Crises and challenges in contemporary Europe: how can research contribute?

ARENA Research Note *(draft)*

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The EU is currently faced with a whole range of crises and challenges. These are: the financial turned political-constitutional crisis; the refugee crisis; the Ukraine crisis; and Brexit (and the domino effects that it might engender). The crises have altered the EU. They have made it less likely that the EU will develop into a United States of Europe; equally unlikely is however a return to a Europe of nation-states. The crises are transforming the EU, the member states and closely affiliated states such as Norway. For Norway which is likely to find itself in a more exposed and likely also more vulnerable situation than before, it is imperative to get a better sense of the nature, direction and broader political, social, economic and cultural implications of these changes.

Introduction

The European Union (EU), as the world's foremost experiment in governing beyond the nation-state is facing unprecedented challenges. From a social science perspective this is doubly challenging. For one, social science has long struggled with trying to understand what the European Union is, how it works, and the effects it has on the member states, their societies and citizens, and states and citizens beyond Europe, even globally. From having been a small subfield or subsection of International Relations, European studies today encompasses all branches of social science, but the task of integrating knowledge across research fields remains a major challenge, one clearly amplified by the many and dynamic crises and challenges currently facing Europe.

Further, it is becoming increasingly evident from the many challenges and crises presently facing the EU and Europe that established knowledge and orthodoxy are no longer adequate. The reasons are manifold: the sheer magnitude of crises and challenges; the speed and dynamism through which events unfold; and the complex interweaving of issues, actors, and structures. The upshot is that a significant research effort is required in order to establish how much of existing knowledge is still relevant and applicable; and what new sources of knowledge we need in order to get a handle on the nature and status of the European political order (which Norway is included in).

Without building up new knowledge through in-depth engagement with the challenges and crises, we are without a clear sense of whether the knowledge we have accumulated is

outdated, and therefore in need of replacement; or whether it can be built on and updated. The problem is compounded by the fact that the EU is a political experiment that raises questions pertaining to the continued relevance of the nation-state based concepts, frames of analysis, and normative standards that we have been so accustomed to relying on. The EU has spawned new ways of thinking about governing, notably under the heading of transnational governance; new ways of policy-making and implementation for instance pertaining to Comitology; new conceptions of citizenship under the rubric of European citizenship; and new ways of thinking of political order and community. Many of these are typically understood as departures or at least deviations from the ways we have been accustomed to think of political order, governing and community –as intrinsic features of nation-states. The question is whether the present crises and challenges transform the European political order so much that we need to reconsider what should be our point of reference: the nation-state, the EU or some complex amalgam of both. The crises have altered the EU. They have made it less likely that the EU will develop into a United States of Europe; *equally unlikely* is however a return to a Europe of nation-states. The crises are transforming the EU and the member states alike, and it is imperative to get a better sense of the overall direction of these changes. Before elaborating on that we will briefly consider the practical relevance of this undertaking for Norway.

Basic research challenge

In this document our objective is to approach the following fundamental research challenge: what is the nature of the present European political order and in what direction is it developing? We do so in the following manner. First we seek to render explicit the crises and problems that are currently facing Europe. The challenge for research is to engage with these developments and hold them up against what we know from the structures in place in order to get a better handle on the key issues and questions that are at stake. An important research challenge is thus to formulate a set of precise research questions that will help to frame the subsequent investigations and mobilise latent and manifest knowledge. The second is to provide a brief survey of the present knowledge of causes and consequences. This is necessarily only partial since the long-term effects are far from clear and are also highly disputed, rendering the third aspect critical, namely to clarify the main gaps, and to spell out the most important research questions.

Before doing that we will briefly caution against three research fallacies. The first is methodological nationalism or the propensity to take the nation-state as the 'natural' given point of reference. The second is the 'aggregation fallacy'. It stems from merely replacing the nation-state with the European level in such a manner as to import the logic that underpins methodological nationalism to the European level. While scholarly analyses of the multiple economic, political, constitutional crises of the European Union point to gaps and lacunas in existing theories, they share with such theories the assessment of the crises from the vantage point of the Union itself. The aggregation fallacy stems from simply focusing on the "domestic politics" of the Union to the detriment of external conditions and constraints that may pull the EU in a different direction than what would be expected if we consider only internal factors.

