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POLICY CRISIS AND CRISIS POLITICS
Sovereignty, Solidarity and identity in the EU post 2008

The theoretical framework of SOLID – a research agenda

Hanspeter Kriesi

Maurizio Ferrera

Waltraud Schelkle

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SOLID

Policy Crisis and Crisis Politics. Sovereignty, Solidarity and Identity, in the Eu post 2008

The last decade has been a *decennium horribile* for the EU. Since 2008, the European Union has faced a series of unprecedented shocks: the Great Recession, the sovereign debt crisis and its dramatic social consequences, security threats linked to terrorism and conflicts in the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa), the refugee crisis and, eventually, Brexit. Supranational decision making was severely tested. From today's vantage point, we observe that policy performance has not lived up to its promises and potential, damaging public trust in the efficacy and transparency of the EU. And yet, despite "existential threats", we observe resilience. The EU and the euro have not fallen apart. At the apex of the crisis, EU leaders managed to agree on strategies for recovery. It is true that extremely vocal Eurosceptic formations have scored increasing success in a number of countries. But data show that in all member states – save the UK – there are still significant majorities supporting EU and integration.

SOLID aims at understanding how and why "doom" and "elation" can go together. The EU is still fragile and its durability remains an open question. New capacities were created during the long crisis. But it is not clear how robust they are and whether developing them further will encounter insurmountable obstacles, including resentment by citizens. We argue that the aforementioned sequence of sectoral/policy crises produced a "deep" political crisis which unsettled fundamental assumptions and practices regarding the exercise of authority and its legitimation. Over time, tensions and disagreements unleashed three foundational conflicts: conflicts over sovereignty (who decides), solidarity (who gets what when and why) and identity (who we are). The "crisis politics" that was deployed to deal with such tensions has constrained policy responses in their scope and effectiveness. Against all odds, however, the destructive spiral stopped short of driving the Union into self-destruction: a circumstance that still calls for an explanation. Only a thorough retrospective analysis of the political crisis can cast light on the nature of this unexpected resilience.

We shall thus address the following research questions:

1. what made foundational conflicts emerge and escalate during the crisis?

2. which political dynamics were activated by each shock and lead to crisis policy making and crisis politics?

3. what coalitional dynamics operated during the euro area crisis, the social crisis, the refugee crisis, the membership crisis (Brexit and intra-EU separatism)?

4. how can we account for key episodes and decisions which underpinned resilience?

A key aim of the project will be to envisage scenarios and perspectives allowing for a durable and politically SOLID European Union.

SOLID is the result of the synergies which brought together **Maurizio Ferrera**, Professor of Political Science at Università degli Studi di Milano, **Hanspeter Kriesi**, Professor of Political Science at the European University Institute, and **Waltraud Schelkle**, Professor in Political Economy at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

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The theoretical framework of SOLID – a research agenda

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Introduction

The research programme of SOLID[1] is to study what the severe crises since 2008 mean for the evolving polity of the European Union (EU). With the benefit of hindsight and a wealth of scholarship to draw on, we look back at multiple crises that politicised EU decision-making in unprecedented ways and brought one of its grand projects, the currency union, to the brink of collapse in the summer of 2012. Our point of departure is that Jean Monnet's much cited dictum about Europe being forged in crisis is a curse for the EU, not a blessing in disguise. Consequently, we see the EU's apparent resilience and each instance of a major reform during times of perpetual upheaval as puzzles that seek explanation. To various degrees, each crisis called into question the authority of the EU, the solidarity among its members and the identity of its union. Our guiding question is whether and how the potential for a deepening political crisis has been averted or suppressed in these repeated crises.

The SOLID research project does not take the notion of a crisis from first principles. We accept that there is discretion, contingency and possibly even interest in turning massive policy problems into crises. When they arise, crises mobilise extraordinary policy responses and change routines of democratic decision-making. We selected, to date, five such crises for our analysis: 1) the membership crisis of Brexit, 2) the COVID-19 pandemic, 3) the Euro area crisis, 4) the humanitarian migration crisis, and 5) the lingering social crisis in all member states. They represent different constellations of crisis politics and policy-making 'in time' (Pierson 2004: ch.3, see Table 4 below). Their temporal structure and the political pressure on national governments arguably determine the potential for a crisis of the polity itself. If a crisis requires decisive and rapid policy action, the EU tends to be in trouble: the diversity of its members and limited policy capacities at the EU level make such intervention difficult. *Too little too late* is an easy criticism of the EU's crisis management. Challenger parties in many member states have been able to use it, instigating acrimonious debates on EU membership itself.

This marks the EU's vulnerability or fragility as a polity, in sharp contrast to established nation states and federations. However polarised US politics has become over the time horizon that SOLID covers, this has not sparked separatist US-sceptic movements. However, we should also note that such politicisation is only possible because the EU has become a political, economic and legal factor in the democratic politics of its members. The question therefore is when normal democratic contestation over policy responses escalates into the politicisation of the polity itself.[2]

This question motivates our polity perspective in the tradition of Stein Rokkan et al. (1999). We take from this tradition that every polity is defined by 1) its external and internal borders, 2) authority over its territory and 3) systems of loyalty and political participation.[3] We go beyond this tradition in that we explore the viability of the EU as an experimental polity, characterised by fluid borders, divided authority that projects itself beyond its territory and loyalty built largely on legal entitlements like non-discrimination and freedom of movement.

[1] The full title of this ERC-funded Synergy project is: *Policy Crisis and Crisis Politics. Sovereignty, Solidarity and Identity in the EU Post 2008*.

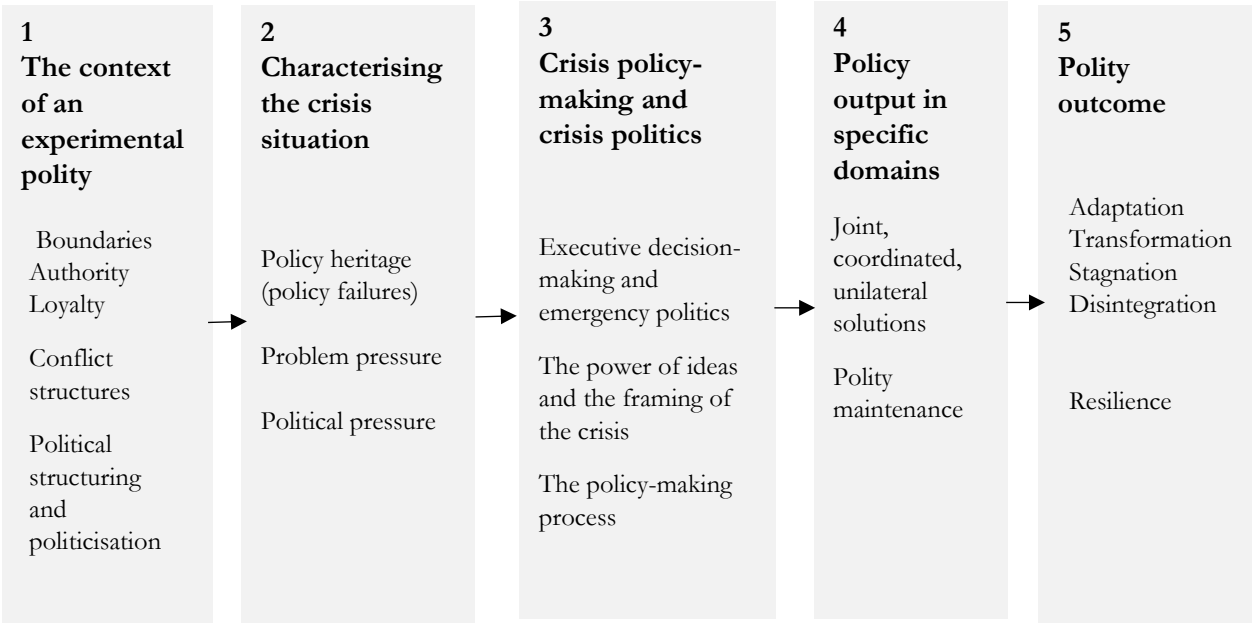
[2] Politicisation here refers back to Schattschneider's (1975) notion of the 'expansion of the scope of conflict within a political system' and will be specified further below.

[3] Bartolini (2005) has re-formulated Rokkan's ideas of state formation in terms of this macro-version of Hirschman's *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*.

This polity perspective distinguishes SOLID from other grand theories of European integration, although it has affinities with post-functionalism (Hooghe and Marks 2019). Our most relevant contrast to neo-functionalism/ supranationalism and realism/ intergovernmentalism is that we see the evolution of the EU's political-economic system as open-ended. It has no finalité, be it in the guise of a federal state (Fabbrini 2005) or of a continued rescue of the nation state (Milward 2000). This is not to deny that in the founding of the European Communities, such ideas and rationales were driving forces. The absence of a clear telos, in the guise of neither an ever-closer union nor ever more efficiently cooperating member states, invites us to pay attention to the maintenance of the EU qua polity. The EU polity cannot be taken for granted as a living durable community. We contrast and compare the EU with known polity types, notably federations and nation states. But we do so in order to both distinguish them and to learn about equivalences at the level of boundary-drawing, the exercise of authority and the building of systems of loyalty and participation.

The SOLID research project has five building blocks that we briefly outline in this paper. Our research will focus on elements 3-5; indented paragraphs highlight particular research projects of SOLID.

Figure 1: The analytical building blocks of the theoretical framework



We also envisage feedback loops, in particular from (4) the policy output and (5) the polity outcome to (2) the policy heritage but leave the specification of these links to further research.

1 The context of an experimental polity

Polity is the overarching term for many possible variants of territorially dominant political organization: city states, empires, states, federations and so on. While the federation/confederation blueprints are often taken as implicit benchmarks for the EU's supposedly incomplete union, we relate to conceptualisations that see the EU as something novel and unprecedented: an experimental polity

Experimentalism is a mode of governing typically associated with federal polities, which have to reconcile constitutional unity with high degrees of local diversity and a territorially fragmented division of powers. In the case of the EU, it is the process of polity-building as such which is "experimental", as it has to test new ways and modes for combining the classical triad of boundaries, authority and social bonds as well as constantly redefine what it means for the member states to remain together and to engage in an "ever closer union". [4]

1.1 Boundaries, authority, loyalty

A polity is a territorially demarcated field of social interaction endowed with a permanent and legitimate authoritative hierarchy, underpinned by a set of social bonds (a modicum of shared identity and solidaristic arrangements). The combination of these three constitutive elements provides a structure of constraints and opportunities, which in turn generate patterns of expectations and behaviours (Ferrera 2005).

In terms of borders or outer boundaries, the EU has a peculiar configuration. Individual exits from and entries into the EU territory are mainly controlled by the member states (e. g. they can freely decide how many third country nationals to admit, and under what conditions). There is, however, a central system of rules on the equal treatment of third country nationals once they become legal residents and on their secondary movements (from the state of entry to other EU states). Collective entries (enlargements) are instead under the exclusive control of the EU. The Rome Treaty did not envisage the option of exit. After accession, membership became irrevocable. Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty has relaxed this rule, however, by introducing the right of exit from the Union.

> Our theory makes us expect that this reform has opened a breach in the Union's demarcating capacity, with systemic implications in terms of centrifugal rather than centripetal and integrative political dynamics. We will research this with respect to the membership crisis of Brexit.

