Cross-National Solidarity and Political Sustainability in the EU after the Crisis*

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Abstract

The recent economic shocks have severely tested the EU's political sustainability. The deep-rooted and unending succession of existential crises demonstrates the sharp misalignment between the high degree of integration reached by the EU, its authority structure, and the absence of solidarity to sustain this structure. The contribution unfolds as follows: first, we claim that the Union has become a complex adaptive system and that attempts to restore the *status quo ante* are unrealistic. Section II shows that its authority structure is ill-suited to steering the complex system because it lacks adequate instruments for addressing common risks and democratic externalities. Section III argues that contemporary EU leaders are failing to promote the principles of solidarity which, according to its founding father are required to disarm centrifugal tendencies. Section IV presents empirical evidence which signals the existence of considerable popular support for these pan-European forms of solidarity.

Keywords: European Union; solidarity; crisis; complex adaptive system; survey

Introduction

The economic shocks of the last decade have severely tested the political sustainability of the EU. Pessimistic views about the future abound in both academic and policy debates. Jean-Claude Juncker (2016) evoked the notion of an 'existential crisis' in the EU and, in particular, at its core, the eurozone. The Union has been facing unprecedented attacks from aggressive anti-EU movements and parties, threats of chosen or forced exits, and even the risk of an outright break-up. In this contribution, we take Juncker's notion seriously by discussing the political roots of the existential crisis. Our main argument is that, beyond unexpected external shocks, such a crisis is fundamentally due to a sharp misalignment between the new 'ontological' nature of the EU after the introduction of the common currency, the authority structure put in place to govern the EMU, and – last but not least – the EU's symbolic order, understood as the set of shared values and norms that link Europe's peoples together, especially at the elite level.

After this introduction, the first section of the contribution will highlight some features of the EU that unequivocally characterize it as a tightly coupled and novel type of collective entity. We will argue that, with the establishment of the EMU, the Union became a complex adaptive system and that any attempt to restore the *status quo ante* (as advocated by some eurosceptic formations) is entirely unrealistic.

Section II shows that the extant authority structure of the EU is unsuited to steering this complex system because it lacks adequate instruments for addressing the common risks

generated by integration, as well as the negative externalities arising from democratic interdependencies. These flaws make polity maintenance an extremely difficult task and the Union is continuously exposed to the risk of existential failure.

Section III shifts the focus to the symbolic order of the EU in a historical perspective. Building on secondary sources about the history of integration, we will highlight an almost paradoxical trajectory. Between the Treaty of Rome and the Maastricht Treaty, a number of farsighted politicians and supranational officials elaborated a quite advanced justificatory framework for market integration, which included explicit principles of solidarity and 'sharing' between member states and regions. However, after launching an ambitious process of economic and monetary unification, EU leaders were unable to engage in a parallel effort to re-forge a justice-based value scheme calibrated with the novel properties and logic of the functioning of the EMU. Their efforts actually moved in the opposite direction.

In the fourth section, we inquire whether an adequate solidarization of the EU is a feasible option today. To this end, we will present some empirical evidence drawn from a recent original survey carried out by the RescEu project (www.resceu.eu). Our data signal the existence of considerable support – at the mass level – for pan-European forms of solidarity. While fully aware of the limits of mass surveys, we nevertheless argue that the potential for crafting a normative frame aligned with the nature and functioning of the EMU as a complex adaptive system is less utopian than it appears and is within the potential reach of responsible leaders. The conclusion hints at some possible future scenarios.

I. From an 'Economically Engaged' Community to a Complex Adaptive System

Paraphrasing the famous dictum of Alexander, to exist means to have causal powers (Alexander, 1920, p. 8). A sum of entities (individuals, groups, states, etc.) exists as a collectivity to the extent that 'togetherness' produces an emergent capacity to causally affect the subjective orientations and objective behaviours of the parts that join together. In this basic, ontological sense, the EU came into existence with the Treaty of Rome and ever since its journey has been one of increasing causal consequentiality. From a political perspective, the original designation – the European Economic Community – was, to an extent, a misnomer. It connoted the Union merely in terms of 'want satisfaction', that is as an institution aimed at maximizing economic welfare. We know that the founding fathers had more ambitious and 'ultimate' objectives: peace, prosperity, and social progress within the various European nations as a result of their co-operation and mutual opening-up (Burgess, 2002; Milward, 2000; Shore, 2013). Using Weber's vocabulary, their aim was not to set up a mere *Wirtschaftsgemeinschaft* (economic community), but rather a *Wirtschaftende Gemeinschaft* – a collectivity/organization engaged in economic activity, but pursuing goals which were wider than mere want satisfaction (Weber, 1978, p. 340). As declared in the preamble to the Treaty of Rome, the signatories are 'determined to ensure through common action the economic and social progress of their countries, by removing the barriers which divide Europe' (EEC Treaty, Article 2).