The third is the 'return to normality fallacy'. It resides on the one hand in the notion that it is possible to restore the EU to the pre-2008 situation (beginning of the Euro-zone crisis). The changes are so profound and the EU has gone through such an important transformation (mutation) that a return to pre-crisis 'normality' is unfeasible.

Part I: What problems/crises are we facing today; what is at stake?

The European Union was established in the 1950s to stabilize a war-torn continent that had faced a range of devastating wars and crises during the first half of the 1900s. Today, the EU is facing the most serious crises since its inception. These are generally referred to as the financial turned political-constitutional crisis; the refugee crisis; the Ukraine crisis; and Brexit (and the domino effects that it might engender). Other important challenges pertain to democratic back-sliding, the most explicit and blatant examples being Hungary and Poland but we see elements in a number of other member states, as well.

In terms of understanding what is at stake we need to develop a deeper understanding of the crises. Are the crises currently facing Europe instances of episodic upheavals; are they mutually reinforcing or could some of them even each other out? Are they indications of broader structural transformations? These questions require attention because they help us to establish whether crises are benign or wicked – their impact and severity; and their handling - whether they can be turned into opportunities, or not.

Further, we need to take into consideration the fact that defining something as a crisis is not an objective undertaking, but is an intrinsic part of the political game. An important issue in order to understand what is at stake is therefore to develop criteria for establishing crises proper, and those instances where the crisis label is being used by some actor to pursue a particular political objective. The implication is that there are issues that are within the reach of solution or handling but where powerful actors find it more politically opportune to define something as a political crisis in order best to promote their political objectives.

Third, precisely because crises are socially and politically constructed we need to unpack the various research-related dimensions to crises. From a research perspective it is useful to keep in mind that the notion of crisis may be construed as a category of diagnosis and critique from which decisive normative, conceptual, and institutional implications follow. Reflection upon the causes and consequences of crisis is at once a reflection upon the dynamics of state and societal transformation (the analytical-diagnostic dimension) and about the ideational foundations and collective orientations that constitute social order and drive social change (the normative-critical dimension). Crisis reflects uncertainty about the underlying paradigm of social and political order. Crisis is not simply a process of social disintegration, destruction, failure or collapse, but can relate back to creative forces of catharsis, re-equilibration, and reorganisation of social relations. The ambiguity of crisis: on the one hand as a possible instance of destruction, and on the other, as a possible instance of social creativity needs to be analytically grasped, process-traced, and normatively evaluated.

The implication for research organisation and orientation is that focus should not be on each individual crisis, but should rather relate to the present challenges through a set of analytical dimensions. We have identified the following dimensions in order to specify the interrelated challenges currently facing Europe:

1) The political challenge: Power, sovereignty and the new hegemony

This challenge pertains to three closely related dimensions: EU-external, EU-level, and EU-internal (EU-member states – regions). Over the last decades conditions internally to the EU have changed radically, and so have external political and economic conditions. This is not only due to the changes in global power structures (the end of the Cold War). It is also a result of the constraints emanating from an increasingly dense network of international legal structures, and intense economic interdependence. In examining the implications of the multiple crises for the EU, the manner in which the global system conditions and constrains actors and structures has to form an explicit part of the analysis.

Many of the crises facing the Union, the financial crisis as well as the refugee "crisis", have their origins outside of the EU. They are linked to the structures of the global economy and/or to shifting power constellations at the global level. The EU is deeply embedded in a global system. Developments at the global level, and the characteristics of the global system, shape the Union as do the Union's domestic system and political events in the EU. The fate of the UK outside of the Union will be determined not only by the kind of agreement it will establish with the EU but by how the EU and the UK are received in the global system.