As to internal boundaries, the EU was born with the explicit mission of weakening or removing those around its member states, especially as regards market integration (Bartolini, 2005). But this process has been selective and nonlinear. National boundaries still filter a significant range of intra-polity exits and entries, e. g. as regards the provision of services with a social purpose. Nonetheless, the four freedoms and non-discrimination regimes have introduced increasingly stringent regulative constraints and in some domains the EU has become the main (and even ultimate) gatekeeper, e. g. regarding the cross-border movement of workers (Ferrera 2005).

The EU has a weak centre. Superimposed on a pre-existing system of robust and compact nation-states that came out of two devastating wars with each other, the EU could not aspire to gain a monopolisation of command at the centre, let alone a coercive one. Yet, even without an autonomous state-like apparatus, the EU has proved capable of autonomous and effective political

[4] See Laffan, O'Donnell, and Smith (2000). On experimental federalism see Gewirtzman (2015). The EU also uses experimentalism in policy coordination and soft governance (Zeitlin 2016). For a review of definitions and approaches, see (Pollack 2005), (Fichera 2018) and (Wiesner 2019).

production, i.e. the making of collectively binding decisions followed by compliance. This has been achieved through other than coercive instruments of constriction by deploying legal, economic and symbolic sanctions.

More particularly, authority of the weak centre has been sustained by two mechanisms, which have little to do with the threat of physical coercion. There is, first, the power of a supranational legal order the norms of which have been internalised by national authorities and judiciaries and lead to integration by law (Augenstein 2012). Second, the shared, multilevel exercise of authority has allowed a novel type of political co-production, in which national executives (the addressees of EU commands) participate in central policy making with a decisive role along with relatively weak supranational institutions. In this light, the EU appears as an unprecedented case of post-coercive (and thus post-Weberian) political domination, based on the threat of exclusively legal constriction[5], on joint monopolisation of command and on the co-production of binding decisions on the side of constituent units.

The EU pattern of political domination is also weak in terms of bottom-up individual political participation. Voice channels are selective and do not reach all the way up. The arena of direct representation based on the 'one person, one vote' – the European Parliament – is limited in transmitting popular demands and has asymmetric competences and powers vis-à-vis Commission and Council. The multinational composition of Parliament only allows for weak responsiveness and accountability to voters. The overall system of co-production is not entirely detached from the chain of representation; executives represent the member states and their voters, after all. But the presence and influence of this chain of representation is hard to perceive by ordinary citizens.

In contrast to historical federations, states are differently represented at the centre. They have different vote endowments – depending on size – in the Council, including the European Council. After unification in 1990, Germany has gained the largest share of votes, a fact that confers it a significant surplus of institutional power. The practice of differential voting rights is not uncommon within international organisations, where there is no formal transfer of sovereignty (Miglio 2019). In a polity with shared sovereignty or coming-together federations, higher (territorial) chambers rigorously comply with the principle of equal statehood. Both in the US Senate and in the Swiss Council of States, states and cantons have two seats/votes each and all legislative bills need the approval of both chambers. In the EU, especially in macroeconomic governance, the intergovern-mental method is still predominant and the principle of equal statehood still weak.

The EU polity contains a variety of national and regional identities and social protection systems. Thus, the margins for the emergence of a free-standing or superordinate EU identity have remained low from the start. Survey research shows, however, that EU citizens have come to internalise over time a modicum of shared identity, potentially capable of nurturing a sense of supranational community (Pellegata and Visconti 2020). As to solidarity, the weight and stickiness of national welfare states and the much debated institutional a-symmetry of the Treaties between economic and social goals (Scharpf 2009) has tended to pre-empt the strengthening of the EU's social dimension beyond regulation. As the standard view of the EU goes, the EU has real power 'beyond the nation-state' only in the field of market integration, while core state powers have not been part of the integration process to the same extent (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2018).

Genschel and Jachtenfuchs (2014) and their co-authors suggest, however, that there is more than meets the eye. Drawing on these authors but combining their insights with the distinction between

[5] For the distinction between coercion (always based on physical force) and constriction (based on non-coercive incentives) see Jobard (2017) and Nye (2011)

the direct and indirect exercise/expansion of power, we propose a new typology of modes of policy integration as exercised by the EU (*Table 1*). This allows us to get the full view of the extent to which the EU has already been involved in or about to engage in capacity building, and that is in cross-national solidarity: the EU can exercise regulative power *directly* by virtue of formally, Treaty-based exclusive authority, or *indirectly* by regulating member state authority in concurrent competence areas. As regards capacity, the EU is, indeed, already endowed with some autonomous capacities (though their full deployment requires at least some collaboration by the member states). In addition, the EU can also resort to the existing capacities of the member states and it can also mandate them to create new ones. Moreover, Table 1 distinguishes between 'exercise' (the implementation of existing capacities) and 'expansion' (the expansion of capacities), in order to capture temporal changes.

Table 1: The EU and its powers

	direct	**indirect**
Regulation:		
• exercise	Exercise of autonomous formal authority (e.g. state aid rules)	Regulation of member state authority (e.g. fiscal rules, Dublin agreement on handling asylum claims)
• expansion	Expansion of autonomous formal authority (e.g. Single Supervisory Mechanism for banks)	Expansion of regulative authority over member state authority (e.g. quota system for humanitarian migrants)
Core state powers		
• exercise	Deployment of existing capacities (e.g. ECB monetary policy, structural funds)	Activation of national capacities (e.g. entitlements of posted workers)
• expansion	Construction of new capacities (e.g. re-insurance of national unemployment schemes through SURE)	Expansion of regulative authority over domestic capacities (e.g. obligation to establish national equality bodies; Single Resolution Fund)

If we widen the notion of solidarity to embrace all forms of risk sharing recognised as such by polity members, the monetary union should be counted as a form of cross-national solidarity: not necessarily in its programmatic original design, but in its evolution over time. As argued by Schelkle (2017), institutions can produce 'solidarity by stealth', resting on relatively autonomous political-economic feedback mechanisms. Moreover, the EU regulatory *social acquis* is vast and a sizeable part of regulations are in fact directives which have obliged member states to introduce new social rights and standards or enhance existing one: e. g. with respect to parental leave, health and safety (Falkner 1998). In such cases, the effect of EU regulations has been higher social spending by governments. The social security coordination regime, a set of regulations of access to and portability of social benefits for EU nationals moving across borders, is an important element in the European social dimension (Ferrera 2005, Schelkle 2017: ch. 8). With the increase of the free movement of workers, the coordination regime has become de facto a system of horizontal inter-personal redistribution in which EU regulations force member states to give resident EU citizens the same social citizenship rights as nationals. The consequences of this regime in terms of bonding are double-edged.

Recent debates have highlighted that, without an adequate symbolic and material balance of opportunities between 'movers' and 'stayers', free movement as such may become socially and politically divisive (Bauböck 2019). However, socially-supported free movement has served as an important mechanisms of EU societalisation (Ferrera and Burelli 2019; McNamara 2015), allowing for concrete experiences of Europe on the side of an increasing number of people (Recchi et al 2019; Kuhn 2015). We will research these ambiguous effects on policy responses with respect to the social crisis.

1.2 The conflict structure of European integration

Similar to coming-together federations, the conflict structure in the EU is dominated by the *territorial* dimension. This dimension produces two lines of conflict: a vertical one, focused on the powers of the polity centre vis-à-vis those of the member states, and a horizontal one, revolving around the specific interests of these member states. Throughout the 20th century, cross-polity *functional* conflicts became increasingly important also in coming-together federations: party-based alliances succeeded in pushing through wide ranging reforms aimed at both cross-state and inter-personal risk pooling and redistribution. Thus, territorial structuring was complemented by partisan/ideological structuring. This facilitated central consolidation – the formation of a monocephalic centre capable of speaking directly to 'the people' and of furthering system building.

In the EU, the conflict structure is still dominated by the territorial dimension. Given the strength and direct legitimation of national centres, the EU has remained a poly-cephalic system. Polity building has essentially resulted from elite consolidation, i.e. through horizontal political co-production by national executives sustained and constrained by a pre-eminent, directly applicable legal order.

The main political fault lines at the EU-level run between states. Only recently have party-based conflicts gained some visibility and salience in the EP arena: especially on social issues, party affiliation has come to dominate national affiliation (Vesan and Corti 2019). Inter-state conflict is by definition *horizontal*, it pitches (coalitions of) states against each other based on material and normative interests. Conflicts between member states have many triggers and targets. In institutional and political terms, the main dilemma is between (national) sovereignty and (cross-national) 'sharing'. Conflicts thus lead to the politicisation of issues concerning national boundaries and national communities. This creates opposition between various groups of member states, e.g. guarantor and debtor states (in the monetary union), frontline and destination states vs transit and bystander states (in humanitarian migration), leaving and remaining states (in the case of Brexit), and origin states of mobile workers versus destination states (in the social crisis).

One research area for SOLID is how fluid or permanent such conflict lines are. For instance, whether they amount to one or several transnational lines of opposition that are identity- or issue-based. It would be a feature of polity-building if we found evidence for an issue-based transnational cleavage around solidarity and sovereignty, analogous to the domestic demarcation-integration cleavage (Kriesi et al. 2008, 2012; Truchlewski and Schelkle 2020).

There is, however, also a *vertical* component. As was noted above, the decision-making procedures at the centre create a power hierarchy among member states, which interferes with interest-based coalition building: some member states are more equal than others. Moreover, supranational institutions may be pitted against (coalitions of) member states. Once decisions are taken, they become collectively binding and directly enforced by the CJEU. A given member state can thus feel dominated by the centre when its interests are defeated and undesired policies are implemented. In this case, conflict may indeed take on a vertical drift, turning into an opposition against the EU as such. As Mair (2013) has argued, it is the lack of a government-opposition nexus at the EU-level

which opens the door to opposition in principle against the polity – to Euroscepticism and to populist reactions against the loss of control at the domestic level.

The nationalist reaction to European integration in the party systems of the member states is part and parcel of a larger conflict opposing cosmopolitans-universalists and nationalists-communitarians which has been restructuring domestic European party systems for decades. The new structuring conflict raises fundamental issues of rule and belonging and taps into various sources of conflicts about national identity, sovereignty, and solidarity. The emerging divide concerns conflicts about the influx of migrants, competing supranational sources of authority, and international economic competition. It is structurally rooted, opposing the 'losers of globalization' or the 'left behind' to the 'winners of globalization' alias or 'cosmopolitan elites' (Kriesi et al. 2006).[6]

The new divide constitutes a break with the period of a permissive consensus and conflicts over Europe have been transferred from the backrooms of political decision-making to the public sphere. As argued by post-functionalists, with the increasing importance of this conflict, *identity politics* have become more important for the decision-making at the EU- and at the domestic level (Deutschmann et al. 2018, Kuhn 2019). The cosmopolitan side of this conflict has mobilised only occasionally and temporarily, although the potential for a common European identity and solidarity among the European populations in fact exists. According to a recent strand of research, large shares of voters would in fact support centralised forms of cross-national sharing in cases of asymmetric socio-economic adversities (Gerhards et al. 2020). Solidaristic attitudes seem to prevail over non solidaristic ones in virtually all member states, and survey research shows that the former are not necessarily motivated by calculative expectations (Pellegata and Visconti, 2020). There are of course cross-national variations reflecting different expectations whether one's own country will be a net-winner or loser of European solidarity. Solidarity also varies by type of crisis: if the causes of the crisis are exogenous (as in the case of pandemics), large majorities support solidarity regardless of gains or losses. Finally, the European public apparently prefers EU-wide instrumentation and coordination of solidarity more than ad hoc, unilateral and bilateral country-level support (Cicchi et al. 2020: 10).

