

THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE CROSSROADS A MULTIDIMENSIONAL

ANALYSIS OF INTEGRATION CHALLENGES AND SCENARIOS OF TRANSFORMATION OR FRAGMENTATION

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DEDICATION

To all those who believe that Europe is not merely an economic project but a human aspiration toward peace, democracy, and transnational solidarity. To the researchers, policymakers, and citizens working toward a Union that is more just, more resilient, and closer to its peoples.

ABSTRACT

This monograph offers a rigorous multidimensional analysis of the European Union's contemporary predicament, advancing a novel theoretical framework of constitutional resilience through differentiated integration. Moving beyond deterministic narratives of either inevitable collapse or automatic resilience, the study develops an integrated analytical architecture combining institutional history, political economy, community law, international relations, and strategic foresight. The central thesis argues that the European Union's survival depends not on uniform deepening but on the institutionalization of structured differentiation as a permanent feature of its constitutional architecture. Through systematic analysis of the eurozone crisis, migration governance, democratic legitimacy deficits, security transformation following the Ukraine war, and the dual ecological and digital transitions, this work identifies three inseparable pillars of European resilience: democratic legitimacy, effective solidarity, and strategic capacity. The study constructs four plausible institutional scenarios for the horizon 2040, ranging from federal consolidation to controlled fragmentation, and evaluates each against empirically grounded viability indicators. By integrating comparative analysis with other regional integration experiences and historical cases of political dissolution, the monograph provides actionable policy recommendations for strengthening cohesion, legitimacy, and strategic agency. The work addresses scholars in European studies, institutional decision-makers, and advanced students in political science and community law, offering a reference framework that transcends ideological simplifications and historical determinism.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication

Abstract

Introduction: The European Union in Existential Recomposition

Part One: Historical Foundations and Institutional Evolution

Chapter One: From European Idea to Institutional Reality

Chapter Two: The Contractual Journey and Successive Enlargements

Chapter Three: Architecture of European Governance and Decision-Making Mechanisms

Part Two: Structural and Contemporary Challenges

Chapter Four: Economic Integration and the Eurozone Crisis

Chapter Five: Migration, Borders, and the Crisis of Political Legitimacy

Chapter Six: The Rise of Populism and the Democratic Challenge

Chapter Seven: Security, Neighborhood, and Common Foreign Policy

Chapter Eight: Ecological and Digital Transition

Part Three: Future Scenarios and Comparative Analysis

Chapter Nine: Models of Future Integration

Chapter Ten: Scenarios of Fragmentation or Partial Withdrawal

Chapter Eleven: Lessons from History with Analytical Rigor

Chapter Twelve: Institutional Resilience Mechanisms

Part Four: Global Consequences and Policy Recommendations

Chapter Thirteen: Repercussions on the International System

Chapter Fourteen: The Global Balance of Power

Chapter Fifteen: Policy Recommendations

Conclusion: Between Collapse and Transformation

References

Keywords in Ten Languages

INTRODUCTION: THE EUROPEAN UNION IN EXISTENTIAL RECOMPOSITION

The European Union traverses a period of historical recomposition. Between foundational heritage, multidimensional crises, and geopolitical uncertainties, the European project finds itself at an existential crossroads. This work aims neither to prophesy collapse nor to celebrate automatic resilience. It proposes a rigorous, multidisciplinary, and empirically grounded analysis of the dynamics shaping the future of European integration.

The central problematic guiding this study is as follows: under what structural conditions can the European Union transform its vulnerabilities into adaptive capacities, and what scenarios of institutional trajectory are politically and legally viable by the horizon 2040? This question transcends the simplistic dichotomy between federalist enthusiasm and Eurosceptic fatalism, requiring instead a sophisticated analytical framework capable of capturing the multidimensional nature of contemporary European challenges.

The methodological approach mobilized combines institutional history, political economy, community law, international relations, and strategic foresight. Each chapter articulates a central research question, verifiable primary sources, traceable quantitative indicators, and reflection on potential methodological biases. The objective is to produce an academic reference useful to researchers, public decision-makers, and citizens engaged in European debate.

The theoretical innovation of this work lies in its rejection of both neofunctionalist teleology and intergovernmental reductionism, proposing instead a framework of constitutional resilience through structured differentiation. This framework recognizes that the European Union's strength resides not in uniform integration but in the institutionalized management of heterogeneous integration speeds across policy domains and voluntary state coalitions.

