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## Chapter 1

# Is This Time Different?

> I have come to learn that my belief, a belief shared by many of my generation, that the path of European integration was irreversible, was a fallacy. No, Europe's future is not set in stone.
>
> (Frank-Walter Steinmeier, German president, 2017)

### Introduction

Observers of the European Union (EU) could be forgiven for thinking that the EU is in a state of permanent crisis. Since late 2009, when a newly elected Greek government announced that the country's budget deficit was far higher than had previously been revealed, the EU has been managing a Eurozone (sovereign debt) crisis, which has occasionally seemed more acute and sometimes subsided. Since 2014, when popular protests overthrew the Ukrainian president, Russia invaded Crimea and armed conflict broke out between Russian-supported separatists and the Ukrainian army in the eastern regions of the country, the EU has been dealing with a 'Ukraine Crisis' involving it in a confrontation with its largest and most powerful neighbouring state. In 2015, after the 'Arab Spring' that broke out in 2011 culminated in large-scale political violence and conflict in North Africa and the Middle East, especially in Syria, the sudden and rapid growth in the number of persons seeking to flee conflict zones in this region and migrate to Europe – by land or by sea – added a Refugee Crisis to the pre-existing ones and jeopardized the Schengen Area of borderless travel. While the EU was grappling with these crises, a fourth one developed over British membership of the EU after Prime Minister Cameron scheduled a popular referendum over the issue for June 2016. The referendum produced a 52 per cent majority in favour of withdrawal that the British government aimed to carry out by March 2019. The withdrawal of a member state, one of its three biggest, from the EU would be unprecedented.

The apparent pervasiveness and quasi-permanence of crises in the EU's recent history raises the question of whether in this context crisis has not become an overworked concept evoked too readily and unthinkingly to refer to a situation in which two or more actors vie with one another over the 'right' course of action on issues where they represent (even diametrically) opposed interests. However, if one conceives of crisis as a 'situation that has reached an extremely difficult or dangerous point; a time of great disagreement, uncertainty or suffering' (*Cambridge Dictionary*) or as a 'vitally important or decisive stage in the progress of anything; a turning-point; a state of affairs in which a decisive change for better or worse is imminent, applied especially to times of difficulty, insecurity and suspense' (*Oxford English Dictionary*), to describe the EU as being in a (multidimensional) crisis seems justified. The issue is not so much whether the EU is in a crisis (or crises) but rather what will be the consequences or implications of this crisis for the EU and the process of political integration that has unfolded in Europe over the last six-and-a-half decades.

If the history and, still more, the historiography of the EU tell us anything, it is that the EU is a highly resilient entity and that European political integration is a process that has never been rolled back (see, e.g., Schimmelfennig 2016: 189). First, the number of member states has grown continually: from the 6 pioneer members of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1950 and the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957, to 9 in 1973, 10 in 1981, 12 in 1986, 15 in 1995, 25 in 2004, 27 in 2007 and 28 in 2013. Hitherto, no member has withdrawn from the EU, although Greenland, then a Danish territory, opted to leave it in 1982. Second, there is so far no issue area in which the member states have taken back decision-making competences that they had previously granted to the EU under the European treaties. Third, no reduction has hitherto occurred in the powers of the EU's organs – the Commission, the European Court of Justice (ECJ), the European Parliament (EP), the European Central Bank (ECB) – vis-à-vis the member states as these are specified in the European treaties. In short, European political integration has proven to be a unidirectional process that, while it occasionally may have marked time, has so far never unwound.

This is not to say, of course, that European political integration has not been a (at times bitterly) contested or controversial process. Rather, its resilience has been proven by its capacity to manage, resist and digest crises without being derailed from its fundamental course. The intellectual founder of the EU, Jean Monnet, is famous for his repeatedly cited remark that Europe 'will be forged in crises and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises' (as cited in Barroso 2011: 2). Monnet's assertion has been a source of comfort for proponents of European integration, whom it has reassured that the EU would not only survive crises, but also grow stronger through them. In the remainder of this introductory chapter I shall review the major crises that the EU has faced and surmounted during more than half a century up until 2009 and compare these with the multidimensional crisis that it has been confronting since then. I shall identify several reasons why the magnitude of the contemporary crisis exceeds that of earlier crises and argue that it is therefore dangerous to conclude from the EU's past resilience to crises that 'this time' will not be any different. I will subsequently define the concepts of integration and disintegration that underpin the subsequent analysis and outline the structure of the book.

## Past crises of European integration

Regardless of how their role and impact are understood, it is indisputable that crises – times of great disagreement or uncertainty in which major changes of direction appear imminent – have been pervasive in the history of European integration. Before the Eurozone Crisis almost every decade since the 1950s had witnessed a crisis that generated (as it transpired, ultimately unjustified) fears that the integration process would be durably impaired or damaged.