> SOLID research will build on this research as it speaks directly to the polity dimension of systems of loyalty. We are particularly interested in the motivational basis of solidarity, in how lasting such expressions of solidarity are, and how they relate to the perception of a crisis (e.g. its spatial dimension).

1.3 Political structuring and politicisation in the EU

For the analysis of political conflicts within the EU polity in general and in crisis situations in particular, we rely on the concepts of political structuring and politicisation. As conceptualised by Bartolini (2005: 37), the term political structuring is used 'to point to the formation of those institutional channels, political organizations, and networks of relationships that allow for individual voice to achieve systemic relevance'. Conflicts are politicised within such structural preconditions.

Our understanding of the concept of *politicisation* distinguishes between three conceptual dimensions which jointly operationalise the concept of politicisation (Hutter and Grande 2014:

[6] Scholars have used different labels to refer to this new structuring conflict at the domestic level – from 'GAL-TAN' (Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson 2002), 'independence-integration' (Bartolini 2005), 'integration-demarcation' (Kriesi et al. 2008, 2012),'universalism-communitarianism' (Bornschier 2010), 'cosmopolitanism-communitarianism' (Zürn and Wilde 2016), 'cosmopolitanism-parochialism' (Vries 2017) to the 'transnational cleavage' (Hooghe and Marks 2018) and the cleavage between sovereignism and Europeanism (Fabbrini 2019: 62f.).

1003):[7] first, salience and public visibility; second, actor polarisation over the issue; third, actor expansion and the range of involvement . Conflicts are politicised to the extent that they are salient, polarised and involve a large range of actors.

In the multi-level polity of the EU, the supranational level is not just another level at which international agreements are negotiated to be transposed nationally later on. Polity membership creates a foundational interdependence that stems from the original choice to become a member of a compulsory association. Market integration and the more or less extensive pooling of core state powers have increased this interdependence over time. However, as we have argued above, the EU is not a full-fledged federal system. Moreover, the degree of interdependence varies by policy domain: in some policy domains the member-states have retained a greater degree of autonomy than in others. The mixture of interdependence and independence of the member states in a specific policy-domain imposes *reciprocal constraints* on the decision-makers at both levels of the EU polity. On the one hand, the interdependence imposes constraints on the policy response of national policy-makers. On the other hand, the independence, which national policy-makers have retained in a given policy-domain, constrains the decision-making at the EU-level[8].

It is *the territorial channel* of representation in the EU which provides the most important (although not the exclusive) conduit for the politicisation of these reciprocal constraints and the related conflicts – mainly territorial conflicts between member states. Intergovernmental coordination has become the key decision-mode in the EU in general and in crisis situations in particular. In turn, the heads of member state governments (in the European Council) and key ministers (in the Council of Ministers) assume a decisive role in this decision-mode. They provide the critical link between the two levels of the EU polity. As a result of their dual role – that of head of state or government representing a country in European negotiations, and that of member of the European Council representing Europe back home, the executives of the member states become the key actors in the *two-level game* that links domestic politics to EU-decision-making.

As far as domestic politics are concerned, conflicts they are structured by multiple channels. The key domestic political structure for the politicisation of EU integration processes is the party system, given that elected policy-makers representing national publics in the EU-level negotiations are the pivotal actors in the decision-making process, both at the national and the European level. Hooghe and Marks (2009) had already argued that the domestic preference formation which matters for the decision-makers at the European level is no longer restricted to economic preferences of domestic interest groups (as claimed by intergovernmentalism), but has to take into account above all public opinion and party politics as well.

> We would go one step further and claim that *party politics and public opinion* have become crucial channels for domestic preference formation with respect to European integration. Hobolt and Wratil (2020) have analysed the opposition to legislative proposals in the Council during the Euro Area crisis and found that governments in the Council are not only responsive to the general 'public mood' (e. g. Euroscepticism), but also to issue-specific public

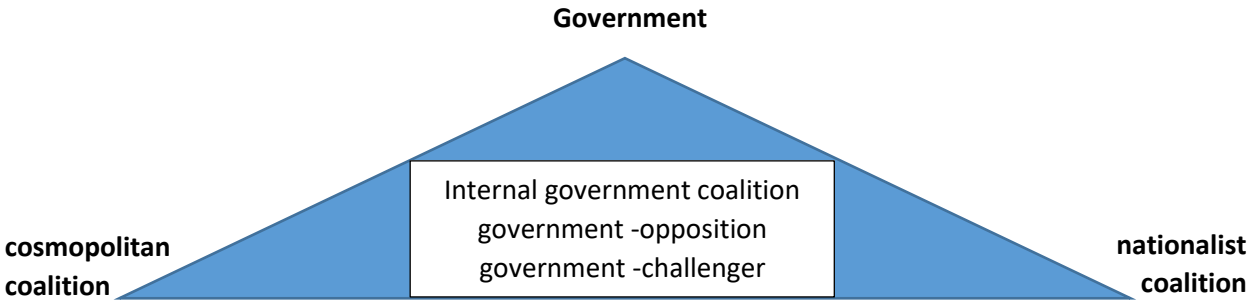
[7] It is widely shared in the recent literature: de Wilde, Leupold, and Schmidtke 2016; Hoeglinger 2016; Hutter and Grande 2014; Rauh 2016; Statham and Trenz 2013.

[8] Member states retain autonomous ("sovereign") legal/political status and prerogatives in the international system in all those domains not covered by EU law (what van Middelaar (2014) calls the "outer sphere"). This pre-empts formal EU action, even in terms of mere coordination. However, the so-called law of anticipated reactions constrains national governments also in this area, making them programmatically attentive to the EU implications of their choices.

opinion. Post-functionalists expect this turn of events to put the brakes on the integration process, but it can also be an opportunity to revitalize the process. Bressanelli, Koop, and Reh (2020: 331) suggest that the contemporary EU has space, too, for *an enabling dissensus*. To establish the relevance of these channels will constitute a good part of our research effort across all crises we study.

At the national level, the *basic conflict structure* with respect to European integration and related policy issues is tripolar. Forming the three poles are 1) the nationalist coalition (including the radical right and national-conservative parties from the centre-right), 2) the cosmopolitan coalition (including the Greens, parts of the moderate centre-left, related interest associations/NGOs and groups directly concerned, such as migrants) and 3) the government.

Figure 2: Domestic conflict structure on European integration



The government takes an intermediate position between the two polar coalitions, to which it has to be responsive without losing sight of the stakeholders at the EU-level, for whom it has to be a responsible partner (Mair 2009). The position of the government in this configuration depends on its composition and its relation with the other two poles, the issue in question and the national interests related to it, the domestic institutional constraints, as well as the government's own strategies. The government's composition determines its relationship with the other two poles. For the politicisation of policy-specific issues in general and for the politicisation of EU policies in particular three aspects of this relationship are most relevant (Altiparmakis 2019). First, the internal government-coalition relationship, second, the government-opposition and, third, the government-challenger relationship.

In *institutional* terms, governments are accountable to the domestic electorate and anticipate its reactions at the next elections. When it comes to EU politics, governments try to shape public opinion with their own cues. In particular, as argued by party competition theory, they will use strategies of issue emphasis and framing to activate certain underlying attitudes of the voters (e.g. Hobolt and de Vries 2015). National *elections* relate to EU-level negotiations in at least three different ways:

- for the government, upcoming elections influence its position in European bargaining[9], which means that supranational negotiations take place 'in the shadow of national elections' (Schneider 2018: 5);
- for the opposition, upcoming elections provide an opportunity to mobilize against the EU (Hutter and Kriesi 2019);

[9] Schneider 2013, 2018; and Schneider and Slantchev 2018 on Germany's original failure to cooperate in the first Greek bailout.

- election outcomes modify the composition of the government and, accordingly, the government's position towards the EU and its weight at the negotiation table.

In addition to elections, there are other channels linking the governments to the voters: the direct-democratic, protest, and media channels. Thus, Grande and Hutter (2016) show that *referenda* play a key role in the politicisation of Europe in public debates. *Protest* mobilisation may amplify the political pressure on the government and cause additional electoral losses, as is illustrated by the contribution of economic protests to the destabilisation of European party systems during the Great Recession (Bremer, Hutter, and Kriesi 2020). Finally, the *public debate in the media* contributes to the politicisation of EU affairs, and all the politicians are trying to contribute to it by their strategies of issue emphasis and framing.

In terms of the government's *strategies,* the game cuts two ways. The two-level game concept (Putnam 1988) captures the fact that each intergovernmental agreement has to be ratified at home[10]. The concept is open to all kinds of complexities but it comes down to two strong predictions:

- First, weakness at home is strength at the EU level. From our perspective, weakness at home means low support or even opposition to European integration, constraining the scope for agreements that can be ratified; the small win-set means that other member states have to accommodate the constrained member state if they want an agreement.
- Second, the two-level game concept can explain why intergovernmental agreements often fail even though there is room for a mutually beneficial agreement (win-sets overlap). The reason is that the strategic value of overstating one's domestic constraints are obvious to all. Thus, everybody may be overplaying their hands and give the impression that there is no overlapping win-set. This chicken game has a high likelihood of ending in a fatal collision for an agreement.

We expect that the domestic conflict structure makes the governments responsive either to pro-integration or to pro-demarcation forces at the domestic level. The game can be played bottom up, stressing the domestic constraints, or top down, using the EU as a means to overcome domestic opposition in a pro-integration environment at home, or as a threat in the negotiations to achieve national advantage in a pro-demarcation environment. This gives us four linkages between EU-level outcomes and domestic preference formation (*Table 2)*.

The table yields distinct hypothesis of how different constellations will play out. The pro-integration/top-down constellation is most unfavourable for an agreement favouring domestic interests, while the biggest payoff is expected for the pro-demarcation/bottom-up position. If a significant number of member states choose one of the other two strategies, the risk of failing to reach an agreement is very high.

> SOLID research will apply the two-level game framework for analysing polity-internal conflicts, with the appropriate modifications required for the political institution of shared sovereignty. Figure 2 above contains one such modification, notably that the domestic conflict structure around European integration must be taken into account.

[10] The EU situation is of course different. Joint decisions do not need domestic ratification, except for Treaty revisions. As we will show, Putnam's perspective provides however precious insights also for the analysis of the EU and the domestic level.

Table 2: Two level game outcomes as result of domestic constraints and strategic choices

	Strategy	
Domestic conflict	top-down	bottom-up
pro-integration (large win-set)	weak position in EU negotiations, yet defends even unfavourable compromise at home	weak position in EU negotiations gives strong incentives to overstate or misrepresent domestic constraints while responsive to EU demands
pro-demarcation (small win-set)	strong position in EU negotiations, but may not be accommodated (opt-out, differentiated integration)	strong position in EU negotiations that may be accommodated to achieve ratification (favourable agreement)

2 Characterising the crisis situation

Our second building block, the crisis situation, refers to the formative phase of a crisis, and we expect it to set the stage for the further development of the crisis. The crisis situation is policy-domain specific and is characterised by the policy heritage, on the one hand, and the particularly intense pressures which prompt policy makers to engage in an out-of-the-ordinary response, on the other hand. In order to specify the pressures involved, we propose to distinguish between two types – *problem (functional) pressure* and *political pressure*. The two types of pressure may be difficult to sort out empirically, but it should be possible to distinguish between them in the formative stage of a crisis. Our expectation is that, within the constraints of the policy heritage, certain combinations of problem and political pressure activate specific response modes and policy-making patterns.

