and the full consequences of the invasion will take time to materialise. While there is general agreement over the need to boost collective European capacity to ensure security and stability on the continent, there is a disagreement over how this can best be achieved. Concepts such as strategic sovereignty and autonomy have become highly controversial as some, including the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), fear that it will imply a weakening of the transatlantic relationship (Stoltenberg, 2022, 2023). However, the recent enlargement of NATO, with both EU members Sweden and Finland bidding to join the Alliance, shows the exact opposite. In this volume, strategic sovereignty and autonomy will be applied as analytical concepts as we try to investigate how and to what extent increased European strategic autonomy has been or is about to be achieved.

A common answer to the question of strategic autonomy in the scholarly literature is that developing an independent European capacity for security and defence is too challenging, and is therefore unlikely to be achieved in the short term (Meijer & Brooks, 2021). In this book, we question both assumptions, building on our own previous work (Rieker, 2021; Rieker & Giske, 2021) and the work of a few scholars and policy analysts who have been challenging these arguments for some time

(Alcaro & Tocci, 2021; Howorth, 2019a, 2019b). This will be done by showing that an evaluation of the state of European strategic autonomy is largely dependent on our understanding of both this concept and the concept of European actorness—concepts that are closely related. For instance, our analysis will differ depending on whether our understanding of European actorness is built solely on EU capacity, or whether it is built on a more complex European system of Differentiated Integration (DI) among European states that share common values but are not always formally members of same institutions.

The argument we put forward is twofold. First, that strategic autonomy ultimately involves much more than building an autonomous European defence structure or an autonomous Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). After two decades of having to deal with different types of crises that have everything to do with European security, but are not necessarily concerned with defence against military threats, this has become increasingly evident. The COVID-19 pandemic is a case in point. Even today, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the main threats against Western democracies are of a hybrid nature rather than of a direct military one, and responses to these threats need to reflect this. In order to build European autonomy, one has to factor in these hybrid threats as well. While potential military threats should not be ignored and strengthening military capabilities is likely to continue to be at the top of the agenda of European states and institutions, these capabilities cannot do much to protect Europe against non-military threats. For this a broader toolbox is required. The second part of the argument is that building European strategic autonomy, in a way that makes Europe better at addressing these challenges, will more likely strengthen rather than weaken both transatlantic relations and other types of partnerships with non-European actors that share the same basic values. The recent expansion of NATO makes the overlap in membership greater and is therefore likely to strengthen both European strategic autonomy and transatlantic relations.

1.1 Conceptual Clarification: European Integration and Security

As argued above, how we analyse the state of European strategic autonomy or actorness will depend on how we conceptualise *European integration* and *security*. The EU will most likely never become a federal

state comparable to the US. Nevertheless, European democracies, with the EU at the centre, have in recent decades shown that they have been able to handle a series of crises together. This has, in turn, advanced the EU's role as a security actor (Riddervold et al., 2021). In this book we build on the arguments in the literature that urge caution in underestimating Europe's agency and its ability to adapt and overcome these constraints (Alcaro & Djikstra, Forthcoming; Rieker & Giske, 2021). We argue that the main explanation for why Europe's capacity as a security actor continues to be underestimated, and why the concept of strategic autonomy is so highly contested, is that these ideas have been based on a too narrow understanding of both European integration and European security. We will therefore start by clarifying these two concepts.

1.1.1 European Integration and Strategic Autonomy

So far, European integration has been understood primarily (and sometimes exclusively) in relation to European Union (EU) processes (Haas, 1958, 1964; Moravcsik, 1998). Even with the introduction of the concept of Differentiated Integration (DI), defined as a process where some actors choose to continue integrating further in certain policy fields while others elect to remain partly on the outside, the basic understanding of integration did not change much. Still, the focus was on DI continued to be exclusively about the processes within the EU—with concepts such as "multi speed," "à la carte," or "variable geography" (Stubb, 1996). More recent studies of the concept have also mainly focused on the EU (Leruth et al., 2022), ignoring the broader European integration process, to which the EU constitutes the core or centre of gravity, but other European non-members—the UK, European Economic Area (EEA)-states, and other partner countries, as well as other multilateral institutions such as NATO—contribute.

While there is a large literature on external Europeanisation (Lavenex, 2004, 2011; Rieker, 2016), this has so far been analysed as an extension of the EU's internal policy, and not as a key part of a DI process that may also strengthen Europe's actorness. This thinking has also greatly influenced the general understanding of what European security integration is all about, as well as of strategic autonomy. For instance, it has led to a general understanding that the EU remains insufficiently equipped to provide a full spectrum of foreign and security policy. In addition to the lack of military capabilities (Meijer & Brooks, 2021), three main

constraints against the EU playing a more important role as a strategic actor have been identified: internal contestation among member states; fragmentation of state authority and regional governance; and multi-polar competition (Alcaro et al., 2022).

With the Treaty of Maastricht (1993), foreign and security policy became a formal part of the EU for the first time. Since then, the EU's involvement in foreign and security policy, conventionally the business of sovereign states, has continued to confound scholars of European integration, in particular supporters of traditional theories of International Relations (IR) (Dijkstra & Vanhoonacker, 2017). Central to the debate on the EU as a foreign and security policy actor is how EU policy in these fields relates to the policies of its member states. The occasionally tense relationship between the various member states, and between member states and EU institutions, has made the Union unable to forge a truly common foreign and security policy (Reichwein, 2015). Additionally, the lines between internal and external policies in the EU have become increasingly blurred, as the Union stresses the need for a more holistic approach. The result of this mixture of internal and external policies and initiatives is a network of integration with the EU at its core. How, therefore, should we understand European strategic autonomy on the basis of such a differentiated network?

To help us analyse European actorness in as systematic way and open it up to include more than EU processes, we will draw on the generic concept of integration introduced by Jim March in the 1990. According to him, integration (vertical and horizontal) can be defined as *a continuum between a state of no integration at one end and full integration (some form of a federal system) at the other end* (March, 1999, p. 134). As most European interaction can be situated somewhere between these two extremes, it makes sense to use the concept of *Differentiated Integration* (DI). What is characteristic of this definition of DI is that it may include a whole range of different combinations of interactions, with different degrees of both uniformity (level of cooperation/harmonisation) and integration (horizontal/participation and vertical/transfer of power) depending on the policy areas and participating states (Rieker, 2021). In Chapter 2 we will show how in more detail how (differentiated) integration can be understood as a function of horizontal and vertical integration and uniformity.

While the EU remains at the core of such a differentiated system (in partnership with NATO in the military domain), there are also numerous

other processes of a bilateral or minilateral[1] character, as well as regional and sub-regional initiatives, which need to be taken into account to paint the full picture of European security integration. This will also help us better understand the status of European strategic autonomy. As there are a wide variety of initiatives and policies that increase the European capacity to act, there are no good reasons why European actorness in the security field should be limited to the EU only. In the end, European foreign and security policy is increasingly a result of a combination of EU policies and various cooperation frameworks of an informal and formal character. While most of them have some kind of association with the EU, they also exist independent of the EU. What is key is that all these processes have to be taken into account to have an accurate understanding of European actorness and European strategic sovereignty.

This understanding of EU foreign and security policy, as a broad framework involving not only the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and CSDP but also a variety of "softer" areas, has been gradually accepted (Bretherton & Vogler, 2006; Rhinard & Sjöstedt, 2019), at least in theory. However, what has been less recognised is the importance of including processes that are not formally part of the EU, but which remain closely linked to it. These are processes, both formal and informal, which include non-EU members as well, or processes that are initiated by EU members outside the EU framework, but which increase integration when taken together. Where EU studies often have a tendency to see such processes as a challenge to the EU—as they may undermine the institutional processes—we argue that they can equally lead to the opposite, namely a strengthening of EU(ropean) capacity to act, as well as increasing EU(ropean) strategic autonomy.

The recent inclusion of Finland and Sweden in NATO, as well as the aspirations of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia to become members in the future, shows that the alliance remains the strongest and most dependable security guarantee for European states. Nevertheless, increased European strategic autonomy through DI will make Europe a more flexible and effective actor in the broader area of security and defence.

[1] Minilateral is here understood as being more limited than most multilateral processes, that are often of a more universal character, like the UN. Nordic cooperation would be an example of minilateralism, as it is used here.

1.1.2 Security

The other concept that has been debated for decades in the scholarly literature is security. While it was traditionally seen primarily in relation to defence, it has become common to talk about a broader understanding of security, and concepts like societal and human security, as well as environmental security, have been promoted since the 1990s in security studies (Baldwin, 1995). While there is no common definition of security, there is at least scholarly agreement in this sub-field of international relations that security is about more than state security and territorial defence against military attacks (Buzan et al., 1998; Rieker, 2006). Interestingly, this has not yet—more than 20 years later—become mainstream in European studies. Both in policy circles and in the scholarly literature, most analyses of European security continue to focus on European defence capacity, often ignoring—or at least giving less attention to—the importance of other types of capacity that address broader security challenges.

There is a large literature on the softer sides of the EU's approach, its resilience, and its broader toolbox (Giske, 2021; Tocci, 2020; Joseph & Juncos, 2019; Juncos, 2017; Rieker & Riddervold, 2022). However, most analysis of European security is still rather narrowly focused on the military dimension. While this trend began to change with the COVID-19 pandemic and an increase in cyber threats, hard core defence has returned to the top of the agenda with the Russian full-scale military attack on, and continued war against, Ukraine. However, even though a brutal war is being fought on the European continent and military threats have returned, it does not mean that other types of threats have disappeared. In the current geopolitical context, Western open democratic societies are probably more threatened in other arenas. This also explains why societal resilience has become a priority for the EU and its member states.

Consequently, to fully capture the potential for EU(ropean) strategic autonomy, we need to look beyond traditional security and defence mechanisms. This is why we, in this book, refer to the "broader area" of foreign, security, and defence policy. This area includes not only the EU's formal foreign, security, and defence structure (CFSP and CSDP), but also policy areas and initiatives that both directly and indirectly contribute to the existence of a joint European foreign and security approach. In this broader area we include what is often referred to as "external relations" (trade, energy, climate, development, and humanitarian aid); and

cooperation with members beyond the borders of the EU. The enhanced cooperation with a variety of actors in both the more formal foreign, security, and defence policy, as well as in areas that are not formally part of EU foreign and security policy, contribute to a stronger European actorness, and potentially also strategic autonomy.

However, European security and strategic autonomy even go beyond CFSP/CSDP and external relations. It is also about building resilience against a multitude of non-military threats, such as energy insecurity, cyber-attacks, and pandemics—threats that rarely take national borders into consideration and that can be easier to handle through cooperation (Giske, 2021; Juncos, 2017; Tocci, 2020). Various efforts to strengthen European security in these domains have also been initiated by the EU in close cooperation with its partners. The mechanisms of external security community-building with the enlargement policy and the development of the new European Political Community (EPC) must also be seen as key processes in enhancing EU(ropean) strategic autonomy. These processes look beyond the borders of the EU with the aim of enhancing regional security through cooperation and closer integration with the Union. The result is an increasingly blurred line between EU members and non-members, as many EU partner countries share the same objectives and many of them also participate in EU rules, programmes, initiatives, and policies.

As we will show in this book, applying a broader understanding of both European integration and security will greatly influence how we characterise both the EU and Europe as a security actor. Applying these broader concepts gives a new meaning to strategic autonomy, as it expands on the means through which strategic autonomy is to be achieved, as well as the actors that can help bring it about.

1.2 Implications for Our Understanding of European Strategic Autonomy

One direct implication of this conceptualisation of European integration and security is that the aim of building European strategic autonomy does not have to be such an unrealistic objective. In the end it does not allude to anything more than the need for building European capacity in a way that makes the European states better prepared to take care of their own security, and thereby also to become better and more competent allies. Most European states would agree that Europe needs to improve its own

capacity for being able to protect European territory, sovereignty, citizens, and way of life. In the end, this is what strategic autonomy is all about. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has put this at the top of the agenda in all European states. It has forced both of them to think more strategically with regard to European security integration, both within and beyond the borders of the Union.

Without doubt, strategic autonomy has been a contested concept since it was first launched, and even more so after it began to be actively promoted—not only by the Commission, but also by France (Billon-Galland & Whitman, 2021). Scepticism towards, and speculation about, the real intentions behind the French approach are widespread. There is a fear that the concept implies the support for a hidden French agenda that, instead of being directed towards a common interest of the European states, aims at undermining NATO or transatlantic relations (Bora, 2023). While there is no evidence in support of this interpretation, it has become a widely shared belief among some allies—especially those who are most dependent on the US for their national defence. A series of French statements about "NATO being brain dead" (The Economist, 2019) or about the need to make sure that Europe does not become "a vassal of the United States" (Les Echos, 2023) do not help—even though these statements need to be put in context to be fully understood.

Russia's invasion of, and war against, Ukraine shows that NATO is needed more than ever. The recent bid to join from Finland and Sweden are proof of this. But it is needed first and foremost to maintain credible deterrence and territorial defence. While this is crucial, it is not sufficient in the current security context, as it spans broader than military defence. In the end, a strong territorial defence with military capability at the centre cannot protect us against the many types of non-military threats that face our open and technologically advanced democracies. This has become most evident after the recent crises Europe has experienced. These crises have clearly uncovered Europe's vulnerabilities in areas such as health, energy, and cyber, and made it clear that strategic autonomy needs to include much more than territorial defence.

Interestingly, the European Commission is now using the concept in a much broader sense, including most policy areas that may contribute to the protection of European societies, European citizens, and the European way of life (Damen, 2022). In the end, to achieve full strategic autonomy in the current security context, credible territorial defence is a must have, but still far from sufficient. Protection against military

threats and state aggression only paints half the picture, as several threats have now assumed a more hybrid form, whereby misinformation, dependencies, infiltrations, and sabotage by non-liberal/anti-western actors are constant threats to open democratic societies. In such a context, the EU is playing a key role together with associated states and partners.

1.3 The Structure of the Book

Building these conceptual clarifications, the next chapter will present a framework for how to study EU(ropean) actorness and assess the state of strategic autonomy, taking all the relevant actors and governance levels into account. It will show how the multi-actor character of (EU)rope can best be studied based on the literature on DI (Chapter 2). In the following three chapters, this framework will be applied to EU(rope)'s role in the world (Chapter 3); to the development of a more autonomous EU(ropean) approach to security and defence policy (Chapter 4); and finally to EU(rope)'s role as a regional actor through mechanisms of external differentiation (Chapter 5).

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CHAPTER 2

Conceptualising the Multi-actorness of EU(ropean) Foreign and Security Policy

Abstract This chapter seeks to conceptualise the multi-actor character of what we refer to here as EU(ropean) foreign and security policy. It takes a holistic approach to European foreign and security policy—a policy that covers multiple areas and is carried out by a multitude of actors and institutions. While the framework builds on institutional approaches, such as the literatures on multi-level governance and Differentiated Integration (DI), it adds a new dimension by applying a somewhat broader definition of European integration—a definition that captures more than just the processes that occur within the EU. Applying a broader approach towards European integration allows us to continue to perceive the EU as central to the European integration process, while also allowing for the inclusion of other processes that in some ways, either formally or informally, are linked to the EU. We argue that such a framework better captures the dynamics of today's increasingly complex EU(ropean) integration process, characterised by opt-outs and opt-ins, formal and informal processes, enhanced cooperation, and various forms of governance led by actors at different levels and with different types of relations to the EU. As we will show in this chapter, a more generic definition of integration helps us develop a framework that captures this complexity and sees clearly the different roles EU institutions play in the various policy areas. The intention is to present a more inclusive conceptual framework that fills two key gaps in the existing literature on European integration in this area.

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Keywords Actorness · Integration theory · Multi-level governance · EU · Europe · Differentiated integration

To paint a complete picture of the state of European strategic autonomy, we need a framework for analysing it, through which we can consider both the formal and the informal processes that enable European actorness in the security field. We also need a framework that captures the comprehensiveness of European actorness. This chapter seeks to conceptualise the multi-actor character of what we refer to here as EU(ropean) foreign and security policy. We take a holistic approach to European foreign and security policy—a policy that covers multiple areas and is carried out by a multitude of actors and institutions. While the framework builds on institutional approaches, such as the literatures on multi-level governance and DI, it adds a new dimension by applying a somewhat broader definition of European integration—a definition that captures more than just the processes that occur within the EU.

Applying a broader approach towards European integration allows us to continue to perceive the EU as central to the European integration process, while also allowing for the inclusion of other processes that in some ways, either formally or informally, are linked to the EU. We argue that such a framework better captures the dynamics of today's increasingly complex EU(ropean) integration process, characterised by opt-outs and opt-ins, formal and informal processes, enhanced cooperation, and various forms of governance led by actors at different levels and with different types of relations to the EU (Rieker, 2021a; Rieker & Giske, 2021). As we will show in this chapter, a more generic definition of integration helps us develop a framework that captures this complexity and see clearly the different roles EU institutions play in the various policy areas. The intention is to present a more inclusive conceptual framework that fills two key gaps in the existing literature on European integration in this area.

First, no theory fully captures the multi-actorness that has become a permanent feature of what we refer to as "the broader area" of EU foreign, security, and defence policy. This broader area includes more than the intergovernmental CFSP and its defence component, the CSDP. It also includes a whole range of areas of policy conducted by the European Commission or its agencies that directly or indirectly contributes to EU

foreign policy and EU security policy. These areas include, among others, trade, development, and humanitarian aid, as well as areas more directly geared towards security, such as the Union's civil protection mechanisms (RescEU); its energy security (RePowerEU); its capacity to counter hybrid threats; and its enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which aims to extend the European security community.

Second, no theory includes capacity at the level of member states and associated states in a systematic manner that does not undermine EU-level capacity (Moravcsik, 1998, 2010). Including this gives a more comprehensive understanding of what contributes to European strategic autonomy. This means that we also need to include the series of processes that are initiated by individual member states outside the framework of the Union, but that are nevertheless closely linked to, and often even framed as, EU policies. Examples of such initiatives could be the E3 initiative towards Iran; the EPC; the European Intervention Initiative (EI2); or even EU–NATO cooperation in specific fields. All of these processes and frameworks have the potential to contribute to European strategic autonomy, understood as an improved European capacity to take care of its own security.

2.1 The Limits of Mainstream Theories

Mainstream integration and International Relations (IR) theories have always been part of the academic debate surrounding EU security policy (Wilga & Karolewski, 2014). Still, no existing theory has thus far been able to fully capture the multi-actorness of this field. We can distinguish between two categories of approaches. The first is a series of approaches that see EU security policy as nothing more than the sum of its parts. In this category we include various examples from the realist school of thought, as well as its sub-genres. The second is a series of approaches that accept that the EU has a certain level of actorness. Here, we find liberal, neo-functionalist approaches and some constructivist approaches, as well as a series of perspectives that put emphasis on the actual functioning of the EU as a multi-level or differentiated foreign policy actor.

In this section we will present an overview of what the different theoretical approaches have to say about European integration in the field of security policy. As this overview suggests, most traditional theories of European integration primarily focus on *why integration takes place* and what drives it forward, but they have had less to say about how the EU

and its different policy fields operate. To compensate for this, we argue that there is a need for an increased focus on the functioning of the EU as a hybrid actor. A focus on the mechanisms of DI or on the EU as a multi-actor might be more useful than other approaches. Additionally, we include a focus on *agency*, so as not to completely lose sight of what drives the process forward, or of what might halt it or even reverse it.

2.1.1 EU Foreign and Security Policy as Only the Sum of Its Parts

Traditionally, it has been difficult to combine *realism* with European integration in general, since IR and EU scholars often view realism as a theory of non-integration (Cladi & Locatelli, 2012). Stanley Hoffman's distinction between "high" and "low" politics made it easy to explain why the EU was for a long time absent from the field of foreign and security policy (Dijkstra & Vanhoonacker-Kormoss, 2017). "High" politics is traditionally seen as the business of sovereign states, which tend to be extremely reluctant to surrender authority to a supranational institution. The various realist approaches see EU foreign and security policy as nothing more than the combined effort of member states' foreign and security policies, which can only deliver common denominator-based policies.

However, as the realist block has branched off in different directions, the gap between European integration and realism has (at least partially) been bridged, and the usefulness of the theory to the study of the EU has been acknowledged (Reichwein, 2015). From the perspective of *neo-realism,* the behaviour of states is a result of their relative power and position in the international anarchical system. Consequently, the transformation of Europe into a rule-based interstate system has confounded neo-realists (Hyde-Price, 2018). However, revisions made to neo-realist theory during the 1990s and 2000s made neo-realism better suited to explain the European situation, as it tried to explain the high degree of cooperation that resulted in the creation of the CFSP. Based on Kenneth N. Waltz's theory on the balance of power (Waltz, 1979), the creation of the CFSP has been linked to member states' desire to act as a counterbalance to the US, as well as an attempt to balance out one another (Reichwein, 2015).

However, the revised neo-realist focus on European integration was short-lived and, as a consequence, the EU remains under-theorised in neo-realist thought. Assumptions made by neo-realists predict that, as

states operate in an anarchical order, the EU as we know it will eventually break down—even though cooperation is necessary to balance against the US (Mearsheimer, 2014; Walt, 2004). However, collapse has thus far been averted, and the EU has muddled through several crises that ought to have led to its downfall (Riddervold et al., 2021). This shows that realist theories lack predictive capability when it comes to EU security policy. Thus, the main focus of realism has remained the nation state and the cooperation (or lack thereof) between sovereign actors, neglecting the values and interests of the EU has a whole. As a result, when it comes to analysing the multi-actor character of the EU and of EU foreign and security policy, realism falls short.

2.1.2 EU Foreign and Security Policy as More Than the Sum of Its Parts

Realists nurture the idea that institutions are based on the interests of the great powers, and that they reflect the power-distribution of the world and lack the ability to directly affect states and state behaviour. Institutionalists disagree with this assumption and consider institutions to be central to international stability and peace. Following the writings of Michael Smith, the process of institutionalisation can be seen as the main cause of EU cooperation in the field of security policy (Smith, 2004). Institutional approaches suggest that when faced with a crisis, the EU is likely to cope in a more or less satisfactory way, as opposed to breaking down. Crises tend to make institutions stronger rather than weaker (Riddervold et al., 2021). Governance systems handle turbulence by strengthening already existing cooperation practices, arrangements, and methods, following the logic of path dependency (March & Olsen, 1998; Olsen, 2009; Pierson, 2004; Skowronek, 1982). Institutions may also improvise, adapting and creating novel ways of employing existing mechanisms (Ansell, 2021; Ansell et al., 2017). This may in turn trigger more integration, since the experienced turbulence may cause institutional soul-searching and the adaptation of existing structures (Emery & Giauque, 2014; Kingdon, 1984; Lodge & Wegrich, 2012). However, this does not explain why some member states become more integrated than others. It also fails to explain the inclusion of areas which are not formally part of the Union's foreign and security policy.