### The European Defence Community crisis (1950–54)

Crises have, in fact, accompanied the European integration process from the outset. Arguably the first concerned the European Defence Community (EDC) project, which was launched by the French government in 1950 only a few months after the ECSC had been proposed. Unlike the ECSC, the EDC failed to get off the ground. The intensification of the Cold War manifested by the outbreak of the Korean War raised the pressure in non-Communist Europe to rearm Germany. The original EDC project was aimed at bringing this about but in a way that would preclude the development of an autonomous (West) German military capacity. While it was backed by the other five ECSC member states, support for it in France subsequently dwindled. The UK refused to join the organization and, as French armed forces became increasingly engaged in military action in French colonies, the provisions of the EDC seemed less and less likely to ensure the subordination of German armed forces to the EDC. Parliamentary elections in 1952 significantly strengthened the representation of the left- (Communist) and right-wing (Gaullist) parties hostile to German rearmament and led to the replacement of a 'pro-European' coalition by a government that viewed the EDC more coolly. When the project was finally voted down in the French Parliament in August 1954, government ministers abstained. Although, by this time, this outcome had been widely foreseen, the shock waves provoked by the defeat of the EDC in France were nonetheless considerable. Monnet himself did not think that the collapse of the EDC meant the premature end of European integration (Monnet 1988: 503). But he seems to have been more optimistic than most of his contemporaries. The German Economics Minister Ludwig Erhard claimed that the 'integration tide is no longer running high' and that 'thoughts of European collaboration' might have to be abandoned (Görtemaker 2008: 33). According to Parsons (2006: 116), 'almost everyone thought the community adventure was over. Not even the strongest community advocates would have believed that they stood on the verge of the decisive triumph of the supranational format.' While the EDC's collapse put a definitive end to plans to create a European army for at least several decades, it did not spell the end of West European military cooperation involving West Germany. The British Prime Minister Eden subsequently seized an initiative that led to the signature no more than two months later of the Paris Agreements, under which West Germany was brought into the pre-existing Treaty of Brussels and the North

Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), undertook not to produce nuclear, biological or chemical weapons and could begin to rearm. Moreover, within a year of the EDC's failure, the original six ECSC member states had started negotiations over the creation of a common market and atomic energy community that culminated in the adoption of the Treaty of Rome in 1957.

## The Empty Chair Crisis (1965–66)

If the launching of the EEC was followed by several 'honeymoon years' (Marjolin as cited in Ludlow 2006: 2), the 1960s were to witness a series of crises related to the stance on issues of European integration adopted by the French president Charles de Gaulle, who returned to power in France only shortly after the Rome Treaty entered into force. The first of these was precipitated by de Gaulle's unilateral decision in January 1963 to reject the UK's entry application – which the other five members supported. The most serious (Ludlow 2006: 70) occurred when, hostile to a package of 'audacious' proposals made by the European Commission that would have strengthened the European Parliament's and its own powers at the expense of the member states, de Gaulle withdrew France from the Council of Ministers. The Commission calculated that France could be persuaded to accept a more 'supranational' Europe in exchange for higher agricultural subsidies, but de Gaulle opposed a proposed extension of the powers of the EEC's supranational organs (the Commission and the Parliament) as well as the scheduled transition from unanimous to qualified majority voting in the Council, by which in future France could be outvoted. After more than six months, during which both sides overestimated the likelihood that the other would capitulate, this crisis was finally resolved by the Luxembourg Compromise, in which France and the five other member states essentially agreed to disagree, but to carry on regardless. The confrontation was prolonged by the fact that both sides were certain that the other could not afford to allow the EU to collapse and would therefore make concessions. In the end, although no changes were made to the Rome Treaty, France nonetheless returned to the Council. According to Ludlow (2006: 115), all the protagonists, France included, had more to gain from the EU's survival than from its collapse. The crisis was thus never existential and its resolution proved the organization's 'institutional resilience' (Ludlow 2006: 204–205, 218). According to a widespread view, it created a 'national veto over all key EC decisions and for almost two decades it stalled progress in many important areas of Community policy' (Teasdale 1993: 567). The notion that the integration process, piloted by the Commission, was unstoppable was called into doubt. Still, the crisis did not prevent the achievement of a customs union between the member states significantly more rapidly than expected. And generally, while it may have helped to entrench the norm that the Council decides by consensus, at least on highly contentious issues, it did not destroy the EU's capacity to make decisions (Golub 1999, 2006). Shortly after de Gaulle's resignation as French president in 1969, The Hague

Summit of heads of the EU governments agreed to launch negotiations for British accession to the EU as well as over 'economic and monetary union'.

## The British Budgetary Crisis (1979–84)

The issue of accession to the EU was politically more strongly contested in the UK, which declined to join first the ECSC and then the EEC, than in the six pioneer member states. When the British government changed its mind and applied for membership in the early 1960s, de Gaulle's opposition kept the UK out as long as he was in office (until 1969). The financial terms of the UK's accession and membership was one of the most contentious issues in the accession negotiations and in the British debate and was thus one of the items that the Labour government 'renegotiated' before the UK voted to remain in the EU in what was its first popular referendum in 1975 (Griffiths 2006: 176–178). As a proportionally large importer of products, especially food, from outside the EU and as it had a relatively small agricultural sector, the UK paid a larger net share of the EU budget relative to the size of its economy than other members, despite being poorer than most. However, even the revised formula for the UK's contribution to the EU budget remained controversial. When she came to power in 1979, the Conservative prime minister Margaret Thatcher insisted that 'I want my money back', that is, that the UK's contribution to the EU budget be reduced once again.