2.1 Policy heritage

The *policy heritage* consists of the accumulated policies in a specific domain. As argued by a large literature, one of the principal factors affecting policy at time 1 is policy at time 0: Policy responds less directly to social and economic conditions than it does to the consequences of past policy (Heclo 1974). Past policies can create a situation of path dependence that limits the available choices for policymakers to make future policy decisions; policy legacies generate institutional routines and procedures that force decision-making, in particular they impose directions by eliminating or distorting the range of policy options available (Pierson 2004). As is argued by Geddes (2020), legacies also produce specific repertoires of governance consisting in all what actors know how to do and what they think they should be doing. As Geddes observes (2020: 16), repertoires contain ways of knowing, ways of deciding and ways of acting or behaving that can 'stabilise' policy governance systems – sometimes, however, at the price of effectiveness or innovation. The policy heritage constrains the policy options in the crisis: it provides the templates for how to deal with the crisis in the formative stage, and the guidelines for the 'puzzling' of the policy-makers in the subsequent course of the crisis. In a diverse union, staying close to the policy heritage is also the way of least resistance.

In the present context, the policy heritage refers to both the EU- and the domestic levels. *Table 3* classifies the coordination challenge posed for policy-making in crisis situations based on the combination of the policy heritage at the two levels. The classification criteria are the role of the EU in the policy domain and the diversity among member states with regard to the policy heritage in the corresponding policy domain.

Table 3: Coordination challenge, based on the policy heritage at the two levels

Institutional diversity among member states	EU competencies/capacities	
	limited	high
large	**Great challenge** Refugee crisis, Covid-19 crisis (economic aspects), social crisis	**Moderate challenge** EA crisis
low	**Moderate challenge** Covid-19 crisis (public health aspects)	**Limited challenge** Brexit crisis

We distinguish between a policy heritage with limited and high EU competences/capacities and classify the constellation of our crisis cases accordingly. The EA and the Brexit crisis are distinct from the other crises, since they fall into a policy domain where the EU has strong competences/ capacities – provided by the ECB (EA) and by the Articles 50 and 218(3) of the TEU (Brexit).

The policy heritage at the level of the member states is characterised by the *diversity of domain-specific tasks, policies and core state capacities* among the member states. We distinguish between a policy heritage with low and one with large diversity of tasks attributed to the member states, as well as of policies and capacities to deal with them. For each crisis, detailed analyses will need to specify the most important aspects of policy diversity.

The coordination challenge is greatest in situations of large diversity among member states and weak EU competences, as is illustrated by the refugee, Covid-19 (economic aspects), and social crises. The challenge is moderate in situations, where either large diversity is counter-acted by high EU competences (as in the case of the EA crisis), or limited EU competences are counter-acted by low diversity (Covid-19, public health aspects). The coordination challenge is most limited, if EU competences are high and diversity is low. This is a rare constellation and we see Brexit as such, even though Article 50 has made its occurrence more likely.

2.2 Problem pressure

We now turn to problem pressure in terms of the time structure. It is at the origin of a crisis situation and arguably dominates policymakers' perception of their room for manoeuvre. We draw on Pierson (2004, ch. 3) generally, crisis research and disaster sociology specifically (Rodríguez, Donner, and Trainor 2018), for our conceptualisation: the problem pressure can be described by the temporal modes by which the functional challenge arrives (sudden and unexpected or cumulative and expected), and by the timing of its effect (immediate or delayed). The combination of the two aspects of time presumably imposes constraints on the decision-making mode as well as the response pattern policy-makers will adopt. Sudden and unexpected occurrence make for high *uncertainty*, cumulative and foreseeable challenges give rise to less uncertainty. Immediate effects create a sense of high *urgency*, as compared to delayed effects; *Table 4* presents the four resulting types, and indicates the time structures that characterize four of our five crises. The natural disaster metaphors are short-cuts for the constellations, but do not imply that political and economic crises have more than temporal structures in common with natural disasters.

Table 4: Temporal structure of problem pressures

Timing of effect / Temporal mode	Immediate (high urgency)	Delayed (low urgency)
Sudden and unexpected (high uncertainty)	**Tornado** (EA crisis, Covid crisis - public health aspects)	**Meteorite** (Brexit crisis, Covid crisis- economic aspects)
Cumulative and expected (low uncertainty)	**Avalanche** (refugee crisis)	**Erosion** (social crisis)

Own adaptation from Pierson (2004: ch.3)

The problem structure of a tornado, combining high degrees of urgency and uncertainty, is potentially the most disruptive. In both the tornado and the avalanche structure, decision-makers feel that policies have to be adopted in haste: contagious market panic or a spreading virus, respectively, trigger an emergency response mode (to be further specified in *Table 8*). The immediate effect calls for urgent action and policy-makers are likely to fall back on well-tried heuristics and policy options. In the two situations with delayed effects – meteorite and erosion structures -- disruption may also be considerable. But the longer time horizon of the effects is expected to allow for more time in preparing a crisis response and less of an 'emergency type' response. In the case of the erosion problem structure, the challenge is chronic, with increasingly serious long-term effects (like in soil erosion from wind or rain). As the latter can often be ameliorated with existing instruments, we generally expect a strong status quo bias. A sharp deterioration, however, may lead to new and strong political reactions (as in the sudden formation of a 'sink-hole' in soil), shifting the underlying structure in the direction of the avalanche.

> The COVID 19 crisis does not fall neatly in any one of the four types, but rather shares some features of each. We will use the multi-faceted nature of the COVID-19 pandemic (as a public health, social and macroeconomic crisis) to scrutinize whether the temporal pattern of crises is the crucial determinant of policy responses or other dimensions, such as exogeneity/ endogeneity and commonality/ idiosyncrasy (Gerschewski 2021, Kyriazi, Alexander Shaw, and Ganderson 2020).

Policy heritage and the problem pressure are related to each other. While the problem pressure may be partly shaped by structural factors such as geographical location, demographic structure, economic development and sectoral specialisation, it is also partly endogenous to the policy heritage. For instance, in the case of the refugee crisis, geographical location matters as a result of the Dublin Agreement that has made countries located at the Mediterranean external border of the EU to bear the administrative and logistic costs of humanitarian migrants arriving in Europe.

The problem pressure also has a socio-spatial dimension. Crises are likely to increase *interdependence* among the EU member states and produce particularly strong demands for policy coordination and intense preferences related to the severe costs and losses incurred during a crisis (Schimmelfennig 2018). Importantly, this increase in interdependence may be asymmetric. Crises typically do not affect member states to the same extent, creating a differential burden of adjustment if risks are not shared. Hence, crises have significant distributional consequences for the member states. *Table 5* presents four possible configurations related to the spatial distribution of problem pressure among member states of the EU:

Table 5: Types of problem pressure based on the socio-spatial distribution

Incidence	Interdependence	
	low	high
symmetric	**Similar** (social crisis)	**Common** (Covid-19 crisis, financial crisis)
asymmetric	**Idiosyncratic** (Brexit crisis)	**Spill-over** (sovereign debt phase of the EA crisis, refugee crisis)

If the problem affects many/most member states, but with low cross border consequences, we can speak of the co-occurrence of *similar* crises (e. g. in terms of unemployment or aging and its fiscal consequences). Secondly, if the impact of the problem is widespread and the cross-national interdependence is high, we speak of a common crisis situation (e. g. the COVID 19 pandemic, the financial crisis in the EA)[11]. If a problem hits a single member state in an isolated domain (e. g. the membership crisis of Brexit before the referendum), the crisis is idiosyncratic. If the problem incidence remains isolated or concentrated in a few member states, but there are externalities affecting other member states, then we speak of a situation of spill-overs. Arguably, such a situation applied in the EA crisis once it had morphed into a panic of government bond markets and the refugee crisis (with the spill-over of migrants entering the EU in the frontline states of Italy or Greece and continuing their way to the open destination states such as Germany and Sweden).

We expect the spatial distribution of the crisis to have important consequences for policy-making during the crisis. The relevance of domestic crisis situations for the EU is highest in the common and spill-over constellations. The extent to which the EU gets involved in policy-making depends, however, on the policy heritage in question, in particular on the EU competence.

2.3 Political pressure

It is difficult to specify general expectations about the politicisation of a given crisis, since contingency, timing, misperceptions, strategical errors, bravado and luck make a world of difference in crisis situations. In the formative stage, we can, however, distinguish situations, where a strong issue-specific challenger is present and exerts immediate pressure on the government, from situations where there is no such immediate pressure forthcoming from an established challenger. Combining the presence of an issue-specific challenger with the salience of the problem in the media and public opinion, we get again four possible combinations:

Table 6: Domestic political pressure in the formative stage of a crisis

Salience	Polarisation due to challengers	
	low (consensus)	high (conflict)
high	**rally-around-the-flag** (Covid-19 crisis)	**potential politicisation** (EA crisis: countries with Troika programme, Brexit crisis: UK, Ireland)
low	**no pressure** (Brexit crisis, except UK and Ireland)	**symbolic threat** (refugee crisis: Italy)

[11] The "similar" vs "common" nature of the problem pressure is also related to the factors which cause the pressure and/or high levels of interdependence in the first place: if EU policies or institutional constraints (e.g. free movement) bear a direct responsibility, then the pressure can be defined as common.

The combination of high salience and low polarisation (consensus) corresponds to the *rally-around-the-flag* effect that was observed in many countries during the formative stage of the Covid-19 crisis (Altiparmakis et al. 2021). The acute sense of a national emergency in the wake of such a crisis constitutes a rare moment of national unity when dramatic jumps of government approval are the norm and even the political opposition tacitly goes along with government initiatives. In the absence of both public salience and polarisation, a crisis does not exert much political pressure. This is best illustrated by the Brexit crisis outside of Britain and Ireland. Politicisation, by contrast, is likely to arise if high public salience is combined with the presence of an issue-specific challenger that has the capacity to mobilise immediately. The Brexit crisis in Britain and Ireland illustrates this combination, as does the EA crisis in programme countries. Finally, a polarising political challenger may be present attempting to exploit the crisis in the absence of public salience. Such a situation we call a *symbolic threat,* and it is illustrated by the case of Italy during the refugee crisis, where the radical right originally mobilised in the absence of public attention.

The *spatial distribution* of political pressure can be characterized in terms analogous to the distribution of problem pressure – symmetric vs asymmetric incidence in combination with the *arena* in which the challenge is expressed (domestic vs supra-/transnational). Idiosyncratic or similar distributions in various member-states are the most likely configurations. The cases where challengers mobilise at the EU-level or transnationally are uncommon. In the past, farmers have been capable of mobilising repeatedly at the EU-level; and the long legislative course of the services directives provoked a series of transnational protests organised by grass-root radical left movements (e.g. Attac). The EU austerity policies were, in turn, accompanied by various moments and forms of mobilisation (such as the November 2012 strike and several other transnationally coordinated initiatives: Bourne 2018).

From the point of view of the combination of problem pressure and political pressure, the spill-over configuration of problem pressure is the most interesting one. In this particular case, where the spill-over of problem pressure from one country to another creates the potential for an inter-state conflict, challengers can exacerbate such a conflict. But the impulse of self-protection that includes maintaining the EU polity is a counter-acting tendency.

> The threat from a challenger is more effective, the deeper and the more institutionalised the integration-demarcation conflict is at the domestic level. At the same time, governments may be aware that it is in the national interest to maintain the EU polity. The outcome of these countervailing tendencies is likely to pose a limit on overtly solidaristic solutions, as has been apparent in the refugee crisis and in the EA crisis (e.. the ESM as a 'firewall').