The grand theory of *neo-functionalism*, developed by Ernst Haas, makes "generalisations about the processes by which political communities are formed among sovereign states" (Haas, 1958, p. 106). Questioning realism, his work was among the first to argue that (at the time, Western) Europe could be transformed by making the cross-border flow of money and people easier. Rather than seeing states as the only relevant players, neo-functionalism emphasised regional integration marked by multiple, diverse, and changing actors that interact in spite of national borders (Haas, 1964; Niemann, 2021). Such actors create functional links by developing a regional network across state borders. The network provides the demand for functionally specific regional institutions dealing with non-existential matters. Through the *spillover* effect, cooperation functionally spreads to other areas, leading to the eventual decline of national sovereignty and rise of supranational institutions (McCormick, 2015). Eventually, as citizens place more and more of their expectations on the region rather than the nation state, governments are pressured to give more authority to the regional organisations, creating a self-sustaining process of cooperation and spillover, which then evolves into closer political integration (Niemann, 2021; Ruggie et al., 2005). Nation-state governments respond to these developments either by accepting and adapting to them, or by ignoring or sabotaging the attempts to integrate made by the regional institutions (Mattli, 1999). By the 1970s, neo-functionalism eventually fell out of favour, in part because of its lack of predictive capability, as European integration had ostensibly not advanced as much as the theory assumed it would (McCormick, 2015).

A *liberal intergovernmentalist* (LI) perspective, as developed by Andrew Moravcsik, suggests that the degree of EU integration is decided by the preferences and relative bargaining power of member states rather than spillover from one area to another (Moravcsik, 1993). In areas such as security policy, member states may choose to integrate further to minimise the potentially negative costs of non-integration, either through treaty changes or through less formal agreements. However, the outcomes of bargaining processes usually mirror pre-existing preferences of member states, especially the members most likely to remain relatively unaffected by the bargaining (Moravcsik & Schimmelfennig, 2009; Schimmelfennig, 2021). LI thus posits a two-level game, where intergovernmental bargains are established based on pressures formed at the domestic level. The demands from interest groups, voters, parties, and bureaucracies that member states governments face at home determine

their positions in international negotiations. European integration moves forward as governments use the information available to them in negotiations at the EU level to reach agreements which they in turn promote to audiences at home (McCormick, 2015). While LI helps explain the interplay between member states and EU institutions, it still does not explain the differentiated character which European integration has taken over the past decades and the fact that the EU institutions have developed a certain degree of agency in their own right.

Constructivism challenges the idea that material interests are sufficient to explain European integration more extensively and resolutely than classical realism, neo-functionalism, or LI. According to constructivists, the historical and social origins of political structures should be accounted for to a much greater extent (McCormick, 2015). Rather than arguing for balancing or economic interdependence as the main drivers for integration, a variety of scholars have claimed that identity and norms are key factors in EU integration, as the various actors aim to create a common institution based on these norms (Hooghe & Marks, 2004; Kuhn, 2019; Liebert, 2016).

Central to this branch of constructivist approaches (often referred to as soft constructivism) is the idea that the EU is crucial when it comes to sharing and spreading norms, ideas and beliefs among both member and non-member states, while placing emphasis on the importance of social interactions. Contrary to the previously discussed theories, these constructivist approaches maintain that membership in the EU has a deep impact on member states' self-representation as international actors. Following constructivism, the EU's common foreign and security policy is made possible through discourse and practices, which trickle down to the level of the member states, effectively redefining their interests (Smith, 2004). Integration is explained through the creation of a common identity, often (but not necessarily) taking the form of some sort of normative power (Manners, 2002, 2006). A more recent branch of constructivist scholarship has been less focused on the importance of norms and values and paid more attention to how policy is practised (Adler & Svendsen, 2019). However, constructivism fails to address why some members willingly opt out of parts of the integration process or choose to leave it behind, as the UK did.

2.1.3 *The Added Value of Multi-level Governance and Differentiated Integration*

Some theoretical frameworks, at times referred to by the general term "post-functionalist" approaches, focus on *the role of institutions rather than the drivers of integration*, and aim to describe their importance in political, social, and economic life (Ansell, 2021; March & Olsen, 1983; Pollack, 2007; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Thelen, 1999). One of the more successful attempts at capturing the European political order is provided by Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks (2001, 2003) in their multi-level governance (MLG) approach (Benz, 2012; Piattoni, 2010; Smith, 2004). They claim that, as European integration has moved into core areas of national state sovereignty, public opinion has become more sceptical of the integration project. As a result, whereas EU-friendly elites previously encountered general consensus, they now face more widespread dissent (Hooghe & Marks, 2009; Schimmelfennig, 2017). For the first time, disintegration becomes a possibility, making scholars question *how* integration works, rather than *why* it takes place and either progresses further or reverses and results in disintegration (Hooghe & Marks, 2019). The multi-level governance approach explores the relationship between the various levels and policy areas involved, their interconnectedness, and how the interplay between different levels produces policies (Smith, 2004).

Following Ernst Haas, the assumption that the EU operates at more than one level, and that both national and supranational levels should be considered, has been present since the very beginning of EU studies. Building on Hooghe and Marks (2001), the challenge has been to theorise the mechanisms of multi-level governance. The introduction of *Differentiated Integration* (DI) as a new sub-field in EU studies has constituted an attempt to take up this challenge, helping us to better understand the actual functioning of European (and not only EU) foreign and security policy by exploring why and how some actors choose to integrate further when others do not.

DI captures a key feature of the EU, namely the search for balance between national autonomy and regional integration. In recent years, DI has proven increasingly relevant, for instance, through its ability to capture the complexity of the EU's multi-level governance structure. With the introduction of the pillar structure with the Maastricht Treaty, which established the CFSP and Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) as two separate

pillars alongside economic integration, DI became institutionalised. While the pillar structure was abandoned with the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, the concept has remained relevant in describing a system of EU governance in which inner groups of EU member states participate in integration processes at different speeds across different policy areas. The DI concept has been explored by several scholars, and today there is a large conceptual and empirical literature on DI (see Dyson & Sepos, 2010; Gänzle et al., 2020; Holzinger & Schimmelfennig, 2012; Holzinger & Tosun, 2019; Hvidsten & Hovi, 2015; Jensen & Slapin, 2012; Leuffen et al., 2013; Warleigh-Lack, 2015; Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2019; Leruth et al., 2022).

It can be argued that a certain level of scholarly agreement concerning the main features of DI has emerged. First, that DI is concerned with differing degrees of the transfer of power from the national to the European level of governance, referred to as vertical DI. Second, that it may include various types or degrees of participation by both member states and associated states, with the possibility for opt-outs from, and opt-ins to, certain parts of the EU integration process, known as horizontal DI. Relevant empirical case studies can be divided into two main categories: those focusing on how differentiation plays out with regard to specific models of membership or association, known as opt-outs and opt-ins; and those that investigate how these models have been implemented in specific policy areas.

What is still missing, however, is an approach that enables us to incorporate both the many processes that occur in or across several different policy areas within the EU framework, and those that are initiated outside formal institutions but still actively contribute to a stronger European foreign and security policy and, ultimately, European strategic autonomy as well. This is what we aim to develop here.

2.1.4 Differentiated Integration in European Foreign, Security, and Defence Policy

The EU has gradually adopted an integrated approach to foreign and security policy, manifesting its aim of developing a policy that recognises the complexity of this field. This policy involves a broader security concept, which extends to different policy areas with different characteristics and levels of integration. It was developed as a consequence of a changing international context, where there are no longer clear-cut

borders between internal and external policies. Today, this broader policy area of security includes areas where the Commission has a certain degree of authority, such as civil protection and crisis response, as well as areas where the main competencies remain with member states, as in the case of defence.

Until recently, DI was most likely to take place in areas with low levels of integration, where there was an urgent need to develop a stronger role for the EU. In Schimmelfennig's words: DI "remains a promising instrument to facilitate further enlargement and kick-start integration in new policy areas" (Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2019). This has also been confirmed empirically, as the CFSP allowed for a certain degree of horizontal differentiation by permitting Denmark to opt out of the CSDP for many years, until it elected to join in 2022. Later, closely associated non-members, like Norway, have been permitted to opt in to the very same policy. The EU also allows for vertical differentiation, by permitting member states to move forward with higher levels of integration, as with the establishment of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). The decision to activate PESCO, with greater use of qualified majority voting (QMV) for certain decisions within this group, and the establishment of a Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space and a European Defence Fund (EDF) within the Commission, are concrete examples of differentiated vertical integration in the area of CSDP (Blockmans & Crosson, 2021, 2022).

Although EU foreign, security, and defence policy is still primarily dominated by intergovernmentalism and national autonomy, there has been a move towards greater involvement of EU institutions, notably the European External Action Service (EEAS)[1] and the Commission. This was highly contested for a time but is now increasingly seen as necessary to make the EU a more capable actor. Even though integration in CFSP/CSDP has moved forward, it is unlikely that we will see a full transfer of power to the EU in this area, as member states are reluctant to give up their national sovereignty in this field. Instead, a certain degree of vertical differentiation is more likely to be the norm—a mix between intergovernmentalism and community policy. Thus, in the EU's foreign, security, and defence policy, DI is here to stay.

[1] The External Action Service was officially launched in December 2010, but was not fully operational until 2012.

What is interesting, however, is that we can also observe a much broader differentiated European integration process taking place on the continent. These processes are closely related to EU processes but go beyond the formal institutions. As these processes are also crucial for the building of European strategic autonomy, they need to be added to the conceptual framework in order to get a full picture of the status of European strategic autonomy. Such a framework needs to take into account the different levels of vertical and horizontal integration in the various parts of EU security policy, but it also needs to include the policies that are not formally part of EU foreign and security policy, but that are still key for developing a European policy in this area—and thus also EU(ropean) strategic autonomy. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has created a profound uncertainty in Europe, but also a new momentum to use DI strategically in order to increase European strategic autonomy as well as making EU(rope) a more capable of operating more efficiently together with the US, but also alone if required.

2.2 EU(ropean) Strategic Autonomy Through Differentiated Integration

In this section we will present a conceptual framework for understanding what constitutes current EU(ropean) security policy and strategic autonomy and how the different parts of this framework are interlinked. However, before the framework as such is presented, there are two important clarifications that are needed: which EU policies we need to include alongside the CFSP/CSDP; and why we need to include the informal parts of integration, in addition to the parts that are formal or treaty-based.

2.2.1 Moving Beyond the CFSP/CSDP

In the Union's CFSP, DI has become increasingly institutionalised. A greater role for EU diplomacy and EU foreign policy was secured by the Lisbon Treaty through the establishment of the EEAS and the strengthening of the mandate of the High Representative for CFSP, who also holds the position of Vice President of the Commission and therefore has a say in the EU's trade, development, neighbourhood and aid policies. Thus, the Union's foreign and security policy must be understood as a mix of CFSP/CSDP and of the areas that are developed and implemented

by the Commission alone or in cooperation with the EEAS and member states. In the field of crisis management or crisis response, this is referred to as the Union's integrated approach. This means that the borders between the areas where the Commission has already developed or is developing a competence alongside member states' national policies—such as in humanitarian aid, civil protection and crisis response, cyber, and space—and areas where member states still are the key actors—such as major foreign policy decisions like economic sanctions and deployment of CSDP missions—have become increasingly blurred or at least interlinked (Svendsen, 2021). This has been particularly evident in the Union's response to the Ukraine war, where most of the Union's foreign policy instruments—both those that are under the competencies of the Commission and as well as those of member states—have been activated to create a common European added value (Rieker et al., 2023).

But not even an integrated approach to foreign and security policy is sufficient to capture all aspects of the EU's global role today. For this, we also need to include *the external dimensions of various internal policies,* such as internal market dynamics, climate regulations, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), etc. These processes have been referred to as the Union's regulatory power. This has also been labelled the "Brussels effect" (Bradford, 2020), referring to the EU's power to shape global standards and regulations. As these policy areas are usually characterised by greater integration and EU actorness, they contribute, together with the areas that are less integrated, to an EU foreign policy that is both differentiated and multi-faceted.

2.2.2 Moving Beyond Formal Differentiated Integration

While an understanding of EU foreign and security policy as a broad framework involving actions across different policy areas has at least been accepted in theory, what is less recognised is the importance of including processes that are not formally part of the EU, but are still closely linked to it. EU studies have a tendency to be overly normative and often see such processes as a challenge or something that may undermine the EU—rather than something that may strengthen it. We argue that we need to include these aspects as well, in order to have a better understanding of the functioning of EU(ropean) security policy, meaning EU security policy (in the strictest sense) as well as policies that in practice are closely linked to the EU but not formally EU policies.

There are several such initiatives in the history of European integration. They often start outside the EU and later become EU policies. Sometimes they remain outside EU structures, but are still closely linked to EU policies. To capture this broader European role, we need to include a study of how policymaking processes in the EU relate to the various initiatives and processes undertaken by member states outside the EU framework, and whether this increased complexity in European responses promotes weaker or stronger European actorness in the foreign and security policy field (Cross, 2021; Rieker, 2021a; Rieker & Giske, 2021).

The distinction between formal (treaty-based) and informal processes of DI has thus far been inadequately studied. While the importance of including this distinction has been highlighted, it has still been largely overlooked in most empirical analyses. The reason is probably that formal differentiation is easier to identify, as it involves flexible formats of integration that are specified in agreements or treaties. Informal DI, on the other hand, may include many different types of processes and can therefore be more difficult to isolate. Based on Rieker (2021a), we distinguish between four main types of informal DI, making it easier to include these aspects in empirical analyses.

First are *opt-outs in the form of non-compliance* with EU rules, norms, and principles by certain member states (understood as informal opt-outs). While non-compliance with rules is most obvious in highly integrated areas (such as the internal market), the non-compliance with fundamental norms and principles may affect all policy areas. Examples of such informal non-compliance would be foreign policy decisions made by member states in their unilateral foreign policies that are at odds with fundamental EU policies and/or principles (Sitter, 2021). The developments in Hungary under Victor Orbán, where we see a move away from the normative basis of the European Union, may be an example of this type of differentiation. In time, this sort of differentiation may affect the functioning of EU foreign and security policy, including the ambitions of building strategic autonomy.

A second type of informal differentiation entails *differing views of the long-term objectives* of the EU as a foreign policy actor. This situation, common in the history of European integration, has often resulted in vague compromises, with a certain degree of "constructive ambiguity" in official documents and official EU discourse. This allows for differing interpretations and thus some kind of informal opt-out. Here, we may

note the various interpretations of the development of a "European security and defence capacity," which historically has meant one thing in Sweden, and something quite different in France (Rieker, 2021b).

Third, we find examples of informal differentiation with *opt-ins in cases where non-members decide unilaterally to sign foreign and security policy declarations or follow EU policies*. An example of this type of differentiation would be Norway's policy alignment with the CFSP. So far, Norway has signed up to close to 100% of all EU CFSP declarations as well as sanctions, making them a highly integrated non-member in this field.

Finally, there are cases where *certain member states push for integration initiatives outside the EU structure,* to kick-start a process seen as difficult to agree on within the Union. Such initiatives are often undertaken by one or several member states (sometimes also together with closely associated non-members), with the implicit or explicit aim of either (i) integrating the area into the Union at a later stage; or (ii) supporting the EU in strengthening Europe's role on the global stage or its strategic autonomy (Billon-Galland & Whitman, 2021; Rieker, 2021a). Two obvious examples of the former would be the Schengen Cooperation and the British–French St. Malo Declaration of 1998.[2] Four examples of the latter would be the E3 Iran format, the EI2,[3] the Intelligence College in Europe (ICE),[4] or the EPC.[5]

[2] The Schengen cooperation was initially signed by only five EU members in 1985 and was not included in the EU treaty until 1999. The St. Malo declaration kickstarted European defence integration, which became an integral part of the EU treaty at the same time as Schengen (in 1999) and is now known as CSDP.

[3] The E3, which has its origin in the 2003 initiative of France, Germany and the UK, embarked on collective negotiations with Iran over its nuclear activities and is often referred to as an EU approach (as the High Representative/Vice President is also part of the negotiating team and the whole process started before Brexit). The French project of establishing EI2 aims to strengthen common European strategic culture and thus might (if it succeeds) have an important impact on EU foreign and security policy and lay the groundwork for coordination in the future. Both cases are initiatives that aim at strengthening Europe's role in the world and have close (although informal) connections to the EU institutional framework.

[4] ICE was launched on 5 March 2019 in Paris. It brings together 23 member countries, who signed a Letter of Intent on 26 February 2020 in Zagreb, and 7 partner countries. The College is a collective endeavour of European intelligence communities. It generates professional and academic views on a wide range of intelligence-related topics and disseminates those in order to contribute to the development of a strategic intelligence culture in Europe.

[5] The EPC was proposed by the French president Emmanuel Macron at the Conference on the Future of Europe on 9 May 2022 following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, in his role as the president of the Council of the European Union (Macron 2022). The idea

Another example of a process that was initiated by a member state outside the EU framework was the initiative taken by Germany to externalise border management, which led to the EU–Turkey migration deal of 2016. While this agreement became a formal part of EU–Turkey relations, the initial push was made by Germany, highlighting the centrality of agency in integration processes. Initiatives can also be taken by smaller member states, such as Sweden's push for a greater focus on conflict prevention in the early 2000s—which has now become a key feature of EU foreign and security policy—or the more recent multilateral defence initiatives taken by the Nordic, the Benelux, and (for a period) the Visegrád Group (V4) countries (Rieker, 2021a). All these initiatives have had the implicit or explicit intention of contributing to a strengthening of the European capacity to act together.

We may also include the processes aimed at strengthening the European pillar in NATO, as these processes contribute to a more differentiated, but potentially also stronger, European joint capacity in the field of security and defence (Howorth, 2019). The recent inclusion of Finland in NATO has certainly strengthened Europe's role in NATO. Although Sweden's application (at the time of writing) still awaits Turkish ratification, EU–NATO cooperation has been reinforced as a consequence of the current geopolitical situation, and Europe has increased its common stance.

What all of these processes indicate is that, as long as there continues to be widespread reluctance to transfer competences to the EU level in this area at the same time as there is increased demand for greater European responsibility for its own security and well-being, we are likely to continue to see more DI in all parts of European foreign, security, and defence policy.

In the remaining part of this chapter, we present a comprehensive conceptual framework for analysing processes that take place outside of the EU framework but have an impact on it, as well as the linkages between them, which may help to better understand *how EU foreign and security policy can become more integrated without necessarily implying a fully-fledged common foreign and security policy in the traditional sense*.

was to create a group that included all European democracies that could discuss common challenges. The group has so far convened two times, first on 6 October 2022 in Prague and then on 1 June in Chisinau, with leaders from 44 states in attendance.

2.2.3 *Differentiated Integration as a Function of Levels of Integration and Uniformity*

Given the need for a broader approach to European security policy, which includes both formal EU policies and processes that are not formal EU policies but are nevertheless closely linked to them, we need to apply a concept of integration that not only includes the transfer of competencies from member states to the EU level, but also the whole spectrum of processes that foster greater density and intensity in the relations between some of the constitutive elements of a specific regional system. From such a generic definition, which is largely inspired by the work of Jim March (March, 1999), European integration can be understood as *a continuum with no integration or interstate cooperation at one end and full integration or federation at the other end*. Everything between these two extremes will then be some type of DI.

Such a definition of integration incorporates both the vertical/horizontal dimension, the formal/informal dimension, and the inclusive/exclusive dimension of integration processes. This means that it can readily be applied to specific studies of processes within the EU, as well as to the many different regional processes that are not formally part of the EU but are still closely linked to it.

With such an understanding of DI, we can more easily capture the dynamics of the different parts of an increasingly complex EU(ropean) integration process, characterised by opt-outs and opt-ins, enhanced cooperation and various forms of multi-level governance. This will help structure our empirical analysis and avoid having too narrow a conceptual framework that risks excluding important processes that are crucial to European foreign and security policy. It will therefore also give a better idea of what European strategic autonomy entails.

By adding the feature of uniformity to vertical and horizontal integration, we are able to distinguish between different types of differentiated integration and disintegration. While integration varies on a continuum between no integration on the one side (competition or conflict), and full integration (federal state) on the other, uniformity will vary between no uniformity (divergence) on the one hand and full uniformity or harmonisation on the other. Combining these two dimensions, we can present a table (Table 2.1) that shows different ideal types of DI. Note that the categories of no integration or full integration have been taken out, as

Table 2.1 Differentiated (dis)integration as a function of levels of integration and uniformity

		Integration		
Uniformity		Low	Medium	High
	Harmonisation	Differentiated Integration	Differentiated Integration	Differentiated Integration
	High level of cooperation	Differentiated Integration	Differentiated Integration	Differentiated Integration
	Some cooperation	Differentiated Integration	Differentiated Integration	Differentiated Integration
	No cooperation	Differentiated (Dis)integration	Differentiated (Dis)integration	--
	Conflict/ Competition	Differentiated (Dis)integration	Differentiated (Dis)integration	--

neither are relevant for European differentiated integration. We distinguish between low, medium, and high degrees of integration, which all are examples of DI.

It is possible to have full uniformity—the harmonisation of policies—without any form of integration. This would imply a high level of cooperation but does not necessarily entail integration. However, the other way around is not possible, as you will need at least a certain level of uniformity to start on a pathway towards integration. Instances between no and full integration, and between some and full cooperation, are characterised as some form of DI. How, then, can we distinguish between different levels of integration?

One way of doing this is to utilise March's (1999) three dimensions of integration: *interdependency*, *consistency*, and *structural connectedness*. Interdependence refers to the degree to which the different parts of the system (often states) are economically or politically dependent on each other. Consistency refers to the members' actions and beliefs, which make them coordinated or coherent in the form of some common rules, values, and/or objectives. Finally, structural connectedness refers to a network vision of integration where the focus is on the number and pattern of different bilateral or trilateral relationships within the system

of members and associated members, such as contacts and meetings, common resources, common institutions, and the level of transfer of competencies/learning.