The 'British Budgetary Question' was a major contributing factor to a growing atmosphere of stagnation and crisis in the EU in the early 1980s. This period 'marked the apogee of Europessimism' (Moravcsik 1991). *The Economist* magazine, for example, diagnosed the community as being in such an advanced state of decay that it published a front-page cover with a tombstone carrying the words: 'EC, RIP'. Several meetings of the European Council tackled but failed to resolve the conflict. Thatcher considered withholding the British contribution to the budget in 1984 to press her case, but she refrained from doing so because of fears that it would be found to be contravening EU law and opposition to such a move among 'pro-European' Conservative MPs (Moravcsik 1991; Thatcher 1993: 559; Wall 2008: 26–33). She had nonetheless a strong bargaining position, in as far as the UK could veto an increase in the EU's budget that was essential to finance the EU's activities following the imminent accession to the EU of Spain and Portugal. At the same time, however, other leaders' impatience with Thatcher's intransigence over this issue provoked threats that France and Germany would launch a 'two-speed' Europe project in which the UK risked being sidelined (Attali 1993: 640–642, 658–660; Moravcsik 1991; Thatcher 1993: 540; Young 1998: 322). Finally, at the Council meeting in Fontainebleau in June 1984, having been offered a marginally better deal than at the preceding summit, a 'more conciliatory' Thatcher determined that the time had come to settle (Denman 1996: 262; Moravcsik 1991; Thatcher 1993: 545). The Fontainebleau accord marked a turning-point in the European integration process, which was relaunched and galvanized over the next three years with the negotiation and adoption of the Single European Act reforming the EU institutions and liberalizing the internal market. Once again, the EU had proven its capacity to survive and bounce back from crises.

## The Crisis of the European Monetary System (1992–93)

The European Monetary System (EMS) had its origins in the turbulence that accompanied the collapse of the Bretton Woods international monetary system and the oil-price crisis of the early 1970s. Aimed at stabilizing exchange rates between the participating states, it was not the first such project, but the oil-price crisis and the EU member states' divergent responses to it had derailed a prior initiative to forge closer European monetary cooperation (see Chapter 3). It was primarily a product of the close collaboration of the German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and the French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who conceived it with minimal involvement of and to a certain extent against the resistance of their respective finance and economics ministries and central banks (Schmidt 1990: 219–233). The system of fixed but adjustable exchange rates was designed by its creators to promote monetary and economic policy convergence and economic integration between member states and to lay the foundations, in the longer term, for a common or single European currency (Schmidt 1990: 230–231).

Launched in 1979, the EMS survived a first major test in the early 1980s, when, having initially pursued a highly expansionary economic policy, a newly elected left-wing government in France shifted towards a policy of economic *rigueur* and accepted the constraints the system imposed. Without the convergence of economic policy and performance that the EMS promoted during the 1980s, it is inconceivable that the single currency project would have been born in the latter part of the decade. However, while the end of the Cold War and the process of German unification were to accelerate the adoption of this project, the consequences of this process – specifically, of the policies that were pursued to bridge the divergence of living standards between West and East Germany – threatened in the early 1990s to destroy the EMS and thus, indirectly, the single currency project as well. The German Bundesbank raised interest rates to combat a perceived threat of rising inflation arising from a burgeoning government budget deficit. As actors in the international foreign exchange markets began increasingly to doubt whether other EMS members, whose economies were not benefiting from the unification 'boom', would be politically able to follow suit, the existing exchange-rate parities came under growing pressure and looked increasingly unsustainable. This uncertainty was compounded by the negative outcome of the Danish referendum on the Maastricht Treaty in June 1992 and President Mitterrand's subsequent decision to call a referendum on the treaty in France. Shortly before the French referendum, fevered speculation in the foreign exchange markets forced the Italian and British governments to withdraw the lira and pound from the EMS.

They had exhausted their means of defending their respective currencies and the Bundesbank had refused to support them any longer (Milesi 1998: 36–40). The same fate beckoned for the French franc, even after the referendum in France approved the Maastricht Treaty, albeit by the slim margin of 51 per cent. With the survival of the EMS and the single currency project seemingly at stake, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl prevailed upon the Bundesbank to intervene to protect the existing exchange-rate parities between Germany and France and calm the foreign exchange markets (Kohl 2007: 505–506; Milesi 1998: 41–45; Védrine 1996: 574).

The EMS's reprieve proved, however, to be no more than temporary. In spring 1993, a new right-of-centre government came into office in France and began to press the German authorities to lower interest rates so that France could do likewise and stimulate the French economy without precipitating a run on the franc and destabilizing the EMS. As the Bundesbank resisted this pressure, a new wave of speculation against the franc developed. This time, it could not be repulsed using the same solution that had worked the year before: 'Not even massive interventions by the two central banks could hold back the floodwaters of speculation' (Gillingham 2003: 292). Having been unable to agree on anything else, the member states, rather than allowing the EMS to collapse completely, decided to enlarge the fluctuation bands within the system from 2.25 to 15 per cent (Milesi 1998: 51–67).

This second act of the EMS crisis provoked doubts among Euro advocates and sceptics alike as to whether the timetable for the adoption of the single currency set out in the Maastricht Treaty could be kept. Some prominent German economists judged that the crisis had destroyed the project altogether: The Deutsche Mark had been rescued and the Euro was dead. Although the treaty provided that the Euro would be launched at the latest in 1999 comprising the EU member states that then met the stability-oriented convergence criteria, relating to inflation rates and levels of public indebtedness stipulated in the treaty, only tiny Luxembourg actually met these criteria in mid-1993. Given the centrality of the Franco-German relationship to this project and the EU, it was certainly highly unlikely that the Euro would see the light of day if French and German monetary and economic policies followed different trajectories, as the new, enlarged bands of fluctuation in the EMS suggested might transpire.

