

European Actorness in a Shifting Geopolitical Order: European Strategic Autonomy Through Differentiated Integration

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In the current geopolitical landscape, Europe finds itself compelled to strengthen its strategic autonomy, particularly in light of uncertainties surrounding the United States' long-term commitment to European security and the NATO alliance. This context is characterized by increasing complexity and an intensifying multipolar competition, exacerbated by the assertive stance of powers such as Russia and China, as well as Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. As a result, European and international security have reached a heightened state of alert. It is within this dynamic and challenging environment that the work *European Actorness in a Shifting Geopolitical Order*, by researchers Pernille Rieker and Mathilde Giske of the Norwegian Institute of Foreign Affairs, is situated. This book emerges as an important analysis, proposing a redefinition and a new approach to Europe's strategic autonomy, moving away from traditional conceptions which, according to the authors, limit the understanding of Europe's independent capacity in the fields of security and defense. This review seeks to explore the book's innovative contributions, highlighting how the authors expand the concepts of European integration, strategic autonomy, and security to include a broader range of actors and processes, both formal and informal, that shape Europe's role on the global stage.

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In the first chapter, which serves as an introduction to the volume, the scholars argue that the concepts of European integration, strategic autonomy, and security are narrowly defined in the literature, hindering the analysis of the development of an independent European capacity in the fields of security and defense. This chapter expands the concepts of European integration and strategic autonomy to include, beyond the European Union (EU), various multilateral and bilateral agreements across the continent. In doing so, it introduces the idea of EU(ropean) where the EU constitutes the core of regional integration, without overlooking other forms of cooperation that also contribute to the continent's strategic autonomy. This approach stands in contrast to traditional authors and scholars of differentiated integration, who limit the analysis of European integration to the EU (Haas 1958; Moravcsik 2013; Stubb 1996).

The researchers understand security as a concept that goes beyond military capabilities, adopting a broader definition that includes human, societal, and environmental security (Buzan, Wæver and De Wilde 1998). The book examines not only the EU's security and defense policies but also areas that strengthen social resilience, such as trade, humanitarian aid, and cooperation with third countries. According to Svendsen (2021), these areas are becoming increasingly interconnected.

The second chapter discusses current theoretical approaches to regional integration, highlighting that they fail to capture the multiplicity of actors involved in the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). As demonstrated by Blockmans and Crosson (2021), elements of differentiated integration within the CFSP are becoming increasingly institutionalized. Therefore, it is necessary to broaden the frameworks of multi-level governance (Hooghe and Marks 2001) and differentiated integration (Leruth, Gänzle and Trondal 2022) to encompass not only the EU's formal processes, but also the informal developments that contribute to Europe's strategic autonomy. In identifying this gap in the literature, the authors introduce a new theoretical approach to analyzing the CFSP through the lens of differentiated integration.

This approach makes a valuable contribution by including informal processes and dimensions of integration in the analysis. Informal processes of differentiated integration are classified as: (i) exclusions, such as non-compliance with rules; (ii) divergences over long-term objectives; (iii) inclusions, where non-members choose to unilaterally sign foreign and security policy declarations or follow EU policies; and (iv) integration initiatives promoted by certain Member States outside the EU framework. The levels of uniformity range from conflict/competition to the harmonization of norms. The dimensions of integration are: interdependence, consistency, structural connectedness, and decision-making capacity; the first three described by March (1999), and the last added by the authors. This assessment results in low, medium, or high levels of integration, addressing the various facet of the process, be they vertical/horizontal, formal/informal, or inclusive/exclusive. The third chapter begins the empirical analysis, applying the introduced approach to examine Europe's role as a foreign and security policy actor. The scholars argue that in order to attain the status of a global actor, two elements are required: (i) the ability to formulate clear objectives and make decisions based on them; and (ii) the administrative and operational capacity to implement those decisions. Thus,

when taking into account the capacities of the EU and its Member States, the organization can be characterized as a global agent.

The researchers then explore what this European global actor represents in terms of differentiated integration in European foreign policy. The EU's actions are characterized by its various structures, shaped by the competences conferred upon the institution (exclusive, shared, supporting, and special¹). The text argues that the EU does not need to become a federation in order to be an autonomous global actor; this can be achieved through its network of differentiated integration. The authors agree with Riddervold, Trondal and Newsome (2021) in stating that, despite its complexity, this network is effective.

The fourth chapter analyses whether integration agreements support or hinder the development of a European security framework, considering EU initiatives such as Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), cooperation between Member States (such as Franco-German defense cooperation), and external projects (such as NATO's European pillar). According to the authors, these agreements display three dimensions of integration (interdependence, consistency, and structural connectedness), but show shortcomings in decision-making capacity. As noted by Latici (2021), Member States have shown little willingness to strengthen this particular dimension. Nevertheless, the chapter concludes that differentiated integration in security contributes to a more robust and flexible European defense structure. In line with Howorth (2019), the authors argue that there is no incompatibility between strengthening NATO and developing Europe's defensive capabilities.

The fifth chapter examines the cooperation between the EU and third countries (external differentiated integration) in areas beyond traditional security, such as trade and humanitarian aid. This network of EU relations enhances interdependence, consistency, and structural connectedness between the bloc and third countries, although it still displays low or no community decision-making capacity. External differentiated integration allows for the Europeanisation of non-member states, such as Switzerland, which has a high degree of uniformity but a low level of integration. These initiatives strengthen regional security by projecting EU norms and values, making the region more resilient. The threats to the EU extend beyond the military domain, encompassing non-military challenges as well, as highlighted by Tocci (2020).

In conclusion, the scholars argue that the literature underestimates Europe's role as a global actor by relying on narrow concepts of European integration, strategic autonomy, and security. They contend that integration should be viewed beyond the EU, with the Union at its core, while taking into account formal and informal, internal and external processes that shape European actorhood. The volume also emphasizes that strengthening Europe's strategic autonomy, being multifaceted, does not undermine NATO but can in fact enhance Europe's contribution to the organization. Therefore, Rieker and Giske argue that differentiated integration processes expand Europe's capacity to act in the 'broadened' field of security and defense.

Notes

1. Rieker and Giske categorize the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy, as well as the Common Security and Defense Policy, as areas of 'special' competence. However, the European treaties refer only to exclusive, shared, and supporting competences.

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Data Availability

Do not apply.

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