In addition to these three dimensions proposed by March, we include a fourth dimension, which we think is crucial in order for integration to deliver results: namely, *decision-making capacity*. The reason for this is that while interdependency, consistency and structural connectedness are necessary conditions for common action, they are not sufficient. They will always depend on the existence of a decision-making capacity that can transform political will into action. This dimension could be operationalised either as QMV or by a delegating capacity, making it possible to delegate a response or action to a member state or a group of member states and associated non-members. All dimensions are important dimensions of horizontal integration. However, only the last two are relevant for vertical integration, as they require a transfer of competencies to another level.

While these four dimensions of integration (*interdependency, consistency, structural connectedness,* and *decision-making capacity*) are crucial, they are not necessarily strongly correlated: There may be high levels of integration in one dimension and less in another. For instance, we can see high levels of consistency in an area where we have lower levels of interdependence and structural connectedness. With regard to EU(rope's) foreign and security policy, we can argue that there is a high level of consistency and interdependence, but that the structural connectedness varies or can take different forms. Sometimes this occurs within parts of the EU foreign and security policy field, and sometimes beyond but still closely linked to it, thus contributing to a higher level of European integration.

A fully integrated system will require high scores on all dimensions. Since most processes will fall somewhere in the middle (see Table 2.1), a framework with these different dimensions makes it possible to say something more substantial about the different forms of DI. The exact level of integration may be difficult to identify—at least with a high degree of precision. This is why we have chosen to distinguish only between low, medium, and high levels of integration. While the low level of integration will be reserved for processes and cooperation formats that can refer to a relatively high score on only one of the four dimensions of integration, medium integration would imply a high score on two dimensions, with a

requirement of a medium to high score on either the dimension of consistency or decision-making. Finally, a high level of integration would imply a high score on three out of four, with the requirement of a high score on consistency or decision-making.

2.2.4 Introducing the Role of Agency

Although the different dimensions of the integration process or continuum are useful and can facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the concept of DI, they do not provide us with a new understanding of what drives these processes forward, what slows them down, or what sends them into reverse. To be able to answer such questions as well, the framework needs to include the role of agency. But agency does not necessarily have to come from member states. It can also be found within the EU institutions themselves. Thus, we assume that some types of push- and/or pull-factors, coming from the different levels of government in the European DI process—meaning the EU level or member state level—are relevant for whichever type of DI is involved.

Here, we identify four roles that the various levels of government may take in this process of integration: *leaders, followers, laggards,* or *disruptors/leavers*. What motivates them, which is the main concern of most established theories—be it national interests, norms, path dependency, or something else—is of less interest to us in this context. We also assume, contrary to most established theories of IR and European integration that have a tendency to choose one over the other, that this will vary over time and from policy area to policy area, and can therefore only be identified empirically on a case-by-case basis. So, what do we mean by leaders, followers, laggards, or disruptors/leavers?

The first categories are *leaders* and *followers*. They cover actors that drive the processes of integration forward, either through taking initiative or through working towards the same goal and not disrupting the process. Leaders often include the EU institutions themselves. For instance, both the Commission and the EEAS propose specific courses of international action. Additionally, there may be a combination, as with the many joint initiatives that often come from the High Representative/Vice President (HR/VP) and the Commission. This equally occurs either in areas where the Commission has a certain degree of independent competence or in intergovernmental policy fields. In intergovernmental policy fields, where joint initiatives are presented for adoption by member states, there is

always a risk that the initiatives will be blocked or changed by certain member states when a final decision is to be made. So far, most of these joint initiatives have been adopted in the end, which also demonstrates that the agenda-setting power of EU institutions such as the Commission and the HR/VP is significant in these areas too (Riddervold & Bosilca, 2021). The Commission has traditionally been rather reluctant to take a very visible role. This has changed, and the promotion of the current Commission as a "geopolitical commission" is evidence of such a change. This approach has also been implemented in the Union's responses to Russia's illegal military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

In the areas dominated by intergovernmentalism, individual member states often take the lead alone or as a group. Different member states may assume a leading role at different times and in different areas. In the area of security and defence, France has traditionally played a particularly important role and led the push for integration—alone or together with other members. For instance, French collaboration with the UK on the St. Malo declaration in 1998 was a crucial part of the process towards what later became the CSDP. France has also cooperated with Germany, strongly supporting the Commission's initiative (from 2016) to activate PESCO and establish a European Defence Fund (EDF). Additionally, France has initiated several processes outside the EU, with the intent of contributing to a stronger European defence capacity. Here, we may note various attempts to strengthen the European pillar within NATO, or independent initiatives taken to strengthen multilateral defence cooperation among the European allies and partner countries, such as the EI2 (Rieker, 2021a). Initiatives to strengthen bilateral defence cooperation/integration should also be mentioned, such as the Lancaster House Agreements with the UK from 2010 or the Aachen agreement with Germany from 2019. It is evident that most of the progress made in this area has been pushed forward by either France alone or France acting together with other EU members, with most of the other members (and associated non-members) as followers.

In spite of these leaders, integration takes time. The main reason is that there are still a number of different member states who still view the integration processes with considerable scepticism. These countries can be referred to as *laggards*. While some—like Denmark, the Netherlands, Poland, and Hungary—have traditionally worried that a stronger role for the EU may undermine NATO and the transatlantic relationship, others—like Germany and Sweden—worry that France might push

the EU in a more interventionist direction and undermine the soft-security identity of the EU. Finally, some member states (like Poland and Hungary) are more challenging than the laggards and have a deeper scepticism of the EU; they call into question the normative foundations of the EU. Rather than laggards, these are perhaps better described as *disruptors*. They represent a greater challenge than the laggards, as they may have a more transformative impact of the processes (Sitter, 2021). Sometimes the disruptors end up becoming leavers, like the UK. In principle, leavers only become a challenge if they grow in number. From a theoretical perspective, if Hungary left the EU right now, the integration process would likely benefit from it, as Hungary slows the integration process down. And without Brexit, the EU would most likely not have been able to agree on PESCO, EDF or a Next Generation EU, to mention some.[6] Through a DI perspective, the UK can potentially still contribute to the strengthening of a European foreign and security policy through some type of participation in a transformed E3 format, the EI2 or perhaps the European Political Community, which seeks to include different types of neighbouring countries, from EEA countries and ENP partners to leavers like the UK.

2.3 Concluding Remarks

The main purpose of this chapter has been to conceptualise the EU(rope)'s multi-actorness. The chapter started by presenting an overview of the relevant academic literature and identified a few gaps in these contributions. While there is a rather substantial body of literature on multi-level governance and DI, none of these contributions have so far been able to capture the multi-actorness that has now become a permanent feature of European foreign and security policy. The main reason for this is that an excessively narrow understanding of the concepts of European and security integration and European foreign and security policy is often applied.

For some time, it has been common to refer to the comprehensiveness of EU foreign and security policy. This means that there is a general agreement that there is a need to move beyond the area of CFSP and external relations, and that analysis of the EU as a global actor also has to

[6] A temporary recovery instrument of more than €800 billion intended to help repair the immediate economic and social damage brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

include the Union as a global standard setter. What is still less common is to include the many policy processes that are initiated outside the formal framework of the EU but still closely linked to its policies.

By applying a more inclusive approach to both integration and foreign and security policy, it is possible to capture the actual functioning of not only the EU, but of European foreign and security policy. Very often it is argued that it is important to distinguish between what is EU and what is European. However, such a distinction is becoming increasingly difficult in a European context that is increasingly characterised by DI—often with the EU at its core, but with other processes playing an important role in defining what European foreign and security policy actorness is all about.

In this chapter, we have presented an analytical framework that captures the comprehensiveness of European actorness by showing how it goes beyond the EU—even though the EU is at the core. The idea has been to shed light on how different European processes are linked together through a system of DI. By doing this, we allow for the possibility that processes and initiatives that are usually studied separately—and sometimes even interpreted as signs of fragmentation—could in some cases be understood as different parts of a greater whole. We also contribute to an understanding of European foreign and security policy that is far more coherent than often argued—and one that also has the potential of producing greater European strategic autonomy. As most analysis is based on conventional understandings of how international politics and the EU are functioning, this aspect is often ignored.

In the next three chapters, we will show how this works in practice. First, we will use this conceptual framework to study the development of Europe as a global actor (Chapter 3). Then, we will move to European security and defence, where we will focus on the different policies and processes directed towards building more resilient European societies—or strengthening European common societal security through a whole-of-society approach as well as through more conventional European defence (Chapter 4). Finally, we will move on to focus on the EU(ropean) role in building a regional security community (Chapter 5).

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CHAPTER 3

Actorness, Differentiated Integration, and EU(rope)'s Role in the World

Abstract Evidently, actorness requires a base level of common goals, resources, interdependences, and objectives. However, having resources or common policies is not enough. To function as an effective foreign policy actor, there needs to be political will and sufficient decision-making capacity to bring these policies to action. Actorness in international politics may be understood in various ways. While some scholars stress the importance of internal resources, others put more emphasis on the perceptions of international society. In this chapter we argue that there are two basic preconditions that must be fulfilled to claim global actorness: (i) The capacity to formulate clear objectives and to make decisions according to these objectives and (ii) The existence of necessary administrative and operational capabilities to implement these decisions. In this chapter, we first investigate the extent to which Europe, with the EU as its core, has managed to develop the capabilities to pursue a global role, and then we move on to identify the levels of European DI. Finally, we will discuss what this tells us about the existence of European strategic autonomy on the global stage.

Keywords Strategic autonomy · Differentiated integration · EU foreign policy

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Evidently, actorness requires a base level of common goals, resources, interdependences, and objectives. However, having resources or common policies is not enough. To function as an effective foreign policy actor, there needs to be political will and sufficient decision-making capacity to bring these policies to action. Actorness in international politics may be understood in various ways. While some scholars stress the importance of internal resources (Rhinard & Sjöstedt, 2019; Sjöstedt, 1977), others put more emphasis on the perceptions of international society (Bretherton & Vogler, 2006). In this chapter we argue that there are two basic preconditions that must be fulfilled to claim global actorness: (i) The capacity to formulate clear objectives and to make decisions according to these objectives; and (ii) The existence of necessary administrative and operational capabilities to implement these decisions (March & Olsen, 1995; Rieker, 2009, 2013). In this chapter we first investigate the extent to which Europe, with the EU as its core—EU(rope)—has managed to develop the capabilities to pursue a global role, and then we move on to identify the levels of European DI. Finally, we will discuss what this tells us about the existence of European strategic autonomy on the global stage.

3.1 Visions and Decisions

So far, the EU and its member states have adopted a wide range of declarations and agreed on ambitious objectives within the area of foreign and security policy, which would indicate that the political will to strengthen the EU as a security policy actor is in place. While it was more of a long-term objective in the Maastricht Treaty establishing the European Union, it has now, especially since the events of 2022, become a reality.

The formulation of a clear vision and common objectives was first made explicit in the European Security Strategy that was adopted in December 2003, where member states for the first time identified potential threats, strategic objectives, and implications for the instruments of the EU (European Council, 2003). To implement these objectives, the EU had to be able to make decisions that commit its members to action. As was seen in relation to the Iraq War in 2003, the EU will not be able to act if its various member states differ deeply in their approaches and views concerning a given conflict. In the case of Iraq there was a divide between those who supported a US-led war and those who were opposed. Another example was when EU countries failed to send troops to Congo in November 2008—a country then on the brink of erupting

into civil war. Whereas France was keen to send EU battle groups, which have been developed for precisely such cases, Germany feared that such an EU force could weaken the legitimacy of the UN operation in the country.

Despite occasional difficulties in making decisions, there have been many instances of internal "crises" or major international events that led to decisions which have made the EU gradually more capable of acting. While the CFSP was established in the wake of the end of the Cold War, the establishment of the security and defence policy (then the European Security and Defence Policy, ESDP) came about as a consequence of the Balkan wars and the recognition that the EU would have to strengthen its capacity for both preventing and handling potential international crises in its neighbourhood. Moreover, the events of 9/11 led to a strengthening of the EU's anti-terror policy, while internal disagreements among member states prior to the Iraq War helped to bring about the adoption of a European Security Strategy. Finally, the enlargement of the EU led to institutional reforms, here materialised in the establishment of the HR/VP and the EEAS, which aims at making an enlarged Union more capable of acting—including in security policy.

Simultaneously, despite differing opinions, broad agreement within the EU emerged as to what kind of security policy orientation it should have. For instance, there was no doubt about the importance of multilateral institutions, and that the focus should be on a broad approach to security where conflict prevention and civilian crisis management play an important role, in addition to the development of a military crisis management capacity. Thus, members agree on the overarching objectives even though they may from time to time find it difficult to make decisions in relation to specific crises and conflicts.

3.2 Responding to a Changing Context

The EU has been forced to adjust its objectives several times since 2003, when the first security strategy was adopted. First, the broad enlargement of the EU in 2004 changed the character of the EU. Second, the security context changed again with a more aggressive Russia and a more assertive China. The Russian use of military power in Georgia in 2008 and then later its illegal annexation of Crimea represented a real shift in European security which required adjustments to the European approach. In June 2016, the Global Strategy (EEAS, 2016) was presented and it oriented

the EU's approach away from its ideal of being exclusively a force of good or normative power to be more concerned with how to protect European interests and the European way of life in a more contested world. "Principled Pragmatism" became the new mantra, guiding the EU's policies. It was argued that a certain securitisation of the European approach was needed to protect the normative basis of the Union.

While the global strategy continues to guide the Union's global approach, it was supplemented by documents that aim to make the EU more coherent, and better at making decisions, and act in accordance with the Union's overarching objectives. First, the Strategic Compass (EEAS, 2022), which was adopted in March 2022, shortly after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, laying out what the EU needs to do to improve its capacity to act, to secure, to invest, and to be better at cooperating with partners to "enhance its strategic autonomy and to […] safeguard its values and interests" (p. 23).

Many processes have led to these key documents, culminating with the Strategic Compass. Two of the most important are related to the promotion of an integrated approach to crisis response and long-term defence capability development. The gradual development of a comprehensive and/or integrated approach has led to improved synergies between the different instruments of the EU's external action on the one hand, and foreign security and defence policy on the other. The promotion of long-term capability development in the military domain, which started in 2017 with the PESCO programmes and the establishment of the EDF (more on this in Chapter 5), has also been crucial as it has led to a shift in EU security and defence policy, giving priority to long-term capacity building, which in the end is a precondition for strategic autonomy.

Second, the European Economic Security Strategy (2023), which was presented by the European Commission in June 2023 (European Commission, 2023), making the Union better equipped to commonly identify and assess the risks to European economic security, and to use strategically the available tools for dealing with these risks (Such as FDI screening and anti-coercion mechanisms) and to develop new tools where needed. However, perhaps the most interesting change is the Union's gradual improved capacity to make decisions in times of deep crisis. Since 2008, the EU has been in constant crisis mode, and it has become stronger through these crises (Riddervold et al., 2021). This has been particularly evident with regard to the two major crises that have shaped the beginning of this decade, namely the Union's response to the

COVID-19 pandemic and its response to the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine, which has led a to a series of innovative decisions and made the EU both individually and with its partners a stronger global actor.

3.3 Capabilities and Resources

In addition to the ability to formulate objectives and make decisions, an actor also needs certain administrative capabilities to be able to act. According to March and Olsen (1995, p. 91) these include four key capacities: (i) a well-functioning set of rules, rights and authorities; (ii) necessary resources (in the form of budgets, staffs, and equipment); (iii) knowledge and competence; and (iv) organisational capacity. In this part of the chapter, we will examine the extent to which EU(rope) possesses these administrative capabilities in foreign, security, and defence policy, which in many ways lay the foundation for whether or not we can talk about a global Europe or European strategic autonomy.

3.3.1 Rules and Regulatory Power

3.3.1.1 Formal and Informal Rules (Practices) Regulating a Policy Area

The EU is equipped with a set of formal rules and practices to regulate the area of foreign and security policy. A smooth functioning set of rules, rights, and authorities is necessary to act, since this clarifies what the actor can do, in what way, and with what kind of means. The Union was set up as a "community of law"; its cornerstones are respect for the rule of law and the fundamental rights on which it is founded—as stipulated in Art. 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU, 2009). When supporting rule of law reform and constitution building in other regions, the EU aims to ensure the same level of respect for fundamental values and democratic culture as in its own member states (Art. 205).

The Union's external action consists of different parts that are all covered by Title V of the TEU. In addition to the CFSP/CSDP, which are still largely intergovernmental, the Union's commercial and trade policy is also an important part of EU's external action. This is an area where the EU has exclusive competencies and is thus acting on behalf of member states. In an area such as climate negotiations, the EU is also seen as a unitary actor, but the competence is mixed, which means that both the EU as such and member states take part and are signatories.

Still, in this area, practice has shown that member states are highly coordinated and, thus far, the EU has been acting as a unitary actor (and a frontrunner) in this field. Other areas where the EU is highly coordinated but not a unitary actor are development assistance and humanitarian aid, as well as energy policy. In the field of development and humanitarian aid, both the European Union and its member states practice their own policies. Still, member states' policies intend to complement and support the development cooperation carried out by the Union. Energy policy is also an example of shared competencies, where the EU is assisting its member states, through the establishment of an energy union, to facilitate delivery of affordable, secure, and sustainable energy. Finally, there are areas where EU institutions have more of a coordinating role where most of the assets are at the member state level, such as civil protection and cyber security (more on this below).

In addition to identifying the overarching goals and principles, the CFSP shall be in accordance with the UN Charter and with international law. These rules also lay out a more detailed set of rules clarifying the competencies of the different EU institutions. As the EU is consistently evolving, the rules are also constantly updated.

For instance, whereas the CFSP was included in the 1993 Maastricht Treaty, the establishment of a High Representative for CFSP was not introduced in the Treaty until 1997. The position was meant to be held by the Secretary General of the Council, thereby contributing to making this policy area more visible at the overall EU level. The Commission—otherwise the most important institution of the European Union—has traditionally had a more limited role in the area of foreign and security policy. Still, its role has also expanded somewhat over time. This has been evident in the move towards an ideal of having an integrated approach to crisis response, for instance, where the objective is to have better coordination of the different instruments that the EU has at its disposal. In addition, the Commission has, through the budget, a certain role concerning implementation of at least parts of CFSP/CSDP. It has also established a Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space, which manages the EDF, and is developing a space strategy with a similar fund (IRIS2). Another area that is closely linked to CSDP is the Union's work on cyber security, which is also to be found under the Directorate-General for Communications Network, Content, and Technology.

Thus, the EU is equipped with a set of formal rules and established practices in the field of foreign and security policy, which also have been

gradually strengthened over time. Gradually, EU institutions have been increasingly important as agenda setters. While CFSP is an intergovernmental form of cooperation, which means that most of the decisions are taken unanimously, there is a trend towards greater influence at the EU level. The establishment of an HR/VP has led to a gradual strengthening of the role of the Commission in this policy area. The EEAS assists the HR/VP in fulfilling their mandate and establishes a European diplomatic service, often existing in parallel to member states' services (even though some member states have reduced their own national diplomatic corps since the establishment of EEAS).

The Commission also plays a role through its various funding mechanisms, such as the Foreign Policy Instruments. But the Commission has more responsibility for policy areas that can be defined as part of the broader area of external action. Global trade is the most important, where the EU has exclusive competences and therefore is acting on behalf of member states. Other areas, such as development aid and humanitarian action, are common EU policies with a common budget, but these policies also exist in parallel to member states' policies. Since Von der Leyen was elected President of the European Commission, this institution has also taken a more important role. Her framing of the Commission as a "geopolitical Commission," for instance, has been important for positioning the Commission as a key actor in this domain (Von der Leyen, 2019).

The anti-coercion mechanism is another instrument that would empower the Commission, in specific situations of coercion, to take trade, investment, or other restrictive measures towards the non-EU country exerting the pressure. Finally, the Commission has also proposed a European Democracy Action Plan that aims to empower citizens and build more resilient democracies across the EU by promoting free and fair elections, strengthening media freedom, and countering disinformation.

3.3.1.2 The EU as a Regulatory Power

In addition to regulating the competencies between the different levels and institutions, some of EU's rules and regulations also have a significant global impact, and are therefore key elements of the Union as a global actor.

This has been very well presented by Anu Bradford in her book "the Brussels effect" (Bradford, 2020), where she emphasises the Union's

regulatory power. In her view, the common narrative of the EU's weakness as an international actor overlooks a crucial dimension of its power, which in many ways remains unaffected by recent crises. That is the Union's unilateral power to regulate global markets, through its ability to set standards in competition policy, environmental protection, food safety, the protection of privacy, and the regulation of hate speech in social media. We could also add the standards for the use of Artificial Intelligence, which is likely to be one of the most important types of regulation in the years to come—and is likely to have global implications.

Even though the EU regulates only its internal market, multinational corporations often have an incentive to standardise their production globally and adhere their production to a single set of rules, as opposed to customising their production to each individual market. As Bradford argues, regulatory power is one of the few areas where unilateralism still works, and in this field the EU is ahead of the US, which, thus far, has been less interested in regulating market forces. But it is a different kind of unilateralism, in the sense that it is not about imposing rules on third parties, but rather about the third party willingly adopting them (Bradford, 2020, Introduction).

3.3.2 Resources

It can be argued that a set of rules, rights, and authorities that clarifies what the different levels in the governance system can do, in what way, and with what kind of means, is in place, but is also constantly evolving—and is flexible enough to be adjusted when needed. In addition to a formal set of rules, an actor also needs certain resources, such as a stable budget, staff, and equipment.

While most of the EU budget continues to go to various transfers within the EU, the single market, and natural resources and environment, there has been a constant increase in the budget for external relations, including security and defence. For instance, the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the period 2021–2027 dedicates 2.2% to security, defence, and crisis response and 10% to development, humanitarian aid, and pre-accession assistance. While the biggest budget lines are still cohesion and values (35%), natural resources and environment (30%), and

single market, innovation, and digital (15%),[1] there has been a substantial increase in external action and security compared to the previous MFF. First, the "security and defence" budget line has been singled out as an independent area for the first time, and no longer as part of the broader Global Europe heading. This has been done without reducing the budget frame for external action (now called Neighbourhood and the world, which still gets its 10%). Another area that has been given priority is "Migration and border management." In the previous MFF, this area was part of the heading "security and citizenship," which also included health, food security, culture, and justice and to which only 1.6% of the budget was dedicated. Now the specific area of Migration and border management gets 2.7%.