As we know with the benefit of hindsight, however, this scenario did not materialize. Calm quickly returned to the foreign exchange markets after the fluctuation bands in the EMS had been widened. Within months most of the currencies still in the EMS were back within or close to the old, narrower bands (Sandholtz 1996: 95). The exchange rate between the mark and the franc remained very stable for the remainder of the 1990s. And, facilitated, in the case of some member states, by a creative interpretation of the Maastricht convergence criteria, the Euro was ultimately launched with 11 of the 15 EU member states in 1999. As during previous crises, dire prognoses of the imminent collapse of European integration were misplaced. The EMS crisis too proved to be transient and the integration process again to be resilient.

## The Constitutional Treaty Crisis (2005–09)

The Single European Act, which came into force in 1987, was the first to revise the Treaty of Rome. In contrast, in a shorter subsequent period of hardly more than 20 years, no fewer than five attempts were undertaken to change the European treaties. The first of these led to the Maastricht Treaty, of which the most important component concerned the single currency, the Euro. The creation of the single currency involved arguably the hitherto single most significant transfer of sovereignty from the member states to the EU and was correspondingly politically strongly contested in numerous member states. The UK negotiated an 'opt-out' from the single currency at Maastricht, Denmark initially rejected the treaty in a popular referendum and approved it only after it too had negotiated a similar arrangement and a French referendum on the treaty produced a razor-thin majority (see the section 'The crisis of the European Monetary System 1992–93' above). The next two treaties – those of Amsterdam (1997) and Nice (2001) – were intended to reform the EU's institutions, particularly to facilitate decision-making after the Central and Eastern European enlargement of the EU (which occurred in 2004). General dissatisfaction with both the provisions of these treaties and the process by which they were negotiated led the heads of government in the European Council in 2001 to propose that a new treaty be drafted by a 'European Convention' comprising representatives of the European and national Parliaments as well as of the governments themselves. This format was to contribute to making the EU 'more democratic [and] transparent' and to bring it 'closer to its citizens' (European Council 2001: 2, 3).

Although the document that emerged from this process was entitled a 'Constitutional Treaty', it was hardly any more far-reaching in its provisions than its immediate predecessors. Initially none of the three biggest member states envisaged submitting it to a popular referendum for ratification (Wall 2008: 176). However, the British prime minister Blair succumbed to domestic political pressure to call a referendum and made it politically difficult for the French president Chirac not to do the same (Qvortrup 2006: 89–90). In all, some 13 of 25 member states scheduled a referendum on the Constitutional Treaty. While, in the first of these, Spain voted overwhelmingly (by 77 per cent) to approve the treaty, in the second and third, by majorities of 55 and 61.5 per cent respectively, two of the six pioneer member states, France and the Netherlands, rejected it.

Some EU observers saw the rejection of the treaty as no big deal. The 'European constitutional compromise' that had meanwhile emerged amounted to a 'stable political equilibrium' that was unlikely to be upset by any 'major functional challenges, autonomous institutional evolution, or demands for democratic accountability' (Moravcsik 2005: 376). But others were less sanguine in their analysis of the implications of the French and Dutch no votes and argued that they heralded the arrival of a new crisis of European integration. One noted, for example, that 'many analysts have rightly said that the EU is undergoing one of the deepest crises of its history' (Schwall-Düren 2006: 1). Another went further, claiming that the votes confronted the EU with a 'crisis of unprecedented seriousness' (Cohen-Tanugi 2005: 55).

The defeat of the Constitutional Treaty itself was, however, a symptom rather than a cause of this crisis. It did not spell the 'end of the union'. Rather it reflected and deepened a 'profound crisis in the process of European unification' provoked primarily by the EU's 'poor economic performance and uncertain long-term prospects' (Cohen-Tanugi 2005: 59).

In retrospect, this 'constitutional crisis' was not very damaging to the integration process. The EU decided to give itself a year to 'reflect' on the defeat of the treaty and determine how to proceed. Having been rejected by two pioneer member states, including the one that had initially launched the integration process, and given the nature of its provisions, it could not be saved by means of supplementary protocols, declarations or 'opt-outs' as had occurred with Denmark in respect of the Maastricht Treaty and later Ireland with the Nice Treaty. In effect, however, a similar outcome was achieved. Shorn of some of its more controversial, but especially symbolic provisions, the Constitutional Treaty was resurrected as the Lisbon Treaty, which came into force in 2009 after it had been approved in a second referendum in Ireland, the only member state to call a referendum to ratify it. During this period, for all the talk of a 'deep' or 'unprecedented' crisis, the EU was not paralyzed, but continued to conduct business pretty much as usual.

## Is the contemporary crisis of the EU different?

Crises are thus clearly nothing new in and for the EU. It has arguably spent much – perhaps as much as a third – of its history in crisis. Analogous to the Empty Chair Crisis of 1965–66, the short-lived British boycott of the Council over the ban on exports of British beef to other member states in the late 1990s might also be analysed as a 'crisis'. The issue of how to respond to the wars in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s might equally be regarded as having constituted a crisis for the EU (Dinan 2017: 26–27). The entire decade of the 1970s, from the break-up of the Bretton Woods monetary system to the first and second oil-price hikes, might be labelled as a period of crisis for the EU in which currency instability and widely divergent economic performance threatened free trade between the member states and the survival of the Common Agricultural Policy (see, e.g., Dinan 2017). What is clear, however, in any case is that, over a period of meanwhile six decades, the EU has regularly confronted and survived crises that numerous political practitioners and observers said at the time imperilled or would destroy it. As true as it may be that the EU has not actually 'moved forward' through crises (Parsons and Matthijs 2015; see also Dinan 2017), it is certainly the case that they have hitherto *not prevented* closer political integration. On all (vertical, horizontal and sectoral) dimensions of integration, the EU has proved on the contrary to be highly resilient to crises.