The perimeter of analysis encompasses the European Union of twenty-seven members, with comparative references to past enlargements and relations with candidate countries. Key concepts are rigorously defined: integration as the process of normative harmonization, sovereign mutualization, and construction of supranational authority; fragmentation as political disalignment, growing regulatory heterogeneity, and risks of partial withdrawal or uncoordinated differentiation; institutional resilience as the capacity of a system to absorb shocks, learn from crises, and reform without losing its fundamental coherence; and multi-speed Europe as framed institutional differentiation allowing variable integration rhythms according to domains and voluntary states.

The structure of the work unfolds in four parts. The first part examines historical foundations and institutional evolution from the post-war period to contemporary governance architecture. The second part analyzes structural and contemporary challenges including the eurozone crisis, migration governance, populist contestation, security transformation, and the dual ecological-digital transition. The third part constructs future scenarios and comparative analysis, evaluating models of integration, fragmentation risks, historical lessons, and resilience mechanisms. The fourth part addresses global consequences and policy recommendations, examining international system repercussions, the global balance of power, and concrete reform proposals.

This book addresses those who refuse ideological simplifications and seek to understand, with nuance and depth, the conditions of possibility for a Europe capable of meeting twenty-first century challenges. It is grounded in the conviction that the European project's future depends not on historical determinism but on collective choices, institutional compromises, and citizen engagement.

PART ONE: HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL EVOLUTION

The theoretical framework of this part mobilizes the classic debates of European integration, particularly the neofunctionalism versus intergovernmentalism controversy, to analyze how compromises between supranational logic and national sovereignties have shaped the current

institutional architecture. The works of Ernst Haas, Stanley Hoffmann, and Andrew Moravcsik provide the foundational reference points, while contemporary scholarship on constitutional pluralism and differentiated integration offers necessary updates to these classical frameworks.

CHAPTER ONE: FROM EUROPEAN IDEA TO INSTITUTIONAL REALITY

The central question of this chapter is how the traumas of the Second World War catalyzed the creation of the first supranational institutions. Priority sources include the archives of the European Coal and Steel Community, the memoirs of Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet, the Treaties of Paris (1951) and Rome (1957), and documents from the Congress of The Hague (1948).

The post-conflict geopolitical context and the will to achieve peace through interdependence constitute the foundational impulse. The negotiations that produced the Schuman Declaration of May 9, 1950, reveal a sophisticated understanding that economic integration in strategic sectors could render war materially impossible while politically unthinkable. The European Coal and Steel Community, established by the Treaty of Paris signed on April 18, 1951, by six founding states (Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands), represented an unprecedented experiment in pooled sovereignty over the material bases of military power.

Quantitative indicators demonstrate the immediate economic impact: intra-European trade volume increased from 10 billion international units in 1950 to 21 billion by 1960, while steel production grew by 156 percent and coal production stabilized after initial post-war reconstruction. Economic growth rates across the ECSC space averaged 5.2 percent annually between 1952 and 1958, substantially exceeding pre-war performance and contemporary global averages.

The consolidation of the common market proceeded through the Treaties of Rome of March 25, 1957, establishing both the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community. These treaties extended integration beyond specific sectors to encompass the entire economy, establishing the principle of free movement of goods, persons, services, and capital. The role of technocratic elites and transnational networks, particularly through the High Authority of the ECSC and the Commission of the EEC, demonstrates the neofunctionalist spillover mechanism in operation.

However, methodological rigor requires acknowledging alternative historical paths that were foreclosed. The European Political Community, proposed in 1952 alongside the European Defense Community, failed ratification in the French National Assembly in August 1954, demonstrating that federalist outcomes were never inevitable. The British preference for a simple free-trade zone, embodied in the European Free Trade Association established in 1960, represented a viable alternative model of European cooperation that was rejected only contingently.

The first decade of European integration thus reveals a complex interplay between structural constraints (the imperative of Franco-German reconciliation, the Cold War context, economic reconstruction needs) and contingent choices (the rejection of supranational defense integration, the gradual extension from sectoral to comprehensive economic integration). This complexity undermines both teleological readings that interpret early steps as an inevitable march toward federation and purely voluntarist accounts that ignore the structural imperatives shaping foundational choices.

CHAPTER TWO: THE CONTRACTUAL JOURNEY AND SUCCESSIVE ENLARGEMENTS

The central question of this chapter is how treaty revisions and waves of accession have transformed the political nature of the Union. Priority sources include the texts of the Treaties of Maastricht (1992), Amsterdam (1997), Nice (2001), and Lisbon (2009); Commission reports on enlargement; and opinions of the Court of Justice on the legal personality of the Union.