In fact, the Union did work remarkably well as a *Wirtschaftende Gemeinschaft* in the first decade and a half after its creation. Confirming transactionalist expectations (Deutsch, 1953), cross-national exchanges and activities grew year after year at

impressive rates. The natural force of territorial proximity and the elective force of for-mally regulated preferential co-operation worked in tandem to gradually transform the EEC into a superior and more cohesive form of community: a family of nations, underpinned by beliefs in togetherness.

The 'family of nations' metaphor was introduced by Frank Castles (1993) to connote a combination of broad affinities observable across a given set of countries. What this au-thor had in mind were similar cultural and institutional attributes linked to geographical proximity and – crucially – a common past (such as in the Nordic nations), generating a shared sense of belongingness. The metaphor can also be used, in a weaker but still meaningful sense, when different countries enter into partnerships for deliberate policy co-ordination (Therborn, 1993). In this case, the commonality of purpose and the bonds within the new collectivity do not result from a common descent, but from shared forward-looking objectives and modes of governance, such as in the EU or other regional associations. In such types of elective families, political leaders play a key role in creating an inclusive context aimed at nudging citizens and socio-economic elites towards a 'fra-ternalism' that transcends the mere *quid pro quo* logic.

The gradual 'familization' of Europe's national societies has happened against the backdrop of the wider processes of global transnationalization made possible by the fast growth of communication infrastructures, technologies and networks. EU-specific transnationalization has proceeded at a higher speed than in other regional contexts, as documented by a wealth of empirical research (see, for example, Delhey *et al.,* 2014; Mau, 2010; Risse, 2015) and in particular by the detailed comparative investigations into 'horizontal Europeanization' (Heidenreich, 2016). Such societization (*Vergesellschaftung*) was largely the result of free movement provisions, which have allowed for concrete transnational experiences for increasing numbers of people (Kuhn, 2015). Other direct and indirect mechanisms of 'people-making' (Eder, 2014) have also played a role: e.g. exchange programmes such as Erasmus, targeted educational and cultural policies, financial incentives for cross-border co-operation and, more generally, the increasing presence of the EU and its symbols in everyday life (McNamara, 2017).

The establishment of the EMU undoubtedly built on this integrative background (a mix of communal and associational ties), but it has also been retroactive in significant ways. The EMU has produced an unprecedented fusion of national economies by bring-ing to completion the single market and introducing a common currency. The categories which we have used so far, essentially rooted in classical sociology, are not very helpful for capturing the real import of this fusion. A more promising analytical framework is of-fered by complexity theory, a multidisciplinary field which has elaborated a set of general concepts suitable for our purposes (Byrne, 1998).

When the degree of interconnection and the pressures of mutual adjustment among the parts of a collective goes beyond (or is made to go beyond, as with the formal establish-ment of the EMU) a critical level, such a collective becomes a complex adaptive system (CAS). This is the key notion of complexity theory. The emergent properties of a CAS are not merely causally active (the defining feature of a collectivity's existence, as such) but become irreducible and irreversible (Bechtel and Richardson, 2010; Sawyer, 2001; Wimsatt, 1997). Irreducibility means that it is virtually impossible to disentangle systemic from sub-systemic causal dynamics; systemic properties are non-localizable and non-aggregative. Irreversibility means that initial conditions cannot be reconstituted via

decomposition. A CAS remains vulnerable to collapse, due to endogenous failures, external shocks and deliberate choices. However, what comes after break-up is hard to predict and the *status quo ante* cannot miraculously reappear. The breakup of the euro (strongly advocated by some eurosceptic parties) would not bring back to life the Greek or Italian economies as they functioned under the drachma or lira. Likewise, Brexit shows that it is very difficult for a member state to disentangle itself from the EU order and certainly costlier than staying out altogether – or having stayed out in the first place, rather than joining and then exiting. As aptly noted by Baubök, 'the European Union has become in this – prosaic and not at all romantic – sense a community of destiny' (2017a, p. 33).