As the EU budget goes to activities where the Commission has a role, the security and defence part of the budget goes to various programmes that intend to strengthen the security and safety of European citizens (e.g. an internal security fund), improving Europe's defence capacities (e.g. EDF), and providing the tools to respond to crises. Concerning EU military operations or military support to third countries, which are part of CSDP and mainly intergovernmental, the expenses are covered by national contributions or off-budget arrangements such as the European Peace Facility (EPF), an instrument that since the Russian invasion of Ukraine has been used to fund weapons delivery to Ukraine.

Another part of the budget that is key for the EU's role in the world falls under the heading "neighbourhood and the world," which includes funding instruments that cover pre-accession support, development aid, and humanitarian assistance. While most of the other headings are funding internal policies, policies under the heading "single market innovation and digital" also have a security dimension, since they cover the area of digital security, cyber security, and satellite communication. Finally, the heading that covers "cohesion, resilience and values" is also about security broadly speaking and cannot be ignored. To have the full overview of EU(rope)'s resources that form the foundations for a strategic autonomy, however, we need to include the resources of member states as well as associated member states, which also contribute to European actorness in the end—albeit through DI.

[1] https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/long-term-eu-budget/2021-2027/documents_en#legislation.

Besides budgets, an actor must also have both staff and the equipment necessary for implementing policies. A security policy actor cannot function properly without civilian and military capabilities. The EU is often considered to have relatively limited resources in this area, but this depends on what is included. In civilian preparedness, for instance, member states have pledged to make a certain number of civilians and military capabilities available for EU international crisis management or civil protection. The EU level is also building up its own resources in certain areas. A concrete example is the post-COVID-19 initiative of establishing the "RescEU reserve." This includes a fleet of firefighting planes and helicopters, medical evacuation planes, and a stockpile of medical items and field hospitals that can respond to health emergencies, as well as mobile shelters for those displaced. Furthermore, the EU is also developing a reserve to respond to chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear incidents. This is an upgrade to the Civil Protection Mechanism, which has been relying exclusively on member states' capacities.

In international crisis management, the EU still relies on member states' resources for conducting crisis management operations (civilian or military). However, with regard to long-term European defence capacity building—a crucial process to make European strategic autonomy a reality—the Commission has become a key actor through its financial mechanisms or incentives to promote defence industry integration. Beyond this, it is the PESCO framework under the EEAS that is a legally binding cooperation framework for developing defence capabilities. The EU has also become more open to drawing on and utilising member states' facilities, as well as developing a closer cooperation with NATO and other bilateral and subnational cooperation frameworks. The fact that the EU has been able to carry out close to 40 (smaller, but still important) CSDP missions, mainly in its immediate and wider neighbourhood—and that there have been more if we include the various ad hoc European coalitions (e.g. Task force Takuba, Emasoch) that have been initiated—indicates that it does have a certain amount of resources available.

3.3.3 A Continuous Learning Process

A third type of administrative capability necessary for an actor is security policy expertise, experience, and knowledge. As individuals acquire

knowledge and skills through education and training, institutions represent enshrined knowledge in traditions and rules. Skills and knowledge therefore depend on a combination of good recruitment policies, good leadership, good training programmes, and the appropriate use of advice emanating from the expertise of reputable research institutes and think-tanks. For the EU, security policy competence will hinge on a combination of the institution's ability to draw on the expertise of its member states and its ability to develop specific programmes for training and learning.

It has been argued that the EU is a young and inexperienced security policy actor (Hoffman, 2000; Kagan, 2003; Toje, 2011; Renard, 2014). Such criticisms fail to account for the fact that member states all come with extensive experience—from their individual security policies, as well as through participation in other multilateral structures such as NATO and the UN. In turn, this expertise will be channelled into the EU through national participation in various expert groups (the Commission) and working groups or committees (the Council). But it will also automatically contribute to the existence of a European security experience that is of a more informal character, but no less necessary.

The EU has proven surprisingly adaptable to the new security policy context—perhaps even more so than many individual member states. Perhaps because the EC/EU had no clearly defined security policy until after the Cold War, it was easier to adapt to a new era. Unlike well-established security policy actors, the EU did not have to go through long and difficult restructuring processes: It could start to develop a security policy from scratch. Since then, the EU has taken a range of initiatives to increase its expertise in this field. For one thing, both the Commission and the Council have made use of expertise from various research institutes and think-tanks. The EU's own Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) in Paris is frequently used, as is the European Policy Centre in Brussels. The EU also established a separate college, the European Security and Defence College (founded in 2005), which trains civilian and military personnel. Training programmes for civilian–military coordination have been implemented as well as a range of civilian and military crisis management exercises. This is an ongoing process. The EU has built up a certain degree of expertise in this field, both by virtue of the experience held by its member states, and by developing its own learning programmes.

Of a more informal character are French initiatives to foster a strategic European culture. Both EI2 and ICE have this as their main ambition. Both initiatives include members that are not members of the EU and show that we can talk about a developing EU(ropean) skill set. The European pillar in NATO is, of course, also contributing actively to this. This will be explored in further detail in Chapter 5.

3.3.4 Hybridity and Organisational Skills

Organisational skills are the final but perhaps most important capability essential to an actor's ability to take collective action. While such skills also depend on the presence of other capabilities (rules, resources, and expertise), all these must be applied effectively. As March and Olsen argue, "Without organizational talents, experience, and understanding, the other capabilities are likely to be lost in problems of coordination and control […]" (March & Olsen, 1995, p. 95). There are many institutions at several levels that play a role in EU security policy. In fact, the Commission, the Council, various independent agencies, and member states all contribute to the development and implementation of EU foreign policy. Although there are regulations for how they are to operate together, these are often of such a general character that uncertainties remain concerning the distribution of responsibilities, both within and between institutions.

Coordination problems within the Commission relate first and foremost to the fact that there are several Directorate-Generals and underlying bodies responsible for the external relations and security policy of the EU. Due to internal communication problems, the Commission does not always manage to act in a unified way. In some cases, this has led to contradictory policies towards third countries (Duke, 2006, p. 10). However, various reform measures have been implemented to remedy these problems and the Commission has gradually become far more coordinated in its approach.

By contrast, coordination problems within the Council are of a different nature, with political as well as institutional dimensions. While the political dimension concerns the traditional problem of coordination between member states within a policy area, where most formal decisions are taken by unanimity, the institutional dimension is about coordination problems between civilian and military personnel. While problems covered by the political dimension have no solution in the short term and will from time to time continue to impose certain restrictions on the EU's

ability to act, those covered by the institutional dimension have led to the creation of structures designed to strengthen civil–military cooperation.

Coordination between the Commission and the EEAS has been improved with the High Representative also being Vice President of the Commission, as well as through development of various more flexible funding mechanisms. The leadership of EU(ropean) foreign policy will continue to be complex due to its different levels and actors. The recent crises in the EU, however, have shown that European unity is still possible to achieve when common action is needed. The Union's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the invasion of Ukraine are cases in point.

3.4 The Degree of Differentiation

What does this discussion of the EU's global role and actorness tell us about the level of DI in European foreign policy? Relying on the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2, the analysis in this section builds on the above analysis of EU(ropean) administrative capabilities and thus actorness. It will show how the wider foreign policy area scores on what we have identified as the two key features of Differentiation, namely *integration* and *uniformity*.

3.4.1 The Level of Integration

As mentioned in Chapter 2, we can distinguish between different levels of integration/disintegration. We see this as a continuum between no integration on the one hand (a state of competition and/or conflict) and full integration on the other hand, which in practice would imply some form of federation.

While most policy areas in the EU can be placed somewhere between these two extremes, precisely where to place a certain policy area on this continuum is not self-evident. This is also the case for a policy area that has come to be so broadly defined as European foreign and security policy. By distinguishing between the different dimensions of vertical and horizontal integration, we will come somewhat closer to a categorisation.

On a scale of high to low levels of vertical integration, the broader area of foreign, security, and defence policy spans the scale. The area includes everything from a predominantly intergovernmental CFSP/CSDP—and thus a rather low level of vertical integration (although continuously evolving—to the more unitary character of the EU as a regulatory power,

where there is a high degree of vertical integration and transfer of competencies (with high score on all dimensions: *interdependency, consistency, structural connectedness*, and *decision-making capacity*). This makes deciding on the exact level of DI a rather difficult task.

The same goes for the second dimension, namely horizontal integration, where there have been different examples of both opt-outs and opt-ins and these have changed over time. The Danish decision to hold on to its opt-out from the CSDP from 1993 to 2022 is a case in point. While the decision in 1993 was based on a fear that the EU might develop a defence policy that could potentially undermine NATO, this fear was no longer realistic in 2022. Rather, the illegal invasion of Ukraine and the uncertainty linked to the upcoming US Presidential election in 2024 made it important to take full part in EU(ropean) defence integration. At the other end of the spectrum, we have Norway, which has opted for the opposite strategy, namely, to opt in to the CFSP and the CSDP. This cooperation is based on a set of formal agreements, such as agreements that regulate Norway's participation in CSDP, but also a set of diplomatic informal practices, like the practice of signing up to most of the EU's foreign policy declarations as well as most sanctions.

Interestingly, seven years after the Brexit referendum, the UK is also searching for a way to re-connect with the EU in the area of foreign and security policy (Whitman, 2023). But horizontal DI is more than just opt-outs and opt-ins; it may also include inter-institutional cooperation, such as the EU–NATO cooperation that has been increasingly institutionalised, in particular since 2016. The same goes for the complex network of bilateral and minilateral European defence cooperation framework (more on this in Chapter 4).

While the EU might be rather willing to find solutions to integrate non-members, there are some practical challenges, as the borders between internal and external policies have become increasingly blurred. Concerning areas that are closer to the Union's common policies, where the Commission has a greater role, there is no simple way to establish close cooperation with third countries without developing a set of cumbersome third-party agreements.

3.4.2 The Level of Uniformity

As argued in Chapter 2, the dimension of uniformity is also key to identifying the level of integration. In fact, uniformity will vary between no harmonisation, which would imply a state of competition or conflict, and full harmonisation. In Europe, examples of the former would be the relationship between Russia and Ukraine; EU/associated partners and Russia; Serbia and Kosovo; and Greece and Turkey, to mention some. Examples of full harmonisation, however, would be in the areas of trade and the EU as a global standard setter.

In most cases, we would expect a close relationship between the level of integration and uniformity, although this is not always the case. There are several examples of a type of differentiation characterised by a rather low level of integration and a rather high level of uniformity. Four examples from areas where the EU and member states have shared competencies illustrate this very well. First, there is the EU's *climate policy*, which is characterised by a low level of (formal) integration, but a high level of coordination and harmonisation in global climate negotiations. Second, the Union's *development policy* is characterised by a high level of coordination and a rather high level of horizontal integration, as likeminded European countries, like Norway and the UK, have maintained a policy that is highly in line with the EU and member states. Third, the Union's energy policy, which in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine has been reframed through the RepowerEU programme, that aims at delivering affordable, secure, and sustainable energy to its citizens; this, together with the Green Deal and EU's Fit for 55 package, will potentially have global implications. Finally, there is the strengthening of a joint European space policy. As space is becoming increasingly critical for European societies and economy, it is also a key enabler for security. This is why space has been defined as a strategic domain in the Strategic Compass and member states have called for an EU Space Strategy for Security and Defence which implies a low level of formal integration, but potentially high level of cooperation and harmonisation.

Another set of examples would be areas where the EU has a coordinating or supporting role in relation to member states. An example of this form of DI would be the various forms of *Civil Protection, including cyber security*, which is characterised by low levels of formal integration, but still

high level of coordination among member states—with the EU only being allowed to intervene to support, coordinate, or complement the action of its member states. In the Civil Protection Mechanism, Norway is a fully associated third party. The EU also has this type of supporting competency in another area that is indirectly linked to individual and societal security, namely the protection and improvement of human health. Since the COVID-19 experience, the Norwegian authorities also see the value of having a form of association in this area (Veggeland & Time, 2022).

Finally, there is the CFSP/CSDP which is defined as an area of "special competence," meaning that it is characterised by specific institutional features. It has a low level of formal vertical integration. However, there is still some kind of coordination that goes beyond a purely interstate relationship. First, the policy is defined and implemented by the European Council, consisting of the heads of states or governments of the member states, and by the Council of the European Union, consisting of a representative of each member state at ministerial level. In addition, the President of the European Council and the HR/VP represent the EU in matters of common foreign and security policy. While this policy area started out as an intergovernmental type of cooperation, it has over time developed into a hybrid type. The establishment of and cooperation with PESCO and EDF shows that the DI element is increasingly institutionalised (Blockmans & Crosson,). This means that we gradually see more uniformity here as well.

In addition to all these aspects, there is, of course, external differentiation, which includes various cooperation frameworks beyond the EU. First, there are frameworks that imply a high level of cooperation and coordination, such as the enlargement agenda and ENP, but also the increasingly institutionalised EU-NATO cooperation. Second, there are frameworks that are either less formal, such as the EPC or the E3, or are more formal but still less capable, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which is hampered by an ongoing war between two of its members (Russia and Ukraine).

Table 3.1 below presents an overview of EU(ropean) global actorness more systematically as a function of levels of integration and uniformity.

Table 3.1 EU(ropean) global actorness as a function of levels of integration and uniformity

		Integration		
		Low	Medium	High
Uniformity	Harmonisation		EU Climate policy, EU Sanctions, CFSP declarations	Trade policy, Regulatory power
	High level of cooperation	EU-NATO, EU Enlargement, ENP	EU development policy, EU civil protection and humanitarian aid, EU cyber policy, EU space policy, EU energy policy, EU-EEA…	--
	Some cooperation	EPC, E3, EU-UK, EU-Switzerland, EU-OSCE, EU-Council of Europe	CSDP, EU CT/PVE	--
	No cooperation	Differentiated (Dis)integration	Differentiated (Dis)integration	--
	Conflict/Competition	--	--	--

3.5 Agency, Actorness, and Strategic Autonomy

What does this tell us about EU as a global actor and the potential for having a certain degree of strategic autonomy or sovereignty? The obvious conclusion to be drawn from this analysis is that the EU does not have to develop into a full federation to become a global actor that also has a degree of autonomy. By applying a more expansive definition of what constitutes European integration, we see that Europe already has obtained a degree of autonomy, but that this is obtained through a network of DI.

What this means is that the EU has a role to play on the global scene, and not only in the area where the EU has exclusive powers, such as trade and market regulation. The EU, in cooperation with its member states and associated partners, is also playing an increasingly important role in many other areas that are either characterised by shared competences, such as climate, development, humanitarian aid; through having a supporting role, such as the EU has in the area of civil protection and public health; or through special competence, as the EU has developed in the fields of CFSP/CSDP. The different types of EU(ropean) DI that characterise this broader field of European foreign security and

defence policy is complex, but it works, and it is increasingly updated and refined—often in relation to crises that need to be solved (Riddervold et al., 2021).

Still, DI in this broader field of foreign, security, and defence policy is not simply occurring on its own. It is pushed forward by certain actors—sometimes by EU institutions, sometimes by certain member states, and sometimes by associated partners. In such a broad field, the same actors will not take the lead in all areas. While France (often supported by Germany) has tended to take the lead in most of these areas, other member states have been pushing for specific agendas—such as Sweden and Finland pushing the Conflict Prevention agenda in the early 2000, or the integrated approach that has defined the Union's foreign policy and security policy (Rieker, 2006).

We have also seen that the European Commission has increasingly taken the lead, especially since 2019. The promotion of a geopolitical Commission is a case in point, but so too is the development of the capacity to respond decisively to serious crises, as has been the case with COVID-19 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and increasingly so vis-à-vis China.

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CHAPTER 4

EU(ropean) Differentiated Defence Integration

Abstract Even though the need to improve European joint defence capacity has been on the agenda of both NATO and the EU, individually and in partnership for over a decade, it has not yet been fully achieved. The Russian invasion was a brutal reminder that Europe is still largely dependent on the US for its security. This added further momentum to the process of building up a stronger European defence capacity, which has already been ongoing for a decade. The EU's adoption of the Strategic Compass in March 2022, shortly after the invasion, is crucial in this context. It had been under development for some time (since June 2020) but had to be rewritten due to the invasion. It was intended to represent a great leap forward, as it was to present an action plan towards 2030. Due to recent events, member states were more committed than ever to delivering joint defence capacity, and they sought to do so through greater flexibility, investing more and more efficiently, and cooperating more closely with partners.

The geopolitical situation makes Europe more committed and obliged than ever to build a stronger European capacity. Over the past 15 years, a series of different initiatives, at different levels and in different formats, have been launched with this in mind. A recurring question, however, has been whether these many different processes and initiatives result in a more fragmented and complicated European security structure, with unnecessary duplication as a result. Or whether they, through various cooperation agreements and coordination efforts, contribute to a more

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flexible and stronger European defence structure, where formal structures are less important than commitment to different initiatives. The aim of this chapter is to provide an answer.

Keywords Strategic autonomy · Differentiated integration · NATO · Defence · CSDP

NATO remains the ultimate security guarantee for its members when faced with the threat of a potential military attack. This explains its attractiveness, especially when the security context becomes more challenging. Finland and Sweden's historic decision to apply for membership of the alliance is a case in point. And the aspirations of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia to become members in the future confirms this. The credibility of NATO's deterrence and collective defence capability is reliant on the US nuclear umbrella and US willingness to protect its allies. The election of Trump created uncertainties in this regard, but the Biden Administration reconfirmed US commitment to European security and defence in discourse and in practice. Still, "Trumpism" is not gone, and a more isolationist US president may very well be elected again in 2024 or 2028. This has also led to a stronger call for strategic autonomy.

Even though the need to improve European joint defence capacity has been on the agenda of both NATO and the EU, individually and in partnership for over a decade, it has not yet been fully achieved. The Russian invasion was a brutal reminder that Europe is still largely dependent on the US for its security. This added further momentum to the process of building up a stronger European defence capacity, which has already been ongoing for a decade. The EU's adoption of the Strategic Compass in March 2022 (EEAS, 2022), shortly after the invasion, is crucial in this context. It had been under development for some time (since June 2020) but had to be rewritten due to the invasion. It was intended to represent a great leap forward, as it was to present an action plan towards 2030. Due to recent events, member states were more committed than ever to delivering joint defence capacity, and they sought to do so through greater flexibility, investing more and more efficiently, and cooperating more closely with partners, including NATO (EEAS, 2022).

The geopolitical situation makes Europe more committed and obliged than ever to build a stronger European capacity. The process of reinforcing European defence capacities have been on the agenda for many years. Over the past 15 years, a series of different initiatives, at different levels and in different formats, have been launched with this in mind.

A recurring question, however, has been whether these many different processes and initiatives result in a more fragmented and complicated European security structure, with unnecessary duplication as a result. Or whether they, through various cooperation agreements and coordination efforts, contribute to a more flexible and stronger European defence structure, where formal structures are less important than commitment to different initiatives. The aim of this chapter is to provide an answer.

The analysis is divided into three parts. First, we examine the main initiatives that have been taken in the area of defence integration over the past 15 years, starting with the initiatives that were taken in response to a more assertive Russia and a period of financial constraints. Second, we delve deeper into the various defence capability processes taken within the two key multilateral institutions, the EU and NATO, as well as the state of the cooperation agreements between them, and the less formal bilateral and multilateral initiatives taken outside the institutional frameworks. We will then determine whether these processes can be understood as parts of a Differentiated Defence Integration (DDI) process. Third, we discuss the extent to which these initiatives can be understood as contributing to collective defence capacity. We conclude by considering the potential implications for European defence architecture, the joint European capacity to act, and, consequently, increased European strategic autonomy.

4.1 The Enduring Call for More European Defence in NATO and the EU

Burden-sharing has been on the agenda of NATO for decades (Fiott, 2018), long before the Trump Administration was installed in the White House. Most American presidents have advocated this, and it has led to continued pressure on European allies to increase their defence spending. In 2006 clear targets for individual member state defence spending were set at 2% of GDP; however, NATO also agreed that 20% should be spent on investments. This has proven to be rather difficult, and the financial

crisis that erupted in 2008 made it increasingly difficult to justify the use of scarce resources on defence.

Responding to such challenges, it became common to push for closer defence collaboration as well as integration. Thus, the call for increased "smart defence," as a way of getting more out of national defence spending, was introduced at the Munich Security Conference in February 2011 (Rasmussen, 2011). The intention was to find ways to promote a series of multinational initiatives to develop the key capabilities the Alliance needs in order to face today's security challenges in the most cost-efficient way. While it was launched in 2011 as a call for a bottom-up approach, since the Wales summit in 2014 it has become a more institutionalised practice in NATO through the launching of 21 High Visibility Projects. These address key capability areas such as air-to-air refuelling, ammunition, maritime unmanned systems, and command and control.

Similar processes have been initiated within the EU framework, starting with the Union's equivalent, the "pooling and sharing" concept. According to the European Defence Agency (EDA), this should be understood as a process "when several Member States decide to use capabilities – either nationally owned or multi-nationally procured – on a collective basis" (EDA 2013). For a period between 2013 and 2017, the EU was fully engaged with handling one crisis after the other, with the Euro crisis, the migration crisis, and Brexit being the most important ones.

Still, it was the election of Trump in November 2016 that represented the first real wake-up call for the EU and European allies. This happened at a time when European security context became increasingly difficult due to a shift in the Russian policy, confirmed by the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014. At a rally in Bavaria, Angela Merkel argued that: "The times in which we could completely depend on others are, to a certain extent, over… I've experienced that in the last few days. We Europeans truly have to take our fate into our own hands" (*The Guardian*, May 28). In late 2016, member states of the EU decided to make use of the Union's PESCO mechanism. Interestingly, PESCO was a structure already written into the European Treaty of Lisbon of 2009, making it possible for members who were willing and able to move forward in their defence integration within the EU framework to do so. It had not been activated earlier due to differences between member states, but the new security context made it more attractive.

With Emmanuel Macron's election as president in France in May 2017, a new period of stronger French leadership began. But there were also some important differences between France and Germany about the nature of PESCO. While France envisioned a small but ambitious group with serious capabilities making major practical leaps forward, Germany opted for a more inclusive approach that could potentially include all states, regardless of their military capability or willingness to integrate. As often is the case, this disagreement resulted in a compromise whereby PESCO would be inclusive, but not all states had to take part in all projects; and progress would be phased, which allowed for the development of new, common capabilities without having to resolve larger differences on end-goals first. The first PESCO projects were announced at the end of 2017. Since then, over 60 projects crucial for the development of a stronger European capacity, have been launched (Blockmans & Crosson, 2021, 2022).