The trajectory from six founding members to twenty-seven (and previously twenty-eight) represents one of the most remarkable processes of voluntary political integration in history. The first enlargement in 1973 (Denmark, Ireland, United Kingdom) transformed the Community from a continental European project to a broader Western European construction. The Mediterranean enlargements of the 1980s (Greece 1981, Spain and Portugal 1986) consolidated democratic transitions and extended the Community's geopolitical reach. The historic 2004 enlargement to ten Central and Eastern European states fundamentally altered the Union's economic structure, political culture, and institutional dynamics.

Quantitative indicators reveal the magnitude of transformation: the number of member states increased from 6 in 1957 to 27 in 2026; cumulative demographic weight grew from 165 million to 447 million inhabitants; economic output expanded from approximately 250 billion euros (2020 prices) to over 14 trillion euros; and the community budget evolved from 0.03 percent of collective GNP in 1958 to approximately 1.0 percent today, with the NextGenerationEU instrument temporarily raising this to nearly 2.5 percent for the 2021-2027 period.

The geopolitical logic of enlargements combined stabilization of the neighborhood, democratic promotion, and economic opportunity. The Copenhagen criteria of 1993 established rigorous conditionality requiring stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities; the existence of a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union; and the ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic, and monetary union.

Institutional reforms induced by the increase in member states proceeded through successive treaty revisions. The Single European Act (1986) introduced qualified majority voting for the completion of the internal market. The Maastricht Treaty (1992) established the European Union's three-pillar structure and launched economic and monetary union. The Amsterdam

Treaty (1997) incorporated the Schengen acquis and strengthened the social chapter. The Nice Treaty (2001) reformed institutional arrangements for enlargement. The Lisbon Treaty (2009) abolished the pillar structure, established the permanent European Council presidency, created the High Representative for Foreign Affairs, and made the Charter of Fundamental Rights legally binding.

Crises functioned as accelerators of adaptation. The Empty Chair Crisis of 1965-1966, when France boycotted Community institutions, was resolved through the Luxembourg Compromise establishing de facto national veto power. The Eurozone crisis of 2010-2012 led to the European Stability Mechanism and banking union. The migration crisis of 2015 prompted reforms to the Dublin system. The COVID-19 pandemic generated the unprecedented NextGenerationEU recovery instrument. The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine accelerated strategic autonomy and defense integration.

However, methodological rigor requires acknowledging the asymmetries generated by rapid integration. The 2004 enlargement, while historically justified as consolidation of post-communist transitions, introduced profound economic disparities (GDP per capita differentials exceeding 1:5 between newest and oldest members) and cultural tensions that have fueled populist contestation in both sending and receiving states. The assumption that political homogeneity (liberal democracy) was sufficient precondition for enlargement underestimated the importance of deeper cultural, administrative, and economic convergence requirements.

CHAPTER THREE: ARCHITECTURE OF EUROPEAN GOVERNANCE AND DECISION-MAKING MECHANISMS

The central question of this chapter is how the decision-making architecture balances national sovereignty and supranational efficiency. Priority sources include the jurisprudence of the Court of Justice of the European Union (*Costa v. ENEL*, *Van Gend en Loos*, *Kadi*); annual reports of the European Central Bank; and European Parliament studies on democratic legitimacy.

The European Union's institutional architecture represents a unique constitutional form that defies traditional categories of international organization and federal state. The institutional triangle of Commission (executive initiative and guardianship of treaties), Council (representation of member states), and Parliament (direct citizen representation) operates through complex decision-making procedures that vary by policy domain.

The ordinary legislative procedure, applicable to most policy areas, requires joint adoption by Parliament and Council based on Commission proposal. Special legislative procedures maintain Council unanimity in sensitive areas including taxation, foreign policy, and treaty revision. The principle of conferral limits Union competence to what member states have voluntarily conferred through treaties. The principles of subsidiarity and proportionality constrain the exercise of these competences.

Quantitative indicators reveal the system's operational characteristics: transposition rates of directives by member states average 99.1 percent for directives with elapsed deadlines, though significant variation exists across policy domains and member states; recourse to veto or emergency brake clauses in the Council remains rare but strategically significant, with approximately 150 instances of formal voting blockage between 2009 and 2024; participation rates in European Parliament elections have recovered from the historic low of 42.6 percent in 2014 to 50.6 percent in 2024, though substantial national variation persists.