We expect, in line with the two-level game literature, that member states for whom an issue has greater salience to have more success in EU-level negotiations (Arregui and Thomson 2009). In such cases of highly politicised issues, governments may try to improve their bargaining position at the EU-level by being responsive to domestic opposition or by even mobilising domestic opposition.

3 Crisis policy-making and crisis politics

The third building block is a focus of our empirical research. Once the crisis situation has set the stage for the political management of the crisis, crisis policy making and crisis politics develop in subsequent stages. The starting point for the conceptualisation of this most important step in our argument is that, in the EU polity, crisis policy-making and crisis politics take place simultaneously at the EU-level and at the domestic level (except if a crisis is idiosyncratic).

In what follows, we shall introduce a set of concepts to analyse decision-making under crisis conditions in the multi-tier polity, which should allow us to formulate some more specific expectations. We proceed in three steps: first, we turn to the role of framing processes, driven by different ideas about the meaning of a crisis as well as the possibly strategic interest in formulating crises as emergencies in which standard routines of political contestation are suspended. Next, we present concepts concerning the decision-making mode and its key actors, and the role of transnational coalitions. And third, we conceptualise the stages of the policy-making process, stressing the role of transnational coalitions of members.

3.1 The framing of a crisis and emergency politics

As Heclo (1974: 305) famously said, politics finds its sources not only in power but also in uncertainty – men and women collectively wondering what to do. Governments not only 'power', they also 'puzzle'. Policy-making is a form of collective puzzlement on society's behalf; it entails both deciding and knowing. Crises provide special opportunities for 'puzzling': new ideas are more likely to emerge in a situation of uncertainty, when past policies seem to have failed, the actors do not know what possible outcomes are likely, and hence what their interests in fact are (Blyth 2002).

SOLID research is based on an analytical distinction between the formative phase of a crisis – what we call the crisis situation – and the subsequent evolution of a crisis. In the formative phase, political leaders are likely to fall back on well-tried interpretations and established governance repertoires, given that they typically feel they have to respond immediately to the situation as they 'find' it. We share this 'objectivist' notion of a crisis situation with other authors such as Bressanelli et al. (2020) Schimmelfennig (2018) and Zeitlin, Nicoli, and Laffan (2019). But this notion be criticised on two accounts. It does not take into account that the crisis diagnosis may be constructed in and through ideational contests (Voltolini, Natorski, and Hay 2020, going back to Hay 1996, Hay 1999). And it ignores that crisis situations may be fabricated and manipulated by parties interested in 'emergency politics' (White 2019).

To take the constructivist objection first. Ideas, in both their epistemic (descriptive and diagnostic) and normative (prescriptive) content, allow agents to reduce uncertainty by interpreting the nature of the crisis around them as a first step to constructing new institutions (Blyth 2002). Combined and communicated through discursive interactions (Schmidt 2010), they provide a sense of purpose and direction and thus serve as collective action and coalition-building resources. They are used as weapons that allow them to attack and de-legitimate existing institutions. They serve as institutional blueprints that agents use *after* a period of contestation to construct new institutions. And they end up coordinating expectations, once they have become embedded within these new institutions.

We readily admit that there may not always be consent among decision-makers how urgent a situation is, notably when the incidence is asymmetric. The fortunate members of the polity are then likely to dominate the first crisis response as they can afford the luxury of being more patient. The longer a crisis lingers on, the more likely such dynamics are likely to unfold. Historical institutionalism has addressed this objection, however. When the early reactions based on reflexive approaches lead to an accumulation of anomalies, the prevailing ideational framework is undermined and a "window of opportunity" for new ideas is likely to open up (Hall 1993). New ideas originate n a variety of arenas, internal and external to organisations (e.g. academia and research institutions). The flow of ideas (especially programmatic and policy ideas) has its own dynamic and reaches decision-making arenas through the selective agency of policy entrepreneurs (such as the Commission, the IMF or WHO, national think tanks and NGOs). Within organisations, ideas typically result from reflexive exercises about policy failures , unanticipated outcomes from policy mutations that arise at the margins of existing policies, lesson drawing from practices that (are

perceived to have) worked elsewhere (Rodrik 2014). ,As argued by Moschella (2015), new ideas may also develop incrementally. By the time Draghi made the "whatever it takes" pledge in the EA crisis, there had been an evolution in the ECB's communication from an asymmetric framing of the crisis caused by fiscal indiscipline by some to a symmetric framing caused by the systemic risk of integrated financial markets (Ferrara 2020).

New ideas may refer to the interpretation of the crisis in terms of its spatial structure, but the crisis may also be reinterpreted in terms of its time structure. Thus, the refugee crisis may be re-interpreted in terms of the timing of its effect – from the alarm about the immediate effect of 'a wave' of refugees to a concern about the delayed effect of integrating large numbers of humanitarian migrants into the host society. Conversely, one might reinterpret an erosion type crisis by pointing to the more immediate effects of 'sink holes,' as is currently the case for the climate crisis, the differential impact of COVID on territorial areas and economic sectors, or 'scarring' of the generation of school leavers in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.

> While the original framing of the crisis is largely path-dependent, emerging new frames are the result of a contest the outcome of which is difficult to predict that evolves over time. Our long-term perspective on crises allows us to study the use of ideas in the evolution of crisis management.

As regards the emergency politics objection: this literature reminds us that there can also be strategies of 'crisisification' (Rhinard 2019). If Europe will be forged in crises, as Monnet's famous quote has it, then one can also use contrived crises to forge Europe. This literature sees emergencies not so much as the temporary operating environment for crisis management but the outcome of a calculated politics of exception, fostered by institutional incentives and deliberate strategies. Action is often delayed until a foreseeable policy problem escalates into a crisis. Such escalation seems unwarranted, given that there is a proliferation of bodies that screen the horizon for potential crises (Rhinard 2019), such as the EU's Civic Protection Mechanism. But the ensuing crisis is then 'exploited' to increase support for public office-holders or their policy agendas (Boin et al 2009; Rauh 2020). By portraying it as an exogenous shock that dictates rapid action, crises appear to be driven by 'external demands rather than chosen normative priorities' (Kreuder-Sonnen and White 2020: 3). The logic of urgency and necessity manifests itself in timetables that empower informal networks of typically-powerful actors to formulate policy proposals to which those without access can only react (Kreuder-Sonnen 2018: 98, 107). We recognise this strategy in the many-crises-one-script syndrome (Rhinard 2019: 623; White 2015: 300).

The actual *politics* in this literature remains somewhat abstract and underspecified, however. The literature infers that 'emergency' must have been the chosen mode of politics from the output of extraordinary policymaking. While SOLID research must be sensitive to the fact that crises can suit certain agendas, e. g. TINA strategies of institution building, we have two theoretical objections that make the drive towards emergency politics more ambivalent. First of all, crises differ in their temporal structure (Table 4), how suddenly they arrive and how immediately they inflict damage. The difference between fast- and slow-burning crises provides space for political choices and variation of the crisis script.[12] If crises do not follow the same emergency script, then EU crisis management can work with the ordering of events to respond in a manner that allows time for politics that is, for instance, in the interest of parliaments (Howlett 2019). Second, the institutional and strategic incentives for emergency politics are quite ambiguous. Unelected, technocratic actors depend on throughput and output legitimacy for lack of democratic legitimation (Scharpf 1999,

[12] On this distinction, see Seabrooke and Tsingou (2019)

Schmidt 2013). Hence, they must be seen to get things done in procedurally regularised ways. A crisis challenges the very claim of output legitimacy and firefighting tends to be messy and *ad hoc*. One way out of this dilemma is to seek a division of responsibilities between supranational and national elected executives that can diffuse blame attribution. This division may require allowing national governments time for decision-making.

In short, we contest a strong version of the emergency politics literature claiming there is an unambiguous tendency of executives in the EU to operate in a state of exception undermining nationally constituted democracy.

> Emergencies can create opportunities that sustain democratic decision-making and interest representation during a state of exceptional policy-making (Ganderson et al 2021). Our task is to find out when emergency politics can play this role, starting with the different temporal structures of crises and the ambivalent institutional incentives for emergency politics.

3.2 Decision-making modes in different crises

In contrast to the literature on emergency politics, we expect a greater variety of decision-making modes, which we argue are the product of the temporal problem pressure and the extent of political pressure. A simplified synthesis of tables 4, 5 and 6 gives us the hypothetical pattern summarised in *table 7*.

Table 7: Decision-making modes

	Perceived temporal problem pressure	
Political pressure	high	low
high	**intergovernmental coordination in executive networks**	**partisan contestation**
low	**issue-specific task force**	**bureaucratic network negotiation**

Under crisis conditions, which combine high political pressure in the sense of conflict-laden salience with high time pressure (urgency), executive decision-making becomes the preferred mode of decision-making. Under such conditions, policy-making is no longer confined to the policy-specific subsystem, but it becomes the object of macro-politics or 'Chefsache', to take be taken over by the political leaders who focus on the issue in question.[13] The decision-making mode of intergovern-mental coordination, which has become most prominent in the EU since the Maastricht Treaty, corresponds to the EU-specific version of executive decision-making. The European Council becomes central in crisis situations, which is mainly due to the fact that member states still control certain core state powers (fiscal and coercive resources) that the EU needs for the management of certain crises. There is another EU-specific mode of decision-making, however, that also corresponds to executive decision-making: executive networks that include member state and EU officials (notably from the Commission and the ECB). We expect this to find in policy-domains where the EU has high capacity/competence.

At first, other forms of decision-making may play a secondary role. But as decision-making in a crisis becomes less salient or conflictual, executive decision-making is most likely to be complemented or replaced by *issue-specific task-forces*. Such task forces are made up of experts or of a combination of officials and experts who are called upon to support governments and who contribute to the 'puzzling' of the executive actors in coming to terms with the prevailing uncertainty.

[13] In the terminology of the punctuated equilibrium model, executive bargaining occurs as a result of 'serial shifts' (Baumgartner and Jones 2002).

At the level of the member states, *partisan contestation* is likely to be of some importance, especially as a crisis becomes less urgent. Executive-led crisis-management is likely to activate opposition from both pro-demarcation and pro-integration forces in the party system and beyond. As we have argued, this kind of conflict is shaped by a set of factors – the institutional context, the government's composition, and its overall strategy. Finally, at both levels, *bureaucratic network negotiations* continue to do their routine work in managing a crisis (e.g. within the extended comitology system of the EU). We do not consider this sequence of executive dominance followed by other decision-making modes to signal a failure of democracy. Rather, they are a matter of overlapping political tempi characterising different institutions as befits complex polities.

We would also argue that transnational coalitions play an important confounding role in decision-making that is simultaneously taking place at two levels. This simultaneity raises the question of the relationship between their reactions, the extent to which they are compatible with each other and how the policy-makers at the two levels go about coordinating their responses.

When crises create urgency (Tornado and Avalanche structure, see *Table 4*), first responses are expected to be forthcoming *unilaterally* at each level, because there is hardly any time for agreed coordination. Decisions can be taken more quickly at the national level but capacities may be limited. This can often create facts on the ground that make EU-level coordination chasing a moving target. The Syrian refugee crisis provides an illustration of such a sequence. In a first stage, we observed a 'free-for-all' with member states adopting unilateral policies (the front-line states waving through the flood of refugees, the transit states building their own fences, the destination states closing their borders). Only later were they ready to contemplate more cooperative solutions. The EA crisis provides an interesting contrast because stabilisation of systemic financial market failure, in 2008 and 2010, was beyond any member states' capacity. The ECB was at first the unilateral policymaker, lending to banks in coordination with other central banks. At the same time, the ECB pushed fiscal authorities in member states for burden-sharing and premised further action on institution-building at the European level, with mixed success (Mabbett and Schelkle 2019).

