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## Part I: **Contextualising the EU and crises**



Mechthild Roos & Daniel Schade

# 1 Introduction: The EU under strain

**Abstract:** Policy-making in the European Union has been shaped – if not dominated – by a wide variety of different types of crises in recent years. Accordingly, much political activity by the EU and related actors has had a certain urgency, occurred under intense economic and societal strain, and required responses in policy areas where the EU traditionally only holds fragmented competencies. Shifting priorities, short-term policy responses, and adapted implementation schedules showcase that EU governance now most often occurs in reaction to unforeseen events, rather than following mid- to long-term planning as originally foreseen by its foundational actors and the underlying institutional set-up in calmer times. Building on a concise overview of some of the most impactful recent crises from an EU perspective, this introductory chapter provides a conceptual framework for the analysis of European crisis governance. While the chapter catalogues and categorizes a variety of different crises, it conceptualises crisis governance not as an exception to the regular functioning of the EU's political system, but instead as a regular feature of how the EU works nowadays. In so doing, it offers a conceptual basis for the following chapters of this volume, as well as for further empirical studies on the impact of crises on EU policies and politics more generally. Following these considerations, the chapter outlines and explains the volume's structure which considers (1) crises related to the legal and democratic foundations of the EU; (2) the EU's role and behaviour as an international actor in a changing world; and (3) the origins and impacts of crises in various EU policy areas.

## Setting the scene: Crisis as the new normal in the EU?

When EU member states signed the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007, they did not anticipate the manifold crises that would ensue over the course of the following years. Instead of the intended consolidation of a Union which had just gone through its biggest round of enlargements, the EU faced the financial and economic crises of 2007–2008, the European debt crisis of the early 2010s, the Arab Spring and ensuing

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instability in the EU's wider neighbourhood, Russia's annexation of Crimea and subsequently rising tensions in the EU's Eastern neighbourhood, the Brexit referendum of 2016 and its aftermath, the so-called 'migration crisis' of 2015–17, strained transatlantic relations under US President Donald Trump, the global repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan, as well as internal threats to the EU's fundamental principles, values and legal order, and most recently Russia's re-invasion of and war in Ukraine, to name only some of the most impactful events. Beyond these, a number of more long-term and slowly evolving developments, such as the ever-increasing impact of the climate emergency, as well as the intensification of the EU's so-called rule of law crisis have further put the EU's system and its internal cohesion under strain.

These events and developments have pushed EU policy-making in many areas into a permanent mode of crisis management. In this context, political and institutional actors often had to prioritise one crisis over another and weigh the urgencies of (re)action against each other. They felt pressured to acknowledge rising tensions and increasing levels of politicization in more and more emotionally charged public, economic, and political debates when making decisions on short- as well as long-term policies. These tensions and the ensuing politicization often developed alongside, or were shaped by, the rise of 'Eurosceptic' political positions at the national level, which have increased sharply since the 1990s (Down & Wilson 2008).

Accordingly, policy-making in the EU has been shaped – if not dominated – by the above-mentioned wide variety of endogenous and exogenous crises in recent years, both in areas with well-established EU competences and in areas for which the treaties provide only fragmentary, if any, EU involvement, yet in which calls for a unified European response arose under the impression of events unforeseen by any treaty or piece of legislation. As a consequence, European integration has evolved in different ways and speeds within different policy areas, as a growing corpus of literature on EU crisis response and on differentiated integration in the EU shows (see also Chapter 4 by Leruth). In a similar vein, different actors' involvement in European policy-making and resulting power balances have changed frequently, but not necessarily in a lasting manner, or in a way that is synchronized across policy areas over the course of the last years.

It is precisely these various dynamics that this volume seeks to examine, contextualise, and conceptualise. In so doing, it aims to provide a research guide that will help develop a deeper understanding of EU policy-making under the impression of (poly)crisis both in the past and future, as current and ongoing global developments and scientific predictions give little reason to expect smoother, less crisis-informed sailing in European politics for years to come. To this end, this introductory chapter offers a conceptual toolkit for further research on EU policy-making under strain.

Most of the strain arising out of the various crises identified above not only affects the EU system in and of itself but also has repercussions at the national level below and for the international community above the EU's political system. Nonetheless, to provide a clearer focus, this chapter and ultimately this edited volume place the EU level at the core of analysis. While there are important interactions between EU-level politics and policy and those at other levels, and such interactions are indeed considered throughout the volume, the actual relevance of EU politics and the interconnectedness of its crisis governance across different types of strain can arguably be best explored when focusing on the EU system as its own level of analysis.

The remainder of this introductory chapter is structured as follows: Building on a discussion of key terms and concepts, the central section of the chapter develops a conceptual framework for the analysis of European crisis governance, both for the following chapters of this volume and for empirical studies on the impact of crises on EU policies and politics more generally. Following these considerations, a section elaborates on how the contributions to the volume are embedded in and add to this framework, and explains their grouping in three topical parts – on the legal and democratic fundamentals of the EU (1), the EU's role and behaviour as an international actor in a changing world (2), and the impact of select crises on specific European policy areas (3) – and provides an overview of the themes and developments covered by the individual contributions.

## Conceptualising crisis and European-level responses

Crises have often been framed as fundamental challenges to European integration, questioning not merely the EU's ability to thrive but to survive in the face of unexpected events and developments with far-reaching political, economic and social repercussions (for a state-of-the art discussion of the literature on EU crises see Riddervold et al. 2021b; also Davis Cross 2017). Yet, this black-and-white framing of crisis as a fundamental challenge to European integration has arguably prevented scholars from developing a more fine-grained conceptualisation of crisis phenomena and their impact on EU politics and policies.

