
BOOK REVIEW

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While crisis management is not new to Europe, nowadays, many of us have the impression that the continent is undergoing several unexpected crises, which can even be interpreted as existential threats. Recent European challenges include disintegration in the European Union, migration, rising populism, climate change, the global pandemic-related crisis, and war in the neighbourhood. As a consequence, in recent years, scholars have increasingly sought to understand the nature of the challenges and their political, social and economic impacts on Europe. For instance, Paul Kubicek in *European Politics* tackles the major policy questions in Europe while surveying their historical and institutional backgrounds. Furthermore, several authors (Berend, 2010; Webber, 2017; Youngs, 2018; Zielonka, 2018; Haass, 2020) have raised the question of how the EU can survive its struggles with a multilevel poly-crisis. The book *European politics: Crises, Fears, and Debates*, edited by Zoltán Simon and Tamás Dezső Ziegler, contributes to these scholarly discussions and aims to provide a brief but very well-structured overview of recent crises.

The main argument of the book is that Europe is in crisis – most importantly, a legitimacy crisis. The editors invite the reader to understand several factors (increasing political mistrust, fears of disintegration at the European level, fears of disorder at the national level, and fears of the future) that should not be ignored because they can generate a new political era of anxiety on the continent.

The book first reveals that little attention has been paid to the theory and practice of potential disintegration so far (p. 15). Zoltán Simon explains the legitimacy crisis through the politicisation dilemma, the changes in politics at the national level, and in a global context, injecting fresh air into recent scholarly discussions.

The book is divided into nine chapters (plus an introductory chapter) and is selective in its choice of topics, which might be a limitation. The authors ask questions – related to integration, social issues (demography, inequalities), migration, sustainable development, democracy, political communication, securitisation, and Global Europe – without always giving answers. Therefore, the book may not only be used by university students and professors but can encourage broader public engagement with recent European events. 'It is about politics, but without the intention of making politics' (p. 28).

The first chapter provides an overview of integration and disintegration in the European Union, written by Tamás Dezső Ziegler. The author points out that the understanding of integration needs further clarification. The chapter offers a complex interpretation of European integration and disintegration by explaining different forms of integration(s), the theoretical background, and lessons learnt from different theories. Several questions emerge in the introduction to the chapter: Integrating what, how, and what for? (pp. 33–38). Chapter 1 will be especially useful for students or those who are not familiar with basic notions of European studies because it lists not merely the stages of integration but also introduces a new vocabulary. The author defines linguistic integration, unification, convergence, divergence, and differentiated integration before dealing with the scholarship of integration. Ziegler critically looks at how different theories of European integration – namely neofunctionalism, intergovernmentalism, institutionalism, constructivism, and realism – have been used to try to model the integration and disintegration of European countries (pp. 39–43). Recent challenges, including Brexit, the refugee crisis of 2015 and authoritarian tendencies, raise the legitimate fear of (major) disintegration. Instead of providing an answer to this question, the author highlights a new model of integration and disintegration: dynamic equilibrium, which happens when ‘integration and disintegration are happening at the same time, within the same system, in different fields, continuously’ (p. 43).

Chapter 2, ‘Inequalities and Social Europe,’ written by Zsófia Katalin Kollányi, contributes to presenting the social tensions that have led to growing inequalities between the EU Member States. The case of Brexit is used by the author to illustrate a wide range of problems and fears related to the future of the European community. Several socio-economic fears have arisen; for instance, the fears that immigrants might take jobs away from locals and that the United Kingdom will lose its national sovereignty (p. 50). The author provides several diagrams to demonstrate the rising inequalities in Europe with regard to socioeconomic issues, structural differences between Member States, and the diverse impact of the financial crisis among countries (pp. 51–61). The last part of the chapter seeks to offer a coherent understanding of the debate about the causes of inequalities and recommended solutions, such as the concept and evolution of Social Europe (pp. 63–66).

In Chapter 3, we learn more about the link between demography and migration in Europe. Zoltán Simon and Tamás Dezső Ziegler define basic demographic trends based on Massimo Livi-Bacci’s diagnosis of contemporary European societies and their impacts on European politics. A demographic transition may be observed in Europe because of numerous issues, like declining mortality and fertility rates, increasing life expectancy, an ageing society, and the end of mass emigration from and the beginning of immigration into Europe. Iván T. Berend identifies these tendencies as ‘dramatic demographic changes’ in European societies (p. 74). Additionally, the policy, political, and external dimensions of the demographic change have far-reaching political implications (pp. 76–79). The authors raise awareness that these social norms and trends should not be ignored because they have the potential to deepen the cleavages between Western and Eastern societies (p. 78). The end of the chapter mentions the global implications of European demographic phenomena, mainly the case of migration.

In Chapter 4, Tamás Dezső Ziegler connects misleading political discourses between migration and politics. First, the author focuses on the technocratic perspective, the main

argument of which is that Europe needs migration in order to cope with its declining workforce (p. 80). Despite the fact that EU leaders express openness to migration, this friendly rhetoric might mask an inhospitable Europe. A major strength of this chapter is that it reveals the dark side of European migration policy by covering the EU–Turkey deal to send asylum-seekers back to Turkey, the collapse of the quota system, hindering the work of rescue ships in the Mediterranean Sea, and refugees being sent back to non-safe third countries. These phenomena are morally questionable. The findings presented in this chapter confirm that migration is definitely politicised and could become a source of disintegration if there is no balance between economic interests and proper social integration (p. 85).

