

# From Crisis to Integration? European Diversity and Identity, Transnationalism, and Institutional Change

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## The Crisis of the European Union

The European Union is in crisis. But the crisis of the European Union (EU) is not only an economic and fiscal crisis. As analysts and academics have pointed out, the current situation and solutions thereof resemble a larger crisis of EU integration – a crisis of a lack of public support and trust in EU institutions and actors, in their capability to provide the people with effective decision-making. Public perception of the EU is increasingly negative, while political elites do not necessarily buy into the necessity of an ever closer union; the proposed referendum of Cameron whether the UK remains in the EU being a good, but extreme example, indeed.

Hence, we face at least a two-fold problem in the EU at the moment; the one being related to an economic and fiscal crisis in parts of Europe, with large impacts on societies, austerity measures, a slowing down of economic productivity, unemployment and reduced economic demand; the other one being related to a growing skepticism of whether the European integration and related institutions and actors are able to foresee policy decisions which would improve living conditions of European societies in the future. In other words, one of the fundamental incentives of the EU project is set in question: to which extent the Union is able to serve as a framework that is perceived to be beneficial for European societies.

In this contribution to the workshop of the University of Kobe in Brussels I make the argument that crisis can be a starting-point for further integration. While building this argument on ideas by Hartmut Kaelble (2005) and – more recently – Timothy Garton Ash (2012), I argue that the crisis of the EU can be seen as a chance to reflect upon a couple of options how the EU could be understood in order to move the integration process forward.

On the one hand, I show that the current crisis has underlined diversities in the EU. While in the past ‘unity in diversity’ served as a phrase to justify the diversities within a homogenizing EU (see Kaelble 2009), this positive notion of ‘diversity in unity’ seems to have come under attack. Currently, diversity in the EU is seen more and more not only as a threat to the integration project, but to European individuals and societies at-large, especially in view of their ability to maintain and progress their conditions of life. As a consequence, the question on the benefit of the integration process is often linked to material objectives. The question “What’s in it for me?”, as Joseph Weiler recently argued, implies a reduction of the European project to the “measurable”, leaving out those aspects of the project which are of added-value to European societies, but simply uncountable (2012). Overall, diversity in Europe is not only resembled in how differently citizens feel attached to the EU in times of crisis, but also how different they feel from others, and whether they are willing to cooperate with other people and societies in the future.

On the other hand, I argue that if we want to take the crisis as a starting point for further integration this would mean to understand if, despite all diversity, integration is a viable concept for further integration. In this regard, it is necessary to outline some options how the EU could be understood if the crisis was perceived as a starting point for further integration. In the remainder of

this contribution I will argue that such an understanding of the EU could, *inter alia*, be linked to a) an understanding of the EU as a space of transnational interactions and interdependence, b) an understanding of the EU in which diversity and difference are a normality and of added-value rather than a state-of-affair that needs to be overcome, c) an understanding of the future European integration as a deliberative choice, including institutional changes, between what Jürgen Habermas recently called “executive federalism” and “transnational democracy”. It is, amongst others, these three understandings of the EU that impact on presenting the crisis as a starting-point for further integration.

## Diversity and the perception of the European Union in times of crisis

The European Union has a famous motto: “Unity in Diversity”. Adopted in 2000, it is essentially about two inseparable and competing aspects of the EU. While unity points to the coming together and the united achievements of European societies, diversity points to the fact that European societies remain essentially different. The motto obviously underlines the need for both – unity and diversity – in the course of European integration. The concept of diversity is a concept that has sharpened the awareness for the EU’s own plurality. Indeed, as Calder and Ceva argue “dealing with diversity has become a familiar part of institutional practice in the public sphere, just as it has become more prominent in legislation. Attention to the questions it raises has become more and more important in public life. The European Union slogan ‘United in Diversity’ reflects this importance.” (Calder and Ceva 2011: 1). European integration theories have often seen integration as a synonymous process to fusion, cohesion and convergence (Mair/Zielonka 2002: 2).