Davis Cross (2017, 24; emphasis in the original) undertakes a fundamental step in this direction by distinguishing “crisis and *existential crisis*”, with the former being a state of affairs “constructed through negative and heightened characterizations of events involving conflict”, and the latter being understood (in the context of EU crises) as “marked by widespread belief that the EU's very existence and/or

core characteristics are seriously under threat". Yet, even this dichotomous distinction does not go far enough, as it does not allow us to capture other relevant properties of crises, such as their origin or how the EU's political system has reacted to them. The EU has – by now – demonstrated a convincing level of stamina in overcoming, or at least muddling through, the multitude of crises it has faced since its creation. Resulting European crisis responses have often been identified in the recent literature as a 'failing forward' of European integration (see e.g. Jones et al. 2021), where a lacklustre initial crisis response leads to further crises evoking a similar response, thus moving European integration forward if on an imperfect basis.

In light of the ever-changing, but arguably never entirely abating crisis context within which EU politics take place, we argue that it is time to consider crises as a feature rather than a bug of European integration. After all, "the EU has reached a stage in its development where it has sufficiently consolidated to adapt to and cope with multiple and simultaneous crisis situations" (Riddervold et al. 2021b, 6). The 'new normal' that the latter has come to signify comes not least with the EU's widening and deepening: the larger its competences and the wider its geographical extent, the more possibilities are there for crises to directly affect European politics. With this in mind, it is particularly important, from a European studies perspective, to move beyond a perspective that sees the presence or absence of crises as binary variables, and to develop conceptual approaches allowing one to systematically grasp different kinds of crises, their life cycle and impact on European policies and politics. It is based on this that we develop a conceptual framework that allows for a more systematic understanding of triggers, processes, sequences, and consequences of crises at the EU level.

To this end, what is first required is a definition of the term 'crisis' itself. In very general terms, crisis can be understood as "a (radical) rupture in the status quo" (Barthoma & Çetrez 2021, 6), including even the mere intensification of likelihood, i.e., the palpable threat of such a rupture. Namely, as its most crucial characteristic, crisis constitutes a juncture calling into question an established order, be it institutional, political, economic, societal, normative, or other; in a manner that is unexpected by its contemporaries. Even if actors expect similar kinds of crises to happen at some point in the future (if, for instance, economists predict a stock market crash to take place again at some point, or if political pundits express worries about the likelihood of major societal unrest), an inherent element of crisis is the unpredictability of its occurrence, of its precise extent, as well as of its repercussions. Moreover, a crisis is defined as requiring a response to the uncertainties it has raised. While this typically raises the need for concerned actors to alter course under time pressure (Davis Cross 2017, 23; Riddervold et al. 2021a, 7), both

the immediate urgency of a crisis and the extent of a required response may vary as the following sections outline.

Beyond its inherent characteristics, a crisis is also ultimately defined by it being *framed and understood* as such by involved actors, the media, and not least the public, for it to qualify as a genuine crisis rather than a mere additional challenge on regular political agendas. It is this dimension related to a crisis needing to be understood as such, which can explain “why various events on the road to EU integration have built up into crises while others have not” (Davis Cross 2017, 30). Indeed, the construction, framing and reading of certain developments as a crisis is something that merits much more enquiry in its own right. A number of chapters in this volume discuss examples where actors’ perception of certain instances of strain influenced their respective crisis responses – among them Mos (Chapter 13) on EU member states’ differing responses to violations of minority rights, Bousiou & Schleyer (Chapter 11; see also Simon 2022) on the effects of the securitization of forced migration and of different understandings of/references to solidarity during the ‘migration crisis’, and Schimmelfennig (Chapter 2) on the relevance of actors’ varying crisis management preferences. It should be noted, however, that the selection of crises addressed in the chapters of this volume is largely limited to developments affecting the EU which have generally been accepted and described as crisis by policy-makers and researchers alike.

Going beyond the identification of such basic crisis characteristics as addressed above, politicians and researchers have in recent years taken the concept of crisis to a somewhat more complex level when trying to assess the multi-layered and multi-issue nature of crises facing the EU. Here, the total of challenges that the EU has been confronted with since the sovereign debt crisis of the late 2000s has frequently been referred to as polycrisis. This term was prominently introduced by then-European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker in a public speech (2016) and then found its way into academic discourse. While the term originally referred “to the confluence of multiple, mutually reinforcing challenges facing the EU” (Zeitlin et al. 2019, 973, footnote 1), today it seeks to capture and conceptualise the fact that “several simultaneous crises are now affecting multiple policy domains and fracturing the cohesion of the Union’s member states across new and changing cleavages” (Zeitlin et al. 2019, 963).

These cleavages emerge and deepen not least as an inherent characteristic of the EU’s confederal nature: the different crises which together form the larger picture of polycrisis tend to affect different member states in distinct ways and to different degrees. Examples for such janus-faced crises abound, with the sovereign debt crisis, the so-called migration crisis and the EU’s rule of law crisis affecting all EU members in some manner, yet leaving a mark on individual EU member states, institutions, and policy areas, and thus public perception across the

union, in different ways.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the many crises Europe has faced, however, it soon became evident that there are some patterns in how individual crises affect different member states and various parts of the EU's political system. Depending on the crisis at hand, divisions could be seen unfolding for instance on a roughly North-South dimension in the EU regarding fiscal policy, or a cleavage between Western European and Central European member states over the issue of migration (Zeitlin et al. 2019, 963–64). These divisions, particularly in the context of the Eurozone crisis, have also been somewhat problematically labelled as a core-periphery divide in academic analysis (Magone et al. 2016) and political discourse alike (Ervedosa 2017), thus speaking to the EU fragmentation potential inherent to these crises.