The primacy of Community law, established in *Costa v. ENEL* (1964) and *Van Gend en Loos* (1963), and the doctrines of direct effect and state liability (Francovich, 1991) constitute the constitutional backbone of the European legal order. The Court of Justice has progressively constructed a quasi-federal constitutional jurisprudence that binds member states, their courts, and their citizens in a unified legal framework.

However, the technocratic model faces persistent legitimacy deficits. The democratic deficit critique, articulated by scholars including Fritz Scharpf and Andrew Moravcsik, identifies the gap between the scope of European governance and the capacity for democratic accountability through European Parliament elections. The European Citizens' Initiative, introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, has had limited impact with only six successful initiatives out of over one hundred attempts. Informal coordination mechanisms including the Eurogroup, Coreper, and trilogues operate with limited transparency despite their substantive importance.

The architecture thus embodies a sophisticated but imperfect balance between efficiency and legitimacy, between supranational integration and national sovereignty, between technocratic expertise and democratic accountability. Understanding this balance is essential for evaluating reform possibilities and constraints.

PART TWO: STRUCTURAL AND CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

The theoretical framework of this part draws on constructivist approaches and theories of democratic legitimacy to analyze how identities, norms, and perceptions of justice influence the Union's capacity to manage contemporary crises. The works of Jeffrey Checkel, Thomas Risse, Fritz Scharpf, and Andreas Follesdal provide the analytical foundation for understanding legitimacy as both input (participatory) and output (problem-solving) dimensions.

CHAPTER FOUR: ECONOMIC INTEGRATION AND THE EUROZONE CRISIS

The central question of this chapter is why the initial design of monetary union generated structural vulnerabilities to asymmetric shocks. Priority sources include reports of the European Stability Mechanism; Eurostat data on macroeconomic imbalances; and International Monetary Fund analyses of eurozone governance.

The Economic and Monetary Union, launched in three stages between 1990 and 1999, represented the most ambitious monetary integration experiment in history. The adoption of the euro by eleven founding members on January 1, 1999 (with Greece joining in 2001) eliminated exchange rate uncertainty and transaction costs within the eurozone, while the European Central Bank's single monetary policy aimed to maintain price stability across a heterogeneous economic area.

However, the original design was fundamentally incomplete. Monetary union was established without corresponding fiscal union, banking union, or political union. The Stability and Growth Pact of 1997 imposed fiscal discipline through the 3 percent deficit and 60 percent debt criteria, but enforcement mechanisms proved inadequate. The absence of a central fiscal capacity, common debt instruments, or banking supervision at the European level left the eurozone structurally vulnerable to asymmetric shocks and sovereign debt crises.

Quantitative indicators reveal the crisis's magnitude: sovereign bond spreads between peripheral and core eurozone countries reached over 600 basis points for Greece, 500 for Portugal, and 400 for Spain and Italy in late 2011; unemployment rates diverged from 5 percent in Germany to over 27 percent in Greece and Spain; current account imbalances exceeded 10 percent of GDP in deficit countries and 7 percent in surplus countries; public debt ratios surged from 66 percent of GDP in 2007 to 92 percent in 2012 across the eurozone.

The crisis response proceeded through multiple institutional innovations. The European Financial Stability Facility (2010) and European Stability Mechanism (2012) provided conditional lending to distressed member states. The ECB's Outright Monetary Transactions program (2012) and subsequent quantitative easing programs stabilized sovereign bond markets. The banking union project, launched in 2012, established single supervision (through the Single Supervisory Mechanism) and single resolution (through the Single Resolution Mechanism), though the proposed European Deposit Insurance Scheme remains incomplete.

The crisis revealed fundamental tensions between solidarity and conditionality, between risk-sharing and moral hazard, between national democratic accountability and European economic governance. The austerity programs imposed on program countries generated severe social costs and political backlash, while the ECB's expanding role raised concerns about democratic legitimacy and mandate overreach.

The methodological bias to anticipate is twofold: demonizing budgetary rigor without recognizing initial competitiveness asymmetries, or conversely, attributing all difficulties to external factors while neglecting institutional design flaws. A rigorous analysis must acknowledge both the structural vulnerabilities of incomplete monetary union and the political constraints on deeper integration.

Perspectives for fiscal union remain contested. The NextGenerationEU instrument of 2020, with 750 billion euros in common borrowing, represented a historic breakthrough in fiscal mutualization, though its temporary and crisis-specific character limits its precedential value.

The debate between those advocating permanent fiscal capacity and those insisting on national responsibility for fiscal policy remains unresolved, reflecting deeper disagreements about the nature and finality of European integration.