Economists have just started to theorize in terms of complexity (Arthur, 2013). The promise and potential of complexity theory for macroeconomics and the analysis of the EMU in particular are increasingly recognized (Dow, 2016; Togati, 2006, 2012). A review of this debate is beyond the scope of the present contribution. It suffices here to point to one indication which is highly relevant to our argument. Steering a complex adaptive system is difficult and demanding; non-equilibrium is the norm rather than the exception and initially local asymmetries can escalate due to unpredictable processes of cumulative causation. A quantum leap in the policy-making mindset is required; what matters is 'getting meta-conditions right' (Colander and Kupers, 2016, p. 18) – i.e. making sure that adaptive interactions within the novel aggregate are functionally sustainable and do not produce inefficient lock-in effects, dead-end path dependencies, undesirable asymmetries or hierarchies (Lustick, 2011). Contrary to mainstream economics and economic policy – which emphasize equilibrium, determinacy and rule-based deductions – complexity economics recommends putting carefully thought-out controls in place in order to safeguard a systemic resilience based on heterogeneity and dynamic adaptation. Conceiving the EU as a CAS allows us to diagnose its main structural problem: the misalignment between its irreducible properties and its authority structure.

II. An Inadequate Political Organization

The establishment of the EMU has been accompanied, since the 1990s, by significant institutional changes. During the crisis, new agencies were created (such as the European Stability Mechanism) and decision-making procedures were incisively redesigned (for example, through the so-called Six-Pack and Two-Pack). Such reforms have contributed to meeting emergencies and averting collapse. They originated, however, from a legitimation vacuum (Fabbrini, 2017) and have fallen short of prompting that mindset quantum leap needed to steer the EMU qua CAS.

Two emblematic examples can be offered to illustrate this point. When, during 2008, it became evident that the financial crisis might pose existential risks to the euro, EU leaders met in Paris and discussed the option of setting up a joint EU stabilization fund. However, they eventually discarded this idea and limited themselves to co-ordinating national responses. Angela Merkel said that she would never use German taxpayer's money to solve the problems of other member states. As noted by Joshka Fischer (2014), this (non-)decision shows the utter lack of shared responsibility within the EU Council. In particular, the former foreign minister points a finger at the German veto, lamenting the failure of this country's elite to understand that, due to the novel nature of the EMU, a number of risks are now 'common' both in their causes and in their effects. Thus, they require common solutions.

The second example relates to the process of crisis management as exemplified by one of its key protagonists, Herman Van Rompuy. In his interesting memoir, the former President of the Council recounted how, since 2009, European leaders have been engaged in a collective learning process, often improvising solutions to unexpected new problems. The challenge was to understand what belonging to a currency area entails. Van Rompuy concludes by remarking that, by 2012, the lesson learned was 'about more interdependence: we are all in the same boat' (Rompuy, 2014, p. 13). Without downplaying the genuine efforts made by leaders, what is surprising about Van Rompuy's account is the implicit acknowledgement that prior to the onset of the crisis, there seemed to be very limited awareness about interdependence, let alone 'complex' interdependence and the need for systemic solutions.

The inadequacy of the EU's authority structure has two main roots. First, despite the phase shift, the EMU is still largely steered within the traditional frame of 'methodological nationalism': treating the member states and their political economies as intrinsically self-determined units. However, this summation logic can no longer serve as an effective compass (let alone as the only compass) for making policy choices and, prior to that, as a means of arriving at correct causal imputations. Public policies always suffer from interaction effects which are difficult to disentangle. Yet, with the advent of the EMU, interaction effects have grown exponentially: local outcomes have multiple roots and some of these are not local, but systemic. To give an example, the Bank of Italy has estimated that when the spread between Italian and German bonds reached a peak of 600 basis points (2012), 200 points could be attributed to the *rischio Italia* (due to the country's high public debt) and 400 to the euro crash risk (the possibility of a break-up of the common currency) (Visco, 2013). It must also be noted that interaction effects also result from horizontal 'democratic externalities' (Nicolaïdis, 2013, p. 351). Domestic leaders face problems for their own electorates which are the – sometimes quite visible – consequence of other EU *demoi*'s decisions and policies (Cheneval and Nicolaidis, 2016) and, in turn, adopt solutions that are very likely to generate cross-border effects (Bellamy, 2013, p. 505). National self-determination is obviously still possible and can make a great difference in terms of functional performance. However, in a growing number of sectors, the separation of responsibilities between supranational, transnational, and national actions and dynamics has turned into a difficult balancing act, subject to major epistemic constraints (after a point, we just cannot know).