Such varying degrees of affectedness, in turn, impact coalition-building, relations between individual member states and EU institutions, and dynamics of differentiated integration (the varying participation in EU policies of different groups of member states) which evolve ever further among member states (see the Chapter 4 by Leruth). To understand such dynamics and evolving patterns of relations, the different sub-strands of the EU's polycrisis ultimately need to be disentangled and understood, both in their individual roots, scopes, and consequences as well as their interconnectedness. Through the crisis typology developed in the following, as well as in its individual contributions, this volume seeks to contribute to this process of disentanglement and understanding.

## A typology of crises

While we consider crises as a regular feature of today's EU governance, lumping different *kinds* of crises together to be able to invoke their collective relevance for today's EU would be analytically harmful. Thus, it is necessary to categorize crises to better comprehend how they affect the EU and its underlying political system, or how they may even be caused by it. So as to trace similarities and differences in their roots, sequence, and consequences, our typology considers different crisis parameters, with notable attributes being crisis origin, temporality, perception, delineation, as well as impact. Each of these different foci allows us to indi-

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1 See e.g. the contributions to the special issue 'The Effects of the Eurozone Sovereign Debt Crisis' (discussed in the special issue editorial by Schweiger & Magone 2014), and also several chapters in this volume, e.g. Bousiou & Schleyer on different countries' affectedness in the context of the 'migration crisis', and Mos on the varying effects of strain in the areas of diversity and minority rights and the rule of law as part of the EU's larger 'values crisis'.



vidually specify different crisis types, as is necessary for a more complex exploration of their relevance in and beyond the EU's political system.

## Crisis origin

The first distinction to be made relates to whether a crisis is constituted through an *exogenous* development that then affects the EU indirectly or directly, or is *endogenous* to the EU and its political system. In adopting this distinction, we argue that crises do not always have to be some exogenous “property” or “chain of events” that “hit [the EU's] institutions, politics, and policies” (Riddervold et al. 2021a, 8), but can equally be produced within the institutional, economic and societal system(s) of the Union and its member states. Among the clearest examples of such endogenous crises are Brexit, and the EU's internal rule-of-law crisis (see Chapter 9 by Usherwood and Chapter 5 by Bogdanowicz). Endogenous crises are not an exclusively recent phenomenon but can be found throughout the history of the EU and its predecessors. Indeed, it could be argued that in the history of the EU endogenous states of “[c]risis arose whenever the Member States resisted (further) transfer of political authority to the EU level or opposed EU interference into their domestic affairs even though joint action at the EU level appeared to be clearly needed” (Börzel 2016: 10). Schimmelfennig (Chapter 2) specifies the delimitation of exogenous vs. endogenous crisis origins even further by distinguishing *policy failures* – as result of exogenous shocks, the impact of which exposes deficiencies of existing EU policies – from *polity attacks* as endogenous events which originate from Eurosceptic actors within the EU political system, who seek to undermine EU core institutions and constitutional principles.

Overall, however, it is not always possible to clearly distinguish exogenous from endogenous crises. Some crises may originate outside of the EU's political system and their effects may then trigger an internal crisis for the EU. In the recent past, this was notably the case for the Great Recession which began in the United States towards the end of 2007 and ended on a global scale by the end of the decade. This originally exogenous crisis – albeit facilitated by structural characteristics of the Eurozone – then caused the interlinked yet separate (endogenous) Eurozone crisis which began in 2009 and from which the EU still has not fully recovered.

Additionally, some EU crises may have their roots in exogenous phenomena which may not have qualified as a crisis originally in and of themselves. While independently these phenomena may only cause some political strain, or indeed contain merely the potential for bringing a system under strain, they may transform into an endogenous crisis within the EU's political system based on the latter's

structure and functioning, or because of a specific context in which they coincide with other, strain-reinforcing events and developments. For instance, European actors may come to perceive events or developments outside the EU as questioning its fundamental values, thus risking contagion in intra-EU processes, even though these same events and developments may not trigger or constitute a crisis in and of themselves in their place of origin. In turn, endogenously created crises – such as Brexit – may not remain purely endogenous phenomena, but can have impacts beyond EU politics and policies, such as for the EU's relations with third countries, or indeed larger shifts of power on the global political stage and in international markets, such as engendered by the EU's loss of influence as a result of Brexit, e.g. manifested in its loss of a permanent seat at the table of the UN Security Council.

Similarly, certain aspects of EU political strain, which may not amount to an endogenous EU crisis in and of itself, may cause crises outside of the EU's own political system. For instance, while the question of rapid EU enlargement to the Western Balkans has caused some political strain amongst EU member states, the delay to further EU enlargement caused by this has led to various government crises in countries such as North Macedonia which hope to join the EU (see Chapter 8 by Keil & Stahl).

In short, examining and disentangling the origins of crises can help in understanding – and possibly even anticipating, as regards ongoing developments – their scope, evolution, and multidimensional impact. At the same time, any scholar conducting research in this wider area always needs to be aware that even careful analysis cannot always neatly disentangle crises as endogenous or exogenous in origin. Beyond the above-mentioned dynamics of – often enough unpredictable – interconnections, actors within the EU political system may seek to alleviate the effects, or even the mere visibility, of one crisis by (over)emphasising the need of reacting to another. In such instances, actors may, for instance, purposefully single out an exogenous crisis in their pursuit of overcoming an endogenous one. An example for such behaviour is discussed in Michael H. Smith's contribution to this volume (Chapter 7), namely the strengthening of the EU's powers in the area of external action and diplomacy as 'antidote' to internal tension regarding the possible redesign of the EU's and its actors' shifting balance of competences.