> These hypothetical trajectories of crisis dynamics will be the subject of comparisons across crises.

In an interdependent political-economic system, unilateral actions are likely to have spill-over effects on other member states, which is often the reason for their call for EU coordination and intervention. We hypothesise that the spatial distribution of the incidence and the EU-competences generally determine whether the EU will intervene and joint solutions will be possible. Opposition from fortunate member states to collective EU action is likely to be raised if member states are affected in asymmetric ways. Opposition from member states in need of support are likely to be raised if the EU intervention comes with strings attached. Strong spill-overs strengthen the bargaining position of the latter and joint solutions, although we expect that strings and unevenly distributed adjustment efforts will have to be accepted. This tit-for-tat can explain why even massive mutual support between members rarely creates a similar amount of political goodwill.

The coalitions among member states are crucial for the solutions possible and the dynamic of coalition formation can be counter-intuitive. Even if a majority in the EU supports intervention on behalf of unfortunate member states, the opposition from a coalition of fortunate member states may be strong enough to prevent such intervention, exploiting the super-majority requirement to change the status quo. The Visegrad-4 countries have played the role of a blocking minority coalition in the refugee crisis. Analogously, even if a majority of member states share a common problem that supports EU intervention, it may not be forthcoming if the EU lacks the corresponding capacity to

intervene. This has, at first, been the case in the Covid-19 crisis. The EU's capacity to intervene had to be created by joint decision-making. Every party can exploit the maximum of leverage that even the weakest members enjoy in at this point (and only at this point), for instance by linking more or less related issues: the majority in the European Parliament insisted for its approval of recovery funding on a rule-of-law clause that was fiercely opposed by CEE countries. These are all instances of the Joint-Decision-Trap (Scharpf 1999) in two-level games concerning institutional change.

It is these vagaries of uncoordinated decision-making that can explain the primacy of the European Council – with all its downsides. It has put national leaders 'acting in concert' at the core of the EU polity's authority structure, in their role as EU actors. Given the lack of a genuine and free-standing polity-holding centre, the EU can be kept together only by extraordinary political investments of national leaders. Crises are times for political leadership, which provides 'ways of overcoming collective action problems in situations where there are no adequate institutions to regulate the collective action' (Schoeller 2017: 3). Leadership can be provided by executives of EU-institutions or by executives from member states.

> However, there is no guarantee that such leadership is forthcoming and during many of the crises under study, leadership has been in short supply (Tortola and Pansardi 2019). We will study under which conditions leadership has been forthcoming from EU institutions and from member states, with what kind of success.

3.3 The policy-making process and transnational coalitions

For the conceptualisation of the policy-making process, we start from the observation that crises are multi-dimensional phenomena, which policy-makers at whatever level break down into specific policy-making tasks. This piecemeal approach gives rise to a set of *policy-making episodes*. These episodes are interlinked and often difficult to separate from each other, but it makes analytical sense to distinguish between them for a more systematic study of crisis policy-making and crisis politics. There are parallel episodes at both the EU- and the domestic level of member states which interact with each other. At the same time, policy-making proceeds in a sequence of stages (deLeon 1999). Each policy-making episode can be broken down in a series of *policy-making steps* – formal stages in the policy-making process such as proposing, negotiating, adopting, implementing policy.

> We try to identify the crucial episodes for each crisis at both levels, and to reconstruct the policy-making steps for each episode. This allows us to trace systematically how the multi-tier system of policymaking in the EU works, e.g. where authority is exercised and where power lies.

Agenda-setting constitutes the first stage. Schattschneider (1975: 66) famously claimed that 'the definition of the alternatives is the supreme instrument of power; the antagonists can rarely agree on what the issues are because power is involved in the definition. He who determines what politics is about runs the country, because the definition of the alternatives is the choice of conflicts, and the choice of conflicts allocates power.' In a crisis, a shock imposes the problem to be dealt with, but it does not impose the interpretation of the problem and the policy options to address it. At the EU-level, it is the Commission which has agenda-setting power. It will provide proposals for how to deal with the crisis.

As the European Council has been gaining in importance, the agenda-control by member states has become increasingly important, too. The question is which member states will control the agenda-setting. Degner and Leuffen (2019) show that in the EA reform process, France and Germany exercised agenda control by narrowing down the set of options such that the other member states

were forced to choose among a preselected set of options. The proposal by the Franco-German couple for a recovery fund in the Covid-19 crisis is only the latest example of the agenda-setting power of these two European heavyweights. However, France and Germany do not always succeed in controlling the agenda. In fact, if one of them gets its way, the other is likely to lose out because their preferences are often at the opposite sides of the spectrum.

Smaller countries may play a decisive role. Arregui and Thomson (2009) find that large states have somewhat less bargaining success than small states in the EU, a finding they explain with the more restricted range of interests of small states, which allows them to argue more effectively that their essential interests are at stake when they do take positions. The Visegrad-4 in the refugee crisis and the so-called Frugal Four in the aftermath of the EA crisis and in the Covid-19 crisis are cases in point. Given the institutional requirements for the adoption of a proposal, the *extremity of position* of some member states has important repercussions for all the earlier stages in the policy-making process, including the agenda-setting stage: opposition at later stages in the process can be anticipated already in the formulation of the proposals.

The *negotiation* stage is the next in line. Contrary to the liberal intergovernmentalists, we do not assume that the member states at the negotiation table have fixed preferences, determined domestically. New intergovernmentalist scholars provided evidence that national preference formation has become an inherently transnational process that involves governments of member states (Kassim, Saurugger, and Puetter 2020; Fontan and Saurugger 2020; Kyriazi 2020). In crisis situations where uncertainty and urgency prevail, national preference formation and European level bargaining become simultaneous processes with policy-makers being involved and negotiating at the national and the EU level at the same time (Crespy and Schramm 2021). Preference formation is strongly driven by eventfulness, uncertainty, and interpretation of multiple interests and multiple consequences of possible action (Hall 2005).

Network capital is a crucial resource to be considered in the coalition formation process. Arregui and Thompson (2009) find that states with more network capital have more bargaining success. Network capital refers to the depth and breadth of cooperation networks in which member states are embedded. These network ties may form more or less informal policy-specific coalitions among the member states. Such policy-specific informal coalitions are shaped by transnational negotiations between subsets of member states. In late August 2017, for example, President Macron embarked on a highly publicized tour in Eastern Europe with the stated aim being to convince key states in the region to support the Amended Posted Workers Directive (Kyriazi 2020). Importantly, the management of the series of crises can be expected to reinforce the formation of such policy-specific coalitions between subsets of member states.

> Coalition formation is, again, a crucial part of the bargaining stage (see Wasserfallen et al. 2019 for the EA crisis). Building transnational coalitions between member states seems to us a promising way to show why size is such an unreliable predictor of the distributive outcome of policy decisions.

The third *adoption* stage is crucial insofar as it is at this stage that the public becomes most aware of the policy-making process. Given the crucial role of executive decision-making and of the intergovernmental coordination mode, the key decisions at the EU level have been adopted by the European Council. The number of Council meetings have steeply increased during the crisis, required by the need to come to terms with the emergency situations (Puetter 2015). As van Middelaar (2014: 304; 2019) points out, the European Council meetings of the heads of state are characterized by the club feeling among the participants sitting around the table (which facilitates the finding of a

consensus), and by high media attention (high visibility, dramatisation, and media pressure), which exerts pressure to present unity and decisiveness. But the European Parliament is perfectly able to throw spanners in the works and delay adoption or modify what the Council has decided. This delaying role is often criticised in the media but it protects the EU from the objection of emergency politics or van Middelaar's attention-seeking talk of European 'coups'. The EP successfully pressed for more stringent regulation of the financial industry and it has sharpened its stance on the rule of law norm recently. Moreover, the EP tends to have a more "social" view on many issues, including on the EU budget. Whether sincere or strategic, the EP's insistence on social and gender impact evaluations (explicitly envisaged by the Lisbon Treaty), often delay or bend Council decisions (e.g. in the European Semester process).

The *implementation* stage, finally, is crucial because the adoption of a given decision does not necessarily settle the issue-specific conflict, nor does it necessarily settle deeper, polity-related conflicts. The member states opposed to a given decision may sabotage it by not implementing it or by preventing other member states from implementing it. The adoption and implementation of a given policy proposal closes a given episode of policy-making. As the "new federalism" literature has argued and documented for the US case, in addition to non-implementation there is a grey area which allows constituent units to partly adjust the jointly agreed decisions to local conditions (Shapiro 2009). The project will investigate such dynamics, drawing insights from the new federalism literature. We expect that the EU experimental polity does offer various 'safety valves' for softening minority losses and prevent destructive conflict dynamics.

Table 9 summarises this section and the possible questions one may have for process tracing and political process analysis (Bojar et al. 2021) in a particular crisis.

Table 9: Stages of the policy-making process

	Crisis policy-making	**Crisis politics**	**Exemplary SOLID questions**
Agenda-setting	interpretation of the problem and policy options to address it	choice of conflict that is likely to arise; Commission vs member states as agenda-setters	Sources and venues for policy proposals? Agenda for capacity-building? Which member states/ coalitions are pro-active? Role of the EU (Com, ECB etc)?
Negotiation	Two-level game of negotiation, depending on EU competences	Basis of transnational coalition formation, conflict lines/ cleavages	venues for negotiations? Apparent divergence of preferences? Compromise or threat of vetoes?
Adoption	accommodation of diversity in the substance of the agreement	media attention, presentation of unity or of hard-won compromises, open conflicts	public attention and response, e. g. by national parliaments, NGOs, business? Indicative of consensus, or constraining/ enabling dissensus?
Implementation	compliance with obligations under the agreement	neglect and open resistance, speed of transposition	issue-specific conflict indicative of deeper, polity-related conflict?

Crisis policy-making does not end with a given episode, because it is highly unlikely that a new policy will be able to eradicate completely the problem raised by a crisis. Additional episodes follow suit at both levels of decision-making. It is a key task of the project to study the relationship between these episodes.

4 Policy outputs and collective action problems

The fourth building block is well-covered in the literature to which we have individually contributed. SOLID's contribution is to systematise the experience of all five crises with the benefit of hindsight. We are particularly interested in how well-known collective action problems have been overcome and led to a variety of agreed solutions – or not. Our polity perspective suggests to explain the policy outputs as a result of the coordination challenge and problem pressures, as summarised in table 3-5, with the EU's competences in the particular domain affected by a crisis.

Table 8 shows how we see, hypothetically, spatial problem distributions interacting with EU competences. The possibility of joint action with EU involvement is greatest for the combination of common problem pressure and high EU competence. In the case of common pressure and limited EU competence, there is a potential for joint action. Second, in the case of similar problem pressures, we expect coordination efforts, involving regulations, but not joint actions. Third, in the spill-over configurations, we expect sustained interventions at best, possibly limited interventions or voluntary action (by a 'coalition of the willing'). In the case of idiosyncratic configurations, inaction or ad hoc actions are expected to prevail.