The book continues with the topic of ecological debt and sustainable development. Chapter 5 provides an overview of the EU's approach to sustainable development since the 1990s. Gábor Szabó and Szabolcs Diósi highlight that the EU's path towards sustainable development 'brings various forms of economic, social and environmental policies under one collective objective' (p. 93). Since the adoption of the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty, the EU has constantly striven to deal with sustainable development issues; however, not only has the Lisbon Strategy failed to deliver on its central promise of making Europe the most competitive economy in the world but meeting all the Sustainable Development Goals represents a great challenge for Europe. The authors reveal that there are significant domestic performance gaps within EU Member States, not just among the global community (p. 97). This chapter also details further EU strategies that are significant responses to climate-related issues – for instance, the European Green Deal, the Circular Economy Action Plan, and a new European industrial and innovation strategy (pp. 97–99). Nevertheless, more impactful activities, more comprehensive approaches, and integrated co-operation are needed between the EU and its international partners.

Chapter 6 focuses on democracy and mistrust while introducing the main drivers of recent political tendencies in Europe. Anna Unger argues that the recent period can be called a 'decade of distrust' because of growing dissatisfaction with democracy, rising populism, the weakening of liberal democracy, and increasing illiberalism (p. 103). All of these tendencies confirm that the classical cleavages have been transformed, and more ideological ones are returning. The author raises the question and makes the reader critically wonder – how can we describe the state of democracy? She gives a detailed explanation: dissatisfaction with democracy, the rise of populism and the polarisation of politics contribute to the erosion of democratic values and represent serious challenges to liberal democracy (pp. 105–111). One of the most significant components of this chapter is where Anna Unger highlights that distrust and disillusionment are the result of the problem, not the cause. She gives several examples of such forms of distrust based on an investigation by Rosanvallon: for example, the liberal distrust of power, democratic distrust, and distrust of society itself (p. 112). Another relevant issue that is addressed in this chapter is whether populism or illiberalism is inevitable. The author responds in the negative: first, because there are ups and downs in liberal democracies, and second, because of the weakening of social inclusion and the extreme growth in economic inequality lead to questioning institutions of both constitutional liberalism and democracy. The chapter ends with the idea of pluralist democracy – according to which no actor, ideology, politician, or social group can be in a hegemonic position – as a replacement for liberal democracy (p. 118).

In Chapter 7 ('Fear and Securitisation'), Beáta Kovács interprets the potential connection between (political) identity and fear through the securitisation process. The author points out how the emotional dimension plays an important role in politics. The dual nature of fear in relation to politics means that it can be shaped, intensified, and created (p. 123). Fear can be examined as a social phenomenon: we live in an age of uncertainty; thus, the politics of fear has become real, and the difference between the left and right has faded (p. 125). Further on in this chapter, the discourse of fear is presented. Beáta Kovács mentions two significant arguments: the connection between populism and fear and the concept of securitisation, which broadens the concept of security (p. 128). On this basis, securitisation refers to a communication process, which topic is widely discussed in relation to fears about migration.

Chapter 8 on 'Political Communication and Populism' first offers a summary of different periods in the evolution of political communication in Europe. Norbert Merkovity and Büşra Özyüksel highlight tendencies through which political actors' communication may be understood. A great advantage of this chapter is that the authors provide a clear explanation of how politicians use social media in Europe while introducing the media and network logic associated with a new political culture that includes celebrity or influencer politicians (pp. 140–143). After presenting mediatisation and its logic, the authors deal with the rise of social media and its impact on populist political communication in Europe (pp. 145–148). This trend puts pressure on citizens' political attitudes, emotions, and behaviour. At the end of the chapter, the reader is faced with a thought-provoking prognosis: 'populist communication may dominate European political discourse in the future,' which may lead to further challenges (p. 148).

Chapter 9 ('Global Europe and Strategic Sovereignty') is structured into four parts. The first part is written by Zoltán Simon and points out – in line with the framework of strategic autonomy and strategic sovereignty – that 'new dynamics in the EU's external and internal environment seem to [be accelerating] the emergence of a new policy attitude' (p. 153). The author mentions several factors (the identity crisis of the EU, fear, and other vague concepts) to reveal some problems with European strategic autonomy. The second part of the chapter is about strategic autonomy and security defence, where Zsolt Nagy argues that the increasing complexity of Europe's security environment is leading to major geopolitical shifts. One of the main challenges arises from the diverging Member States' approaches to strategic autonomy in security and defence. In the third part, Tamás Dezső Ziegler introduces the free trade debate within the EU through the case of the TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) and CETA (Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement) initiatives. Here, the author argues that the EU needs to invest in a genuine rethinking of its trade system while also listening to the voices of its citizens. Last but not least, Viktor Szép presents the most important information about international sanctions and the European Union as a major sanctions actor (key policy documents, the average time of sanctions, reasons why the EU imposes sanctions, inconsistencies with regard to their practice). The subchapter concludes that in order to avoid counterproductive actions when imposing sanctions, there is a need for cooperation between EU Member States.

The major advantage of this book is its logical structure and interlinked chapters (which can also be read independently), which provide a clear overview of the most sig-

nificant European challenges and their impacts through well-known examples such as Brexit. Furthermore, key concepts and definitions at the end of the chapters make this book student-friendly. This book does not just introduce European debates, but its critical approach makes the reader think, and most importantly, it raises awareness of how current European debates could influence our everyday lives.

European Politics: Crises, Fears, and Debates is a book which perfectly manages to capture the main challenges and debates in contemporary European politics. Accordingly, not only students but anyone who is interested in recent multidisciplinary disputes could benefit from reading it. The greatest strength of this edition is that it includes valuable information, straightforward summaries, and, most importantly, explains social, political, and economic trends from an up-to-date perspective.

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