## Temporality and prominence of crisis

When it comes to the temporality of crises, several distinct categorizations related to the factor of time can be made. Firstly, some crises are *long-lasting*, whereas others can be very *short* in nature, either due to a solution being found or their origin

disappearing at one point in time. An exemplary area for long-lasting crises are the ever-on-going power struggles between supranational and (inter)governmental actors at the EU level, with the former typically seeking to extend the respective institutions' remit of competence, and the latter pursuing the preservation of their decision-making power. This question of the division of competencies within the EU has never been fully resolved given different readings of the EU's treaties and altered demands by various actors across time. This is despite various attempts by both sides to address these issues, such as through the 1966 Luxembourg compromise which enshrined national veto rights to Community decision-making, or later on phase-in periods to enable further majority voting. The type of short-lived crisis is exemplified by the Presidency of Donald Trump in the United States, which led to a significant rift in transatlantic relations, but which mostly disappeared – at least temporarily – with the election of Joe Biden in 2020 (see Chapter 10 by Schade).

A related yet not entirely similar categorisation of crises can also be found in the literature on EU crisis governance. Schmidt (Schmidt 2020, 1177; emphasis added), for instance, makes a distinction between “Europe’s *fast-burning crises*” starting “with the sovereign debt crisis in 2010, continued with the migration crisis that exploded in 2015, and followed with the British vote to exit the EU in 2016”, and its “*slow-burning crises*” such as “the on-going security crisis, the simmering climate crisis, and the steady rise of populist anti-system parties which challenged the existence of the euro, the EU, and the tenets of liberal democracy and the rule of law in the EU and its member-states”.

The distinction between these two types of crises lies not only in the pace at which a response is required, with crisis developments unfolding rapidly for fast-burning crises and requiring immediate attention, whereas reacting to slow-burning crises has the potential to be more gradual and thought-out, but also whether these are – portrayed and perceived as – *dominant* or *latent* in the EU's political system. For instance, while issues such as the Covid-19 pandemic or Russia's re-invasion of Ukraine have dominated the EU's political system, the climate crisis has until recently rarely been the focal point of the EU's entire political activity (see chapter 14 by Rosamond). Dominant crises tend to be of a fast-burning nature (e.g. Brexit, especially in its initial phase; the sovereign debt crisis; and Russia's re-invasion of Ukraine), and latent crises of a slow-burning nature (e.g. the EU's diversity and minority rights crisis, see chapter 13 by Mos). However, the chapters in this volume also shed light on cases of dominant yet mostly slow-burning crises (e.g. the rule of law crisis) and latent yet – at times, at least – fast-burning crises (e.g. the EU's political representation crisis, especially around European elections; see Chapter 6 by Kinski).

Importantly, most EU crises do not constantly unfold as fast- or slow-burning crises, or indeed dominant or latent crises. Carstensen & Schmidt (2018, 611; emphasis added) “differentiate between fast- and slow-burning *phases*” of crises, with the former “requir[ing] quick responses from actors in a position to decide”, and the latter “allowing more time for reflection on optimal solutions”. Similarly, while a particular crisis can dominate the EU’s political system, it can transform into a latent one when a temporary workaround is found, or when another crisis begins to dominate the EU’s political system, as happened in February of 2022 when Russia’s re-invasion of Ukraine made the EU’s Covid-19 recovery discussions take a back seat, despite the pandemic’s ongoing impact on member states’ economies and healthcare systems.

Similarly, some slow-burning latent crises in the EU, such as constant tensions over institutional competencies and inter-institutional relations which can be traced back to the 1950s, occasionally see fast-burning phases in which they dominate the EU’s political activity. In the case of conflictual institutional relations, occasions such as the 2014 and 2019 European Parliament elections have temporarily brought these to the fore given the European Parliament’s insistence on establishing the so-called *Spitzenkandidaten* procedure for the election of the European Commission President, with the European Council attempting to circumvent such efforts (Heidbreder & Schade 2020). Overall, crises can thus combine various of these temporal aspects, and even move between types over time.

## Scope and nature of crisis effects

As already demonstrated through the distinction of dominant vs. latent crises, it is helpful analytically to examine not only the origins and duration but also the situatedness and effects of different types of crises within a political system. This helps in better grasping their (potential) impact on the system, understanding their inherent characteristics as compared to other crises, and thus contextualising their appearance, evolution, and possible disappearance. In this vein, it is conducive also to delineate what is affected by individual crises. Here, one can distinguish between crises that are *isolated* in nature, being of relevance only for individual EU policy areas or institutions, and *all-encompassing* crises that affect a whole host of areas of EU activity, or indeed the EU’s entire political system.

While examples for the latter kind abound, such as how Brexit affected not only almost every single EU policy but also led to concerns about the EU’s future composition (see Chapter 9 by Usherwood), those for the former are increasingly hard to find as the contributions to this volume show. One historical example of an isolated crisis would be the corruption scandal in the Santer Commission in the

late 1990s, which led to the collective resignation of the College of Commissioners, and thereby threatened the credibility of this particular institution, yet which did not have a long-lasting effect on EU policy-making or the EU's political system in a broader sense. Instead, this crisis merely acted as a temporary highlight in the still ongoing contestation and underlying strain related to inter-institutional relations (Ringe 2005; Spence 2000).

At the same time, many crises may neither fully qualify as isolated nor all-encompassing. This is not only a characteristic of factors such as crisis origin and temporality explored above but also ultimately mitigated by the internal structure of the EU. Given the EU's current differentiated set-up (as discussed in Chapter 4 by Leruth), with not all EU member states participating in all EU policies and some non-EU countries partaking in individual EU policy areas, it may thus be important to consider whether a crisis is *differentiated* in nature or not. Here, the sovereign debt crisis can serve as an example in which only those EU members which had adopted the Euro as their currency and those EU institutions and bodies linked to Eurozone governance were directly affected.