History would therefore suggest that fears that the contemporary crisis will provoke partial or complete political *dis*integration in the EU are ill-founded and exaggerated. To dismiss such fears, though, would be warranted only if it can be assumed that this crisis is no different from its predecessors. The contemporary crisis arguably exhibits several traits, of which some can be observed in past crises, but which no past crisis replicates in their entirety. It is therefore highly plausible that 'this time' will be different.

The first of these traits is the *multidimensional character* of the contemporary crisis, which in fact comprises several cris*es* and which I will therefore label the *quadruple crisis*. The original crisis, which had its debut in October 2009, concerned sovereign debt in the Eurozone. The tides of the *Eurozone Crisis* then ebbed and flowed over a period of six years, reaching high points in 2010, 2012 and 2015 at which the survival of the zone, at least in its current make-up, seemed questionable. While these tides were shifting, without having been banished, the *Ukraine Crisis* broke and escalated in late 2013 and 2014, with Russia invading and annexing Crimea in March 2014 and armed conflict breaking out between the Ukrainian military and separatist militias that seized and retained control of parts of south-eastern Ukraine. The EU was challenged to find a common response to Russian or Russian-supported military intervention in Ukraine. The French and German governments were closely involved in the negotiation of the 'Minsk Accords' that included a ceasefire between the protagonists in the conflict. However, no lasting solution to the conflict was found in the following four years and sporadic violence continued on its front line.

To these two crises came a third when in late summer 2015 there was a large, sharp and sudden increase in the number of persons fleeing to Europe from war and conflict zones in the Middle East and North Africa. This *Refugee Crisis* provoked strongly divergent responses among EU member states. As numerous member states resorted to unilateral measures to control or stop the influx of refugees, this also became a *Schengen crisis*, jeopardizing borderless travel within the 26-country area named after a small town in Luxembourg located on the country's borders with France and Germany. Almost simultaneously, following the Conservative Party's election victory with an outright majority in the British Parliament in May 2015 and Prime Minister Cameron's pledge to conduct a referendum on the UK's EU membership, the path was set for the *Brexit Crisis* unleashed by the vote of 23 June 2016.

No political crisis ever exists entirely in a vacuum. Political systems are always handling a multiplicity of issues that generate conflicts with varying degrees of intensity. The EU faced the EMS crisis in the early 1990s, for example, while it was also divided by intense conflicts over the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) Uruguay Round trade liberalization negotiations and the wars in the former Yugoslavia. Similarly, the Empty Chair Crisis in the mid-1960s was arguably an act in a more prolonged drama opposing de Gaulle's France to the five other member states over the issues of British accession and the distribution of power between the EU's supranational organs and the governments of the member states. At no other time in the last six decades, however, was the EU confronted by *as many* simultaneous crises as in the period since 2009.

The second trait that distinguishes the current crisis from most of its predecessors is its *longevity* or *duration*. To specify when a given crisis has 'begun' and 'ended' is an inherently subjective exercise. There are no objective criteria by which it can be precisely determined at which point a political issue or conflict becomes a 'crisis', that is, reaches a moment of great uncertainty, at which a major change of direction could occur. Thus the British budgetary 'question' (as it is often labelled) occupied the EU regularly over a period of at least a decade, bearing in mind that it was one of the central issues in the renegotiation of the terms of British accession that occurred prior to the 1975 referendum. But it arguably did not develop into a crisis – a highly conflictual issue that threatened to provoke major changes in the EU – until 1983–84, when it became the foremost item on the agenda of successive European Council meetings. Such an exercise is or would also be complicated by the fact that, over time, the intensity of a crisis may fluctuate. This was the case with the British budgetary crisis, with the Ukraine Crisis and, even more so, with the Eurozone Crisis, which some observers declared to be over in the period between 2012, when the ECB governor Mario Draghi pledged that the bank would do 'whatever it takes' to save the Euro, and 2015, when Greece elected a radical left-wing, anti-austerity government.

With and despite these caveats, a strong case can be made for classifying the contemporary crisis, dating as it does from October 2009, as the most protracted the EU has confronted. Compared with this, the Empty Chair Crisis of 1965–66 and the EMS crisis, which spanned a period of 15 months between June 1992 and August 1993, were short-lived. Other past crises lasted longer than these: the EDC crisis lasted at most roughly four years, from the announcement of the Pleven Plan in 1950 to the negative vote of the French Parliament in 1954; the British budgetary crisis for five years, if it is dated from the election of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government in 1979; and the crisis over the Constitutional Treaty for a maximum of just over four years, if it is viewed as having been unleashed by the lost referenda in France and the Netherlands in June 2005 and resolved by the positive outcome of the second referendum over the Lisbon Treaty in Ireland in October 2009. The *uniquely protracted* character of the contemporary crisis points also to its being simultaneously the *most intractable* that the EU has had to manage – as well as to the danger that its disintegrative impact may be stronger than that of previous crises.

