

After BREXIT

What prospects for European security?

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June 23, 2016, will be remembered as a defining moment for European integration. For the first time, a member country decided to leave the European Union. A shock wave swept through Europe and perhaps the United Kingdom, too. Is this the beginning of the end for the European project? Will Brexit encourage other countries to follow the U.K.'s example? Or will Brexit encourage the remaining member countries to show more unity and solidarity and push the EU toward an ever closer union? What are the EU's prospects?

After the British referendum, paradoxically, discussions about further integration gained new momentum in the EU. Will those discussions provide a new vision for the EU with a catalytic dynamic, as the single market and monetary union projects did in the 1980s and 1990s? Is "more Europe" the right answer to growing Euro-skepticism and Euro-populism in all member countries?

The answer is "yes" and "no" and "it depends." It depends on what "more Europe" really means. The EU is a complex and differentiated political system that follows at least three tenets: integration, interdependence and balance of power. This is the inherent system of checks and balances. Efficiency, cohesion and credibility among all 28 — and maybe soon 27 — members relies on the well-orchestrated management of this complex system.

Brexit is certainly a huge challenge for the EU because it affects all three tenets. Brexit will make integration much easier because the U.K. often served as a staunch veto to



European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker holds a joint news conference with European Council President Donald Tusk, center, and Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico during a European Union leaders summit in Brussels, Belgium, in December 2016.

the further deepening of European integration. In fact, the U.K. is perhaps the least integrated EU member. It is neither a part of the eurozone, nor of the Schengen area, the banking union or the monetary union. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union is not considered applicable to the U.K. Without the U.K. in the



Pro- and anti-Brexit protesters stand outside the British Supreme Court in central London on December 7, 2016, the third day of the challenge against a court ruling that Theresa May's government requires parliamentary approval to start the process of leaving the European Union.

EU, progress in deepening European integration will be much easier.

But the tenets of interdependence and balance of power are certainly suffering from the U.K.'s planned departure. Containing Germany's leading role within the EU will become more difficult. Finding a new internal balance will become a key task for the remaining countries. How Germany and France organize their cooperation and how they manage to keep Germany as the leading country of the EU, within a working system of checks and balances, will be of utmost importance for the EU's future.

In September 2015, in his first State of the European Union address to the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker complained about the lack of two fundamentals

in the EU: the lack of deeper integration and the lack of solidarity among the member states. "Our European Union is not in a good state," he said. "There is not enough Europe in this Union. And there is not enough union in this Union."

At first glance, this double deficiency seems to be the result of a lack of political will among member states and, therefore, Juncker's message is quite simple: With more political will by all member states to show solidarity and deepen European integration, the current multiple crises facing the EU can be tackled. The issue is more difficult and complex. It is not just a lack of political will, but rather the more serious fundamental problem of the current construction of the EU after the Lisbon Treaty.

Both deficiencies — the lack of deeper integration and the lack of solidarity — are the result of a historical compromise that dates

back to the Maastricht Treaty and the end of the Cold War. The decision to deepen the EU and enlarge it led to a multispeed integration with several layers, several requirements for participation, different memberships in different layers, different interests in integration and, therefore, several degrees of solidarity among the member states.

Differentiated integration has led to differentiated solidarity among member states, putting in jeopardy the overall solidarity of the EU. The main problem for the EU, now challenged with multiple crises, seems to be how to transfer differentiated integration and solidarity into a real, working integration system. Differentiated integration and differentiated solidarity have undermined the EU's coherence and cohesion. It is important to find a new internal balance, a balance among member states and among EU institutions and member states. In other words, a new horizontal and vertical balance needs to be arranged.

The call for a security union is a well-chosen project because it brings to bear the EU's internal and external capacities and capabilities, as well as the member states'

If the EU can prove its capacity to successfully manage these security questions, European integration will gain new momentum and legitimacy. It will mean redefining the European project in the age of globalization, regionalization and renationalization.

Solidarity is important, but it is certainly not the only key to effective European policy. Reducing the discussion to one on solidarity misses the point dramatically. Indeed, solidarity matters a lot, but checks and balances and internal balancing matter, too, within the political architecture of the EU and the construction of the treaties. Differentiated integration and the shift toward differentiated solidarity are important and very ambiguous developments.

A kind of solidarity in parts has emerged, and it has the inherent potential to spoil the entire EU project by eroding its common values and interests. The EU is not an international organization relying mainly on solidarity or, in other words, on consensus. It is a supranational political system that has purposely tamed the national aspirations of its member states. The EU is designed to tame nationalism and unilateralism by

a common method. A certain degree of solidarity is required, because national interest as such (whatever it means and whoever defines it) is not producing European solutions. Solidarity is fundamental for the EU, and differentiated solidarity is a reality for the time being.

Solidarity is a basic EU principle, as are checks and balances and internal balancing. When we understand the nexus of these principles, the EU will survive and grow despite the current storm of crises, and nationalist and populist attacks. That's the true meaning of Jean-Claude Juncker's call for more union and more Europe in the European Union. The EU is too important for peace, security, democracy, freedom and prosperity in Europe and

beyond to let it fall apart due to simplified perspectives. Differentiated solidarity can lead to more Europe and more union if we understand its limits and its underlying tenets.

The creation of a security union has the potential to take differentiated integration and differentiated solidarity into account, opening a new dynamic for more unity and more Europe — in the end, not a bad prospect for European security after Brexit. □



Belgian Army special forces deploy during the Black Blade exercise involving several European Union countries and organized by the European Defence Agency at Florennes Air Base, Belgium, in November 2016.

particular roles. It doesn't matter whether it starts as an avant-garde project outside the EU's legal framework, or if it evolves into "Security Schengen," a project of permanent, structured cooperation within the legal framework, or if it becomes a comprehensive approach that covers the external and internal dimensions of security. What matters is that it creates a new dynamic and that it stimulates a positive discussion within the EU and within its member states.