Moreover, much like crises can move from being dominant to being latent in nature, their delineation can also change. For instance, while the so-called migration crisis of 2015 initially unfolded within the scope of the EU's asylum policy, it would soon affect related policy areas, such as the governance of the Schengen area, relations to key third countries such as Turkey, and the EU's development policy. Furthermore, the impact of the crisis on Schengen can be considered a prime example of the potential *spillover effect* of crises: a crisis that originally affected only one part of EU activity or of the EU's political system may subsequently begin to have effects on others (Niemann & Speyer 2018). Given the set-up of the Schengen area, in the case of the so-called migration crisis this also turned the crisis from one affecting the EU collectively to one that was differentiated in nature, and where a crisis related to a largely intergovernmental area of EU activity, namely migration policy, then hindered the effective governance of a more supranationally integrated area of EU activity, namely Schengen.

Beyond the *extents* of crises' impact, we can also consider *how* distinct crises have affected the EU's political system. Specifically, crises may show distinct characteristics as regards the broad type of impact and effect that they have on the EU, in that they *disrupt* existing EU activity in a particular area, and thus add strain to or intensify existing tensions in the EU's political system. Alternatively, crises may ultimately have a *shaping* effect on policies and/or politics, thus opening up new avenues for European-level cooperation, whether organized or more ad-hoc in nature. Much like how crises can move from slow-burning to fast-burning phases, so can a crisis originally have a principally disrupting effect, before later on setting the foundations for shaping EU policies or the EU's political system further. This

links closely to different types of crisis responses which are discussed and distinguished in the following subsection.

To illustrate the distinction between a disrupting and a shaping crisis with an example, one can use the phase of European integration of the 1970s which was determined by multiple economic and financial shocks, and has been characterised as a period of ‘Eurosclerosis’. At the time, this phase of interlinked crises was principally disrupting in nature, as many attempts to progress on European integration were stalled, such as in the realm of social and employment policy (Varsori & Mechi 2007). Later on, the larger and longer-term background effects then transformed this crisis into a shaping one, allowing not least to set the foundation for the establishment of the European Council, and producing momentum for the creation of the Economic and Monetary Union and European Political Cooperation, culminating thus in the later dynamisation of the European integration process from the early 1980s (Mourlon-Druol 2012). The Covid-19 pandemic constitutes a more recent example, initially causing a surge in intra-EU tensions as member states first chose swift national over common European action, leading not least to border closures and competition in the area of medicine, equipment, and vaccine procurement. Over the course of the pandemic, however, the impression of economic and social strain shared across the EU led to the evolution of previously unreachable levels of integration, not least in the areas of health and debt policy (see Chapter 12 by Kurzer, and Chapter 15 by Eisl & Tomay).

## Distinguishing between types of crisis response

Beyond characteristics in their origin, temporality, and effect on the EU’s political system, crises can also be distinguished by the type of crisis *response* that they elicit by political actors involved in the EU’s political system. Here, crises are typically expected by those studying them in the EU context to have an impact on the EU’s governance system either by furthering European integration (if constituting a shaping crisis) or weakening it (if being principally disrupting in nature), or indeed to introduce further differentiation into the EU system (Riddervold et al. 2021a, 5). In light of this apparent connection between the occurrence of crises and the character of the respective crisis responses, scholars have tried to grasp causal pathways between different types of crises, the response that they engender, and the effect that this has on European integration as a whole.

Existing research has already developed a tripartite conceptualisation of distinct kinds of EU crisis response, with crisis possibly contributing to the (at least) partial breakdown of the EU as a response (1); providing incremental progress by “muddling through” (2); or indeed by catalysing radically new solutions (3)

(Riddervold et al. 2021a, 8). While this conceptualisation of crisis response helps to provide answers as to crises' wider impact on overall European integration, akin to how grand theories of European integration try to explain the overall evolution of the EU (see Chapter 2 by Schimmelfennig), it is less helpful in trying to understand how far crisis-driven activity has become a regular feature of day-to-day activity of the EU system akin to the explorations of middle-range theories of European integration.

To better understand crises as a now regularized feature of the EU's political system, we consider two distinct modes of crisis response by the EU, namely *crisis management* and *crisis governance*. The first of these two concepts, crisis management, describes a type of crisis response that sees EU actors react to an ongoing crisis on a largely confined and ad-hoc basis which arises out of the immediate need to urgently answer developments caused by the crisis. However, this type of response does not see the EU deliberately develop or adapt its toolkit to be able to respond more systematically to the next potential phase of said crises, or to similar crises moving forward.

In contrast to this, crisis governance sees the EU act in a more structured manner, with equal consideration being given to resolve the crisis at hand, all while equipping the EU with the necessary tools to also act in a more structured manner going forward. While crisis governance can occur immediately after the onset of a crisis, it may also happen later on, after initially attempting to contain a crisis through crisis management. For instance, while the EU's reaction to the sovereign debt crisis was initially shaped by crisis management, thus trying to deal with the immediate fallout of the crisis, later reforms to areas such as EU economic and fiscal policy and banking supervision have equipped EU actors with a new governance toolkit allowing a (theoretically) more systematic response to the issues which were at the core of the initial crisis (Haas et al. 2020; Howarth & Quaglia 2020).

Rather than adopting a course of either crisis management or governance, individual EU actors may of course also choose not to act at all upon a crisis at hand – that is, to adopt a course of *crisis ignorance*. This may happen in particular when every possible response to the crisis at hand would be more uncomfortable to the respective actor, would come with higher costs, and be (perceived as) going more against their interests, than not acting at all. Whilst this form of crisis (non-)response can hardly be found across the board of all European actors (at least some – even if powerless – agencies or individual members of EU institutions typically speak up and call for a more proactive response), the contributions to this volume trace a number of examples, for instance in the cases of the EU's political representation crisis (Kinski in Chapter 6), rule of law crisis (Bogdanowicz in Chapter 5), or migration (administration) crisis (Bousiou & Schleyer in Chapter 11). Just



like crisis management and governance, ignorance may be only one stage of EU actors' overall crisis response, potentially being replaced at a later stage by either crisis management or governance measures.