The second root of inadequacy is that this delicate balancing act is largely performed by non-majoritarian institutions, entrusted with the task of identifying and applying rules and technical formulas for steering national fiscal policies. The belatedly acknowledged challenge of interdependence has been met, in other words, by adopting a technocratic mode of governance based on strict surveillance, discipline and sanctions, and aimed at an ever-closer top-down harmonization of the standards and practices of member states. This system rests on deep-seated (and mostly implicit) assumptions: budgetary stability and market efficiency are supreme goods; there is a 'right way' of guaranteeing them (and more generally of solving collective problems); economics (as a discipline and as a sphere of activity) must prevail over politics, especially agonistic politics. The literature on Eurocracy (Chalmers *et al.,* 2016; Earle *et al.,* 2016) has underlined the affinities between this approach and some tenets of German Ordoliberalism, including its coveted notion of the *Soziale Marktwirtschaft*. Returning for a moment to the Weberian vocabulary

employed previously, within the Ordoliberal framework, the safeguard of the *Marktwirtschaftsgemeinschaft* (the market sphere of a territorial community) becomes an end in itself. There is no need for the EU to pursue wider and superior goals. For Ordoliberalism, the 'social' is a natural by-product of the market (Hien and Joerges, 2017). The authority structure put in place during the crisis has not only proved ineffective in terms of outcomes, but has also been eroding the necessary conditions for polity maintenance, unleashing the demons of populism and pushing them into attacking the EU for its lack of democratic representation (Notermans and Piattoni, 2017), its constraining rules on budgetary decisions, and its erosion of territorial sovereignty and border controls (Hutter *et al.,* 2016; Kriesi *et al.,* 2012).

III. (Re) Constructing the EU Moral Order: Pan-European Cohesion and Solidarity

Aligning the fact of togetherness (a much deeper togetherness than acknowledged and perceived, at least in the economic and monetary spheres) with an authority structure capable of effective functional steering and polity maintenance requires the mediation of an adequate symbolic framework or, more precisely, a 'moral order'. Moral orders are sets of principles which define 'what is proper to do and reasonable to expect' (Wuthnow, 1989, p. 14) in associational relationships, accompanied by clear normative criteria 'by which people and their activities are valued' (Harré, 1987, p. 219). In the political sphere, a key component of the moral order is principles and criteria about sharing: what – and why – the members of the collectivity owe to each other. A certain degree of adequacy between such norms and the facts of socio-economic co-operation and institutionalized togetherness must hold in order to buffer legitimation dynamics. It should be stressed that, for empirical political theory, the adequacy of a moral order is not gauged in substantive terms, that is, as a conception of justice. Of course, the specific kind and features of factual togetherness serve as normative 'pointers' (see, for example, Sangiovanni ,2019 in this issue). What matters politically, however, is the capacity of this order to sustain legitimation, system performance and diffuse support. In Weber's wake, empirical political theory conceives of legitimation as a complex property and process, resting not only on right reasons (normative and instrumental), but also on affectual and habitual attachments.

Togetherness evokes ideas such as continuity and compactness: in a word, solidarity (from the Latin *solidus*, a firm and compact body). Solidarity is a contested concept (Stjernø, 2009, p. 2), but its prime meaning is relatively straightforward: it connotes, precisely, the 'set of feelings of belonging together' (Parijs, 2004, p. 375), which supports 'attitudes of mutual acceptance, cooperation and support' (Banting and Kymlicka, 2017, p. 3). Solidarity, in this sense, is partially grounded on 'an interest in the integrity of a shared form of life that includes one's own well-being' (Habermas, 2015, p. 23). Such interest gradually becomes ethically charged; the shared form of life turns into a 'moral community' (Bayertz, 1999), whose members feel 'co-responsible' for the actions and desires, faults and merits of each other (Henckmann, 1998, p. 131).

Solidaristic norms mainly have a horizontal nature (cross-personal and cross-group), but inevitably also involve the vertical dimension (rulers–ruled). Political authorities are, in fact, the ultimate guarantors of togetherness, as well as of specific co-operative arrangements. Under democratic constraints, leaders have an interest in making sure that

such arrangements are freely accepted as 'valid' in terms of compliance. In its vertical dimension, solidarity plays a key role for sustaining the Weberian '*Legitimitätsglaube*' (Weber, 1978: Vol. 2, pp. 901 and ff.) – the belief in the state's right to rule, beyond its coercive monopoly. In combination with cultural identity, solidaristic norms embodied in state institutions contribute to upholding diffuse support. Togetherness underpinned by sharing schemes and a moral order acquires a deontic charge. Because everybody has a stake, the fact of togetherness is internalized as a meta-norm. Just like security and peace, solidarity is a necessary condition for polity maintenance, serving as the 'inner cement holding together a society' (Bayertz, 1999, p. 9), the 'glue that binds society and prevents it from disintegrating' (Banting and Kymlicka, 2017, p. 5). The comparative welfare state literature has extensively documented the key role played by 'social sharing' in the historical process of state- and nation-building, especially after the extension of suffrage (Ferrera, 2005; Flora, 2000; Flora and Alber, 1981; Mau, 2010). Normative theories of citizenship have, in their turn, stressed the importance of membership ties and social rights as sources of identity and legitimation (Bauböck, 2017b, 2017c).