Table 8: Spatial distributions of problem pressure and EU involvement

Incidence/Spatial distribution	EU Competence: limited	EU Competence: high
Common	**Coordination/joint action** (Covid-19 crisis)	**Joint action with EC involvement** (Brexit crisis after referendum)
Similar	**Coordination** (social crisis: poverty)	**Coordination/regulation** (social crisis: posting of workers)
Spill-over	**Limited intervention/ voluntary action** (refugee crisis)	**Sustained intervention** (EA crisis)
Idiosyncratic	**Inaction** (Brexit crisis before referendum)	**Ad hoc action** (emergency relief for specific localised crises/critical sinkholes, Brexit after notification under Art.50)

The various solutions are up against well-known collective action problems. All agreed solutions run into the commitment problem of dynamically consistent behaviour. What looks like a sensible constraint on one's own actions behind the veil of ignorance is no longer in one's interest after the veil of ignorance has been lifted and one turns out to be among the fortunate. Democracies have a inherent problem of sticking to commitments because it goes against the very principle of time-bound rule and reversibility of decisions by shifting majorities. The obligation to provide rescue for humanitarian migrants is a case in point. More specifically, joint solutions are public goods or common pool resources from which users cannot be easily excluded. This creates adverse incentives for free riding, namely of not contributing to the cost of providing the public good and/or of overusing the resource. Financial stability and the temptation to (over-)issue debt in an integrated capital market is often seen as a case in point, although this leaves out the free riding of the supply side/ capital exporters. Joint solutions will therefore have to make the costs and benefits felt, by stipulating contributions and by monitoring use. Coordinated solutions run into the cartel problem, notably that not sticking to an agreement becomes all the more attractive when everybody else sticks to it. In this case, only a credible sanctioning mechanism can prevent such opportunistic behaviour and coordination failure.

The general reasoning on intergovernmental coordination (table 2) predicts that the hardest hit member states, which are most in need of cooperation, tend to have the weakest position in the

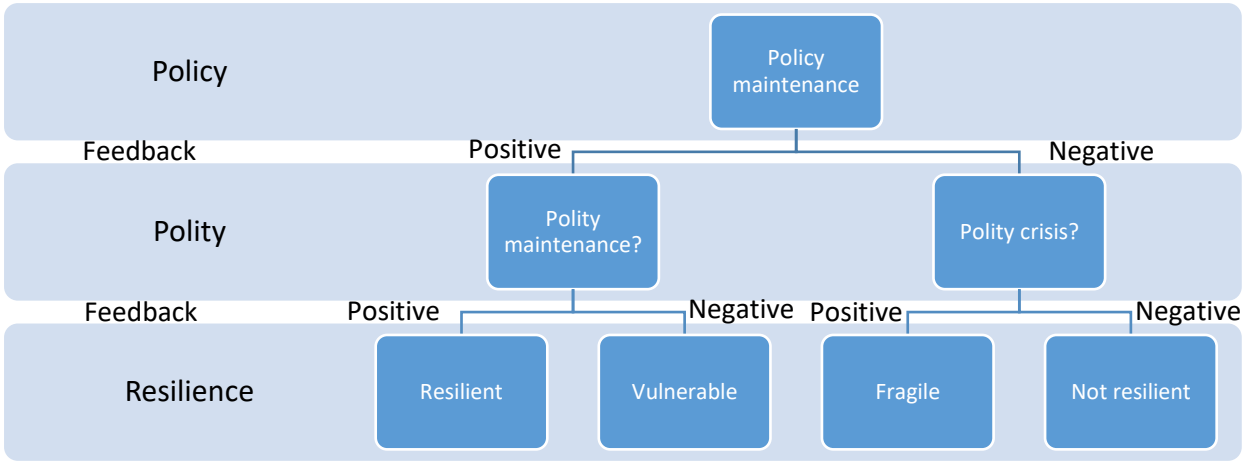
intergovernmental bargaining. Intergovernmental negotiations can be overridden in policy domains, where the EU has high competences, however (e.g. the ECB in the EA crisis; or localised crises in sectors covered by EU regulations). In policy domains, where the EU has limited competences, dominant member states in coalition with other member states are likely to take the initiative (e.g. Germany in the case of the refugee crisis). If a member state faces a unique problem on its own, inaction or ad hoc responses on the part of the EU is most likely, irrespective of the extent of its competences.

In the final analysis, the SOLID project asks questions about the maintenance of the EU as a functioning polity and interprets this, perhaps optimistically, as determined by the outputs in terms of policy response and in terms of polity development. Is the sequence of policy-specific responses sufficient to guarantee the support for the EU polity? Or does the sequence of policy-specific crises produce a deep political crisis which unsettles the fundamental assumptions and practices regarding the exercise of authority and its legitimation in the EU? The underlying assumption is that policies matter and output legitimacy, albeit a fragile form of legitimation, works.

In the first instance, different crises have an impact on specific policy-domains, from which they may extend to the polity as a whole. Under certain conditions policy-specific politicisation may escalate to the point of seriously threatening the EU polity as such.

While policy-specific outcomes are often short-term outcomes, their implications for the polity as a whole are likely to become transparent only in the long-term. We shall attempt to identify the various policy-specific outcomes of a given crisis, which may be quite heterogeneous, and to assess their combined effect on the resilience of the EU as an experimental polity. Importantly, we shall not only consider the outcomes of each individual crisis, but take into account the sequence of the crises and their cumulative effect on the resilience of the polity as a whole. The following flow diagram tries to capture this assumption on which our study of the polity outcome rests. Figure 3 provides the link to the last building block.

Figure 3: The link between policy outputs and polity outcomes



We differentiate between vulnerable and resilient to mark the difference between unstable institutional equilibria that are, on the one hand, due to polity politicisation despite policy responses that address the domain-specific crisis (vulnerability) and, on the other, due to policy failure but effective containment of polity politicisation (fragility).

5 Polity outcomes of the EU's policy response

The SOLID-project's main goal is to investigate developments since 2008 in order to account for the puzzling co-presence of 'deep political crisis', on the one hand, and yet polity-resilience, on the other. Our theoretical framework, and in particular our theoretical propositions, suggest a number of causal mechanisms that may produce both crisis and resilience. In our empirical investigations, we aim at reconstructing how the joint operation and intersections of mechanisms have indeed produced a mix of crisis and resilience. We also aim at identifying the conditions under which deep crisis or resilience are likely to prevail.

The policy and the polity levels are obviously related, but must be kept analytically separate. At the polity level, what matters for resilience is the capacity of the EU to preserve an equilibrium between its three constitutive elements, ie boundaries, authority and loyalty/solidarity. This equilibrium has a functional aspect, but its essence is political: what is key is to preserve the overall legitimation of the polity. Crisis situations are delicate moments, since the polity equilibrium can be seriously jeopardized, as it was the case during the EA and refugee crises and Brexit in particular.

The typical mechanism which challenges polity resilience is polity politicization. The latter is obviously related to policy politicization, but the two are not coterminous. The integration-demarcation conflict in member states is not an either/or binary opposition, but plays out on a continuous dimension of more or less, and may manifest itself in a plurality of forms, ranging from a contingent policy crisis to a full-blown polity crisis. Two general hypotheses can nonetheless be suggested about the link between policy and polity politicisation:

1) an episode of policy politicisation is more likely to escalate into polity politicisation if the policy has a direct link with boundaries and social sharing;

2) polity politicisation is set in motion by boundary- and bonding-related issues and then escalated by targeting the EU authority.

We investigate the link between the policy and the polity level by observing the policy outcomes of our crises. We propose to distinguish between four possible outcomes, based on two criteria – the mode of institutional change, and the type of long-term equilibrium resulting from such change. With regard to the mode of institutional change, we can distinguish between the dual mode of change and the continuous mode of change. The critical junctures (Capoccia 2015: 147) and the punctuated equilibrium literature (Baumgartner and Jones 2002) subscribe to the dual mode of change: shorter phases of fluidity and change alternate with longer periods of stability and adaptation. With regard to the long-term equilibrium, we propose to distinguish between positive and negative feedback mechanisms, i. e. between policy-specific change that succeeds in stabilising the polity (especially in terms of depoliticizing the polity as such), and change that is destabilising it, by contributing to its politicisation. Combining the two criteria, we arrive at four types of possible crisis outcomes:

Table 9: Crisis outcomes

Model of policy change	Polity outcome	
	positive feedback	negative feedback
continuous change	**Adaptation** (EU-Turkey agreement, EBCG, Banking union, European employment authority)	**Stagnation: decay, inertia** (EA crisis: limited fiscal backstop, refugee crisis: lack of Dublin reform)
punctuated change	**Transformation** (Brexit; ECB intervention in EA crisis; Recovery Fund)	**Disintegration: chronic instability (breakup)**

Adaptation (e.g. by layering or conversion (Streeck and Thelen 2005 and Mahoney and Thelen 2010: 15ff.), or first- and second order change (Hall 1993) corresponds to continuous policy-specific change that contributes to polity resilience by stabilizing the policy domain. The establishment of the banking union or the EU-Turkey agreement are examples of layering (the introduction of new rules on top of the existing ones), the creation of the European Border and Coast Guard (ECBG) provides an example of conversion (the already existing Frontex is expanded and transformed into a more effective agency with few changes of existing rules). The establishment in 2019 of the European Employment Authority (ELA) is another example of adaptation to the challenges of workers mobility, through capacity building /layering in the management if the European single labour market. "*Transformation* (third-order change; displacement) corresponds to a punctuated change, the choice of a new path of development that leads to a new stable equilibrium of the policy-domain and, indirectly, of the polity. Examples of transformation include the ECB intervention in the EA crisis, which introduced a paradigmatic change into EU monetary policy (Ferrara 2020); the final outcome of the Brexit crisis, i.e. a negotiated exit of the UK, which transformed the composition of the EU membership; or the creation of the Recovery Fund and the procurement policy for vaccinations in the Covid crisis, which introduced a new core state capacities at the EU-level. However, adaptation and transformation may not be easy to distinguish, nor is it easy to show to what extent they contribute to the resilience of the polity as such.

Stagnation or inertia is an outcome that reproduces the extant policies without providing a long-term stabilisation of their domain. If extant policies perform poorly and tend to wear down diffuse support, they negatively affect resilience. This outcome is closely related to the problem structure we called 'erosion'. If actors do not react to changes in the environment, the very inaction may change the impact of the institution (drift). An example is the failure to reform the Dublin regulation in the refugee crisis. The final outcome is *disintegration*, i.e. chronic instability or even breakdown of the polity as a result of a missed opportunity of reform in a specific policy-domain during a critical juncture. Bernhard (2015) points out that the critical juncture of a crisis does not necessarily produce a new stable equilibrium, but may give rise to chronic instability for an extended period of time. For the time being, we do not have an example for disintegration.

The overall outcome of a given crisis is difficult to assess, as is illustrated by the crises we are dealing with in our project. Take the example of the joint experimental solution which preserved the euro in 2012. While the EU polity was kept together, its underlying structural equilibrium was transformed, by enhancing the ECB's prerogatives and indirectly underpinning cross-national solidarity – even if "by stealth". The new institutions that were created – ESM, banking union, six-pack, two-pack – combined with the ECB interventions introduced a paradigmatic change making the EU more

resilient against future crises. The transformation, in turn, fell short of what was required for a truly resilient monetary union: key elements of the established framework (fiscal rules and fiscal surveillance) were maintained and key elements for long-term resilience (fiscal backstops) were only partially introduced, which may be a sign of stagnation. The creation of a new facility in response to the Covid-19 pandemic reveals that policymakers themselves saw the need for more fiscal backstops. In the case of the refugee crisis, the EU-Turkey agreement can be considered an adaptive solution: it consists in a short-term adaptation that is highly fragile since it depends on the continued cooperation of a third-party – Turkey, which, as the events in spring 2020 showed, cannot be taken for granted in the long run. In terms of the transformation of the established system, the refugee crisis did not give rise to stable solutions: the Dublin regulation could not be reformed, and the proposal of a new EU Pact on immigration and asylum that was launched in September 2020 (FT, September 24, 2020) remains a dead letter so far. The Brexit crisis has transformed the EU, of course, but at least up to now, it has not led to negative feedbacks giving rise to further disintegrative tendencies or even the breakup of the union.