In addition to these crisis response options, it would also be possible to consider a further category in which the EU would not react to or *act upon* a crisis, but instead, take action through *crisis prevention*. Such preventive action might take shape through anticipation of a possible crisis based on previous experience in another policy field, which has been affected by crisis or elevated strain in the past, causing a response at the EU level either in the form of crisis management or crisis governance. Considering the potential for a similar/comparable crisis in another policy field, EU actors may then adopt preventative action even though the respective area has not yet experienced a phase of crisis, e.g. by providing for accelerated decision-making procedures, or by outlining a detailed plan of action for the case that a swift response to the anticipated crisis is required. Such preventative action might even take the shape of treaty reform, allowing for instance for faster, more efficient, or also (more) differentiated policy-making wherever needed.

While individual institutions have attempted to enable crisis prevention in individual areas, such as the European Commission in the field of migration (Simon 2022: 6–9), we have been unable to find examples of the EU collectively having decided to provide itself with a toolkit to prevent a potential future crisis from unfolding. Instead, all crisis-related governance changes have ultimately been introduced as a prevention mechanism to avoid similar crises from happening again in the future. This can be exemplified in the now established frameworks allowing the EU to negotiate the withdrawal of a member state from the union, as triggered by Brexit (see Usherwood in Chapter 9), or the set-up of the so-called Temporary Protection Directive which was not established to pre-empt the kind of migration crisis caused by Russia's reinvasion of Ukraine, but instead as a reaction to the migration crisis triggered by the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the associated conflicts (see Bousiou & Schleyer in Chapter 11).

Whether the EU reacts or acts in response to a crisis through crisis management or crisis governance depends mainly on how affected actors perceive the crisis and the existing EU tools, where they see the need for action, as well as what public, economic and political repercussions they expect (see Hadj Abdou & Pettrachin 2022; Pettrachin 2021 for examples related to the EU's so-called migration crisis). Crucially, even where parts of a majority of the EU's political system may see the need for the introduction of tools allowing for crisis governance, instead of crisis management, this may ultimately be prevented by the lack of support on the matter from member states or institutions with the power to stall or even block related processes.



For the most part, crisis governance should be easiest for a crisis affecting the EU in areas where a strong degree of supranational integration has occurred, reducing the effect that (limited) diverging views and perceptions by individual actors on a crisis can have on the strength of the EU's crisis response. Conversely, crisis management is likely bound to occur most for those crises which unfold in policy areas principally outside of the core competencies of the EU, where the EU's continued intergovernmental nature requires a unanimous position to establish the necessary toolkits. If such a united position cannot be achieved, then the EU's response to a crisis will – at least initially – resemble a muddling-through reaction, with only those steps taken that everyone deems necessary, leading the EU's crisis response to reflect the position of the actor least keen for the EU to (re)act on the crisis collectively. It is also this underlying tension that can see crisis governance move to the realm of differentiated integration, or indeed partly or entirely outside of the scope of the EU's institutions, as is the case to some extent for the EU's sovereign debt crisis, in the European-level reaction to which the International Monetary Fund, alongside some national governments, the Commission and the European Central Bank, took centre stage in the pursuit of leading the EU and its member states out of the crisis (Véron 2016).

Both crisis management and governance have in recent years been shaped by a certain degree of *learning*. As the number and variety of crises grow which the EU and its member states have faced, so does intra- and interinstitutional, political as well as procedural experience in dealing with situations of elevated strain and urgent need for (re)action. Such experience may then be – and has over the past repeatedly shown to be – transformed into crisis responses resembling reactions to previous crises. Indeed, such learning processes and resulting similarities in crisis response strategies have proven to take shape not just between crises of similar origins, or affecting the same areas of EU policy-making, but also between very different types of crises and affected areas. A range of examples is addressed in the contributions to this volume, such as common debt schemes developed as an answer to the Eurozone crisis and then once again in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic (Eisl & Tomay in Chapter 15); the incorporation of climate objectives in economic recovery schemes within the crisis contexts of the Covid-19 pandemic and thereafter also of Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Rosamond in Chapter 14); and the idea first of a European Confederation (in the wake of the fall of the Iron Curtain) and then, more recently, of a European Political Community (under the impression of Russia's invasion of Ukraine) as institutionalised fora of cooperation between EU/European Community member states on the one hand and (mostly) Central and Eastern European countries (largely) with the ultimate aim to join the Union/Community on the other (Chapter 4 by Leruth, and Chapter 8 by Keil & Stahl).

Not least via such learning processes, which through repetition, adaptation and refinement may result in the institutionalisation of crisis response measures, crisis governance can contribute to the *formal* and permanent evolution of the EU's institutional superstructure where existing mechanisms and formats have proven unable to guide a sufficient EU crisis response. Yet, important hurdles to altering the EU's institutional superstructure through treaty reform exist. Here, only some smaller integration steps can be made by groups of willing member states as so-called enhanced cooperation, thus furthering the differentiated nature of European integration. Given the difficulty of such formal changes, crisis response thus typically occurs as more *informal* steps where this is deemed necessary or inductive. The type of crisis response is then also determined by whether it leads to further *intergovernmental* cooperation amongst the EU's member states, or whether this provides the opportunity for further *supranational* integration steps.

Typically, one would expect formal supranational integration steps to be a rather long-term effect of EU crises, following the pace of EU treaty reform. Informal steps can, however, also occur on a much more rapid basis. For instance, while health policy is an area of activity framed by very limited EU competencies, the Covid-19 pandemic has nonetheless contributed to the EU becoming a much more active player in this regard (see Chapter 12 by Kurzer). It also constitutes an example of a crisis where some further informal supranational cooperation has occurred amidst difficulties to formalise EU powers in the primarily concerned area.