One implication of the many crises currently facing Europe is that they have largely undermined the sense that Europe would overcome the long-established enmities among its nations and that the European Union would act as a 'benign ruler' that pools the sovereignty of its equal members. The crises and their handling have largely undermined the credo of member state equality. In addition, major challenges such as financial instability and security have given a special impetus to executive governance and a clear shift of power to non-majoritarian supranational institutions. The challenge is on the one hand to establish the broader systemic implications of these developments for the European political order, and on the other hand, to relate them to a broader historical challenge confronting the EU: that of redefining hegemony in international relations and rebalancing the relationship between national governments, supranational institutions and global structures in a context where all kinds of issues and issue-linkages can be 'securitized'. A key aspect of the present situation is the rise of arbitrary domination, whose sources are manifold, not least stemming from an unruly capitalism and a new Russian assertiveness/aggressiveness. The ascent to power of Donald Trump brings in new uncertainty of the role of the U.S. in these processes.

2) The economic and social challenge: Social inequalities and solidarity

The many crises appear to be undermining the credo that the generation of growth through the establishment of a liberal economic market would be followed by higher degrees of social cohesion and equality. The idea that European market integration would be based on cooperation among equals, based on a win-win situation for all, and the creation of equal living conditions across the continent, have been fundamentally shattered. Inequalities within and between the EU's member states have increased with substantial parts of the population at risk of social exclusion. At the same time, global inequalities have become more acute with repercussions for Europe's external relations and internal cohesion. Such developments may

undermine support for universalist welfare states, and may persuade voters to opt for political parties bent on eroding solidarity. The historical challenge for Europe has been to formulate a social model that addresses internal and global inequalities and provides for efficient mechanisms of redistribution. A key challenge today is not only that of how to *overcome* and contain the economic crises, but also to *reverse* the "production" of inequality.

3) The democratic challenge: expertocracy, populism and the new authoritarianism

The many crises currently facing the EU have largely undermined the credo that European integration would automatically lead to an advancement of democracy in Europe and the world, and that the European Union and its member states would act as humanitarian agents. In the current situation, democracy is challenged at three interrelated levels: First, expertocracy and depoliticized decision-making outside the arena of partisan contestation, which disempower representative democratic institutions and electorates. Secondly, populism and re-politicization through the rise of new political parties that claim the status of 'authentic' sources of popular sovereignty in contrast to elitist and 'alien' political establishments steeped in expert rules and legal-constitutional reasoning. And thirdly, new authoritarian forms of governance (e.g. in the field of security) and governments (like Poland and Hungary), who increasingly deviate from the commonly agreed EU framework for democracy, civil liberties, and rights. In this situation the foundations of democracy are attacked from actors within the EU, who actively install measures bent on restricting the EU's fundamental principles such as freedom of speech and assembly, media pluralism, and the protection of minorities. The historical challenge for Europe has been to rebalance transnational governing through supranational law with the maintenance of democratic legitimacy. The challenge facing the EU and its member states today is to reinvent representative democracy in such a way as to contain expertocracy and populism, whilst at the same time addressing the transnational dimension of justice and rights in a manner that is both effective and convincing for the electorates.

Part II: What do we know about causes and consequences?

External factors clearly shape European developments, as is illustrated in the realm of security, where Russian assertiveness is raising tensions and concerns about security. The refugee crisis is a consequence of how hostilities unfolding outside of Europe have direct effects on European societies, governing arrangements and the nature and shape of European political order. The financial crisis turned Euro-crisis was initially an external crisis whose distinct imprint and dynamic were due to internal European factors.

A common feature that all these developments testify to is the EU's vulnerability to crises/upsets. This is well illustrated in the Euro-crisis where it became clear early on that the repercussions would be far more profound for the EU than for the U.S., where the financial crisis originated. In Europe, the crisis took on important political and institutional – even constitutional – dimensions, which testifies to the presence of structural faults built into the

EU construct: Monetary union without an attendant fiscal union, as it was constructed in the EU, has proven to be a highly unstable construct. It has long been underlined that the Eurozone is not an "optimal currency area". Even if the effects of this may be disputed, there are large differences between the economies. Whilst they initially fell, in recent years they have increased partly because there are no efficient mechanisms to provide economic transfers from economies that fare well to those that fare less well. That produces the pro-cyclical fiscal policies we see now austerity in the crisis countries, making it worse.