Today, the glue of solidarity is blatantly missing in the EU. The principles which predominate in the communication of Europe on the part of its leaders and which are embodied in the EU's more consequential institutions and policies are mainly based on 'economism'. Such views ignore that contributing to co-operative schemes normatively entails gaining a 'stake in a fair share of the benefits made possible by them and an obligation to shoulder a fair share of the associated burdens' (Sangiovanni, 2013, p. 220). The EMU made this requirement even stronger, as the initial co-operative scheme escalated to CAS status and the economic crisis exacerbated economic and social asymmetries and the related distribution of advantages and disadvantages, leading to systemic 'structural injustices' (Eriksen, 2017, p. 2). Simple reciprocity is no longer a sufficient ground for framing systemic decisions and more ambitious 'principles of socio-economic justice [should] apply' (Viehoff and Nicolaïdis, 2015, p. 278). Yet, their grounding need not be found in abstract moral ideals, but can be internally derived, through principled reasoning about the necessary (and, thus, 'non-negotiable') conditions which are required in order to achieve the very goals and values that the economic and monetary union has set for itself. The current governance practices of the EMU risk producing functional failure and are thus self-defeating for the system as a whole. Hence, changing such practices is simultaneously a functional and normative necessity (Verovšek, 2017).

The early architects of the EU were well aware that economic integration (an instrument for peace and prosperity) required a solidaristic ethos to activate mutual feelings of community and sustain EU-building (Donati, 2018). In the early 1950s, the first institutional moves towards integration prompted an articulated debate on the possible social consequences of the common market. An awareness emerged that integration could cause benefits and losses, despite its general purpose of increasing collective prosperity. The vulnerability of less developed areas was considered to be the result of an undeserved 'historical accident', which could, however, encourage harmful dynamics of social dumping (Ohlin Report, 1956, p. 13). Both facts were deemed unfair. Hence, on this ideational backdrop, EU leaders created funds for inter-territorial redistribution, not only for economic reasons, but also as political tools (Middelaar, 2013).

As is well known, the late 1960s saw the beginning of discussions and plans for the establishment of a fully fledged economic and monetary union. The key document was the

Werner Report, which clarified that the EMU's objective was to create an area where 'goods and services, people and capital will circulate freely […] without thereby giving rise to structural or regional disequilibrium' (Werner, 1970, p. 11). To avoid the latter, cohesion policies were needed, implying transfers of responsibility from the national to the Community levels'. The Thomson Report (CEC, 1973) written with the view of establishing the European Regional Development Fund (set up in 1975), in turn stated that a harmonious development of the Community as a whole was a 'moral and human requirement'; without sustaining local communities, the 'idea of European unity' would be doomed to 'disenchantment' (cited also in Sutcliffe, 1995, p. 8; Manzella and Mendez, 2009, p. 9; Brunazzo, 2016, p. 18). Some of the proposals that were put forward during the 1970s and 1980s by key institutional actors seem today extremely ambitious – almost revolutionary. In 1977, the European Commission appointed a high-level working group on the budgetary implications of the EMU, chaired by Donald MacDougall. The final report suggested that a future European Federation should in principle adopt a public budget of 'around 20–25% of aggregate GDP, as in the U.S.A. and the Federal Republic of Germany', although MacDougall considered 5–7 per cent a more realistic figure in the beginning (the EU budget today only amounts to ca. 1 per cent of aggregate GDP). The Report proposed a Community Unemployment Fund to cushion temporary setbacks, a budget equalization scheme for weak member states of up to 65 per cent of the average fiscal capacity, and a 'conjunctural convergence facility' to counteract cyclical crises (MacDougall, 1977, pp. 12–13). It was through this sequence of initiatives that the 'social dimension' of integration made its silent, but tangible, appearance within the EU symbolic and institutional framework and that the value of solidarity – in particular, inter-territorial solidarity – came to be part and parcel of the European 'ethos' (Williams, 2010).

The key development of the 1980s was the completion of the single market – an ambitious economic objective. However, largely thanks to Jacques Delors, the need for an explicit, robust and fair social dimension was re-affirmed and linked to the moral framework of the 1970s. Delors underlined on several occasions the political rationale of this dimension as a tool to strengthen the Community as a political entity (Ross, 1995). The 1988 reform of the Structural Funds established for the first time direct connections between the Commission and sub-national governments. This move had the objective of breaking the juxtapositions between paying and receiving member states – what Delors dubbed the vicious circle of *la non Europe*. By shifting the focus to regions, the Commission President sought to kill two birds with one stone: the common budget is for regions, not for states; all regions have a stake in EU-building and should have an interest in supporting its key institutional driver – the Commission (Barca, 2009).