Even where supranationalisation is not the aim, and where the crisis response has technically remained intergovernmental in nature, can a crisis set a precedent contributing to the shape of the EU's overall development going forward. For instance, the EU's Next Generation EU instrument as part of its Covid-19 response under which collective debt has been issued, was notionally described as a one-off process – not least to get sceptical governments to support it, against previously held opposition to common debt issuance. At the same time, this development has already served as a precedent in discussions surrounding the EU's energy crisis following Russia's reinvasion of Ukraine (see prominently Breton & Gentiloni 2022).

Lastly, it is important to point out that a crisis *response* need not necessarily be limited or genuinely linked to the respective crisis at hand. Instead, the prevalence of various crises can also serve for so-called *crisis-washing* in which a particular crisis is used to justify and legitimize EU activity in areas that have no genuine linkage to the crisis at hand. This may then allow political actors to take political decisions which would have been deemed inconceivable otherwise. One example is how the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic has led to an instance of 'Covid-washing' thus aggravating the EU's rule of law crisis. Here, the governments of both Poland

and Hungary instrumentalised the state of crisis caused by the pandemic to adopt an emergency governance modus and vastly rule by decree and with significantly limited parliamentary oversight, thus justifying a significant reduction of civil liberties as means to combat the pandemic (Drinóczi & Bień-Kacała 2020). When considering the closely connected concept of securitization, that is, the justification of policy action by actual or constructed security threats, similar developments could also be observed for the EU's migration policy (see Chapter 11 by Bousiou & Schleyer).

## EU crises across this volume

The individual chapters in this edited volume help explore the type, prevalence, and impact of different types of crises across various aspects of EU activity. Whilst the introductory part seeks to provide a conceptual and theoretical framework for the study of the interconnections of EU governance and crisis, the following three thematic parts of this volume contain a wide range of case studies of specific crises which currently shape EU policies and politics, and often enough also have the potential to impact the EU polity as a whole. In the chapter following this introduction, Schimmelfennig develops a novel conceptualisation approach offering a key to distinguish the ways in which different types of crises may predominantly affect either EU policies, or the union's core institutions and principles. Based also on a critical discussion of the grand theories of European integration's explanatory power when it comes to the study of crises in a European context, Schimmelfennig thus provides a valuable theoretical toolkit for further research in the larger thematic area of this volume.

Part II, which opens the triad of thematically structured case studies on European crisis responses, is principally concerned with crises affecting the foundations of EU integration. Here, Desmond Dinan outlines the difficulties underlying EU treaty change, thus affecting the EU governance system at large. Benjamin Leruth considers in his chapter how another core feature of EU integration, namely differentiation, has been the product of EU crises and can potentially contribute to their resolution going forward. The remaining two chapters of this section are then concerned with the EU's core values and its democratic foundation. Piotr Bogdanowicz elaborates on the EU's increasing difficulties to uphold the rule of law across the union. Lucy Kinski takes a different perspective and focuses on the EU's continuing difficulty to ensure citizen representation.

Part III of the volume then explores the EU's perspective on and role in strain and crises with a global dimension. The chapter by Michael H. Smith provides a broad overview of the evolution of the EU's standing in the wider world, including

how this is determined by developments affecting the EU internally. Two chapters then focus on the EU's neighbourhood, with Simon Usherwood considering processes of disintegration and the shrinking of the EU through Brexit, while Sören Keil and Bernhard Stahl discuss the roots and effects of the EU's stalled enlargement policy. The remaining chapter of this part considers strain in the EU's international affairs beyond the immediate neighbourhood, as Daniel Schade outlines the parallel presence of different kinds of strain in the transatlantic relationship between the United States and the EU, which is shaped by international issues within and beyond the transatlantic sphere, and also by the relations of both with select third countries, such as – recently and increasingly – China.

The last part of the volume sheds light on key areas of EU activity that have been affected by crises over the course of the last decade. Here, Alexandra Bousiou and Linnea Schleyer consider the wider effects of the so-called migration crisis of 2015 within the fields of asylum policy, border control management, and beyond. Paulette Kurzer then discusses EU health policy amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, and thus another area of EU activity shaped and affected by a major crisis in recent years. As a contrasting case study to such fast-burning and dominant crises, Martijn Mos' analysis of minority rights across the union provides an example of a latent crisis for the EU, yet one which affects the very foundations of its societies and fundamental value system. Thereafter, Jeffrey Rosamond sheds light on the EU's response to the climate emergency, and how this slow-burning crisis links up with other recent EU crises. Focusing on EU finance and debt policy, Andreas Eisl and Mattia Tomay lastly consider an area of EU activity that gained particular relevance in the aftermath of the Eurozone crisis, and which has again been shaped in important ways by a crisis in recent years, namely by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In their variety of crisis roots and origins, affected policy areas and institutions, consequences and responses, the different examples of strain studied in the contributions to this volume provide examples for almost all of the types of crisis characteristics conceptualised in this introductory chapter. Table 1.1 provides an overview of the types of crises' origins, temporality, prominence, effects, and response mechanisms covered in the following chapters.

Many of the crises mentioned in Table 1.1 are addressed in several chapters (see the volume's index for a comprehensive list of respective mentions). However, to keep the table as clear and concise as possible, it lists only those contributions which put a primary focus on the respective crises. In the same vein, the table does not contain the categories crisis learning, formal & informal responses, and supranational & intergovernmental responses: considering that such crisis response processes appear(ed) in all crises covered, virtually all chapters would need to be listed under each of the categories, which would be detrimental to the table's clarity and comprehensibility. The table also leaves out the categories crisis preven-

tion, given that no occurrence could be identified, as discussed above, and crisis-washing, since no case thereof is addressed in any of the contributions to this volume.