In a similar manner, a Schengen system of unregulated internal borders presupposes a system of external border controls, which had not been adequately established before the refugee crisis hit.

There are many sources of the EU's vulnerability: external factors; the EU's institutional set-up; member state opposition, reluctance and hostility; and a mismatch between collective action problems and problem solving capability. In the EU context, states and societies are increasingly tightly interwoven and interdependent. The EU's member states have great scope for imposing harms/negative externalities on one another but have thus far refrained from developing the institutional arrangements that will prove capable of providing core shared goods – from security to the shared benefits of a justly and predictably regulated market - without co-operation or without risks of free riding.

The upshot is that a number of the causes of the current conundrums facing the EU are 'design faults' or factors associated with the EU's design and functioning. The EU's socio-economic constitution played a fundamental role in shaping the present crises. In the process, it has started to "manufacture" inequalities. A similar structural weakness has appeared in the EU's efforts in handling the crises, in the sense of blurring the division of labour between economic and monetary policy. The ECB is formally independent and materially both dependent on Member States (on some more than on others) and holder of key sovereign powers with which it can force policies upon single Member States. Such a construct brings up obvious accountability and legitimacy issues and challenges.

The crisis has weakened the EU's democratic legitimacy, but analysts do not agree on how the crises have affected the EU's system of governing. One position argues that it has strengthened the EU's supranational component, notably in the areas of macroeconomic policy and banking regulation. The changes have ushered in a 'hardening' of EU governance, in that the threshold for instituting sanctions has been greatly lowered, coupled with a much tighter system of macro-economic monitoring and control. The notion that the crisis has strengthened the supranational component appears paradoxical given that numerous analysts have underlined a second outcome, namely a considerable strengthening of the EU's intergovernmental components. The argument is that the crisis and the EU's handling of it have ushered in a shift in the locus of decision-making as the crisis has been largely dealt with through intergovernmental means, with the European Council playing a central role (the so-called Union method) through measures such as intergovernmental treaties (cf. Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union) and informal intergovernmental bargains (notably between Germany and France). These developments are seen as giving rise to an executive-dominated federalism that is quite impervious to parliamentary oversight and control, and prone to de-constitutionalisation.

The broader implications for European political order is a more complex, more differentiated EU. Rather than developing at multiple speeds, directed at the same destination, today's differentiation is one where some member states occupy *permanently different membership statuses*. Some states seek to move in the opposite direction – towards less binding forms of collaboration or towards collaboration in a more limited number of issue-areas. Even Brexit must be situated in this picture: the UK will become the first instance of a has-been-member but is very unlikely to cease to be an EU rule-taker. The more assured access it seeks to the EU's internal market and customs union the more of a rule-taker it will be. Differentiation does not stop at the borders of EU membership, as the EEA clearly testifies to. The EU has developed at least 5 different forms of affiliation with non-members. Brexit brings up the question of how these might be reshuffled as part of the UK's disassociation from EU membership.

Another general aspect of the European political order is increased politicization. That engenders its own paradoxes: even though many Europeans have benefited from free movement (taking advantage of unlimited travel, stay and work in the area defined by the European Common Market), these benefits remain largely invisible, while public debates are dominated by those who oppose the principles of openness and equal rights on which it is based, either in principle or when it comes to certain groups of foreigners (like 'crisis refugees' from Southern Europe, working migrants from Poland, Roma people or Muslims). This situation is aggravated by the more recent linkages that are made in policy discourse and in the media between freedom of movement and security. Governments from various member states have reinvigorated internal border controls in various and unprecedented ways, not only in the form of classical border checks as they have been temporarily (?) reintroduced in the Schengen area, but also more flexibly through enhanced police controls in streets, metropolitan areas or through preventive checks of personal data (e.g. registration of travels in trains, buses, etc.). This process of internal securitisation goes hand in hand with the unhampered process of fencing off and militarizing Europe's external borders through new security techniques that are coordinated at the EU level and implemented by EU agencies (Frontex).