While these two processes could have been perceived as competing against each other, they were instead quickly seen as being mutually reinforcing. Gradually, the two processes have also been increasingly coordinated through a call for closer EU–NATO cooperation. The 2016 Joint Declaration in Warsaw gave new substance to the EU-NATO strategic partnership, as it outlined seven concrete areas where cooperation between the two organisations should be enhanced: (1) countering hybrid threats; (2) operational cooperation including at sea and on migration; (3) cyber security and defence; (4) defence capabilities; (5) defence industry and research; (6) exercises; and (7) supporting Eastern and Southern partners' capacity-building efforts. On the basis of the mandate established by the Joint Declaration, mutual sets of proposals were endorsed by the EU and NATO Councils in December 2016 and 2017. Altogether, 74 concrete actions are under implementation in these seven areas. Regular progress reports have been submitted highlighting the main achievements and added value of EU–NATO cooperation in different areas.

4.1.1 Strengthening European Collective Capacity

While most analysts would agree that the EU cannot (and should not) replace NATO when it comes to territorial defence, they also agree that all European states must do more to strengthen their collective capacity to

act in response to the various threats Europe is facing. As there is a continually increasing overlap in membership between the two institutions, all initiatives to boost European defence are now welcome and contribute to reaching the same objective of strengthening collective European defence capacities.

Although an increase in national defence budgets is still needed, it has to be combined with an effective integration agenda. Still, defence integration is not exclusively occurring within the European Union; it is a set of ongoing processes that are taking place at different levels and in different formats and is therefore best described as DDI (Rieker and Giske, 2021). In such a framework, processes in NATO and the EU are both crucial, as are the many bilateral and minilateral defence cooperation initiatives that take place simultaneously. The French European Intervention Initiative (EI2) is an example of such an initiative, aiming at building a shared strategic culture that would enhance the ability of its members to act together on missions as part of NATO, the EU, UN, or other ad hoc coalitions. This is an initiative that aims to compensate for what the EU cannot deliver in the short term and increase the European joint capacity to act autonomously as and when needed.

In addition to the EI2, there are also a series of bilateral and minilateral defence cooperation initiatives that have been ongoing for some time, partly as a consequence of the push for bottom-up defence integration through smart defence or pooling and sharing initiatives. In the end, this has contributed to what we may call a DDI framework. French–British and French–German bilateral defence cooperation are crucial to this process, as is the Weimar triangle (France, Germany and Poland) and the many different sub-regional cooperation frameworks, such as the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO), the Visegrád 4 cooperation, or the Benelux cooperation. While these all differ in effectiveness and have resulted in different degrees of cooperation, they all aim at contributing to an improved European defence capacity.

Analysts have focused on understanding the potential consequences of the many initiatives for European defence (Svendsen & Adler-Nissen, 2019). As we showed in Chap. 2, the concept of DI is now widely used by practitioners and academics to describe the internal process of European defence integration. PESCO is often referenced, denoting a key feature of this process: the search for the optimal balance between national autonomy on the one hand, and regional integration on the other (Blockmans & Crosson, 2021, 2022). However, as explained in Chap. 2, DI

may also be used in the area of defence to capture a wider set of processes that are closely linked but initiated both within and outside the EU (Rieker, 2021a; Rieker & Giske, 2021). By applying a more comprehensive understanding of European defence integration, we will now show how this can be done, and how it can help us in making sense of the many initiatives that are taking place in this area.

4.2 How to Make Sense of the Complexity of European Defence Cooperation

DDI has been confirmed empirically through the CFSP, which was introduced with the Maastricht Treaty. The CFSP enabled horizontal differentiation by allowing Denmark and Malta to opt out of security and defence policy (later referred to as CSDP) (Groenendijk, 2019; Howorth, 2019a, 2019b). Later, it also permitted opt-ins by closely associated non-members, such as Norway. Additionally, it allowed for vertical differentiation, permitting certain members to move forward with higher levels of integration, such as the establishment of PESCO. Many of these processes have been studied in depth (Blockmans & Crosson, 2021, 2022; Faure et al., 2019; Howorth, 2019a, 2019b).

While it is no secret that this area remains dominated by intergovernmentalism and national autonomy, there has been a steady move towards greater involvement at the EU level, especially regarding the EEAS and the Commission. While highly contested, this move is now increasingly seen as necessary to make the EU a more capable actor in a more uncertain geopolitical context. As a full transfer of EU competence in this area is highly unlikely, a mix between intergovernmentalism and community policy will most likely continue to be the norm. Thus, DI in EU security and defence policy appears to have taken root. The recent decision to activate PESCO with an increased use of QMV for certain decisions within this group, and the establishment of a European Defence Fund (EDF) within the Commission, are concrete examples of differentiated vertical integration in CSDP.

While DI has become customary in the literature on EU security and defence policy, the processes that are not formally part of the EU are less recognised. This is unfortunate since including them is crucial if we want to capture the broader *European* defence capacity. This is why an additional step is needed, and why it is important to study (a) how the processes in the EU relate to the initiatives and processes taken by key

EU members outside the EU framework; and (b) whether this increased complexity in European responses entails a weaker or a stronger European defence capacity.

The distinction between formal (treaty-based) and informal processes of DI has been understudied. Formal differentiation is easier to identify, as these are flexible formats of integration which are specified in agreements or treaties. Informal DI, however, is no less important, but includes many different processes that may be more challenging to recognise. In Chapter 2 we distinguished between four main types of informal DI. The first of these are opt-outs in the form of non-compliance with EU rules by certain member states in highly integrated areas (informal opt-outs). The second are the different views of the long-term objectives of the EU as a foreign policy actor, or its *finalité*. Third, we can find examples of informal opt-ins in cases where non-members make a unilateral decision to sign up for foreign policy declarations or follow EU policies. Last but not least, there are cases where certain member states push for integration initiatives outside the EU structure, with the aim of kick-starting a process that is perceived as difficult to agree upon within the Union.

While we can find examples of all these types of informal DI in the area of defence integration, we will give particular attention to the latter in the remaining part of this chapter. These non-EU initiatives are often taken by one or several member states, sometimes together with closely associated non-members. The objectives might differ, but the goals are most often to either integrate the area into the Union at a later stage (such as with the St. Malo process) or support the EU in strengthening Europe's defence capacity (for instance, the EI2). Additionally, there are key initiatives taken by smaller member states, such as the defence cooperation initiatives taken by the Nordic countries (NORDEFCO), the Benelux Union and the Visegrád states (V4). While these sub-regional integration initiatives do not necessarily wish to be integrated into the Union, they are also driven by the desire to contribute to a strengthened European defence capacity. As Howorth (2018) has argued, this is also the case for strengthening the European pillar in NATO.

In sum, all the initiatives that are taken outside the EU contribute to a more differentiated, but potentially also stronger, European capacity in the field of security and defence. Therefore, if we want to capture the full potential of Europe's defence capacity, all these initiatives need to be taken into account. To reflect the complexity of the ongoing European defence integration, the more generic definition of integration that we

introduced in Chapter 2 is helpful. Such a definition makes it possible to understand European integration as something that goes beyond the EU. Integration can be understood as a function of vertical and horizontal integration on one hand and uniformity on the other, making it possible to include most of the European defence cooperation initiatives into this framework of DDI. Table 4.1 presents a simple overview of European DDI as a function of integration and uniformity.

As defence integration is taking place at different levels and in different institutional frameworks, it makes sense to dig a bit deeper into the levels of integration. We can evaluate how different initiatives score on the different dimensions of vertical integration outlined in Chapter 2—interdependency, consistency, structural connectedness, and decision-making capacity—and what this implies in the end for actorness and strategic autonomy.

Most European states are either EU or NATO members or both, meaning that economic and political interdependencies between the states are already high. Further cooperation in the field of defence creates an opportunity for further integration. Regarding consistency, agreement

Table 4.1 Differentiated defence integration as a function of levels of integration and uniformity

		Integration		
		Low	Medium	High
Uniformity	Harmonisation			
	High level of cooperation	European pillar in NATO, NORDEFCO Benelux, France-UK pre-Brexit, V4, EI2	EU-NATO, EPF, CSDP, CSDP+Norway, France-Germany	PESCO, EDF
	Some cooperation	France-UK post Brexit and with new agreements	Differentiated Integration	Differentiated Integration
	No cooperation	France-Uk after Brexit and before new agreements		--
	Conflict/ Competition	--	--	--

over the *finalité* of the initiative usually translates to a high score on the consistency dimension. Finally, formalised and institutionalised voting mechanisms and arenas for resource and information sharing will result in higher scores on the third and fourth dimensions. In the next two sections, we will go through a selection of the most important defence capability initiatives that have been taken within and outside the EU and discuss the extent to which these can be understood as interlinked processes that fit with our understanding of DDI.

4.2.1 Differentiated Defence Integration in the EU

The processes of EU defence integration have a long history and have largely been driven by France. In the 1950s, French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman sought, together with his European partners, to create a highly integrated European defence community (EDC) in parallel to the other European communities that existed at that time (the European Coal and Steel Community and Euratom). This failed in the main not because of opposition to defence integration, but rather due to reluctance by the French parliament (primarily by de Gaulle's political party) to support what was perceived as a defence community that would not be sufficiently independent of the US. After this failed attempt, it took some time before European defence integration returned to the agenda.

Real progress was made after the Cold War, first with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 (which came into force the following year), and then as a response to the Union's inability to prevent the Balkan wars. This led to the St Malo declaration between France and the UK in 1998, and subsequently the creation of the ESDP (later renamed the CSDP) in 1999. In 2004, the European Defence Agency (EDA) was established. With the Union's (2016) Global Strategy, the EU raised its level of ambition. Macron's election, and the revival of the French–German engine, prompted the creation of new defence initiatives and opportunities for cooperation, such as PESCO, the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC), the EDF, and the European Peace Facility (EPF).

The CSDP has always been a case of DI. It is based on an intergovernmental structure, with decisions made unanimously. Over time, the CSDP has integrated more supranational elements, where the EEAS, Commission and agencies have been given a more important role (Howorth, 2019a, 2019b). The signing of the Maastricht Treaty created the first

instance of formal horizontal differentiation, as Denmark and Malta decided to opt out of European defence integration. With the various agreements between the EU and Norway, the EU also allowed for the possibility that a non-member could opt in and participate in CSDP operations. However, third-state participation in PESCO is set to be the exception, not the rule.

As with PESCO, the EDA allows for third-party participation, following certain rules of engagement. For one, there is an obligation to share the EU's values and adopt EU intellectual rights regulations. Additionally, potential third parties need an administrative arrangement to take part in EDA projects and programmes. Only Norway, Switzerland, Serbia, and Ukraine have thus far concluded such agreements. While these opt-ins represent formal horizontal differentiation, there are also examples of more informal differentiation, especially with regard to the different views on what the development of a European defence should entail—whether it should primarily be concerned with crisis response or also include common defence.

While it is not controversial to argue that the CSDP is a case of DI, we will try to say something about the level of European DDI that has been achieved through this by going systematically through the four dimensions of vertical integration introduced in Chapter 2. By doing so, we can assess the level of integration in different areas of cooperation, showing how DI can be used as an analytical tool to investigate regional integration that includes the EU (as explored in this section), but also goes beyond (as we will see in the next section).

The first dimension, interdependency (both economic and political), is often referred to as the main driver of integration. Consequently, the more interdependent member states are in a specific field, the more likely it is that we will see a higher level of integration. As shown above, the development of the CSDP has taken time, but it has been gradually strengthened, especially in response to radical shifts and uncertainties. With PESCO, it can be argued that the CSDP has reached at least a certain level of this first dimension. To ensure further improvement in defence integration, the 25 states participating in the PESCO framework have subjected themselves to 20 binding commitments that highlight the need for cooperation. These agree to harmonise their defence apparatus; to identify common objectives; and to work together to develop joint programmes. Since March 2018, more than 60 PESCO projects have been put forward, covering a wide range of domains, including military

disaster relief, surveillance, land, air and maritime capabilities, and cyber capabilities (EEAS, 2021).

The EDF works to support PESCO projects and offers incentives for defence cooperation; it also aims to stimulate innovation in defence research and strengthen defence capacities, providing economic interdependencies by making the EU the fourth largest defence investor in Europe and including defence cooperation in the EU budget. Additionally, it is said to provide a key contribution to European strategic autonomy (Bátora, 2021). Thus far, PESCO has produced a highly inclusive expression of enhanced cooperation by applying a modular approach to the field of defence (Blockmans & Crosson, 2021; EEAS, 2016). Consequently, the states most often involved in PESCO projects are Western European member states (France, Italy, Germany, and Spain), which are categorised as defence "frontrunners" and usually take the lead (Blockmans & Crosson, 2019, 2021, 2022).

Despite their names, neither the CSDP nor CFSP constitute a true "common" policy. Indeed, the field of defence cooperation and foreign policy has been characterised by a lack of consistency or unified standards and rules—the second dimension of integration. The establishment of CARD and the commitments made by the participating states notwithstanding, diverging interests remain, especially concerning the long-term objectives of security and defence integration. One way for the Union to get around this issue, particularly regarding PESCO projects, has been to focus on projects unrelated to any EU objective (Biscop, 2017).

The initiatives have become more ambitious (Blockmans & Crosson, 2021). The full impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, regarding a common EU foreign, security, and defence policy, remains to be seen. However, the invasion has sparked an increased willingness and ability to agree on a common policy—though the CSDP is not yet scoring high on the second dimension of consistency. One explanation for this is that the ambitions are too high. At the end of 2020, for instance, the CARD Report concluded that the EU/CSDP military ambition was unachievable within the current European defence landscape.

Despite the relatively low score on consistency for the CSDP and CFSP, we can identify higher scores with regard to the third dimension of structural connectedness. In fact, since the establishment of the CSDP, there have been regular meetings within common institutions and there is an ongoing process to strengthen common resources—which in turn creates arenas for mutual learning and transfer of knowledge. The

EU's integrated approach, as presented in their (2016) Global Strategy, calls for tailor-made and multi-faceted approaches to the situation on the ground. This requires sharing of knowledge and intelligence from CSDP members whenever and wherever possible. Most notably, CARD was initiated to provide a picture of the existing European defence capability landscape and identify areas of potential cooperation. Additionally, permanent political, military, and civilian structures have been created, such as the Political and Security Committee (PSC), the European Union Military Staff (EUMS), and the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC).

With regard to the fourth dimension, decision-making capacity, there are prevailing and structural limitations. CSDP missions require unanimity, creating issues related to actual decision-making capacity, as unanimity hinders a swift response to a crisis. Preventing rather than managing crises has a higher chance of success and limits violence on the ground. However, rapid response remains a challenge, as member states fail to agree on the situation on the ground and on the appropriate response (Meyer, 2020). As pointed out by Howorth (2014), of the 23 missions undertaken before 2009, only five were launched in under four weeks. To strengthen CSDP decision-making, the European Parliament has requested that existing decision-making structures be upgraded, formalised, and strengthened (Meyer, 2020) Seemingly, part of this solution would be to work towards a decoupled decision-making process, where the political decision to launch a CSDP operation is further removed from national decision-making than is the case today (Meyer, 2020, p. 13). However, the willingness of member states to allow this is limited (Lațici, 2021). Still, in response to the increased security challenges in and around Europe, there has been a continued call for a more effective and rapid decision-making process in areas related to the CFSP and CSDP. While this would allow for quicker decision-making and prevent EU foreign policy paralysis, it would also potentially weaken EU unity. This, in turn, would weaken the second dimension of integration as well as the democratic legitimacy of any decision. But it is nevertheless required if the EU is to be an actor capable of reacting more rapidly to crisis. The deterioration of European security has made this even more obvious, and the Strategic Compass therefore enables the use of more "flexibility in the decision-making processes" by a wider use of constructive abstention and delegation of authority (EEAS, 2022, p. 26).

When evaluating the level of integration of specifically EU defence/CSDP with regard to the four dimensions, it can be argued that the CSDP, in short, scores high on interdependency and structural connectedness. It also scores relatively high on consistency, mainly because of CARD, in the sense that rules and values are generally shared but there are differences concerning the long-term objective. However, there are still ways to go regarding decision-making capacity. For now, the EU scores relatively low on this dimension, but interestingly, there are developments towards both increased use of QMV, through constructive abstention, and delegating capacity (EEAS, 2022). The latter in reality means the different cooperation frameworks that exist beyond the EU but nevertheless contribute to European defence integration.

4.2.2 Non-EU Processes of Differentiated European Defence Integration

In addition to the formal processes of DI taking place within the EU structures, presented above, there are also a set of bilateral and multilateral processes that are taking place outside the institutional structures of EU but nevertheless have a clear aim of strengthening joint European security and defence capacities. Based on our understanding of DDI, these will be seen as integrated parts of this broader European defence integration, both in terms of vertical and horizontal integration. Ultimately, what is interesting is the extent to which European defence as a whole is integrated. We will start by outlining the European pillar in NATO, followed by the two most important bilateral initiatives in this area: namely, Franco-German cooperation and Franco-British cooperation. We will then move to discuss a series of sub-regional or minilateral defence cooperation formats.

4.2.2.1 The European Pillar in NATO

When talking about European defence integration, NATO is the key actor. Together with the initiatives and processes taking place within the EU, development towards a stronger European pillar of NATO must be an integral part of differentiated European defence integration. Through its integrated military structures and its partners, NATO scores high on interdependency and consistency and somewhat lower on structural connectedness and decision-making capacity. The two institutions also have a large degree of overlapping membership, as 22 (soon to be 23)

of NATO's 30 members are also members of the EU and have regular consultations. Non-EU NATO members, such as Norway, and non-NATO EU members, such as Sweden and (until recently) Finland, also participate in all EU–NATO meetings, further enhancing the transatlantic bond. However, there are still discrepancies regarding the long-term objectives of EU–NATO cooperation. While some (like Denmark, the Netherlands, Poland, and Hungary) fear that a stronger role for the EU may undermine NATO and the transatlantic relationship, others (like Germany and Sweden) worry that France might push the EU in a more militaristic direction and undermine the softer-security identity of the EU (Rieker, 2021b).

Comparing the two institutions, their core tasks are somewhat different. For NATO, territorial defence remains the primary task (increasingly so after the Russian invasion of Ukraine), with international crisis management and cooperative security as key but secondary tasks. For the EU, the scope is much broader, covering the entire spectrum of security and defence—including territorial defence as specified in article 42.7 of the treaty of the EU. Given the complexity of the current security context, one can argue that both institutions together contribute to the collective defence of Europe with their various tools—civilian as well as military. But, beyond that, the EU (and its member states) is also contributing actively to strengthening member states' military capacities through a series of defence integration initiatives that will ultimately serve NATO's territorial defence objective and the capacity for military crisis response and management—whether through the EU or NATO.

Considering the security context and the uncertainty linked to the US' long-term commitment to European defence, there is greater recognition that the two institutions must cooperate more closely. This is also why the two institutions adopted a Joint Declaration in 2016 that reflected on this necessity (Tusk et al., 2016, p. 1):

> In light of the common challenges we are now confronting, we have to step-up our efforts: we need new ways of working together and a new level of ambition; because our security is interconnected; because together we can mobilize a broad range of tools to respond to the challenges we face; and because we have to make the most efficient use of resources. A stronger NATO and a stronger EU are mutually reinforcing. Together they can better provide security in Europe and beyond.

This cooperation has been strengthened ever since and was identified as a top priority after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022—both in the Union's Strategic Compass (EEAS, 2022), and in the NATO's newest Strategic Concept adopted at the NATO summit in June 2022 (NATO, 2022).

European security remains dependent on NATO, recalling the first dimension. Indeed, the aim of European defence initiatives has never been to compete with NATO regarding the (territorial) defence of member states (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022). This means that it makes sense to see NATO as an integrated part of an increasingly differentiated European defence integration. The process of strengthening the EU–NATO cooperation is ongoing but has now reached a new level. This has been evident in the coordinated response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and is likely to be further strengthened.

As shown in the first part of this chapter, NATO and the EU/CSDP have both contributed actively to an improved European security and defence capacity through various bottom-up mechanisms, referred to at an early stage as smart defence and pooling and sharing, and more recently these have become more institutionalised processes in both organisations. As these processes are to a large extent mutually reinforcing, and there is an increased overlap in membership, several researchers have also been arguing for a need to merge the two processes (Howorth, 2019a, 2019b; Valášek, 2017).

A more realistic scenario, however, is that the two processes will develop and jointly strengthen European defence in some form of complementarity, seeing the European pillar of NATO and the CSDP as two parts of a whole rather than competing entities. Structural connectedness can ensure complementary existence through burden-sharing and streamlining. The existing agreements between the two institutions are important steps in that direction. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has also made this type of cooperation more important than ever, as it is seen as the only way to improve Europe's defence capacity significantly in the short run. This means that the development of an improved European defence capacity will most likely be based on closer coordination between existing institutions, as well as between existing institutions and various bilateral and minilateral frameworks.

4.2.2.2 Bilateral Defence Cooperation

There are two important bilateral defence cooperation agreements in Europe that must be analysed in this context: first, the Franco-German defence cooperation and the objective of creating a defence union between the two, as stated in the bilateral Aachen Treaty of 2019; and second, the Franco-British defence cooperation since 2010 and its future potential in a post-Brexit context.

While the Treaty of Aachen is a qualitatively new development in *Franco-German relations*, it builds on deep and comprehensive cooperation between the two countries that started in the 1960s. In 1963, with the Élysée Treaty, France and Germany had already set ambitious goals for bilateral cooperation in most areas, including in security and defence. On the strategic and tactical level, both countries were to harmonise their doctrines with a view towards arriving at joint concepts. Differing approaches during the Cold War made these ambitions difficult to realise until 1989 when, for the first time, a joint military unit—the French–German brigade—was created in the hope that it would serve as the embryo of a European army. Although this has not yet been the case, France and Germany have continued to collaborate closely in the post-Cold War era, both with regard to counterterrorism and in building a military-industrial complex that accounts for almost half of Europe's capabilities. Despite good intentions on both sides, the French and German strategic and military cultures diverge to such a degree that they have, at times, proven very difficult to reconcile. However, the growing unease in Berlin and Paris during the Trump presidency over the reliability of the US and its security guarantees pushed both governments to take actions that once seemed inconceivable. This led to the signing of the Treaty of Aachen in January 2019, which ultimately is a renewal (and strengthening) of the 1963 Élysée Treaty.