As a concept, diversity is essential to understand that the EU is not only about commonalities, but that there is an inherent cultural, historical, political, legal, economic plurality in the EU, that continues to be shaped by diverse European societies. Overall, diversity rather points to the underlying diverse structures of the EU. For instance, diversity is essentially about Europe’s diverse social stratification (Mau/Verwiebe 2010), diverse legal and political institutions, diverse economic and financial markets (Zielonka 2005). As Landfried has pointed out: “diversity describes [solely] the existing structural differentiation within a society and between societies.” (Landfried 2011: 20) And, indeed, diverse structures matter, as after the last large enlargement round the structure of European society presents itself as more diverse than before (Mair/Zielonka 2002; Zielonka 2005).

Diversity can also change over time. As EU enlargement shows, diversity within the EU and diversity of European societies and member states can change. Institutional changes, following the “diversity logic” (Mair/Zielonka 2002), can lead to an increased diversity within the multi-level institutional structure of the EU (Zielonka 2005). One obvious example is the Council setting in the European Union where – after the last enlargement – the intake of new member states led to the representation of 27 member state governments. In the case of foreign policy, the structural differentiation increased not only based on the new formal representation of Eastern European countries, but also because of the increase of structural representation of pro-transatlantic views in EU foreign policy.

The European public-debt and economic crisis has made diversities come to the fore. European economies are highly intertwined through transnational economic and capital business; but

European economies and societies at-large are affected asymmetrically by the crisis. This is not only clear in front of the sheer numbers of, for example, unemployment rates and economic growth across EU Member States. Also the effects of the EU's emergency measures (austerity) to counter-act and to avoid the failure of the European Monetary Union (EMU) have impacted upon European societies in different ways, with Greece being the most radical example.

While in the past 'unity in diversity' served as a phrase to justify the diversities within a homogenizing EU (see Kaelble 2009), this positive notion of 'diversity in unity' seems to have come under attack. Currently, diversity in the EU is seen more and more seen not only as a threat to the integration project, but to individuals and societies at-large regarding the ability to maintain and progress their conditions of life. Protesters in Greece show their disagreement with the overall austerity measures, identifying German Chancellor Merkel as being responsible for the enforced austerity measures and the worsening of their social conditions. On the other hand, Germans express in their public debates their prejudice against the way "Südeuropäer" ("South-Europeans") run their public households, fearing that the interdependent relationship between the "South" and the "North" will lead to less economic progression in the future.

QA7a What do you think are the two most important issues facing (OUR COUNTRY) at the moment? - Three highest percentages

	EU27		IE		LT		PT
Unemployment	46%	Unemployment	62%	Unemployment	46%	Unemployment	68%
Economic situation	35%	Economic situation	55%	Rising prices\inflation	45%	Economic situation	37%
Rising prices\inflation	24%	Government debt	22%	Economic situation	33%	Rising prices\inflation	25%
	BE		EL		LU		RO
Economic situation	27%	Economic situation	66%	Unemployment	38%	Economic situation	45%
Unemployment	26%	Unemployment	57%	Housing	36%	Unemployment	33%
Rising prices\inflation	24%	Government debt	20%	Rising prices\inflation	23%	Rising prices\inflation	33%
	BG		ES		HU		SI
Unemployment	58%	Unemployment	76%	Unemployment	57%	Economic situation	55%
Economic situation	45%	Economic situation	61%	Economic situation	43%	Unemployment	53%
Rising prices\inflation	28%	Government debt	11%	Rising prices\inflation	28%	Government debt	28%
		Health and social security	11%				
	CZ		FR		MT		SK
Economic situation	39%	Unemployment	55%	Rising prices\inflation	42%	Unemployment	51%
Rising prices\inflation	37%	Economic situation	29%	Economic situation	32%	Economic situation	38%
Unemployment	31%	Government debt	24%	Government debt	26%	Rising prices\inflation	36%
	DK		IT		NL		FI
Unemployment	51%	Unemployment	49%	Economic situation	56%	Unemployment	38%
Economic situation	48%	Economic situation	42%	Health and social security	30%	Health and social security	33%
Crime	16%	Taxation	29%	Government debt	28%	Economic situation	24%
The education system	16%						
	DE		CY		AT		SE
Government debt	37%	Unemployment	64%	Rising prices\inflation	37%	Unemployment	63%
Rising prices\inflation	30%	Economic situation	58%	Economic situation	35%	Health and social security	31%
The education system	21%	Crime	20%	Government debt	27%	The education system	25%
	EE		LV		PL		UK
Rising prices\inflation	51%	Unemployment	53%	Unemployment	58%	Unemployment	48%
Unemployment	47%	Economic situation	41%	Rising prices\inflation	44%	Economic situation	31%
Economic situation	33%	Taxation	20%	Economic situation	24%	Immigration	21%