Implications for Norway

For Norway, as a closely associated non-member, the need for updated knowledge based on assessments covering the relevant issues and crises, and their interaction, is essential. As a non-member Norway is far less included in the ongoing EU decision-making processes. As part of that is not only a representation deficit; there is also a knowledge and information deficit, amplified by the status of non-member which gives the misleading impression of being less affected. There are good grounds for claiming that Norway's status as a very closely affiliated non-member makes it particularly important to take active measures to make up for these deficits.

Without such updated knowledge we will not be able to get a clear grip on the factors increasingly shaping Norwegian government and society, and Norway's future development. In contrast to almost all EU member states, Norway has exceptional fiscal leverage. But fiscal leverage does not translate into structural immunity. We have to consider fiscal leverage in

relation to the manner in which Norway through its very close EU affiliation is being structured along many of the same tenets as do EU member states. Thus, Norway is not free to choose its own socio-economic model. In incorporating EU regulations and directives and by virtue of being incorporated in the EU's internal market, Norway is being reconstructed along the same lines as EU's member states are being reconstructed by the EU's four freedoms. The structural implications are visible in a host of areas: in terms of the scope for public action; in terms of the relationship between what is public and what is private, and how each is being regulated; in terms of the type and scope of regulatory and distributive mechanisms that are permissible; in terms of the relationship between what is international and domestic. All of these and other aspects are affecting Norwegian society and Norway's political-administrative apparatus. This type of EU-driven legal and administrative hard-wiring is an ongoing and cumulative process that requires constant attention. It requires Norway-specific attention because Norway's relationship to the EU is not entirely synonymous with that of an EU-member and may through Brexit become more visibly distinct.

This is of course not only an EEA matter even if the EEA agreement is the most dynamic component; it pertains to all aspects of Norway's relationship to the EU. Norway is an associated member of Schengen and is therefore affected by the EU's policies on border controls and the regulation of immigrants and asylum-seekers. In a similar manner Norway is closely affiliated with the EU's foreign and security policies and will be deeply affected by developments there, as well.

Drastic changes in the EU's composition as we saw with Eastern enlargement and as we are now seeing with Brexit have important direct effects on Norway. With regard to Brexit it is necessary to examine if not the implications for Norway will be quite different to those for EU member states. Norway's affiliation to the EU has for quite a while been a hotly discussed topic in the UK in connection with Brexit. And even if the UK government at present dismisses the so-called 'Norway Model' (Norway's EEA ++ affiliation), it is obvious that if the UK wants to retain open access to the EU's internal market, the EEA is the most obvious choice. The Swiss model is off the table (even if it were not its actual effects on the Swiss governing system are not drastically different from those of the EEA). Further, it is obvious that whatever affiliation the UK seeks with the EU (hard, soft-hard, or soft), Norway will be affected by this. The issue of effects is not only a matter of the option that the UK pursues and might end up with; equally important is how the process of Brexit unfolds. To what extent can this process be legally regulated and contained, given the lack of precedent? To what extent is this almost bound to become politicized and hence be privy to complex rounds of bargaining and political caprice? Of particular importance then is whether this unfolds in an orderly or in a disorderly fashion. For now the momentum lies with the UK and will do so until they approach the EU with a concrete proposal. From then on the dynamic changes; the EU's response and subsequent handling will be critical to the outcome. That in turn will be of critical importance to the EU itself, including its long-term sustainability.

Finally, the election of Donald Trump as the next U.S. president will have transatlantic effects. The question is not whether such effects will ensue; the question is how broad and encompassing they will be and the effects they will have on European developments.

This brief overview gives some indications of Norway's exposure to present events and developments. This is a matter of external structural embedding; of susceptibility to

cyclical processes; and of exposure to sudden events and disruptions (shocks). Norway's strong fiscal leverage is clearly a buffer, but cannot recompense for Norway's vulnerability to external developments and events. Norway's external exposure is broad and deep, including in the manner in which Norway has internalized external norms, rules and regulations (the 2014 constitutional amendment is just one recent albeit highly symbol-laden example).