Interestingly, the Treaty of Aachen commits the two countries to common defence, by arguing that they should "afford one another any means of assistance or aid within their power, including military force, in the event of an armed attack on their territories" (Aachen Treaty, 2019, Art. 4). During an hour-long interview at the Élysée Palace in Paris, Macron acknowledged that "all means" would also include the French nuclear deterrent force (Drozdiak, 2019). Under the Treaty, a French–German defence and security council is to be established as the decisive political body to guide these reciprocal engagements. In her speech at the signing ceremony, Chancellor Merkel said that Berlin and Paris had

scrutinised "each and every word at length," and vowed to build "a common military culture" that "contributes to the creation of a European army" (Drozdiak, 2019). While the Aachen Treaty adds several new items to the Franco-German security and defence agenda, according to Kunz and Kempin (2019, p. 2), it is "no blueprint for action, ready to be implemented," and it may be some time before concrete results are evident. However, with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, results may come sooner than expected. Chancellor Olaf Scholz's announcement of a radical change in German security and defence policy (a zeitenwende), including a historic increase in the national defence budget is a clear indication in that direction (Sholz, 2022). If implemented, Germany will by far have the largest military in Europe.

Thus, Franco-German bilateral cooperation is likely to become a key element in the increasingly differentiated European integration in the area of security and defence. But what degree of DI are we talking about in the case of the Franco-German defence cooperation? How can this be understood with regard to vertical DI and dimensions of interdependency, consistency, structural connectedness and decision-making capacity? Concerning the first dimension, namely economic and political interdependency, Franco-German cooperation scores relatively high. France and Germany are highly interdependent through their EU membership, and their willingness to take the lead in pushing the integration process forward has been strong for decades. This has also been the case recently, in the area of defence, as reflected by the various initiatives taken.

With regard to consistency (i.e. common rules, values, and objectives), the picture is a bit more mixed: While they both subscribe to the rules, values, and objectives set by the EU, the two countries still have somewhat different interpretations of European defence and what it should entail. The main difference is linked to whether one should give priority to inclusive or exclusive institutional processes in the EU; whether one should give priority to long-term capacity building within the EU; or whether this should be combined with building a capacity to act among the willing and able. While France wants to prioritise exclusivity and capacity to act, Germany is more concerned with inclusivity and long-term capability development.

This difference, as we have seen with many other Franco-German differences, could be overcome if there is sufficient political willingness to do so, which will impact the fourth dimension: decision-making capacity.

As decisions made in this format are dependent on consensus between France and Germany, finding common ground will move the process forward. As Krotz and Schramm (2021) show in a recent analysis of the Franco-German cooperation, France and Germany have in recent years exercised joint leadership in times of existential crisis—in response to the Eurozone crises, the migration crisis and then in response to the COVID-19 crisis. The radical shifts in European security and transatlantic relations we have been witnessing are therefore likely to motivate closer Franco-German cooperation in the field of defence.

It has been emphasised that Germany reacted remarkably passively to Macron's many advances in this field following his 2017 election—whether it was to focus efforts and investments on creating an autonomous European defence, or the creation of a common strategic culture, intervention force or defence budget (Krotz & Schramm, 2021). However, this attitude has since been modified, first in response to a deeper and more structural transatlantic divide, and second in response to Russian aggression. It was a combination of the election of Donald Trump and the difficult Brexit negotiations that led to the signing of the Aachen Treaty in January 2019. With the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the German Zeitenwende (if implemented), and the re-election of Macron in France, it is also more likely than ever that this treaty will be followed up and implemented.

Concerning structural connectedness—which refers to the existence of contacts and meetings, common resources, and common institutions—we can see that this dimension is very much in place between the two countries. With more than 50 years of cooperation in most fields, including in the area of security and defence, the structural connectedness between the two countries is high. The permanent mechanisms for consultations in foreign, security, and defence affairs have been numerous, including the Franco-German Defence Commission (1982), the Franco-German Defence and Security Council (1988), the Blaesheim process with irregular and informal meetings (2001), and the Ministerial Councils (2003), which deepened the provision originally defined by the Élysée Treaty. Numerous initiatives have arisen from these meetings, such as the Franco-German brigade (1987) and Eurocorps (1992). All this has led to close cooperation between the two countries. Both countries also support the development of a common European army, but the meaning of this differs. While German politicians have traditionally stressed the contribution such an army would make to transatlantic security, the French

have seen it as an indispensable component of an autonomous European defence policy (Krotz & Wolf, 2018).

Nevertheless, bilateral defence integration has been gradually strengthened, and has become a formalised form of bilateral cooperation that scores high on interdependency and structural connectedness. While it used to score low on consistency, external factors such as global threats and a continued transatlantic divide have led to more convergence. As both Germany and France are explicit that their cooperation is crucial for building a stronger European cooperation in this field, this bilateral agreement can be seen as part of an increasingly differentiated European defence integration framework and could be a framework for implementing EU decisions through a delegating capacity.

Another potentially important bilateral defence cooperation in Europe is that established between *France and the UK* in November 2010, when President Sarkozy and Prime Minister Cameron signed the Lancaster House Treaties for French–British defence and security cooperation. This cooperation includes a treaty on defence and security cooperation, cooperation on the handling of nuclear weapons, the creation of a framework for exchanged between UK and French armed forces, and work on industrial and armament cooperation.

When it was signed, this agreement was seen as crucial for strengthening European defence capacity. While the Treaties did not have a formal link to the EU as such, they alluded to the EU's CSDP. For instance, the parties agreed that they were reaffirming their commitment to supporting the role of the CSDP. Further, the parties consented to deploy troops together, agreed under the auspices of the CSDP (Pannier, 2013). This means that these agreements—which preceded Brexit—had at least the intention of becoming an important part of a European DI.

However, this became complicated following the UK's decision to leave the EU in 2016. Since then—and even more so since the Aukus deal was signed in September 2021, a trilateral security pact between Australia, the UK, and the US for the Indo-Pacific region. Under this pact, the US and the UK will assist Australia in acquiring nuclear-powered submarines. However, the creation of the pact also spelled the end of a French–Australian submarine deal, something that led to a diplomatic crisis as France felt betrayed by its close allies (The Guardian, 2021, September 19). At that time the cooperation had reached its lowest point. After Brexit, there was some hope (in both France and the UK) that this bilateral cooperation would be a way of keeping the UK integrated

into a more flexible European defence integration. Aukus made it more difficult—at least for a period. Paradoxically, the UK and the French traditionally score higher on consistency in defence matters than France and Germany—at least when it comes to the willingness to use force. In the new security context since the Russian invasion, there might be greater willingness on both sides to find a way to revive these bilateral treaties and make them contribute to a stronger differentiated European defence capacity. However, this requires renewed trust and increased structural connectedness, which remains low since Brexit and even more so since Aukus.

A speech by Macron in Strasbourg in May 2022 called for "a European political community," which would allow democratic European nations—not just EU members—who share a set of values to find new space for political and security cooperation. This initiative towards a new and broader framework for integration would include candidate countries, such as Ukraine, and closely associated countries, such as the UK. As such, it might be a way to compensate for this challenge, and to include non-members in a broader European integration structure. Macron's statement is a response to the understanding that swift European integration cannot only happen through membership in the EU; instead, he calls on differentiation as something that has "always been fruitful for the European project" (Macron, 2022). At the same time, he has also made clear that this should not be considered as an alternative to enlargement (Macron, 2023).

In addition to the strengthening of the European pillar of NATO through EU–NATO cooperation and the bilateral defence arrangements presented above, *a series of sub-regional defence cooperation initiatives* have been launched that also have the ambition of strengthening European defence capacity. Initiatives have been implemented by the "big three," such as the German Framework Nation Concept (FNC), the UK's Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) and the French European Intervention Initiative (EI2). Additionally, we can mention sub-regional cooperation initiatives between smaller countries, such as the one that exists among the Nordic states (NORDEFCO) and those between the Benelux states and the V4. In the following, we will discuss how and to what extent these initiatives must also be understood as an integrated part of an increasingly differentiated European defence structure.

The German FNC was initially created as a pragmatic and flexible framework for joint cooperation in the field of defence, whereby states

cooperate voluntarily while retaining full sovereignty when desired. The FNC balances central coordination and decentralised implementation, allowing for the different geopolitical priorities and threat perceptions of NATO states (Glatz & Zapfe, 2017). The goal of the FNC is to develop European capabilities. It consists of around 20 partner nations, covering a wide area of defence cooperation in different areas such as medical and chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) cooperation, civil–military cooperation (CIMIC), and logistics.

The FNC aims to close capability gaps and create a plan for a structured and collaborative force. Similar initiatives, on the other hand, have different foci. For instance, the JEF and EI2 aim to create a framework for multinational intervention forces in high-intensity cooperation. Thus far, however, it is only JEF that has managed to fulfil its ambitions. Today, the JEF consists of nine countries (Denmark, Finland, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Norway), in addition to the UK. It was publicly launched with a Letter of Intent as a NATO initiative at the September 2014 Wales Summit, subsumed under the new FNC rubric. In 2019, a series of maritime exercises occurred among JEF nations, known as Baltic Protector. This cooperation scores relatively high on interdependency, as all signatories are either members of the EU or closely associated states. The JEF also scores relatively high on consistency and structural connectedness. In a joint statement by the Defence Ministers of the JEF, the initiative was characterised as a "group of like-minded and proactive nations, with shared purpose and values, and a common focus on security and stability" (Hultqvist, 2022, para. 2), indicating a high level of consistency. Regarding structural connectedness, JEF creates an opportunity for the UK to uphold dialogue and regular consultations with other European states, even after Brexit.

The EI2 was announced a few years later, in 2017, as a joint military project between now-13 European countries—led by France, but outside of existing structures (both NATO and the EU/CSDP). It is a looser construct than the JEF in the sense that it wants to start by enhancing interaction on intelligence sharing, scenario planning, support operations, and doctrine. It intends to be resource-neutral and will make use of existing assets and other joint forces available to members. The idea is to prepare the ground for a common understanding of threats to facilitate common action, through a coalition of the willing. Though it is planned that it will operate with a "light" permanent secretariat based on the network of military liaison officers within the French defence ministry,

it must be seen as a rather informal set-up. While this cooperation scores relatively high on interdependency, as all signatories are either members of the EU or closely associated states, it scores lower on consistency and structural connectedness. Nevertheless, it was established with the distinct aim of improving their score on these dimensions.

Sub-regional defence cooperation between the Nordic states (NORDEFCO), the Benelux Union, and the V4 was established primarily as means to pool and share within the EU framework or to contribute to NATO's smart defence initiative. In other words, they are economically interdependent, scoring high on the first dimension. To create multilateral interdependencies with nation states' military capabilities, a certain level of trust is required. NORDEFCO has thus been able to move forward in this dimension, as the Nordic states enjoy a fairly high level of multilateral trust (Järvenpää, 2017). The recent inclusion of Finland to NATO, as well as Sweden's bid to join the Alliance and the Danish choice to join the CSDP, might also make such sub-regional security cooperation among the Nordics easier.

So, what type of DI do these sub-regional cooperation formats or minilateral initiatives represent? First, with regard to economic and political interdependencies, we can say that the states in all these minilateral formats are highly interdependent. This is largely because the initiatives consist of either EU member states or NATO members, adding to an already existing framework of cooperation and interdependency. Second, with regard to consistency—in terms of common rules, values, and objectives—there are some differences that remain due to different historical experiences and traditional defence policy orientation. However, these differences are less important when facing a perceived common threat, as has been highlighted in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Indeed, the decision by Sweden and Finland to join NATO and Denmark's referendum to end its opt-out from the CSDP show how a common threat overshadows other inconsistencies.

Third, concerning structural connectedness, there are also variations; here, the Nordic cooperation is the most advanced, with regular and informal contacts on different levels. However, the general rule is that all cooperation frameworks strive for a low level of institutionalisation, focusing primarily on joint training and information sharing. In time, this will ultimately lead to the transfer of competencies. Finally, concerning decision-making capacities, there is a high degree of decision-making consensus and interdependence; though members retain their sovereignty,

as part of a wider European integration process it could be used as a format for delegated authority. The lack of institutionalisation creates low levels of institutionalised voting mechanisms, meaning initiatives such as these generally score low on the fourth dimension.

Although these sub-regional cooperation initiatives have some level of success, they also have specific challenges. While the Benelux and the V4 have the advantage of having similar institutional affiliations, the Nordic countries are divided between non-EU allies (Norway and Iceland), non-allied EU members (Sweden and Finland), and (until recently) an allied EU member with opt-outs from EU defence cooperation (Denmark). But while the Benelux and the V4 have the same institutional affiliation, different security orientations remain (Sitter, 2021). While the Netherlands is Atlantic in its orientation, Belgium and Luxembourg are more oriented towards continental Europe—and towards France (Blockmans & Crosson, 2019). What this means is that, regarding consistency, shared ideas, and objectives, these initiatives score low. Additionally, these differences have placed some limitations around some of the initial ambitions. However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine is likely to strengthen these sub-regional cooperation initiatives as well. This is already evident regarding Nordic cooperation, as both Finland and Sweden have now applied for NATO membership and Denmark has decided to participate in the CSDP.

4.3 Implications for Strategic Autonomy

Following the above discussion, there is little doubt that we have seen the development of an increasingly differentiated European defence integration in Europe over the past decades. The question is whether or not this has led to an improved European defence capacity. Commonly, it is argued that this is not the case and that strategic autonomy for Europe is an illusion (Meijer & Brooks, 2021). This argument, however, is based on a narrow idea of what should be included in the concept of European defence, as it only focuses on initiatives taken within the EU framework.

By applying a broader understanding of European defence capacities, as we do in this chapter, we aimed to show that European defence cannot be limited to either the CSDP or the European pillar in NATO, nor to a combination thereof. These processes and initiatives, together with the initiatives and processes occurring outside of formal structures, create a wider network of European defence and security cooperation, resulting

in a strengthening of European defence and capacity to act. Seen as part of a broader framework for European defence integration, all initiatives have a part to play in what we have referred to here as a system of DI. This chapter has looked at DI along four dimensions: political and economic interdependency, consistency, structural connectedness, and decision-making capacity. It has found that, for all initiatives taken both within and outside the EU, interdependency seems to be the key to integration. However, this dimension is not sufficient for developing a joint capacity to act. For this, we must also have a certain degree of consistency, structural connectedness and—last, but not least—decision-making capacity.

The first three dimensions have been fulfilled to a certain degree. Most of the initiatives can be categorised on a medium to high level of integration on interdependency and consistency. While the result for structural connectedness is more mixed, this is due to the lower score on the subdimensions of vertical integration: common institutions and transfer of competencies, where only NATO and the EU, as well as parts of the French–German cooperation, show some results. Overall, this tells us that the main challenge for European defence integration should be to improve the last dimension: collective decision-making capacity. It means that the main problem is not so much a lack of defence capacity, even if there still are obvious gaps that need to be filled (and processes have been initiated to do precisely that). Rather, the main obstacle is a continued lack of constructive thinking on how to build on the potential in the existing differentiated European defence structures that exist at different levels (low to high) of DI. This has resulted in a lack of political initiatives that allow for a) making the most out of the existing structures, and b) making use of the full potential of the many different types of (formal and informal) European defence integration processes. It remains to be seen whether a common threat perception, like the Russian illegal military invasion of Ukraine, may lead to a recognition of the value of the development of more flexible DI on all dimensions of integration discussed in this chapter: interdependency, consistency and structural connectedness, and decision-making capacity. Recent developments might suggest that it will.

The trend towards a more differentiated defence integration is likely to continue. Rather than resulting in a more fragmented and complicated European security structure, and thus unnecessary duplication, these different cooperation agreements and coordination efforts have the

potential to contribute to a more flexible and stronger European defence structure—so long as there is the political will to make the most of them.

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CHAPTER 5

Strategic Autonomy Through External Differentiation

Abstract The EU engages extensively with states surrounding the Union. Since its inception, the EU has been successful in creating a network of agreements and institutional relationships with other states, whether they are potential new members of the Union or not. Non-members have been invited to participate in the EU's internal market; to participate in various decentralised agencies; or to enter trade, partnership, or association agreements with the Union. These are all parts of what we have previously referred to as the "broader area" of European foreign and security policy. While Chapter 4 explored EU cooperation with third countries in relation to security and defence, this chapter takes a broader perspective on EU foreign and security policy, looking instead at EU-third country cooperation in a wider variety of policy fields. Building on the framework presented in Chapter 2, it explores DI beyond the Union, and how the EU and European states together, through a wider network of European cooperation and DI, are contributing to increased European strategic autonomy. As far as vertical differentiation, also known as "deepening," is concerned with the formal member states and the transfer of power from the national to the European level of governance, this is of limited relevance to a discussion of deeper integration between the EU core and non-members. Horizontal DI, or "widening," however, is concerned with the territorial and normative expansion of EU policies, and is therefore of greater relevance. The discussion below looks at both bilateral and multilateral agreements between the EU and various

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associated non-members, among them the EFTA states, the UK, Turkey and other candidate countries, as well as institutional frameworks and membership of non-EU members in various decentralised agencies.

Keywords Strategic autonomy · External differentiation · Horizontal integration

The EU engages extensively with states surrounding the Union. Since its inception, the EU has been successful in creating a network of agreements and institutional relationships with other states, whether they are potential new members of the Union or not. Non-members have been invited to participate in the EU's internal market; to participate in various decentralised agencies; or to enter trade, partnership, or association agreements with the Union. These are all parts of what we have previously referred to as the "broader area" of European foreign and security policy. While Chapter 4 explored EU cooperation with third countries[1] in relation to security and defence, this chapter takes a broader perspective on EU foreign and security policy, looking instead at EU-third country cooperation in a wider variety of policy fields. Through agreements and systematised links, the EU has created a web of institutionalised relations expanding far beyond the borders of the Union (Bretherton & Vogler, 2006; Dür & Gastinger, 2023). Today, almost all European countries and several non-European countries engage in some sort of institutionalised relationship with the EU (Schimmelfennig, 2016, p. 789). However, the degree of integration and cooperation these agreements contain is of varying quality and depth, creating a global network of tighter or looser integrative links. Taken together, the result is increasing regional integration, which in turn serves as an instrument for security-building (Rieker, 2016).

The EU's relationship with the various countries of the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood has been described as an instance of *external differentiation*, referring to their varying degrees of acceptance of the EU's initiatives, policies, and regulations, aiming for approximation to

[1] A "third country" is common in EU terminology and refers to any country outside the EU.

EU law. In addition to the ENP and the newly included candidate countries to the east, there is the multilateral European Economic Area (EEA) Agreement with European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries; EU bilateral relations with Switzerland and candidate country Turkey; negotiations with post-Brexit UK; the Stabilisation and Association Agreements with the Western Balkans; and the customs unions and adoption of the Euro in Andorra, Monaco, and San Marino. These are all instances of external differentiated European integration. This chapter takes a regional perspective, exploring the degree of integration both within and beyond the borders of EU(rope). Building on the framework presented in Chapter 2, it explores DI beyond the Union, and how the EU and European states together, through a wider network of European cooperation and DI, are contributing to increased European strategic autonomy.

As far as vertical differentiation, also known as "deepening," is concerned with the formal member states and the transfer of power from the national to the European level of governance, this is of limited relevance to a discussion of deeper integration between the EU core and non-members. Horizontal DI, or "widening," however, is concerned with the territorial and normative expansion of EU policies, and is therefore of greater relevance. The discussion below looks at both bilateral and multilateral agreements between the EU and various associated non-members, among them the EFTA states, the UK, Turkey, and other candidate countries, as well as institutional frameworks and membership of non-EU members in various decentralised agencies.

5.1 External Differentiated Integration and Regional Security-Building

Earlier chapters have shown that internal differentiation within the EU is a central aspect of DI. However, it is not the only one. Equally important to the study of DI is the involvement of third countries in existing EU structures, without demanding or necessarily offering these states complete accession to the Union. This allows non-members to selectively integrate into certain policy areas. This sort of differentiation has been referred to as "external" or "mixed" DI (Schimmelfennig et al., 2022). The extent and degree to which a third country integrates with the Union depends on the willingness of the EU and the third country to integrate, as well as the state of the free market, quality of democracy and governance, and capacity of the third country (Schimmelfennig, 2016). Examples include

inclusion in the Schengen Area, the EEA, EU's Association Agreements (AA) with a variety of third countries, a variety of bilateral agreements, and involvement in EU's decentralised agencies (Rabinovych & Pintsch, 2022; Schimmelfennig et al., 2015). Together, this net of arrangements creates a web of DI spanning far beyond the borders of the Union.

Recent geopolitical developments have led to several changes in the EU's relationships with its own members as well as its neighbours. Ukraine, Moldova, and Bosnia were all granted candidate status in 2022, while Georgia was considered eligible for candidacy once certain criteria were met. Denmark, already an EU member, elected to join the CSDP. Finland and Sweden both applied for NATO membership. As a consequence of the new shockwaves spreading across Europe, new intergovernmental forums, such as the EPC were established. With the aim of increasing political, economic, and security coordination between European states, the EPC seeks to integrate European states through cooperation and common values, whether they are EU members or not (Gänzle et al., 2022). Currently, more than 40 states take part in the Community.

Increasing regional integration is a way of enhancing regional security through regional security-building. For the EU, the projection of rules and values beyond the borders of the EU has constituted the basis for the Union's role as a security actor (Rieker, 2016). The importance of building regional security has become only too clear following the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, military threats are not the only threats with which the EU is concerned. With the world re-emerging from a global pandemic, and with continued perils resulting from cyber-attacks, disinformation, energy security, and global food shortages, European strategic autonomy is challenged in other arenas than on the battlefield. Threats such as these move quickly across state borders; they are hard to predict; and they often carry unforeseen consequences. This is not only true for the EU, but also for states close to the EU's borders. In an increasingly interdependent world, global instability is felt everywhere.

For the EU and for EU members, security within the Union is dependent upon stability in its neighbouring states, something which again has become only too evident since the invasion of Ukraine. This was the rationale behind the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) of 2004,

in which the countries of the EU's neighbourhood[2] would share "everything but institutions" (Prodi, 2002). Through enhanced contact and cooperation with non-member states to the East and South, the EU seeks to enhance its own security indirectly through stabilising the states closest to it. The spreading of EU laws, policies, and institutions to non-members, either by offering possible accession or by allowing access to the EU market or other institutional bodies, are instances of external differentiation based on non-members' willingness and ability to accept EU laws and norms.