**Figure 1: Copy from Eurobarometer 78, 2012**

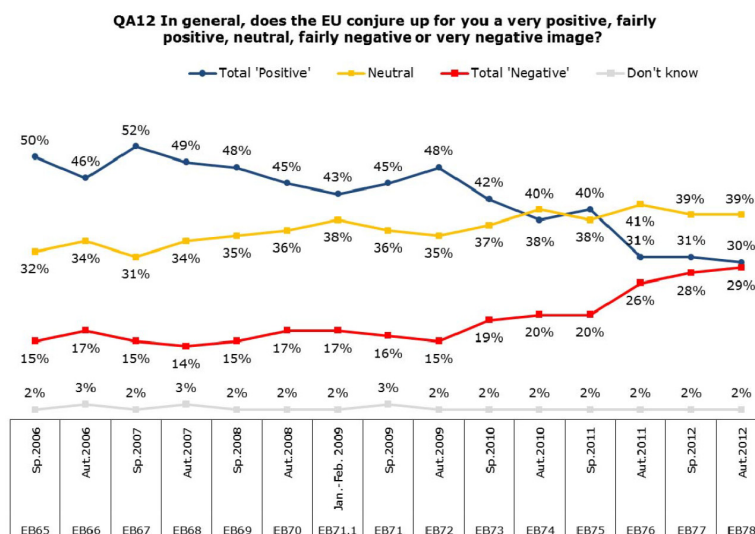
Eurobarometer findings show in the first place that indeed the perception of the economic situation by citizens and the personal problems that citizens face differs according to countries of

origin. Germans still see the economic situation as “in total good” by 75%, while 99% of the Greek respondents state the situation is “in total bad”. Germans see by 37% that government debt is the most important thing that they face currently, whereas Greek people see by 66% that the unemployment is the most important issue. Moreover, the Eurobarometer findings of 2012 show that in times of crisis European citizens do not see themselves connected to other citizens in Europe (see Eurobarometer 78, 2012).

At the same time that diversity is reinforced during the crisis, the question of how the integration process benefits citizens has become more and more a questions of material benefits. The question “What’s in it for me?” implies to reduce the European project to the “measurable”, leaving out those aspects of the project which are off added-value to European societies, but simply uncountable (Weiler 2012). Overall, diversity in Europe is not only resembled by the question how much citizens feel attached to the EU and “European” in times of crisis, but also by how different they feel from others, and whether they are willing to cooperate with the other in the future.

The trust in European institutions, as the Eurobarometer surveys show, has steadily declined in the EU on average. In 2007, the EU saw a peak at 57% of respondents stating that they trusted the EU on average. In 2012, five years later, only 33% tend to trust it. Likewise the “positive image” of the European Union has lost support. In 2006, the EU was said to have an overall positive image (50%), while it came down to an ever-low 30% in 2012 (see figure 2). The negative image of the EU has however increased throughout time, almost meeting the positive image with 29% in 2012 (see figure 2). In other words, there is some evidence that, if not skepticism in integration, it is a less positive and more and more negative image that the EU has to face amongst its EU citizens.

Overall, the reinforced diversity in the EU seems to coincide with an overall less and less persuasive integration process that would in theory have to balance between on the one hand homogeneity and diversity on the other hand. For the moment, ever more homogeneous EU (austerity) policies and increasing diversity seem to foster questions of “what’s in for me?” on all sides, while at the same time the overall trust in the EU is decreasing.



**Figure 2: Copy from Eurobarometer 78, 2012**

Given these sketches on diversity, a lack of trust in EU institution, a darkening picture of the EU, there is the question whether European integration will be seen as a necessity and something in the future. Next to the findings shown above, Eurobarometer (EB) data also shows that overall EU-Europeans see “more” coordination of Member States as the most likely step to respond to crisis. 85% of EB-respondents agree that the crisis will foster more coordination amongst Member States (see EB 78, 2012). In other words, while it is far from clear that EU integration will be favored in the future, coordination is seen as unavoidable in times of crisis.