That the European integration process has historically been mainly an elite-driven process belongs to the conventional wisdom of EU scholarship. The third specificity of the current crisis is that, in contrast, it has involved an unprecedented *mass politicization* of this process (see also Hooghe and Marks 2008; Parsons and Matthijs 2015: 211, 223–224, 226). Of the earlier crises, only that concerning the EDC involved a comparable mobilization of the mass public and then only in France (Kaelble 2013). Up to the 1990s, EU crises were otherwise confined to and managed within the political elites – of Brussels and the member states. Domestic political incentives and constraints may have shaped elite behaviour to some extent, but there was hardly any direct mass participation in these crises. In most of the member states, the party system was dominated by 'pro-European' political movements spanning the ideological spectrum from the moderate Left to the moderate Right and the party-political mobilization of 'anti-European' sentiment was very limited. Following the end of the Cold War and the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty, the hitherto prevalent 'permissive consensus' in this regard began to wane (see Chapter 2). To legitimize the transfer of decision-making powers in core areas of national sovereignty such as the currency, political leaders have felt obliged to resort more frequently than in the past to popular referenda. These fostered the mass politicization of European integration, but the EU's political elites typically managed – at first – to navigate their way around the obstacles thrown into their path temporarily by negative referendum outcomes. Since the outbreak of the GFC, however, the mass politicization of European integration has begun to manifest itself in at least two additional ways that aggravate the current crisis. First, especially during the Eurozone Crisis, distributional conflicts between different groups of member states have intensified and 'anti-European' parties have been founded and prospered in numerous member states, rendering the mediation of conflicts between governments increasingly difficult. Second, as the EU has become increasingly associated with the imposition of economic austerity in southern European 'debtor' states, the EU and its policies have become the target – notably but not only in Greece – of popular demonstrations, protests and strikes.

The final trait of the contemporary crisis that differentiates it from most if not all past crises relates to *the costs of inaction* (see also Parsons and Matthijs 2015: 211, 223–224). The crisis involving the collapse of the EDC, for example, was resolved by enabling West German rearmament in the NATO. While it cut off the prospective development of a European army and increased Western Europe's security dependence on the USA, it arguably facilitated closer European integration in other, politically less sensitive issue areas. The fallout from a failure to reach agreement over the British budgetary contribution would have been contained because in such a scenario the budget for the previous year would have applied. It would have been more serious if the British government had decided not to transfer its contribution to the EU, but it had ruled out this course of action because of the expectation that the ECJ would have determined this to be illegal and a substantial proportion of 'pro-European' Conservative MPs was opposed to it (Thatcher 1993: 539). If the Constitutional/Lisbon Treaty had definitively failed, the EU would have continued to operate on the basis of the existing treaties. How this would have affected the EU's functioning is uncertain, but the impact would very likely have been gradual and limited (conceivably, for example, by impeding decision-making through the maintenance of unanimous voting in issue areas that the proposed treaties would have subjected to qualified majority voting). There was never any danger of imminent European disintegration.

The Empty Chair and EMS crises are in this regard slightly different. The failure to reach an accord whereby France resumed its seat in the Council of Ministers could have destroyed the EU in its infancy, as France was its most powerful and therefore least dispensable member state, although the five other member states might have tried to offset the impact of a French withdrawal by replacing it with the UK, whose accession they in any case strongly supported. We know in retrospect, however, that, just like the British government withholding its contribution to the EU budget in the early 1980s, in practice French withdrawal from the EU was never a very likely scenario (see the section 'The Empty Chair Crisis (1965–66)' above).

In the EMS crisis in 1992–93, in contrast, the costs of non-agreement and inaction would have been significant, in as far as in this scenario the EMS would certainly have collapsed and the EU would in this issue area have disintegrated. Simultaneously, the credibility of the single currency project would have been destroyed, at least for the time being, in just the same way that the monetary instability that accompanied the first oil-price crisis in the early 1970s had destroyed the initial project for economic and monetary union in the EU. With this, the foundations of the Franco-German bargain, whereby France consented to German reunification in return for Germany's pledge to deepen European integration, would have collapsed, with all the uncertainty that this would have implied for the EU's future. The EMS crisis was also unprecedented in as far as it revealed a set of actors outside the EU's political elites – the firms acting on the international foreign exchange markets – that could precipitate European disintegration in the absence of an accord as to how the crisis should be managed. The stakes of the EMS crisis were nonetheless not as far-reaching as in the contemporary crisis, as the latter's (multidimensional) scope is much wider and the financial, economic and political fallout from the collapse of an actual single currency would be much vaster and more negative than that of a project and timetable to introduce this currency.

The contemporary crisis of the EU is thus different, perhaps even very different: It is unique and unprecedented in its gravity because it exhibits a combination of four traits of which no more than a half characterized any of the earlier crises of European integration. To forecast based on the EU's survival of past crises that it will also resist disintegrative pressures and surmount the contemporary one would therefore be naïvely optimistic. Warnings expressed during the crisis that the 'European integration project' is in 'greater danger today than ever before' or that the EU 'can fall apart' were by no means groundless (Fischer 2014: 160; the Luxembourg foreign minister Jean Asselborn, quoted in *Der Spiegel* 2015a). The goal of this book is to describe the extent to which the EU has integrated or *dis*integrated in these crises and to advance a coherent explanation of the observable patterns of political integration and disintegration that can help us understand the conditions, if any, under which the integration process that has developed in Europe since the middle of the last century may be reversed.