5.2 Differentiated Integration Beyond the EU's Borders

Building on the understanding of integration presented previously, we understand integration to be a result of a certain level of (i) economic and political *interdependency*; (ii) *consistency* regarding norms, rules, and values; (iii) *structural connectedness*, referring to the level of contacts and meetings and common institutions and resources that exists in the relationship; and (iv) *decision-making capacity*, which depends on the ability to transform political will into action, either through QMV or delegating capacity. It should be recalled that, while these dimensions are crucial for integration, they are not necessarily strongly correlated. Consequently, we might find high levels of integration in some aspects, but low in others. There is also a distinction to be made between having common norms, values, and structures on the one hand and acting on them and utilising them on the other hand.

DI, seen from a regional perspective, functions as a middle ground between full accession to the EU and limited to no contact. Third countries can either refuse or be refused membership in the Union, and instead opt for a lower grade of association by, for instance, participating in a select variety of policies or agencies in a limited manner (Schimmelfennig, 2016, p. 781). For EU members opposed to further widening of the Union, such limited participation functions as a compromise. TEU Art. 8 allows for the EU to establish "special relationships" with neighbouring

[2] The ENP consists of 16 countries to the EU's east and south: Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia, and Ukraine.

countries, and Art. 218 gives the Union the right to formulate association agreements with non-members. Due to the broadness of the terms "special relationship" and "association agreements," external differentiation may take many forms and be of varied depth and intensity. As a result, EU relations with its closest neighbours range from narrow, bilateral agreements to broad, multilateral frameworks of cooperation (Gstöhl, 2015).

Regarding membership of the Union, and following TEU Art. 49, any European state may apply to become a member of the Union, provided the state respects the values of liberal democracy. This, combined with the accession criteria, also known as the Copenhagen criteria—which includes a requirement for candidate states to respect the norms and values of liberal democracy and of the Union—provides the baseline for accession. In sum, one could argue that "good governance" is at the core of the accession process and a necessary requirement for potential new members. Following the argument proposed by Schimmelfennig, the more a third country's governance capacity aligns with that of the EU, the more integrated the state is likely to be. Other explanations for varying degrees of integration include wealth; cultural, religious, and political legacies; identity; geography; or various policy-based explanations (see for instance Kölliker, 2006; Schimmelfennig, 2016; Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2014).

EU contact with non-EU European states comes in a wide variety of forms, ranging from large, formalised structures such as the EEA to bilateral agreements focused on a narrow policy area. However, the availability of these sorts of arrangements can sometimes be limited for third countries, because of a lack of willingness or ability to integrate or adopt the EU *acquis*. As an alternative, third countries can collaborate with the various transgovernmental decentralised agencies that have beens proliferating since the mid-1990. These structures are decentralised in the sense that they are distinct from the EU institutions. They contribute to the implementation of EU policies, and are limited to specific tasks and jurisdictions, and may be more willing to open participation to third countries than the more complex and "wide-spanning" EU institutions (Lavenex, 2022; Lavenex & Lutz, 2023). They therefore serve as an alternative and/or complement to other integration initiatives. In other words, third-country participation in decentralised agencies does not act as an obstacle to simultaneous engagement in other policies and programmes. Third-country participation in EU agencies are mainly a result of attempts

to formalise cooperation or a result of EU foreign policy, which has developed circles of association beyond the borders of the EU (Lavenex, 2022).

The number of such EU agencies has expanded drastically over the last 15 years, covering a diverse set of policy areas ranging from medicine, air safety, border control, external security, environment, and food safety (Egeberg & Trondal, 2015; Lavenex, 2022). Concrete examples include the Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (ACER), the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), the European Environment Agency, and the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA). Mainly, these bodies have emerged from pre-existing networks open to third-country participation, with the result that they are mainly concerned with policy areas which have traditionally been under the control of EU supranational authorities (Eckert, 2022). Evidence suggests that these decentralised agencies are not only increasing in number, but also in terms of power and quality (Trondal et al., 2022). While most of these decentralised agencies allow for non-member third-country cooperation in their founding acts, not all of them do (Lavenex, 2022). For instance, the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) only accepts EU members.

Such transgovernmental structures are an example of horizontal integration, whereby national administrations are linked together through common regulatory activities (Lavenex, 2022). Integration can happen both formally and informally, either through having formally been granted decision-making authority, or informally sharing information or cooperating in policy implementation (Lavenex, 2022). The focus on informal ways of integrating makes it easier to participate in said structures, as they will be more independent from states' national governments. In turn, this allows for webs of foreign relations to be created, blurring the line between outsiders and insiders (Lavenex, 2022). Applying the definition of integration as proposed in this volume, participation in decentralised agencies can "increase the 'density' of interaction among national executives, deepen the 'intensity' of these interactions based on commonly defined curricula, data, practices and regulations and modify the 'character' of the relations among the participating countries by establishing a densely connected layer of transgovernmental cooperation" (Lavenex, 2022, p. 250). In short, it can increase integration.

5.3 Varieties of External Differentiation

Following the logic of DI, the level and depth of EU involvement with neighbouring countries varies. Common for all of them is that they extend EU rules and norms beyond EU borders (Lavenex, 2011). Formally, external differentiation is based on a set of legally binding agreements between the EU and the non-member state. This provides a variety of models of external DI, which has been referred to as "concentric circles" of integration (Lavenex, 2011) or as "privileged partnerships" (Gstöhl & Phinnemore, 2019). These partnerships range from close cooperation to more peripheral collaboration. This section will look at some of the alternative ways in which the EU integrates with different non-member third countries in the Union's close neighbourhood. As the previous chapters have largely explored the CFSP and CSDP as well as the various bilateral and multilateral agreements and initiatives that exist between the EU and third countries, we will now explore the non-militarised areas of what we have referred to as the "broader area" of EU foreign and security policy. This includes, among others, the EU's relationship with the four EFTA countries; the customs union with Turkey; the special agreements made with post-Brexit UK; and the varying degrees of cooperation found in the ENP and in the Western Balkans. While the EU additionally maintains contact and both Trade and Partnership Agreements with countries even further removed from the borders of the Union, such as Canada, these fall outside the scope of this chapter.

While these frameworks differ in institutional set-up and level of intensity, they all come with a web of institutionalised relations, sometimes referred to as "joint bodies," and cover a wide array of EU legislation (Dür & Gastinger, 2023; Lavenex, 2011). For instance, Norway and Switzerland are both granted near-complete organisational inclusion through Schengen. Organisational inclusion may also take the shape of inclusion in EU committees and agencies, where third countries are given the power to influence decision-making while legislation is excluded. Alternatively, EU rules can be promoted through EU-initiated non-EU bodies, such as regional fora. Looser relations are found in intergovernmental contacts, administrative connections, and diplomatic relations, where the *acquis* is promoted in parts and cooperation mainly occurs through agencies (Lavenex, 2011). Note that these are all ideal models, and actual rule adoption in third countries may differ. Nonetheless, it has been argued that the higher the level of interdependence between the

EU and the third party, the higher the benefits to both (Dür & Gastinger, 2023).

5.3.1 *Economic and Political Cooperation: EEA and Schengen*

Close cooperation between the EU and non-members Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway was secured by the EEA Agreement in 1992. The premise for the creation of the EEA was offering market integration to non-members without providing full membership of the Union. Covering the free movement of goods, services, capital, persons, and competition rules, the EEA is considered the "most prominent case of *acquis* export outside the enlargement paradigm" (Magen, 2007). Non-EU members of the EEA are required to apply the whole *acquis* related to the "four freedoms," based on the notion of legal homogeneity, which means that the inclusion of non-EU states to the EEA is currently the most extensive and deepest form of external differentiation (European Commission, 2021a). The inclusion of these states in the internal market is a pillar for the economic interdependency between the EU and EEA EFTA states.

The level and scope of the EEA Agreement has granted the three EEA EFTA states—Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway—the designation of "quasi-EU members." EU relations with the EFTA states are based on a vision of free trade and economic integration both within Europe and globally. In 1989, Commission President Jacques Delors offered the then seven ETFA countries the opportunity to "look for a new, more structured partnership with common decision-making and administrative institutions" (Delors, 1989). This shows how external differentiation beyond the borders of the EU has been part of the Union's set-up for decades. Except for Switzerland, all EFTA states have also become members of the EEA.

Special provisions were also given to all EEA/EFTA countries apart from Switzerland, which were granted participation in the Administrative Boards of EU agencies, with the same rights and obligations as EU members, except the right to vote (Lavenex, 2022, p. 252; Official Journal of European Union, 2014).[3] EEA EFTA states are at times given formal and informal access to EU policymaking bodies. Participation is

[3] With the exception of EFSA advisory board, where EFTA countries are given the same voting rights as EU members.

especially pronounced in committees and agencies at the transgovernmental level (Lavenex, 2011). Considering our four dimensions of DI, this form of cooperation strengthens the dimension concerned with structural connectedness, i.e. common meetings and institutions. EEA states also take part in select decentralised agencies, which can give non-EU member influence in surprising ways, such as transferring national interests to common rules. For instance, through participation in ACER, Norway was able to avoid oil regulations being considered relevant to the EEA. Had they been considered appropriate for the EEA Agreement, they would have been binding on Norway (Lavenex & Lutz, 2023).

Schengen is an example of internal DI as well as external DI, as some EU members are not part of the Schengen area. Additionally, all four EFTA states are part of Schengen, as well as the Dublin asylum system (Lavenex & Križić, 2022). In areas related to Schengen, discussions take place in the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council in a mixed committee format, comprised of all EU member states as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland—again strengthening the structural connectedness of the EU and the EFTA states. Additionally, this applies to Frontex (the European border and coast guard agency) and the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) (Lavenex & Križić, 2022).

The two pillar structure of the EEA sometimes serves as a hindrance to our second dimension, that of consistency or common rules, norms, and values. This is ironic, given that homogeneity is the leading principle of the EEA Agreement (Baur, 2019). New EU Internal Market legislation is continually incorporated into the Agreement. However, new legislation does not have to be implemented verbatim, which leaves room for manoeuvre. As the EU increasingly adopts packages of internal market legislation rather than individual acts, the legislation often contains elements which are not part of the EEA Agreement, including new forms of governance. This blurs the lines between what is and what is not internal market legislation (Gstöhl, 2015; Tobler et al., 2010).

The Schengen Area increases interdependencies between signatories to the Agreement, as it more or less abolishes internal border checks, bringing the countries of the Area closer together. Given the nature of the Schengen Agreement—which is often concerned with politically sensitive and sometimes pressing matters, such as terrorism—identical legislation is adopted by all states (Baur, 2019). This not only increases political interdependence, but also consistency in this area. Additionally, as

EFTA members fully participate in meetings, consistency is strengthened. However, EU members exclusively maintain the right to vote.

Regarding our dimension of decision-making capacity, the EEA Agreement does not give the EFTA countries full rights of co-decision. While the Agreement gives EFTA states participation rights in EU programmes and representation in EU agencies, it does not give them voting rights. Seeking to safeguard its own decision-making autonomy, the EU has never given EEA EFTA states the right to vote (Frommelt, 2020). Consequently, the score on the fourth dimension, decision-making capacity, will be low in relation to non-EU EEA states. However, EFTA states participate closely in many committees and consult in the preparation of new acts, giving them the power to shape decisions, but not make them (Gstöhl, 2015). This sort of participation will increase the score of integration on our third dimension, structural connectedness.

5.3.2 Increased Cohesion Due to Bilateral Agreements

EU–Swiss relations are complex, covering more than 120 agreements. Despite sharing values and ideals, agreements have been made bilaterally rather than multilaterally, and Switzerland has largely forged its own set of associations (Kaddous, 2019). While the first Free Trade Agreement was signed in 1972, EU–Swiss relations today are based on two packages of agreements, signed in 1999 and 2004. The first package covered areas such as the free movement of people, barriers to trade, and public procurement. The second package integrated Switzerland into the Schengen and Dublin systems, as well as covering, among others, environmental policy and arrangements to combat fraud (Eckert, 2022). Most agreements are based on the idea of equivalence of laws between the EU and Switzerland (Gstöhl, 2015). Economic relations are not controlled by a monitoring clause, as with the EEA—rather, joint bodies are considered capable to administer the agreements and adopt the necessary decisions (Rabinovych & Pintch, 2022).

EU relations with Switzerland has been characterised as "pragmatic bilateralism." Despite being part of EFTA, Swiss citizens rejected the EEA ratification in 1992. Since then, cooperation with the Union has been based on a series of bilateral, sectoral agreements (Gstöhl, 2015). While these bilateral agreements are more limited when viewed independently, when taken together they construct a solid framework for EU–Swiss cooperation, despite lacking the global character of the EEA

Agreement. Through this plethora of agreements, Switzerland is close to the status of quasi-membership, on equal footing with members of the EEA (Lavenex et al., 2009).

As with Norway, through the Schengen association agreements, Switzerland is granted near-complete access to EU decision-making structures but not given the right to vote (Lavenex, 2011). Additionally, after the signing in 2004 of the second bilateral package, agreements have been reached in a variety of other fields, such as policing, the fight against international terrorism, security cooperation, legal assistance, satellite navigation, immigration, and company taxation (Kaddous, 2019). Taken together, these agreements serve to increase both interdependencies between the EU and Switzerland, as well as consistency. However, in 2021 the Swiss government decided to terminate negotiations over a proposed EU–Swiss Institutional Framework Agreement intended to enhance bilateral relations and govern Swiss participation in the EU's internal market. As several of the EU–Swiss bilateral agreements are ageing they might no longer be fit for purpose. Consequently, there is a growing fear that the full potential of the relationship will not be reached (European Commission, 2021b).

The UK's decision to leave the EU in 2016 prompted a revival of the literature on DI, as it plunged the EU into unknown territory. While Brexit has been conceptualised as a case of differentiated *dis*integration (Leruth et al., 2019), it does not entail the end of cooperation. The UK government's ambition was to create a relationship with the EU that was "broader in scope than any other that exists between the EU and a third country" (UK Government, 2018, p. 7). Consequently, since the UK's exit, several joint committees, sub-committees, and working groups have been established through agreements, and their decisions will shape EU–UK relations in the future (Dür & Gastinger, 2023). In the absence of overarching institutions, such transgovernmental committees are also the main fora through which EU–Swiss dialogue occurs, opening channels for stable communication between experts and higher-ranking officials (Lavenex, 2011).

With its withdrawal from the Union in January 2020, the UK ceased to be a party to the EEA Agreement, and with it the UK's commitment to the four freedoms ended. The EU was quick to insist on the indivisibility of the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people, asserting that the UK could not "cherry-pick" which freedoms to keep and which to discard (European Council, 2018). The first round of

EU–UK negotiations on their future partnership took place in March 2020 and resulted in an agreement that set the terms for future cooperation, as well as the signing of three agreements covering Trade and Cooperation (TCA), security of information, and cooperation on nuclear energy (European Council, 2022). The TCA established several joint sub-committees and working groups, as well as a "partnership council," all with the aim of increasing cooperation and making EU–UK relations accessible (Dür & Gastinger, 2023). Regarding DI, this sort of arrangement increased both structural connectedness and consistency, although the full impact of the TCA is yet to be seen. Finally, there is the Windsor framework, proposed in 2023 as part of the Northern Ireland Protocol, which addresses practical difficulties regarding Brexit, especially concerning the Single Market.

The UK and Switzerland are both members of the European Political Community (EPC). Part of the rationale behind the creation of the EPC was that it was regarded as a way of bringing the UK back to the table to discuss security issues, as well as to function as a "platform for political cooperation" (European Parliament, 2022). It also allowed the UK and Switzerland to "redraw their relationships with their EU neighbours" (Gänzle et al., 2022), at a time when their associations have loosened. As the EPC is still in its infancy, it is too early to assess the results of the Community. However, the signal sent by the inclusion of countries such as Ukraine and Moldova is that the future of Europe is not to be decided by the EU alone.

Turkey's involvement with European integration includes the 1963 Ankara Association Agreement and the establishment of a Customs Union in 1995. Although accession negotiations with Turkey began as far back as 2005, EU-Turkey relations have been stuck at an impasse for a long period. This has led to discussions of allowing Turkey to enter through a more flexible agreement, or for integration to happen incrementally through gradual membership (Turhan, 2018). However, with the democratic backsliding under Erdogan's rule, Turkey's prospects for membership have been diminishing, as evidenced by a call from the European Parliament following the failed military coup of 2016 for the European Commission and the European Council to initiate a temporary freeze on accession negotiations (European Parliament, 2016). Still, the Germany-initiated negotiations which resulted in the 2016 EU–Turkey deal on migration shows that the parties are capable of cooperation when necessary. Turkey's attempt to trade Sweden's NATO bid for EU

membership created headlines in July 2023 created headlines. In an unexpected turn of events, the then newly re-elected Turkish President Erdoğan tried to link future Turkish EU membership prospects to the country's ratification of Sweden's historical bid to join NATO. Ever since May 2022, when Sweden applied for membership in the military alliance, Turkey has been hesitant to ratify Swedish accession. In the end, Erdoğan asked Europe to "open the way" for Turkey to the European Union in exchange for its support for Swedish membership in NATO. Exactly what this entails is uncertain—nevertheless, it shows a continued wish for increased integration and cooperation from the Turkish side.

Turkey's geographical position, as well as its status as a NATO member and part of the G20, makes Turkey a strategic partner for the EU. Despite Turkey's current stance on ratifying Sweden's accession to NATO, it remains an important member of the alliance. As the chances of Turkey becoming a member of the EU have been slim, other opportunities for closer, external DI have opened. The customs union of the 1990s was "forged in an environment of slow but committed bonding" (Terzi, 2019, p. 121). While the customs union has certain institutional and functional issues, such as not including the service sector and the lack of an effective consultation mechanism, there is an inherent understanding from both actors of the need for cooperation and opportunities closer relations entails. Additionally, Turkey has joined the European Environmental Agency (EEA) and the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), albeit without voting rights (Lavenex, 2022, p. 254), strengthening EU–Turkey relations areas outside the customs union.

As the chances for Turkish membership to the EU any time soon continue to be slim, opportunities for closer cooperation arrangements have arisen. In 2000 it was suggested that Turkey should have a "privileged partnership" with the EU, going beyond association with EU institutions and including integration in the internal market and the CFSP. However, this status has routinely been rejected by Turkey (Gstöhl & Phinnemore, 2019). Despite this, cooperation is again on the table, both due to Erdoğan's recent comments, as well as the inclusion of Turkey in the EPC. Regarding the dimensions of DI, Turkey will continue to score relatively low on all dimensions, as there are several hurdles that need to be addressed before EU-Turkey relations will be marked by a high level of interdependency and consistency.

5.3.3 *A Widening and Expanding Union*

Historically, the EU has refused membership and close association with several states whose governance capacity, democracy, or economy has been deemed unsatisfactory. After the 2004 and 2007 waves of enlargement, EU accession cooled down. However, the new borders of the Union necessitated a new relationship with its near abroad. An alternative to accession came in 2004 in the shape of the ENP, where Eastern and Southern neighbours were offered "the prospect of a stake in the EU Internal Market based on legislative and regulatory approximation, the participation in a number of EU programmes and improved interconnection and physical links with the EU" (European Commission, 2004). There is an expectation of alignment between the domestic legislation of the ENP country and the *acquis*, strengthening cohesion (Lavenex & Lutz, 2023). In short, the policy sought to reduce pressure on the EU's external borders through the creation of a "ring of friends," resulting in a buffer zone for EU influence (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2021).

While the ENP was modelled on the EU's pre-accession policy, the ENP was still regarded as an alternative to accession. In other words, the EU has offered willing non-members regulatory approximation to the EU *acquis* without demanding or offering membership (Lavenex, 2011). However, the promise of sharing "everything but institutions" (Prodi, 2002) with ENP countries changed following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as both Ukraine and Moldova were granted the status of candidates to the Union, while Georgia's application to join was put on hold (Crombois, 2023).

Despite having several states up for EU membership, the focus has shifted to neighbouring countries that have not been offered candidacy status, particularly those covered by the ENP and Western Balkan states. While not granting access to EU core institutions, the ENP foresaw increased cooperation and contact in EU secondary bodies, such as agencies (Lavenex, 2022, p. 255). As stated by Art. 8 TEU, regarding neighbouring states, "the Union may conclude specific agreements with the countries concerned. These agreements may contain reciprocal rights and obligations as well as the possibility of undertaking activities jointly," suggesting increased interdependence. According to a communication from the Commission, ENP country involvement in EU policies could take the form of either "ENP country participation, or observer status in, or cooperation with specific agencies or other bodies that are involved in

the management of Community policies" or "inclusion of ENP partners in the implementation of Community policies (e.g. research & development, consumer protection, information society, competitiveness and innovation, etc.)" (European Commission, 2006). The EU continues to have relations with countries beyond its neighbourhood as well. However, cooperation is mainly limited to issue-specific norm transfer, diplomatic intergovernmental relations, and transgovernmental networks, and involves less institutionalisation (Lavenex, 2011).

Whereas the opportunity to be granted candidate status has been given to countries of the Eastern Neighbourhood, candidacy is off the table for neighbourhood countries in the MENA region. This does not mean, however, that the EU does not extend its external differentiation to these countries as well. The EU enjoys Association Agreements with several countries of the Southern Neighbourhood such as Morocco, Jordan, and Tunisia. Typically, these Agreements are concerned with liberalising trade and investment relations. For some states, such as Egypt, negotiations have begun for the development of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. Through the ENP, the EU also engages in financial support and development assistance to associated countries. A new financial cooperation instrument, the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), was launched in 2021 and will channel €79.5 billion to programmes that aim to strengthen thematic areas such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

Alignment with the Schengen and Dublin *acquis* is part of the accession process of candidate countries to the EU. Additionally, several countries of the ENP have specific agreements and commitments in line with Schengen legal acts. Both ENP and candidate countries participate on an occurring basis in the JHA agencies Frontex and EUAA (Lavenex & Križić, 2022). Frontex in particular has been mentioned as an example of far-reaching DI in operational activities, and it has concluded far-reaching agreements with ENP countries on operational cooperation in border management. Frontex has concluded 18 working arrangements, including among others with the authorities of various ENP countries (such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus), Western Balkan states (such as Bosnia and Hercegovina and Montenegro), as well as candidate countries to the EU (such as Moldova, Turkey, and Ukraine). This not only increases structural connectedness, but also interdependencies between the members.