Since the early 1990s, the EU's normative framework has followed two diverging tracks, in a sort of personality split. On the one hand, the new Treaties from Maastricht to Lisbon have articulated and strengthened the social face of the EU in their programmatic articles. On the other, the ideational rationale behind the EMU and the discourse which accompanied its implementation has moved in the opposite direction. In his detailed historical reconstruction of financial relations among the member states, Kenneth Dyson forcefully demonstrated how the pre-Maastricht ethos – which recognized the EU's role in attenuating the negative externalities of integration and cross-national disparities – has gradually given way to an ethos fundamentally centred on national responsibility and on implicit moral judgements about fiscal 'sins' and 'virtues' (Dyson, 2014).

Adjusting to the EMU's discipline has become a categorical imperative for domestic governments. Borrowing some terms from Bagehot (1900; writing about the English Constitution), it can be said that the various Treaty revisions promoted a growing solidarization of the 'dignified' part of the EU's constitutional order but, at the same time, the 'efficient' part of this order moved in the opposite, de-solidarization direction. Needless to say, the efficient side won out at both the practical and discursive levels.

The transition towards a 'Union of national adjustments' has been rightly seen as a change of paradigm in both descriptive and prescriptive terms (Beck and Underhill, 2017). The new paradigm assumes that the EMU framework – as currently configured – is essentially well-designed and that structural adjustment is fundamentally a matter of doing the homework at home. If adjustment is seen as a matter of homework and rule-compliance, then EU solidarity is not really needed. The derogatory connotation attributed to the idea of a Transfer Union in Brussels and in various northern capitals testifies to this anti-solidaristic drift of the EU value framework, especially for the eurozone (Dyson, 2014).

The weakening of the commitment to inter-territorial solidarity which accompanied the birth of cohesion policy has been noted and documented by various authors (Begg, 2010; Fargion and Profeti, 2016; Mendez, 2013). The formal subordination of EU co-funding to strict compliance with fiscal rules introduced by the 2013 reform are the most emblematic indicators of the predominance acquired by the new stability-oriented paradigm, which seems to utterly neglect the key functional and political role of solidarity policies. In line with Ordoliberal principles, the new paradigm assigns to the EU the limited role of providing the *Ordnungspolitik* which allows for institutional (or jurisdictional) competition. The monetary and fiscal regimes as well as a tough competition law should serve as bulwarks against interest group politics within the member states, and in particular against moral hazard and rent-seeking strategies on the part of their governments. As has been aptly noted, this approach has generated the 'myth of the beggar': 'The idea that the core countries should not provide financial assistance to peripheral countries because, if this were to happen, market pressure would disappear, and peripheral countries would have little incentive to implement reforms' (Nicoli, 2015, p. 32). This myth has rapidly resurrected the ghost of *la non Europe*: the clash between ('deserving') richer and ('undeserving') poorer member states – saints and sinners, industrious ants and indolent grasshoppers (Dyson, 2014; Offe, 2015; Scharpf, 2016). There is a lively debate about the factors that led to this transformation of the EU and, in particular, about the eurozone economic governance. The sudden explosion of the sovereign debt crisis; a new power constellation objectively favouring creditors *vis-à-vis* debtors; the latter's low state capacities and their interest in bilateral bargaining with the EU and/or Germany rather than forging a horizontal coalition; the *de facto* hegemony acquired by Germany and – within its political system – by the Finance Ministry and the Bundesbank, largely imbued with an Ordoliberal mentality; all these dynamics have been highlighted by the debate (see, for example,; Caporaso and Rhodes, 2016; Hien and Joerges, 2017; Moschella, 2017; Schmidt, 2015). The Ordoliberal mentality has also permeated the culture of top officials within the Commission and the other EU non-majoritarian institutions (Nedergaard, 2013). For the purposes of this contribution, the genesis of the new paradigm is, however, less important than the sheer fact that it has now become predominant, fraught with unwholesome political consequences and hard to overcome due to the notorious 'joint decision trap' of the EU decision-making system.