## *Political integration and disintegration: concepts*

For the purposes of this analysis, I conceive its dependent variable, political (dis)integration, as a multidimensional phenomenon. It comprises, first, the expansion or reduction of the range of issue areas in which the EU exercises policy-making competences and, within specific issue areas, an expansion or reduction of the scope of existing common policies. This I label *sectoral* political (dis)integration. Sectoral (dis)integration equates roughly with what has sometimes been defined as the *scope* of (dis)integration (see, e.g., Börzel 2005). The second dimension concerns the expansion or reduction of the formal (i.e. treaty-based) competences and effective authority of the EU's supranational political organs vis-à-vis the EU's intergovernmental organs and/or those of the member states. I label this dimension, which is occasionally called the *level* of (dis)integration (Börzel 2005), *vertical* political (dis) integration. This enables me to distinguish it from my third dimension, that of the expansion or reduction of the number of EU member states, which I define as *horizontal* political (dis)integration. Horizontal and sectoral political (dis)integration may also be seen as two – respectively, geographical and functional – components of the scope of integration. Political disintegration can thus occur as a consequence of a member state withdrawing – completely or partially – from the EU, as a consequence of a loss in the power or authority of supranational organs vis-à-vis the member states and/or the EU's intergovernmental organs, and the collapse of common policies or elements of such policies through their 're-nationalization' by the member states.

## Plan of the book

The absence – at least before the contemporary crisis – of any tangible European political disintegration makes difficult the task of identifying the conditions under which it might take place. Unsurprisingly, given that the historical trend has been in the opposite direction, there are many theories of European integration, but few if any of *dis*integration (Zielonka 2014). For this reason, in the following chapter, I review competing theoretical perspectives on European integration, turning them on their head to discover under what conditions their proponents might have expected disintegration to occur. Extending this survey to include a range of theories from international economic and political relations and comparative politics, I find that most approaches fall to a greater or lesser extent into two categories, the one essentially 'optimistic' and the other essentially 'pessimistic' concerning the future of the EU and European political integration. For the theoretical 'optimists', political disintegration in Europe is close to being inconceivable. For the theoretical 'pessimists', the mounting political pressures to reduce the level and scope of integration should prove increasingly difficult for member states to resist. From this perspective, the quadruple crisis that has beset the EU since 2009 ought really to have been the 'perfect storm' that swept away at least a significant part of the existing 'system'.

In fact, however, the quadruple crisis has produced a range of outcomes in respect of political (dis)integration, ranging from closer political integration to partial disintegration. Neither of the general approaches to the analysis of (dis)integration can account for this divergent pattern of integration outcomes. To solve this puzzle is the main objective of this book. I propose an explanation of this pattern based on the hegemonic stability theory of international political economy, whose core claim is that the dominance of one country is a necessary condition of the stability of international (for the present purpose, regional) economic and political systems. Revising hegemonic stability theory, I argue that, before the quadruple crisis, France and Germany, which have been closely linked in a uniquely intensive bilateral relationship, formed a 'hegemonic coalition' in the EU that, while it did not dominate the EU's 'everyday politics', exercised a very strong influence over key decisions and integration projects in the EU's pre-2010 history. They did not always agree: for example, French opposition delayed the UK's accession to the EU, which Germany supported, by a good decade. But, as the following case studies will show, France and Germany, acting together, were the primary architects of the closer political integration that developed, prior to 2010, in respect of monetary, foreign and security and justice and home affairs policies in the EU. This applies especially to the period from 1982 to 1995, when Helmut Kohl was the German chancellor and François Mitterrand the French president and which saw the launching of the Euro, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Schengen Area of borderless travel.

During the quadruple crisis, however, the balance of power in this relationship has shifted decisively in favour of Germany. Practically, therefore, the question during this period has been whether Germany, largely alone, is capable and willing to provide stabilizing hegemonic leadership to the EU and, under the weight of the burgeoning crisis, to prevent its possible disintegration. The defining traits of such leadership would consist of playing a dominant role in the process by which these crises were managed, exercising a dominant influence over the rules that were adopted to address them, ensuring that the burdens of the crises and the rules chosen to address them were fairly distributed among member states, and mobilizing members' support for or acquiescence in these rules.

Chapters 3–6 of the book explore, in rough chronological order, the principal crises that have dominated the EU's agenda during the last decade: the Eurozone Crisis, the Ukraine Crisis, the Schengen and Refugee Crisis, and the Brexit Crisis. The former three crises constitute cases of sectoral (dis)integration and the Brexit Crisis one of horizontal (dis)integration. The *Eurozone Crisis*, the subject of the third chapter, has (hitherto at least) resulted in closer political integration. At first glance at least, this outcome seems at odds with the expectations of hegemony stability theory. With cross-issue variations, Germany largely dominated the fiscal politics of the crisis, but it pursued policies that in many respects ran counter to those that a stabilizing hegemonic power would have followed, placing the burdens of crisis-management overwhelmingly on the member states that had to be 'bailed out'. In line with the 'optimistic' theories of European integration, the fact that the Eurozone nonetheless became politically more closely integrated during the crisis is partly attributable to the level of interdependence between 'creditor' and 'debtor' states and the conviction of the governments among both groups of states that the price of allowing the Euro to collapse would be prohibitive and that this scenario should therefore be avoided. Had things been left entirely to the member governments, however, it is nonetheless very conceivable that, at some point in the crisis, especially in 2012, the rapidly rising interest rates that southern European governments were having to pay on their bonds would have precipitated the collapse of the Euro. A more critical factor in the survival of the Euro, in case of doubt, was the intervention of the ECB, which rapidly – and lastingly – calmed nervous international financial markets with the assurance that, within its legal powers, it would do 'whatever it takes' to defend the single currency. In this crisis, the ECB, the kind of international agency with 'real authority' that existed neither in the 1930s nor at the time that Kindleberger was analysing the causes of the Great Depression, assumed a stabilizing leadership role that Germany had largely abdicated. In monetary policy at least, Germany was not the Eurozone's stabilizing hegemon. Rather the ECB was.