While EEA EFTA countries enjoy automatic access to EU decentralised agencies, the same cannot be said for others. While Switzerland has not been granted the same level of access, cooperation agreements have ensured Swiss access to 18 agencies as of 2023 (Lavenex & Lutz, 2023). As the decentralised agencies are believed to serve the EU's overarching goal of "encouraging and supporting regulatory and administrative reform and institution building in neighbouring countries" (European Commission, 2006, p. 3), they have the potential to serve as a platform for further integration with the ENP. Consequently, participation by ENP countries has been initiated by more than 20 agencies. This would be in line with our second dimension of integration, consistency, while also enhancing structural connectedness. The decision of whether or not to involve a neighbourhood country in an EU decentralised agency rests on the agency in question, however, not on EU foreign policy in general, and is determined on a case-by-case basis. As a result, most neighbouring countries have ad hoc ties with EU agencies rather than full participation (Lavenex, 2022). In other words, third-country participation is still an underused form of external differentiation, as ENP third-country participation remains relatively low.

Participation in decentralised EU agencies is not the only method of increasing communication and connections between the EU and its neighbours, however. The EU AAs, for instance—which the EU has with several countries in the Neighbourhood and the Western Balkans—established a framework of cooperation between the Union and the third country in question. We can distinguish between two different types of AAs: free trade agreements (FTAs) and Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAAs). While FTAs do not necessarily *aim* for integration, they do increase interdependence and, consequently, DI. FTAs also increase consistency, in that they are used as a mechanism to export EU rules to the EEA Agreement; FTAs lower or remove tariffs and remove restrictions on movement of capital. SAAs have accession as an end goal, and are, as a consequence, prime opportunities for increased interdependency, consistency, and connectedness.

Regarding third countries which have been granted the status of "candidate country," the EU has created something resembling a "waiting room" for future EU members. The formal status of "candidate country" was invented in 1997, when the EU started looking East for new members. There are currently eight candidate members of the EU. In December 2022, Bosnia was given candidate status, joining Albania,

Moldova, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey, and Ukraine. What this means is that, with the exception of Kosovo, all of the countries of the Western Balkans are now EU candidate countries. For the Balkans, the association process is preceded by the Stabilisation and Association Process, designed to enhance cooperation and prepare the respective countries for potential EU membership (Pippan, 1994).

While the status of pre-accession could be considered the most obvious form of external DI, it contrasts with other forms of arrangement the EU has with neighbours in that it is, in theory, temporally limited. As the candidate country is expected to take on the full EU *acquis*, the opportunities for formal DI are limited (Baur, 2019). On the other hand, informal DI, in the form of opt-outs once the candidate has become a member state, remains an opportunity. Although accession erodes the opportunity for external DI, it opens up the possibility of internal DI. As several states have been waiting for EU membership for several years, however, candidacy serves as a category in its own right.

Candidate countries to the EU have been given access to the same programmes as EFTA states, in an attempt to familiarise candidates with EU policies and make adoption of the EU *acquis* more straightforward. However, this strategy has not been as efficient or widespread as intended, and candidate countries to the EU rarely enjoy access to EU agencies' management boards or secondary bodies. Instead, contact is more focused on capacity-building programmes and concrete operational activities (Lavenex, 2022, p. 254). Nevertheless, the possibility of this sort of cooperation suggests a willingness for cooperation.

Concerning the recent development of the EPC and the inclusion of several neighbourhood states, the Community represents a new opportunity for increasing integration. There is a worry among non-EU members that the EPC will serve as a "holding place," where candidate countries will become stuck, preventing membership. Rather, the EPC should be seen as an alternative to accession that in no way diminishes the status of the candidates. Rather than threatening accession, "the initiative serves as a twofold stepping-stone by allowing countries such as those in the Western Balkans, Ukraine, and Moldova to complement their ambitions for accession" (Gänzle et al., 2022). However, as already argued, it is still too early to consider the impact of the Community beyond the signalling effect.

5.3.4 *Leaders, Laggards, and Disruptors—(Dis)agreement in External Differentiated Integration*

We have stressed the importance of agency regarding the various initiatives that result in DI, and the situation is no different in the case of external DI. Regarding the ENP, the Commission has historically taken the role of leader. They are joined in this endeavour by the HR/VP and the EEAS, and together they are responsible for the implementation of the policy (Sobol, 2015). Regarding the Neighbourhood policy, the member states themselves have acted as laggards and disruptors in the process towards a more effective Neighbourhood policy because of their diverging interests. EU members have not been able to agree on the long-term objectives of the policy, resulting in a series of vague compromises and informal differentiation (Chapter 1). However, this is not necessarily a result of the EU lacking actorness, as the message behind the ENP is the same across member states. Rather, it is a result of the conflicting interests. In other words, the normative basis is the same, but the objectives are different. As argued by Börzel and van Hüllen (2014, p. 1034), "the ENP suffers from substantive inconsistency rather than a lack of internal cohesiveness." This shows how the dimensions of DI can affect the efficiency of EU policies.

In other instances, the countries of the Neighbourhood may act as laggards and/or disruptors themselves, since much of the relations between EU and third countries are based on willingness to cooperate. For instance, while the EU signed a Cooperation Agreement with Syria in 1977 and while the EU is still Syria's largest trade partner, all bilateral cooperation between the EU and the Government of Syria has been suspended since the outbreak of war in 2011. While this does not hinder EU cooperation with other members of the ENP, it does impact the overall functioning of the Policy, as well as decrease EU legitimacy as an effective foreign policy institution. Through the NDICI, however, Syria continues to receive humanitarian and financial aid.

Regarding further enlargement of the Union, EU members disagree on the extent to which this should occur. After years of enlargement fatigue following the 2004 and 2007 Eastern enlargement, the changes in the geopolitical climate have brought new resolve in bringing candidates into the fold. For instance, Germany has generally remained a firm supporter of the enlargement policy, calling for the inclusion of the Western Balkans on the basis of conditionality and the fulfilment of the needed criteria

(Töglhofer & Adebahr, 2017). The Commission has also pushed for further enlargement of the EU, especially as a consequence of the invasion of Ukraine, by calling for the status of candidate to be given to Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, once the criteria set up by the Commission were fulfilled.

Regarding laggards and disruptors, who has this role is not as evident when it comes to external differentiation as it is for internal DI. As most external differentiation is based on the willingness of both partners to cooperate and integrate, laggards and disruptors become increasingly unlikely. Of course, there are instances, such as Syria, where bilateral cooperation is virtually non-existent, or cases such as Turkey, where cooperation is made hard because of differing objectives. However, overall, the policies and institutional frameworks continue to function for those who are willing, leaving the unwilling behind. Non-cooperating participants among the non-EU thus do not necessarily slow the process down—they just increase differentiation beyond the EU's borders (Table 5.1).

Based on the discussion above, we give both the EEA EFTA states and members of the Schengen Agreement a high score of both integration and

Table 5.1 EU(ropean) regional actorness as a function of levels of integration and uniformity

		Integration		
Uniformity		Low	Medium	High
	Harmonisation	ENP East, EU and Western Balkans	EU and candidates	EEA, Schengen
	High level of cooperation	EU-UK after the Windsor, EU-Switzerland	--	--
	Some cooperation	EU, Turkey, ENP South EU-UK before the Windsor framework	--	--
	No cooperation	--	--	--
	Conflict/ Competition	--	--	--

uniformity, as these agreements result in high levels of interdependency, both economic (EEA) and political (Schengen), as well as high levels of consistency and structural connectedness. Regarding the candidate countries, there is an expectation of a high level of uniformity through the adoption of the EU *acquis,* as well as the Dublin and Schengen arrangements, which is required in order to become a member. Although not all candidate countries can boast this level of harmonisation yet, we follow the argumentation of Baur (2019), whereby the opportunities for formal DI for the candidate countries are limited. As they are still formally outside the EU institutional framework, however, they are awarded a medium score on our integration dimension. While this score differs from the one given in Chapter 3, we explain this by arguing that, as Chapter 3 was concerned with *both* internal and external differentiation, the relative integration of the EEA and Schengen Area is lower when compared to internal differentiation. In this chapter, however, we have only focused on external differentiation, where the EEA and Schengen are more integrated and display a higher level of uniformity relative to the other initiatives.

As expected, most of these arrangements and initiatives fall in the category of low levels of integration. However, there are variations regarding the level of uniformity, which creates what Lavenex (2011) has referred to as "concentric circles" of EU integration. Regarding the ENP, we have distinguished between the East and the South. As there is a possibility for candidacy for countries in the Western Balkans and the Eastern Neighbourhood, especially Georgia, as well as a number of Association Agreements, these areas scored a high level of uniformity, but a low level of integration. As EU relations with the Southern Neighbourhood are mainly concerned with trade and/or development aid, these states collectively, together with Turkey, have some level of cooperation with the EU. As the Windsor Framework has worked out some of the main obstacles challenging EU–UK cooperation, we can distinguish between uniformity pre- and post-Windsor. The UK post-Windsor joins Switzerland in being given a high degree of cooperation and a low level of integration. Following from this, we see that EU external differentiation often results in low levels of integration, but that higher levels of association with the EU usually lead to higher levels of uniformity.

5.4 Differentiated Integration Beyond the Borders of the EU

Through this discussion, it is evident that the EU had created a network of relations that expand well beyond the borders of the Union. External differentiation is not a new feature of Europe and has been a part of the Union's external policy even before foreign policy was formalised in the Maastricht Treaty. This is part of what we have earlier referred to as the "broader" area of foreign and security policy, which includes the areas of trade and humanitarian assistance, areas which external differentiation is mainly involved with. EU involvement with non-EU European states has led to closer and mutually beneficial ties between the EU and its neighbours. While the depth and institutional extent of these networks vary, they all serve the same purpose—increasing European strategic autonomy. Through increasing interdependency, both political but mainly economic, consistency, and structural connectedness, these initiatives help bring about strengthened EU actorness in a wide variety of policy fields.

EU relations with neighbouring countries are largely based on the ability and willingness of these countries to integrate. In some cases, as with the EFTA countries, they are generally considered able but not willing to join the EU, while certain countries in the Neighbourhood, like Georgia, are willing but not able (Gstöhl & Phinnemore, 2019). In other words, external differentiation hinges not only on the actorness of the EU, but of its neighbouring countries as well. This is also the case regarding agency, where the laggards and disruptors are usually just left behind rather than working to disrupt the process of external integration.

External DI, as shown above, takes many forms, either through extensive multilateral and highly formalised arrangements, such as the EEA, or through narrow bilateral agreements, such as free trade agreements. Overall, most external differentiation is concerned with strengthening the consistency between the EU and the various third countries. This should not come as a surprise as further integration requires a baseline of agreement on common rules, values, and objectives. In cases such as the EEA where there already is a high level of consistency, interdependency in the form of strong economic cooperation can occur more steadily. As one of the main principles of the EEA Agreement is homogeneity, shared rules, and the existence of equal conditions, EEA countries get a high score on the dimension of consistency. The general success of the EEA Agreement has strengthened the EU Single Market, making the

EU a more desirable trading partner with other neighbouring countries. Regarding non-EEA EFTA states, Switzerland can be considered a case of Europeanisation without institutionalisation, meaning that they are normatively largely integrated while still remaining institutionally on the outside (Linder, 2013). The UK, neither an EEA nor an EFTA state, has been on the inside but has elected to return to the outside. However, the following negotiations that followed Brexit have been largely focused on maintaining EU–UK trade, continuing the process of regional economic integration.

Gstöhl (2015) defines regional economic integration as being located somewhere between a free trade area and an internal market, with the ability to execute a level of collective decision-making capacity. This entails the creation of common standards and competition rules. The expansion of the EU economic community can therefore be seen as a form of external integration in the economic area. This, in turn, enhances European strategic autonomy by making the states of Europe more economically dependent on each other. As effective decision-making in this area requires the members to speak with "one voice" in order to agree on common rules and objectives, this form of cooperation also increases consistency and structural connectedness.

External differentiation may also take the form of involvement in EU decentralised agencies, especially for third countries with limited availability to cooperate in some of the more extensive initiatives. Mainly, EU agencies act as agents of EU governance in that they project EU rules beyond EU borders (Lavenex, 2004; Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009), representing a potential, though underused, arena for further cooperation and integration. For the EEA EFTA states, who are granted automatic access, these agencies serve to increase cohesion and structural connectedness. Additionally, increasing transgovernmental cooperation with public administrations in countries in the Neighbourhood—albeit through ad hoc agreements rather than full-fledged participation for the ENP countries—points to a limited but heightened level of consistency, as common rules, values, and objectives serve as the baseline for cooperation. However, such transgovernmental cooperation requires bureaucratic structures equipped with enough capacity to handle such cooperation (Lavenex, 2022, p. 256).

Regarding decision-making capacity, none of the arrangements score high on either QMV or delegating capacity. As for the EEA, relevant legislation is first presented by the Commission and then adopted by the

Council and the Parliament. It then becomes the job of the EEA Joint Committee to implement the corresponding amendment however they see fit. As the EU has been adamant about protecting its autonomy in this area, EEA EFTA states have never been given the right to vote. However, EEA EFTA states still have considerable influence through their ability to delay or adapt legislation (Frommelt, 2020). Nevertheless, the lack of a common decision-making arena for EEA-relevant legislature gives the EEA a low score on the dimension concerned with decision-making. Regarding the ENP and candidate countries, there is a high level of power asymmetry, as ENP countries and candidates are subjected to EU policies with limited influence on the contents of said policy. This could partly explain why the ENP has faced criticisms for not being as effective as initially predicted, as the bargaining power is in the EU's favour (Börzel & van Hüllen, 2014; Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2004).

As applicant states need to fulfil the Copenhagen criteria concerning democracy, free markets, and the ability to take on the EU *acquis*, candidate countries work towards aligning themselves with the common rules, values, and objectives of the EU. When only the candidates to the EU are considered, they are given a high score on the dimension concerned with consistency. However, because of the variety found in the Neighbourhood, where some countries are still far away from aligning themselves with EU rules and values, the ENP in total can only be given a middle score on the dimension of consistency. This is enhanced by the fact that, in general, the ENP has been unsuccessful in promoting good governance and democracy to the neighbourhood, as the promise of accession has largely been absent.

Through closer cooperation with the countries of the neighbourhood—whether through the EEA Agreement, bilateral agreements, decentralised agencies, the ENP, or through granting candidacy—the EU has created a network of cooperation and external differentiation through increased interdependency, consistency, and connectedness. These processes have helped blur the line between the EU and non-EU third countries, as they become increasingly connected to EU policies and initiatives. With the EU at the core, these initiatives serve to build regional security through the projection of common rules and values beyond the borders of the Union, making the entire region more capable of working together to handle obstacles regarding economy, migration, trade, visa, and further enlargement.

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CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

Abstract This book has provided an alternative analysis of the state of European foreign and security policy, based on a broader understanding of key terms: European integration, strategic autonomy and security. We wanted to show how the meaning of European strategic autonomy changes when a broader understanding of these concepts is applied. The analysis has illustrated how a better understanding of the interlinkage between the various formal and informal and internal and external initiatives that are occurring simultaneously gives us a more accurate picture of the status of European strategic autonomy. Chapter 2 provided an overview of the relevant academic literature and showed why existing IR theories are not sufficient to capture and explain the multi-actorness of the broader European foreign and security policy. We then demonstrated why the existing literature of multi-level governance and DI also applies a narrow understanding of EU integration and security, and that we need to include both formal and informal, as well as internal (EU) and external (non-EU) processes in order to fully capture European strategic autonomy. To fill these gaps, we presented an alternative conceptual framework, which we then applied to analyse Europe's role as a foreign policy actor (Chapter 3), its role in regional defence integration (Chapter 4), and its role as a builder of regional security (Chapter 5). The analysis in these three empirical chapters has enabled us to better capture the dynamics of today's increasingly complex European integration process, characterised by opt-outs and opt-ins, formal and informal

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processes, enhanced cooperation, and various forms of governance led by actors at different levels and with different types of relations to the EU. In this chapter, we will present some concluding reflections.

Keywords Strategic autonomy · European integration · Security · Differentiated integration

This book has provided an alternative analysis of the state of European foreign and security policy, based on a broader understanding of key terms: *European integration, strategic autonomy and security*. We wanted to show how the meaning of European strategic autonomy changes when a broader understanding of these concepts is applied. The analysis has illustrated how a better understanding of the interlinkage between the various formal and informal and internal and external initiatives that are occurring simultaneously gives us a more accurate picture of the status of European strategic autonomy.

Chapter 2 provided an overview of the relevant academic literature and showed why existing IR theories are not sufficient to capture and explain the multi-actorness of the broader European foreign and security policy. We then demonstrated why the existing literature of multi-level governance and DI also applies a narrow understanding of EU integration and security, and that we need to include both formal and informal, as well as internal (EU) and external (non-EU) processes in order to fully capture European strategic autonomy. To fill these gaps, we presented an alternative conceptual framework, which we then applied to analyse Europe's role as a foreign policy actor (Chapter 3), its role in regional defence integration (Chapter 4), and its role as a builder of regional security (Chapter 5).

The analysis in these three empirical chapters has enabled us to better capture the dynamics of today's increasingly complex European integration process, characterised by opt-outs and opt-ins, formal and informal processes, enhanced cooperation, and various forms of governance led by actors at different levels and with different types of relations to the EU.

One of the conclusions we can draw from this analysis is that while actorness seems to depend on two assets—the capacity to formulate clear objectives and to make decisions in line with these objectives, and the

existence of necessary administrative and operational capabilities to implement these decisions (Chapter 2)—European actorness cannot be limited to the EU. In support of our initial assumption, to capture European actorness we need to go beyond the borders of the EU, and include policies and initiatives that also include non-EU members as well. Even though, the EU remains at the core of most of these processes, formally or informally, it often includes more than the EU and EU members. This is why we introduce the concept of "EU(ropean) strategic autonomy" as it recognises the key role that is played by the EU, but also the importance of other actors that are not formally members of the Union.

Thus, in Chapter 2 we presented a framework for analysing this complexity as a form of DI. We based this on a definition of (vertical and horizontal) integration that sees it as *a continuum between a state of purely interstate cooperation at one end and full integration or federation at the other end* (March, 1999) and considered everything in-between a case of DI. To distinguish between different levels of DI, we applied March's three dimensions of integration: (i) interdependency, both political and economic; (ii) consistency, referring to common rules, values, and objectives; and (iii) structural connectedness, referring to contacts, meetings, common institutions, and the transfer of competencies. We then added our own fourth dimension, namely decision-making capacity, which we suggested could be operationalised in two ways—as QMV and/or as delegating capacity. By including delegating capacity, we take into account the actions of certain member states—explicitly or implicitly on behalf of the Union. On top of this, we introduced uniformity as a key dimension, arguing that European integration is a function of vertical and horizontal integration and level of uniformity (degree of harmonisation).

The three empirical chapters presented some interesting empirical findings. First, Chapter 3 showed how such a broader conceptualisation of European integration and security can help us to better understand how EU(rope)—the EU and associated partners—functions as a global actor. It started by analysing how it scores on the dimensions of actorness as well as the dimensions of (differentiated) integration presented in Chapter 2. The chapter concluded that despite certain limits, EU(rope) can claim to have a certain degree of actorness and thus also a certain degree of autonomy. This means that it is playing an increasingly important global role in most policy areas, even though these are characterised by different types of governance structures: Some are characterised by exclusive competences, others by shared competences (such as climate,

development, humanitarian aid), by a more supporting role (as the EU has in the area of civil protection and public health), or even by some type of special competence such as the EU has developed in the fields of CFSP/CSDP. This EU(ropean) foreign security and defence policy is perhaps complex, and has certain limitations, but it is also flexible and is continuously being updated and refined—often in response to crises.

In Chapter 4, we moved to take a closer look at the development of a European defence capacity. While Chapter 3 has shown that strategic autonomy is about far more than defence, defence is undeniably an important part of this concept. This chapter also clearly shows that there is no reason to fear that building stronger European strategic autonomy in the area of defence would automatically undermine NATO or the transatlantic alliance. On the contrary, it is more likely that such a process will pave the way for European states to take on increased responsibility together, including within the alliance. In the end, increased burden-sharing depends on the European NATO members increasing their own military and defence capabilities. But to be able to make a difference, with regard to burden-sharing, increased national defence spending will never be enough. It must be supplemented with real European defence integration. This is an ongoing process that is currently taking place at different levels and in different formats, often pushed forward by EU incentives within the PESCO format and by the European Defence Fund.

Finally, Chapter 5 showed how the Union works to build regional security through a variety of initiatives, policies, and agreements with its neighbouring states. It showed that through closer cooperation with the countries of the neighbourhood—whether through the EEA Agreement, bilateral agreements, decentralised agencies, the ENP, or through granting candidacy—the EU has created a network of cooperation and external DI. Through increased contacts and slow but steady increase of uniformity, they also enhance the security of the entire region through increased interdependency, consistency, and connectedness, but it also has the potential of leading to a strengthening of a European actorness and strategic autonomy. While this process is at times slow and contested, as the cooperation between EU and Turkey, the set of formal and informal arenas provide forums where disagreements can be discussed, and common action can be agreed upon.

Based on the analysis presented through these five chapters, we can conclude that the current formal and informal DI process is shaping EU(rope) as an actor that can also claim increasing strategic autonomy.

The reason why Europe is often underestimated as an actor is precisely because most analyses continue to be based on a rather narrow understanding of key concepts, such as European integration, security, and strategic autonomy. With a broader interpretation of these concepts, European strategic autonomy is perhaps not as unlikely or difficult to be achieved as often suggested.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has led to greater unity among the European states as well as a new momentum to the enlargement process. While this could be interpreted as the beginning of a period towards less *differentiated* integration and a higher degree of general integration across the board, it is more likely that some form of Differentiated Integration will prevail. As there is an urgent need to improve European security, different European cooperation frameworks (such as the EU, NATO, and various forms of sub-regional formats) with different levels of integration, are likely to be the way to produce a European actorness and strategic autonomy. While the EU is at the core of most of these processes, the differentiated integration process also goes beyond the EU.

Increased interdependency (both political and economic), consistency, structural connectedness, and decision-making capacity have all led to a more capable European actor in what we have referred to as the *broader area of security and defence*. We have argued that it is not enough to simply consider military and defence capabilities in this area, but that it is necessary to include areas such as trade, development, humanitarian assistance, cyber, and health, to mention some. Additionally, to get a full measure of European capacities, it is not enough to only consider internal EU processes in these fields. External initiatives between EU and non-EU but nevertheless European states need to be included as well. So far, all these initiatives taken together indicate that Europe is continuously evolving, with the EU as its core, to improve its capacity to handle various geopolitical challenges. The future is uncertain, but it is not unlikely that a flexible and DI process will be able to adjust itself so that it can also handle future challenges as they occur.

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