While all of these chapters vary in the crises that they consider, as well as the overall focus that these bring to the discussion, they nonetheless contribute to a broader discussion on the interrelations of crises and the EU present throughout this volume, and speak to one another in important ways. Overall, the volume thus serves as a map of the broad landscape of strain and crises affecting the EU. When utilizing the typology developed here it can also serve as a guide to link similar types of crises and their effects more clearly, as well as to distinguish those whose defining underlying characteristics differ substantially. Lastly, the volume illustrates that crises are (now) part and parcel of the development of the EU and cannot be considered an exception to an otherwise harmonious process of European integration.

**Table 1.1:** Crisis characteristics from the conceptual framework developed in this chapter, with examples covered in the contributions to this volume

| <b>Crisis characteristics</b>                                | <b>Examples (chapter in this volume)</b>                                                                                                                                                                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Origins</b>                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Exogenous                                                    | Climate crisis (Rosamond)<br>Covid-19 pandemic (Kurzer)<br>Global political turmoil (Smith)<br>Transatlantic relations crisis (Schade)                                                                  |
| Endogenous                                                   | Brexit (Usherwood)<br>Rule of law crisis (Bogdanowicz)<br>Crisis of political representation in the EU (Kinski)                                                                                         |
| Mix of (relatively balanced) exogenous and endogenous causes | Sovereign debt crisis (Eisl & Tomay)<br>Migration crisis (Bousiou & Schleyer)<br>Enlargement (Keil & Stahl)                                                                                             |
| <b>Temporality and prominence</b>                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Long-lasting                                                 | Climate crisis (Rosamond)<br>Crisis of political representation in the EU (Kinski)<br>Crisis to uphold diversity and minority rights in the EU (Mos)                                                    |
| Short                                                        | Covid-19 pandemic (Kurzer)<br>Migration crisis & refugee emergency following Russia's re-invasion of Ukraine (Bousiou & Schleyer)<br>Transatlantic relations crisis under the Trump presidency (Schade) |

**Table 1.1:** Crisis characteristics from the conceptual framework developed in this chapter, with examples covered in the contributions to this volume *(Continued)*

| Crisis characteristics    | Examples (chapter in this volume)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Fast-burning (dominantly) | Brexit (Usherwood; at least in its initial phase)<br>Covid-19 pandemic (Kurzer)<br>European sovereign debt crisis (Eisl & Tomay)<br>Migration crisis & refugee emergency following Russia's re-invasion of Ukraine (Bousiou & Schleyer)<br>Transatlantic relations crisis (Schade)                                                                                                                                          |
| Slow-burning (dominantly) | Climate crisis<br>Rule of law crisis (Bogdanowicz; with occasional fast-burning phases – notably when colliding with other crises such as Covid-19 and Russia's re-invasion of Ukraine)<br>Crisis to uphold diversity and minority rights in the EU (Mos)                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Dominant                  | Brexit (Usherwood; at least in its initial phase)<br>Covid-19 pandemic (Kurzer)<br>Migration crisis (Bousiou & Schleyer)<br>Russia's re-invasion of Ukraine (Smith)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Latent                    | Climate crisis (Rosamond)<br>Crisis to uphold diversity and minority rights in the EU (Mos)<br>Crisis of political representation in the EU (Kinski)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Effects</b>            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Isolated                  | Brexit (Usherwood)<br>Migration crisis (Bousiou & Schleyer)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| All-encompassing          | Russia's war on Ukraine (Bousiou & Schleyer; Leruth; Smith)<br>Treaty articles and Treaty changes both as possible effect and root of/fuel for crisis (Dinan)<br>Rule of law crisis (Bogdanowicz)<br>Crisis of political representation in the EU (Kinski)<br>Climate crisis (Rosamond; although long treated by EU actors as isolated crisis)                                                                              |
| Differentiation           | Brexit & Russia's war on Ukraine (Leruth)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Spillover                 | Covid-19 pandemic (Kurzer)<br>Climate crisis: EU crisis governance to some extent hampered, but also facilitated by coinciding crises such as Covid-19 and Russia's re-invasion of Ukraine (Rosamond)<br>Global turmoil and its effects first on the EU's external action, but gradually its entire political system and internal functioning (Smith)<br>Effects of EU enlargement policy in third countries (Keil & Stahl) |

**Table 1.1:** Crisis characteristics from the conceptual framework developed in this chapter, with examples covered in the contributions to this volume (*Continued*)

| Crisis characteristics | Examples (chapter in this volume)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Disrupting             | Brexit (Usherwood)<br>Covid-19 pandemic (Kurzer; especially in its initial phase)<br>Global political turmoil (Smith; Schade)<br>Migration crisis (Bousiou & Schleyer)<br>Rule of law crisis (Bogdanowicz)                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Shaping                | Climate crisis (Rosamond)<br>Covid-19 pandemic (Kurzer; see also Eisl & Tomay; in its later phase)<br>Crisis of political representation in the EU (Kinski)<br>Differentiation as a shaping effect of crises (Leruth)                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Responses</b>       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Crisis management      | Brexit (Usherwood; especially in its early phase)<br>Global turmoil and shifting world order in immediate consequence of ruptures such as Brexit, US Presidency of Donald Trump, Russia's re-invasion of Ukraine (Schade; Smith)<br>Migration crisis (Bousiou & Schleyer)<br>Rule of law crisis (Bogdanowicz)<br>Sovereign debt crisis & Covid-19 pandemic (Eisl & Tomay; Kurzer) |
| Crisis governance      | Brexit (Usherwood; especially in its later phase)<br>Shifting world order and global power balance in the aftermath of global turmoil and ruptures (Smith)<br>Treaty change and reinterpretation/novel usage of Treaty provisions (Dinan)                                                                                                                                         |
| Crisis ignorance       | Climate crisis (Rosamond)<br>Crisis to uphold diversity and minority rights in the EU (Mos)<br>Crisis of political representation in the EU (Kinski)                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

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