In this perspective, the crisis might not only be seen as an end, but rather as a new beginning for European integration, a starting point for integration after the crisis. But how can the crisis be seen as a starting point for further integration?

### Understanding of the crisis as a starting-point for further integration

In this regard, it is necessary to outline options how the EU could be understood if the crisis was a perceived as a starting point for further integration. I will focus on three conditions of how to understand the EU, which are not meant to be exhaustive in nature. I will argue that our understanding of the crisis as a starting point, is, *inter alia*, dependent of a) an understanding of the EU as a space of transnational interactions and interdependence, b) an understanding of the EU in which diversity and difference are a normality and of added-value rather than a state-of-affair that needs to be overcome, c) an understanding of the future European integration as a deliberative choice, including institutional changes, between, for example, what Jürgen Habermas recently called “executive federalism” and “transnational democracy”.

It is, *amongst others*, these three understandings of the EU that might impact on presenting the crisis as a starting-point for further integration.

### Understanding the EU as a space of transnational interactions and interdependence

Transnationalism is at the heart of the crisis, but it can also be seen as part and parcel of an understanding of European integration that sees the EU project as a tool to facilitate ever more transnational interests.

Transnationalism can be understood as cross-border-activities in which actors are non-governmental actors (see Keohane/Nye 1974, Hurrelmann 2010). Europe as a common social space of transnational daily activities has emerged only since the Mid 20th century (Kaelble 1997). The process of transnationalisation “expands the scope of cross-border exchanges, transnational socialization and policy transfer below the EU level” (Kaiser/Starie 2001: 1). In the EU, transnationalism is encouraging Europeanization to take shape through horizontal transnationalism (top-down between EU institutions and transnational actors) and vertical transnationalism (pan-European transnational actors). In short, transnationalism facilitates a drive for an ever-more unity of European decisions and rules.

Obviously, transnational dynamics can be both seen as factors having a vital role in the building up and creation of the crisis. But rather than providing an explanation of the crisis, I take it as a given and argue that transnational activities can also be seen as being very much at the heart of overcoming crisis. Pointing to studies of Fligstein, but also Mau/Verwiebe (2009), who address the

link between experiencing Europe and impacts upon your European identities, I suggest to think about networks of transnational activities, like the increasing transnational mobility and economic interactions Europe, as factors that impact not only on how individuals perceive Europe, but also on the direction of European integration at large.

“Transnationalism from below”, the involvement in transnational activities and the experiences thereof, matter with regards to the understanding of the EU. At the same time, it has been argued that “transnationalism from above means the intensification of international exchange relationships created by nation-states, international and supranational organizations, as well as internationally acting corporations, but also by international financial and product markets.” (Mau 2010: 24) The EU is both a space of and facilitator of transnational action. These transnational interactions have created an ever denser web of interactions which create interdependencies amongst European societies. Moreover, transnational interaction impacted upon interdependencies of between the EU and the world. For example, the EU’s Neighbourhood – both to the East and the South – is linked to the EU through all sorts of transnational interactions. The EU’s external action is especially required when transnational activities underpin the interdependent relations between the EU and the rest of the world.

According to the above said, understanding the crisis as a starting-point implies to put transnationalism into the centre of providing arguments why integration matters. In a similar way that transnationalism has helped academics to escape “methodological nationalism” and start thinking about societal developments and interactions in the direction of one “European society”, it may help underlining and understanding why further integration matters for the EU and European societies, which both have become part of ever closer webs of transnational relationships.

## Understanding of the EU made of diversity and difference

At the same time that transnationalism is likely to serve with arguments to understand why “more Europe” is necessary; we have to understand the complexities of diversity within Europe and possibilities to manage differences within the EU.

Diversity does not equal difference (Landfried 2011). The basic argument in this is that whereas diversity is overly concerned with structural diversification (see Landfried above); only difference brings diversity to the fore in times of dissent. However, if the EU is keen to put its logo “Unity in diversity” into place, then it needs to provide space for differences to be articulated. Difference is activated by actors or institutional actors: Actors need make claims that clearly distinguish them from others. It is that gap, that opens in times of conflict and dissent between them and others, that can be identified as difference. Rather than avoiding this gap, I would argue that it is essential to communicate differences within the European Union in times of crisis and beyond. This however implies that the EU provides arenas where difference can be articulated. The lack of one common public sphere in the EU is clearly detrimental in that regard. Today, differences on European issues are mainly, if at all, articulated in many national public spheres. While a politicization of European issues pushes the relevance of EU topics, they are predominantly articulated in national public spheres.