Part III: What is unknown, where are the gaps and what are the pertinent research questions?

When examining Europe's challenges in terms of crisis we have to take into account that the external economic, political and legal context within which the EU exists has changed radically since the late 1950s/early 1960s. The global forces itself upon the Union in a different manner from then. It is not only so that the crises facing the Union are for the most part external in origin; EU responses are constrained and conditioned by the economic, political and legal characteristics of the international system. The global may limit the options of the Union as such, but it may also empower some actors over others and pull policies in certain directions rather than others. It may transform the internal distribution of power within the EU in the same way as the EU in turn contributes to change the distribution of power within the individual member states. Since the global context is very dynamic and the transmission of events and upsets is so rapid, unknowns and gaps keep occurring, and require a broad knowledge network to tap into.

A further gap stems from the recognition that present-day EU consists in three things that can no longer be had in combination: a) adequate solutions to collective action problems; b) minimum requirements for the survival of the democratic-constitutional-welfare states in Europe; and c) national democracies and *demoi* whose majorities are unconstrained by a European political order whose legitimacy they have themselves worked out from an understanding of what is required for constitutional democracies to operate under conditions of *inter*dependent choice. We cannot do without a) or b), and have to find some solution to c).

The prospects of addressing this combination hinges among other things on the EU's further development as a political system. At present that appears more uncertain than ever. It is therefore necessary to operate with different possible developmental trajectories. We may spell out three such: a) core consolidation; b) muddling through (or further segmentation); and c) EU disintegration. The point is that the efforts to fill in gaps in knowledge must be oriented to the different trajectories; which of these is more likely to predominate over time. Which trajectory will shape and be shaped by the following important issues that require attention.

The first pertains to the EU's value-basis. What kinds of values and principles are those that European citizens will and should embrace? If the European citizen is to regard herself as a social solidaristic being, what kind of socio-economic arrangements are necessary for that identity to emerge and consolidate? What kind of identity is being reproduced through education, media, culture and society? Which one should be reproduced to ensure a sustainable Union? What kind of relationship should there be between the obligations towards fellow Europeans and obligations to those who share an actual physical space at the local, regional and national levels?

The second pertains to the underlying socio-economic model. That in turn has three aspects: distributive, constitutional and democratic. What kind of socio-economic model is needed in order to both overcome the crises and reshape European societies in line with the normative aspirations of the constitutional law of the postwar European state, which constitutes the *deep structure* of European constitutional law? Can the present socio-economic policies be implemented for as long as they are claimed to be needed in order to rebalance the Eurozone without requiring the setting aside of democratic decision-making in the long run? Can national tax systems remain effective when still based on the postwar Social and Democratic tax state, while being forced to adapt, through the primacy of European law, so as to become *instruments facilitating* the exercise of entrepreneurial freedom and the right to private property, and *ensuring the solvency of public debt after public institutions have renounced to make use of the power over money to support the solvency of the state?* Can powers over tax and social expenditure be transferred to the supranational level at the same time that the supranational level champions policies that undermine the collective good of tax compliance through the fostering of capital movement (whether motivated by economic logic or by the will to avoid the payment of taxes)?

The overall challenge is to re-establish the legitimacy credentials of supranational constitutional law, which has become both *autonomous* from national constitutional law and lacking in obvious sources of democratic legitimacy. Are there preconditions for a *constitution-making exercise* at the European level? Have the crises and the governing of the crises depleted the necessary preconditions for a successful exercise of collective constitution-making, both at the European level and even at the level of some Member States? If "revolutionary" supranational constitution-making is regarded as impossible or too risky, how could the legitimacy of European constitutional law be re-established?

A specific challenge consists in getting rid of the elements of the "emergency constitution" which have been enshrined into more or less formal European constitutional law, and which should not belong there, both for material/substantive and structural reasons. Crises and the issue of framing – the risks of downplaying as well as of overstating issues and crises.