The outcomes of the other three crises, however, closely followed the bargaining power exercised and kinds of strategies pursued in them by Germany. There was no supranational actor that could play a role in these crises comparable to that played in the Eurozone Crisis by the ECB. In the *Ukraine Crisis*, Berlin played the role of an ideal-typical stabilizing hegemonic leader. Playing a leading role in determining the stance that the EU adopted in the crisis versus Russia, it sought and maintained a very close relationship with France, one of the EU's two major military powers. It informed and consulted closely with other member states about its contacts with the Russian government. It also bore in absolute terms by far the largest and in relative terms a proportionately large share of the burdens of the economic and financial sanctions imposed by the EU on Russia. It succeeded in mobilizing and retaining the support of the other members, despite numerous prognoses to the effect that the sanctions policy was about to collapse. As the existing treaties provided sufficient instruments for the application of sanctions on Russia, there was, unlike in the Eurozone Crisis, no pressure or need in this crisis to forge closer political integration to hold the EU together.

Compared with the Ukraine Crisis, Germany was significantly less successful in providing stabilizing hegemonic leadership in the *Schengen and Refugee Crisis*. It did not – perhaps could not – consult or coordinate with other member states, except for Austria, before Chancellor Merkel decided in September 2015 not to oppose the entry into Germany of hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants, many of whom had already landed in or traversed other EU member states. Subsequent bilateral efforts to persuade other member states to take in some of these migrants failed. Several member states refused to fulfil their legal obligations under a German-initiated Council decision to redistribute a limited proportion of refugees mainly from Greece and Italy, defying a ruling of the ECJ. Germany tried to lead, but numerous member states refused to follow it. In effect, refugee policy in the EU was, to a significant extent, re-nationalized. At the same time, to limit the influx of refugees and address fears that these could include some prospective terrorists, several member states reinstated border controls on some of their borders with other members of the Schengen Area. The imposition of these controls did not break the letter (as opposed perhaps to the spirit) of EU law, as the legal basis on which they were justified was regularly changed so that the maximum period for which the controls could be maintained was never exceeded. In effect, however, on some Schengen-internal borders uncontrolled traffic had practically been suspended indefinitely.

Germany tried to provide stabilizing leadership to the EU in the Schengen/Refugee Crisis, but it failed. In the *Brexit Crisis*, its efforts to provide such leadership were far more limited than in either this or the Ukraine Crisis. The relatively low profile that it maintained on Brexit reflected in part its recognition of the limits of its influence over other member states, given that some of these strongly opposed British demands for controls on the free movement of labour and persons between member states and such controls could be imposed only if all members agreed to change the EU treaties. But it was attributable probably no less to the government's conviction that to accede to British demands on this issue could prove to be the 'thin end of the wedge', encouraging other members to raise similar demands relating to the 'four freedoms' that, if granted, could undermine the integrity of the Single Market and – consequently – the EU, whose survival was an overriding goal of German European policy.

In Chapter 7, 'Conclusions', I argue that the overall record of German leadership of the EU during the quadruple crisis is thus very mixed. While it is overall indisputably the EU's most powerful member state and has compelling geopolitical as well as economic motives to preserve the EU, its capacity to play the role of a stabilizing hegemonic power in the EU is nonetheless limited. It is a 'hobbled hegemon'. If the survival of the EU should depend on stabilizing German leadership, the prospects for European political integration are not favourable. The breakthrough of the national-populist party, the Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland – AfD), in the 2017 federal elections also showed that Germany was no longer exceptional in its resistance to Euroscepticism and may in future no longer be as willing as it has been historically to promote closer European integration.

If German leadership cannot guarantee the future of European political integration, the fate of this process will depend on whether other, more inclusive forms of stabilizing leadership may emerge to fill the vacuum created by Berlin's incapacity or in future conceivably unwillingness to assume this role, at least by itself. I then assess the prospects for the emergence of other possible EU leadership coalitions. I identify three conceivable 'hegemonic coalitions'. One, the most inclusive but also the least likely to materialize, given the existing balance of domestic political power in Poland, would be a 'Weimar coalition', comprising France, Germany and Poland, respectively the three biggest member states from Southern, Northern and Central and Eastern Europe. The second would be a 'Hanseatic coalition', consisting of Germany and a group of eight, mainly small and rich, free-trade-oriented member states from Northern Europe. The third such coalition and the most likely to materialize would be a revived Franco-German relationship.

The election in France in May 2017 of a new, strongly pro-European French president, the centrist Emmanuel Macron, and the continuation in office in Berlin after the 2017 elections of a (much weakened) Grand Coalition government created a window of opportunity for a rejuvenated Franco-German 'tandem' to provide the EU with stabilizing hegemonic leadership. This window could, however, be shut, at the latest in scheduled elections in the two countries in 2021 and 2022. It was not certain whether the two governments would try to seize this chance or whether if they should try, given the rising tide of Euroscepticism in the EU, they would succeed. The absence of stabilizing hegemonic leadership in the EU may not matter unduly for the prospects of the EU and European political integration in normal political times. But it does matter in crises if the EU is 'leaderless'. If existing crises should re-escalate or new ones break out, they could then result in greater European political disintegration than has occurred since the Eurozone Crisis broke out in 2009–10.

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