In a normative variant of the concept of difference, it has been argued that the EU in an effort to live up to its motto “unity in diversity” needs to take difference seriously (Beck 2009;

Beck/Grande 2004; Beck/Grande 2007; Grande 2011; Landfried 2005; 2006; 2011). Difference needs to be accepted and recognized within the EU (Beck 2009: 605), because any further integration will only be carried out if difference is sufficiently recognized in EU legislation and integration steps (Beck/Grande 2007). It seems that a lot of frustration within European societies with EU decisions during the crisis stems from the fact that differences were not perceived to be dealt with in a communicative, transparent and inclusive way. For the EU it matters that in times of crisis and enforced diversity differences are seen as a normality, in fact an added-value. Based on the idea that differences can matter in a positive way, differences should in fact become embedded in a communicative, transparent and inclusive way. The EU, but also its Member States' settings should provide institutions where such a way of dealing with differences can be handled. As EB findings show, Europeans still feel disconnected from each other. If the EU wants to provide arguments for why 'unity in diversity' matters, it should manage dealing with differences in most open ways.

### Understanding future European integration as a deliberative choice

Jürgen Habermas has lately pointed out that the institutional choice for Europe is one between 'executive federalism' and 'transnational democracy' (2012). Rather than making a point for the one or the other choice, I would share the notion that there needs to be explicit institutional choices for the further integration process to be made. The reason is that the permissive consensus amongst governmental elites which basically has driven the European integration process for most of its existence seems to have come to an end.

Over time executives in the European Union have increasingly increased their powers, e.g. the European Council, which has made academics argue that the EU is a political system of "executive federalism" (Dann 2010). In other words, the EU is a shared-sovereignty arrangement (federalism) in which executives (national governments and the Commission as a supranational executive institution) have increasingly become central forces in European decision-making. Indeed, ad hoc decisions by the European Council during the financial and public debt crisis have shown how powerful executives are in the EU these days (see Dinan 2012). At the same time, we have also seen that the European Parliament has extended its powers over time in the European integration process (Rittberger 2003), providing us with the argument that the EU has also gone through a parliamentarisation process over time, culminating in the Lisbon Treaty.

Making the case for the crisis as a starting point for integration cannot be built on the permissive consensus any longer. Rather, institutional choices for the integration process should be deliberate. There must be a choice. If European citizens were to make a choice for further integration, institutional choices have to follow. Sovereignty-sharing, delimitation of powers, executive federalism and supranational democracy are but a few choices that can be foreseen.

A first government leader has recently announced to pose the question whether EU membership should come to an end in a public referendum. In order to have a fruitful debate about the future of European integration, that both takes into account a deliberate choice about institutional choices and the need to manage difference in Europe, it seems to be problematic that this debate will mainly be made in one Member State alone. There should be a Europe-wide debate on the institutional choices Europe wants to take. A referendum on the question "in or out" is simply

oversimplifying. All the institutional choices – including the choices to rethink or enhance common internal and external policies – need to be re-discussed. It has been argued elsewhere that another Convention on the Future of Europe, bringing together various national and European stakeholders, could be an alternative option to search for a new institutional choice which would also represent the needs of European citizens. There are good reasons to believe that such a method to re-constitute the EU is necessary to push a Europe-wide debate, to think about transnationalism, to take differences seriously, and to make a deliberate institutional choice for Europe.

## Conclusion

In this brief paper, I have argued that currently the European crisis can be seen as a starting point for further integration. I have argued that transnational needs, the recognition of manifold differences and the deliberate option for an institutional choice could be taken into account if we are to understand the crisis as a starting point for further integration.

When looking at the EU's external relations, especially its relations with the Southern Neighborhood (but with other parts of the world, too), it becomes evident that the world is not waiting for the EU to act. While external threats and global development might push the EU to integrate, it depends upon European societies to decide whether they are willing to share a common destiny in the future. One way of doing this is to think about how they want to balance transnational needs, diversities and differences.

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