Third is the need to understand the important political transformation in the field of security policies and its impact on democracy. This relates to the question of how security threats are constructed in political parlance and in the media, which actors (political parties) proactively define the new security agenda, what strategies of mobilization are used by them and how mainstream and new (social) media are involved in diffusing perceptions of threat. Further, it is important to understand how 'securitization' relates to European integration. How is the EU framework of cooperation used to define the new security agenda? Several scenarios are possible: The EU can emerge strengthened in coordinating the European security agenda, but this might weaken its engagement for civil rights and democracy. The new security agenda can make the EU more intergovernmental as it is mainly promoted by the governments of the member states restricting the scope of Parliamentary or legal scrutiny. Or the EU might experience an internal conflict about the definition of the new security agenda in relation to its humanitarian ambition.

A fourth gap with bearings on socio-economic and securitization aspects is to understand how openness as an organizing principle of liberal-democratic societies can be maintained in situations of economic decline or radical economic rethinking. Is there a

necessary relationship between openness and capitalist economic growth? How can the return of redistributive conflicts be explained and what consequences does that have for the organization of democratic societies in Europe and the relationships and exchanges between them? Openness as an organizing principle of democratic societies is further challenged by the return of cultural conflicts and the difficulties experienced in many parts of Europe to accommodate cultural diversity. The EU's fundamental values are threatened by new religious groups, by political parties and governments which openly defend more authoritarian solutions and state interventions in culture, education and freedom of the press. Openness in Western societies has led to a rapidly proceeding transnationalisation of our everyday lives. From a sociological angle it is important to understand why this process of social transnationalisation goes hand in hand with a process of political renationalization.

A fifth gap pertains to the status and future of representative party democracy. To what extent is the European setting currently facing a toxic mixture or perhaps even a mutually reinforcing process where executive dominance/technocracy spurs extreme versions of populism and the obverse? Events as we see unfolding in Europe today increasingly appear as *aberrations* in the sense of deviations from the fact that all modern democracies rely on a significant executive *presence;* all modern democracies require *expertise;* and an upsurge in populism can provide a much-needed stimulus to democratic politics, especially since the style of politics that populists espouse is focused on responsiveness to citizens/society. As such, populism can serve to situate politics in society, restore links between citizens and the political system, and shake up established parties, especially insofar as they move in the direction of cartel parties (parties closely associated to the state). One challenge, then, is to understand the nature and magnitude of aberration in each case; the other is to understand their interaction. To what extent is there a mutually reinforcing relationship between executive dominance, technocracy and populism?

Today's European situation has thrown out of whack the precarious balance that all parties and representative bodies have long sought to maintain between what the late Peter Mair depicted as responsibility, on the one hand, and responsiveness, on the other. With responsibility is meant: "to act prudently and consistently and to follow accepted procedural norms and practices… responsibility involves an acceptance that, in certain areas and in certain procedures, the leaders' hands will be tied."(Mair 2009:12) Parties and popular bodies have in the post-war period been made subject to a comprehensive set of international and transnationals rules and regulations that subject them to stronger constraints and stronger requirements of responsibility than has been the case before. Thus, their ability to balance responsibility and responsiveness is largely undermined. In this image, the nativist-oriented populists pose themselves as the main keepers of responsiveness, as the authentic manifestations of the people, the nation and the national spirit. And even if they often demand participation but often hanker towards authoritarianism instead, the other parties feel so hamstrung that they give in to populist demands. We might label this the hamstringing hypothesis. Another hypothesis pertains to the manner in which mediatization has altered patterns of authorization and accountability. Media increasingly takes on the role as repository of societal memory; including much of the critical input to the political accountability discourses that parties are subject to.

It is important to understand the democratic effects of these processes. The pathologies emanating from executive dominance, technocracy and extreme populism have party-political representative democracy as the main casualty. Particular focus must therefore be placed on the implications for constitutionally entrenched representative party democracy. How are legislatures and parties affected? One aspect is to understand the particular configurations of representative politics that are emerging in Europe. This undertaking is complicated by the uncertain nature of the EU's further development and must therefore cover several possible options, including various forms and shapes of differentiation.