IV. The View from Below: More Solidarity than Meets the Eye

The difficulty of further strengthening and solidarizing the EU is often imputed to the shift from 'permissive consensus' to 'constraining dissensus' on the side of national constituencies (Hooghe and Marks, 2009). The prevailing line of reasoning is: no common identity, no demos, no electoral room for a political union, let alone a Transfer Union. The constraining dissensus argument has obvious analytical purchase, but it also has two limits. First, by focussing on the demand side, it soft-pedals the role played by the elite in having prepared fertile ground for the voters' differences of opinion. Second, it tends to overestimate the extent and depth of such dissensus. Can we confidently say that domestic public opinions share the same ideational framework of their elites and are unwilling to support a (re-)solidarization of the EU?

A recent survey offers a different picture (Ferrera and Pellegata, 2017). Here, we can only limit ourselves to highlighting those findings which are more pertinent and relevant to our general argument.[1] The survey tried to capture some empirical referents of the moral order which is operative at the mass level in seven countries: Spain, France, Italy, Germany, Poland, Sweden and the UK. What do citizens consider as 'proper to do and reasonable to expect' in terms of EU solidarity? Prior to that, what kind of summary image do citizens have of the EU and what are its 'sharing' implications? Four different metaphors were proposed by the survey: 1) the EU as the 'common home' of all European citizens – this is the most demanding image, typically associated with the strong bonding ties which underpin fully fledged political communities and their sharing arrangements; 2) the EU as an 'apartment building' in which national peoples, with legitimate diversities, live next to each other – this metaphor comes close to the Weberian concept of 'neighbourhood community' (Weber, 1978, Vol. 1, p. 360 and ff.), whose members are typically driven by a mix of reciprocity and a modicum of benevolence; 3) a 'playground' (a commons) that facilitates mutually beneficial economic exchanges in the context of a juridical/market association – this image is the least demanding in terms of solidarity dispositions. What matters is procedural fairness and compliance with the rule of law; 4) a 'sinking ship' from which member states should escape as fast as they can – the eurosceptic view. Considering the entire sample (Spain, France, Italy, Germany, Poland, Sweden and the UK), Table 1 shows that the preferred image turned out to be the apartment building (30.1 per cent), followed by the playground (26.0 per cent), the common home (23.8 per cent) and, finally, the sinking ship (20.3 per cent).

Of course, some differences among countries remain evident. In Germany, more than 54 per cent of respondents declared themselves closest to the image of the apartment building, while only 6.9 per cent of them opted for the common home. By contrast, in Italy (38.1 per cent) and Poland (31.9 per cent) people opted for the latter. In Spain (33.8 per cent) and Sweden (34.5 per cent), a relative majority identified with the 'playground' option. Finally, 33.2 per cent of French and 32.3 per cent of British respondents saw the EU as a sinking ship that should be abandoned as soon as possible. The key summary indication that comes out of these findings is that the majority of Europeans share either a strong (common home) or at least a weak (apartment building) solidaristic ethos.

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[1]A detailed methodological supplement can be accessed at: Supporting Information section.

Table 1: Image of the EU

Country	Common home	Apartment building	Playing ground	Sinking ship
France	22.1	22.4	22.3	33.2
Germany	6.9	54.6	26.6	11.9
Italy	38.1	26.4	15.1	20.4
Poland	31.9	31.4	23.5	13.2
Spain	31.0	22.6	33.8	12.6
Sweden	18.7	28.3	34.5	18.5
United Kingdom	17.9	25.1	24.8	32.3
EU-6 + UK	23.8	30.1	25.8	20.3
EU-6	24.8	31.0	26.0	18.3

The survey also asked some questions about possible EU policies inspired by pan-European solidarity norms to a restricted sample of six countries: Spain, France, Italy, Germany, Poland and Sweden. As can be seen in Table 2, almost all respondents (89.1 per cent) agreed that the EU should provide financial help during a crisis to anyone without basic means of subsistence. In this EU-6 sample, this proportion was higher than 84 per cent. In addition, more than three respondents out of four were in favour of a specific EU-funded scheme to fight poverty.

In turn, Table 3 shows that more than 77 per cent of respondents were in favour of an increase of the EU budget to support jobless people during a crisis. The fact that more than two-thirds of Germans are ready to support a partial mutualization of the risk of un-employment is remarkable, considering the reluctance of the German government when it comes to mutualization policies.

In addition, more than three out of four respondents in the six countries were in favour of increasing the EU budget to foster social investment policies (75.9 per cent). By contrast, 'only' 56 per cent supported the introduction of Eurobonds. Country differences are quite sharp, reflecting the controversial nature of this issue in the context of the creditor–debtor cleavage. In Spain and Italy, respectively, 78.5 per cent and 72.3 per cent of respondents backed Eurobonds; however, only 37.3 per cent of Germans did so (despite, we should note, the stark opposition to this issue by all German governments). In France, the approval rate reached 48.3 per cent.