The key question is under which conditions the crisis provides an opportunity for long-term transformative change with polity stabilising effects. Based on the previous sections, we propose three general hypotheses. First, we suggest that an important condition for transformative change to occur lies in the sequence of change. If long-term reforms are a sequel to short-term policy-specific crisis management, long-term, transformative reforms are likely to be pre-structured by the short-term reactions to the emergency situation. This is easiest to observe in the case of failure (note the possible bias). Early failures may prevent long-term reforms. The failure to react in time to a crisis, for example, increases the pressure at later points in time, or the failure to build consensus for short-term solutions may foreclose the possibility for long-term policy reforms. An example in point is the failure to achieve a reform of the Dublin regulation in the refugee crisis: more far-reaching reforms were foreclosed by the early failure to reach agreement on the resettlement of refugees. In terms of the classification of policy-domain specific solutions proposed in Table 8, we suggest that coordinated interventions and, especially, joint solutions to policy-specific problem pressure create favourable preconditions for long-term transformative change, while early unilateral actions, ad hoc actions, or inaction create unfavourable preconditions for such change.

Second, we suggest that the politicisation of crisis-specific policy-making renders the transformative solutions more difficult. Policy politicisation can result from policy-specific conflicts between member states or from such conflicts within member states, which are exacerbated by the policy-specific crisis management. On the one hand, the asymmetric incidence of a given crisis creates or exacerbates existing domain-specific conflicts between member states – between guarantor and debtor states in the EA crisis, or between frontline, transit, bystander and destination states in the refugee crisis. On the other hand, with the rise of nationalist formations at the domestic level, national governments may be encouraged to exploit such issue-specific conflicts and to even engage in a generalized anti-EU, pro-demarcation conflict, especially on the more sovereignty-sensitive issues. Such a polity-disruptive prospect is all the more likely, the more nationalist challenger parties acquire coalition power, gain access to the political majority in parliament or enter the executive (e. g. the Lega-M5S executive in Italy, or the Orbàn government in Hungary).

Note, however, that, at the same time, the politicisation of policy-based transnational conflicts is also a sign of polity-building. In other words, while transformative solutions become more difficult once policy-making, as a result of conflicts between member states, is politicised in a given policy-domain, such policy-specific politicization processes are not only prone to giving rise to negative feedback processes. They may also provide opportunities for positive feedback processes, involving

not only more intensive powering, but also more intensive puzzling and mobilizing of support for joint solutions. The increasing attention that such politicization processes draw to the policy-domain in question may concentrate the minds of the policy-makers, trigger leadership, and expand public support across member states.

Third, we take into account the endogenous nature of political institutions (Bartolini 2021: 255; Hall 2016: 39; Gerschewski 2021: 230): institutions not only shape politics, they are also shaped by politics, actors are not only rule takers, but also rule makers and rule shapers. Hall calls this the "paradox of plasticity" of institutions, and he advocates a coalitional perspective on institutions to address it. Waldner and Lust (2018), similarly, advocate a "balance-of-power" framework in combination with a coalitional approach for explaining (de-)democratization. We have stressed throughout the role of actor coalitions for the analysis of crisis policy-making and crisis politics. We suggest that, given the lack of institutional constraints in the experimental polity of the EU, not only the opportunities for coalitions of unilaterally acting member states to block joint solutions/coordination/intervention, but also the opportunities for the formation of polity-maintaining and polity-building coalitions promoting reforms are particularly rich, especially in the specific conjunctures of crises. From the literature on federalism, we know that both centralized party systems and centralized representation of member states (bicameralism) facilitate the success of federations (McKay 2004). In the absence of centralized party systems, in the EU we mainly expect polity maintenance from the territorial representation of the member states in the European Council, i.e. from the executives of member states and their capacity to forge coalitions among themselves in support of concerted efforts at reform.

The polity implications of policy responses may be deliberate or not (i.e. result from unintended effects). Faced with disintegrative tendencies, however active and committed to 'defending the EU', the Commission cannot play the role of a resourceful polity-holding centre, endowed with direct-democratic legitimation and authoritative prerogatives. Thus, in the EU the burden of identifying serious negative polity implications and engage in deliberate polity maintenance during systemic crises falls on the shoulders of national leaders, who are the ultimate custodians of the territorial system they are meant to lead. Polity maintenance can take various forms in practice (e.g. through communicative discourse, or through specific calibrations of policy responses to avoid their potential polity undermining effects, for example). Democratic theory assigns the function of polity maintenance to democratic leaders: these are in fact bound not only by the duty of responsiveness and accountability to their constituencies, but by a wider responsibility towards 'the whole' (Sartori 2016). Such responsibility is not only functional (preservation of system integration and performance), but also political stricto sensu: it implies preserving the legitimacy of the polity, i.e. the basic preconditions of the latter's durability. Responsibility is "Chefsache", in the profound sense of the term: it requires the capacity and readiness to look and act beyond the short term and – paraphrasing Jacobs (2011) "govern the polity for the future". As argued by Müller and Esch (2020), the quality and orientation of leadership is key on this front. In critical moments, characterised by extraordinary problem and political pressure, the availability of purpose-oriented and even conviction-oriented leadership can play a decisive role in averting disintegration.

The EU polity is "experimental" also on this delicate front. Contrary to other types of established polities (including coming-together federations) in the EU polity maintenance tends itself to be a two-level game. Given the presence of domestic nationalist coalitions, investing in maintenance at the EU level may be counterproductive at the domestic level, and vice versa. Under the Covid crisis, Merkel was able to embark upon the most direct route, by persuading German voters that "what is good for Europe is good for Germany". However, this route is possible only under special conditions,

and in most cases even perceptive leaders have a hard time in contrasting and managing (e.g. through political “bypasses” or by stealth) disruptive, polity undermining conflicts.

Disruptive conflicts have two sides: the subversive and the maintenance side. The first (subversion) is characterised by harsh and dogmatic juxtaposition and a refusal to compromise, uncovering fundamental disagreement on the polity structure and its purpose. The second (maintenance) responds by diverting attention from the contingent substantive conflict towards shared values and long-term interests in preserving the community. This strategy is meant to produce various positive effects: extending the horizon of contenders, allowing them to perceive the wider balance of intertemporal costs and benefits which accrue from polity membership; opening up unexploited opportunities to reach compromises and package deals; providing conflicting parties with a broader and shared sense through which to interpret their substantive and relational choices.

Crisis policy-making must be understood as covering not only policy responses, but also this extraordinary type of polity maintenance as well. For obvious reasons, France and Germany play a key role in the provision of polity leadership. Their joint involvement is a necessary condition for maintenance, even if it is not always sufficient. In moments of crisis, the leaders of these two countries (and their allies) must be able to reconcile two polity maintenance logics: one upholding the EU, the other upholding their national polity.

Summary and conclusion

SOLID research pursues a number of big research questions in the Rokkan-Hirschmanian tradition, which we will turn into answerable puzzles over the lifetime of the project:

- What are the policy resources of this experimental polity, not only in terms of instruments but also in terms of authority to deploy them?
- Where is the centre of political power in the management of the crises and how does it operate? Notably, are there overlooked advantages of a ‘weak centre’ that can mitigate collective action problems, which a stronger centre would aggravate?
- How does the politicisation of specific crisis responses take place and how is such routine politicisation in a union of nationally constituted democracies prevented from escalating into the politicisation of the polity itself, questioning its borders, its authority and the loyalty to its community?
- How effective have the emergency politics and policies in response to the multiple crises since 2009 been? Are the policy measures addressing a crisis accompanied by explicit efforts to maintain the polity, for instance through rhetorical/symbolic action?
- Have these crises provided an opportunity to increase the resilience of the EU as a polity, or have they generated stagnation and even the risk of disintegration?

In short, we want to explain the policy-making process in times of crises and its outcome at the level of the policy-specific domains as well as the outcome for the polity as a whole. Figure 1 summarises the building blocks that this paper spelled out as follows:

The experimental polity is a multi-tier system with unconventional features. We regard it as a political form in its own right, not as an incomplete federal state. This experimental polity has advantages and drawbacks. For instance, porous borders may make it less prone to military conflict and geopolitical instability than hard borders that afflicted nation states for centuries, but they also render the formation of systems of loyalty (social solidarity and political participation) more difficult. The conflict structures in the multi-tier system are characterised by new conflict structures, presumably different for intra-national and transnational conflict lines. The experimental nature of

the polity makes it vulnerable to processes in which routine political conflicts around policy decisions turn into the politicisation of the polity itself.

Within this experimental polity, crisis situations are shaped by the policy heritage, often by the experience of past failure. The EU's weak centre, constituted by an entrepreneurial elite bureaucracy and diverse member states represented in various Council formations, is more likely than nation states to take the heritage as a trigger for specific institutional innovations, despite a hard to change economic constitution (four freedoms) and the ever-present multiple veto-points. This makes every crisis a critical juncture in the sense of a situation in which the future is open as regards the possible outcome for the polity (captured as adaptation, transformation, stagnation and disintegration). The polity outcome affects the policy heritage in the future, captured by new EU competencies and capacities as well as a different degree of institutional diversity among member states.

Apart from the given policy heritage, a crisis situation is the result, on the one hand, of problem pressures, i. e. the initial characteristics of a crisis in terms of urgency, uncertainty and interdependence between member states. On the other hand, it is the result of political pressures that arise from the domestic salience of a crisis and the strength of polarisation in the guise of challengers to elected governments. This shapes the two-level game in the EU polity. We capture the fact that this is a two-level game between states sharing their sovereignty by a second conflict structure: the EU is present inside each member in the guise of a cleavage around integration and demarcation, that divides political coalitions of cosmopolitan and of nationalist orientation. This cleavage or conflict line is cross-cutting other domestic cleavages.

The (evolving) setting of the experimental polity and the crisis situation together drive ('explain') crisis policy-making and politics. To a large part, this is about executive decision-making in a mode of emergency politics. Ideas play a crucial role in the collective puzzling that crisis responses amount to. We trace the policy-making process in four stages but unlike the public policy literature, we do this with a specific interest in the crisis politics of the EU polity and we have developed a detailed policy process tracing methodology for this (Bojar et al. 2021).

This is the crucial step to assess the outcome in terms of policies and the polity. As regards the policies, we are particularly interested in whether member states come out of crises sharing more risks through coordinated or joint solutions. Moreover, we ask whether the change this requires builds on existing institutions or constructs new institutions because the existing ones are seen as a failure. Ultimately, our interest is of course in the polity outcome, both in terms of its political development, but also in terms of the explicit effort put into its maintenance. It may be one of the paradoxical strengths of an experimental polity that its very fragility mobilises efforts among member states to maintain it, e. g. compared to established federations like the US. But EU polity maintenance remains a political effort, it is not guaranteed, for the very reason that the evolving EU polity has no finalité.

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