Table 2: EU measures against poverty

Country	EU assistance to indigents in a crisis		EU funded poverty scheme	
	Disagree	Agree	Not in favour	In favour
France	15.4	84.6	34.7	65.3
Germany	12.7	87.3	30.3	69.7
Italy	4.7	95.3	13.5	86.5
Poland	11.6	88.4	24.7	75.3
Spain	6.7	93.3	9.5	90.5
Sweden	14.4	85.6	33.6	66.5
EU-6	10.9	89.1	24.4	75.6

Table 3: Social investments and mutualisation of risks

Country	EU unemployment fund		Increase EU social budget		Introduction of Eurobonds	
	Disagree	Agree	Not in favour	In favour	Not in favour	In favour
France	32.1	67.9	33.0	67.0	51.7	48.3
Germany	35.1	64.9	33.3	66.7	62.7	37.3
Italy	8.8	91.2	14.0	86.0	27.7	72.3
Poland	18.1	82.0	16.2	83.9	43.6	56.4
Spain	9.0	91.0	11.7	88.3	21.5	78.5
Sweden	30.5	69.5	36.3	63.7	57.9	42.1
EU-6	22.3	77.7	24.1	75.9	44.1	55.9

Survey data must be handled with care. They only provide snapshots of attitudes in one particular moment and we know that attitudes are rather volatile. Moreover, they indicate citizens' preferences, but not necessarily their salience for voting behaviour. Finally, responses are sensitive to the way in which issues are framed and formulated. For these reasons, surveys only register contingent 'value expressions', and are not necessarily indicative of genuine value judgements and of a stable and internalized collective moral order. We are aware of this. However, these limitations should not be overrated. The fact that attitudes may easily change means, in fact, that they are malleable and thus flexible to bending to the views of elites, through – precisely – issue framing and discourse. In addition, it cannot be assumed *a priori* that value expressions are entirely devoid of internal and stable commitments. It must also be noted that the results of our survey have been robustly confirmed by other recent investigations (for example, Gerhards *et al.,* 2018). On this basis, it can be suggested that voter resistance and electoral constraints cannot explain the process of de-solidarization of the EU which we have described in the previous section. Quite the contrary, a 'silent majority' seems potentially available to support a strategy of realignment between the deep togetherness created by the EMU, on the one hand, and the institutional and symbolic architecture of the EU, on the other. The absence of such a strategy represents a clear failure of European political elites. As mentioned above, elective (choice-based) partnerships based on forward-looking objectives turn into fully fledged families of nations to the extent that their leaders engage in some fraternal nudging. The exercise of 'socioemotional leadership', capable of developing a collective fraternal idioculture has become difficult in a world increasingly based on fluid social relationships, self-seeking behaviours and rational–legal authority (Brint, 2001). However, the EMU elite has made long steps in the opposite direction, emphasizing difference and apartness between national communities and their governments; denigrating, also symbolically, any mechanism of mutual support; promoting a historically unprecedented rule-based formalization of political authority – almost a deliberate recipe for undermining the conditions of polity maintenance.

Conclusion

The European Union is a multinational territorial collectivity characterized by deep economic and monetary integration and a significant level of 'societalization'. It has an authoritative centre endowed with rather extensive sovereign prerogatives and ultimate

legal powers in key policy sectors. The 'dignified' part of its quasi-constitution (the Lisbon Treaty) includes an ambitious transformative project based on a panoply of goals and values, including justice and solidarity. The dominant and 'efficient' institutional and moral order which has emerged in parallel with the establishment of the EMU is, however, out of sync with the nature and depth of socio-economic togetherness, the basic values of the EU as a political community, and with the solidaristic ethos of its citizens, as revealed by mass surveys. Without a broad reconfiguration of its normative order, the durability of the EU polity is at stake. The nature of this reconfiguration is quintessentially political, in a double sense. First, it must be centred on political values: the search for commonality despite diversity, a shared commitment to reciprocity despite interest-based divergences, political equality despite disparities of power resources, and sober brotherhood and fraternalism *vis-à-vis* different national vulnerabilities and needs. Second, the reconfiguration must be forged by political actors: by responsible elites capable of exploiting the solidaristic capital which seems to be available on the demand side. In the run-up to the German elections of 2017, both Angela Merkel and Wolfgang Schäuble repeatedly stated that in EU politics 'this is no time for visions'. We disagree. As famously argued by Weber, world images and visions can sometimes operate as switchmen, channelling historical developments towards new directions. However, ideas need political 'carriers'. Today, we see some promising ideas, but no available carriers. In this post-crisis but still turbulent phase, the long-term sustainability of the EU cannot be taken for granted.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Methodological Note