CHAPTER FIVE: MIGRATION, BORDERS, AND THE CRISIS OF POLITICAL LEGITIMACY

The central question of this chapter is how the management of migratory flows has exposed the limits of the Schengen-Dublin model. Priority sources include the Dublin III and IV Regulations; reports of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and International Organization for Migration; Frontex data on illegal border crossings; and national and European jurisprudence on asylum law.

The Schengen area, established by the 1985 agreement and progressively expanded to encompass twenty-six countries (including four non-EU members), represents one of the most tangible achievements of European integration. The abolition of internal border controls, combined with common visa policy and the Schengen Information System, enables free movement of over 400 million people across a vast territorial space.

However, the Schengen system rests on the Dublin Regulation's principle of first country of entry for asylum responsibility, creating disproportionate burdens on peripheral member states. The 2015 migration crisis, with over 1.2 million asylum applications in a single year, exposed the system's structural fragility. Unilateral border reinstatements by multiple member states, though formally temporary, have persisted for years, undermining Schengen's fundamental principle.

Quantitative indicators reveal the crisis dynamics: asylum applications peaked at 1.28 million in 2015, declined to 450,000 in 2016, and stabilized around 450,000-500,000 annually thereafter; relocation mechanisms established in 2015-2016 achieved only 35 percent of planned transfers, revealing solidarity deficits; Frontex operational costs increased from 6 million euros in 2005 to over 700 million euros in 2024, reflecting the growing emphasis on border externalization.

The New Pact on Migration and Asylum, adopted in 2024 after years of negotiation, attempts to rebalance responsibility through mandatory solidarity mechanisms allowing member states to choose between relocation of asylum seekers, financial contributions, or operational support. However, implementation challenges remain substantial, and fundamental tensions between border security, humanitarian protection, and political legitimacy persist.

The crisis has fueled populist contestation across the political spectrum, from those demanding stricter border controls to those advocating expanded protection. The political legitimacy of European migration governance depends on reconciling these competing demands through effective, fair, and democratically accountable policies.

The methodological bias to anticipate is confusing border security with humanitarian closure, or conversely, neglecting the structural demographic and economic dimensions of migration flows.

A rigorous analysis must acknowledge both the legitimate concerns about integration capacity and social cohesion and the legal obligations under international refugee law and the fundamental rights charter.

CHAPTER SIX: THE RISE OF POPULISM AND THE DEMOCRATIC CHALLENGE

The central question of this chapter is what structural factors fuel contestation of European elites and challenges to the rule of law. Priority sources include Eurobarometer surveys on institutional trust; comparative studies of anti-system parties; and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe reports on elections and the rule of law.

The rise of populist movements across Europe since the 2008 financial crisis represents one of the most significant challenges to the European project's legitimacy. Populist parties, whether on the radical right (National Rally in France, League in Italy, AfD in Germany) or radical left (Syriza in Greece, La France Insoumise), contest the liberal democratic consensus underpinning European integration, advocating national sovereignty restoration, immigration restriction, and skepticism toward supranational governance.

Quantitative indicators reveal the populist challenge's magnitude: populist party vote shares in European Parliament elections increased from 18 percent in 2009 to 23 percent in 2014 and 24 percent in 2019, stabilizing at approximately 23 percent in 2024; political polarization indices have increased substantially across most member states; abstention rates, though declining in recent European elections, remain higher than national elections in most countries, with significant generational cleavages.

The genesis of populist mobilizations combines multiple factors: representation crises as traditional parties converge on pro-European positions; distributive effects of globalization and European integration creating winners and losers; identity questions exacerbated by migration and cultural change; and territorial fractures between metropolitan centers and peripheral regions. The articulation of these factors varies across national contexts, requiring nuanced analysis rather than monocausal explanation.

The European Union's response has evolved from initial dismissal to more sophisticated engagement. Rule of law conditionality mechanisms, particularly the 2020 regulation linking EU budget access to rule of law compliance, represent a significant institutional innovation. However, enforcement remains politically contested, with Hungary and Poland challenging mechanisms before the Court of Justice.

The methodological bias to anticipate is assimilating all institutional critique to democratic rejection or purely economic phenomena, or conversely, minimizing real risks to fundamental Union values. A rigorous analysis must distinguish between legitimate democratic contestation of specific policies and fundamental challenges to the liberal democratic order.

Renewing civic dialogue and transnational citizen participation represents a crucial but underdeveloped dimension. The Conference on the Future of Europe (2021-2022) experimented with citizen panels and digital participation, but translating deliberative input into concrete policy outcomes remains challenging. Building a genuine European public sphere, with transnational media and political parties, is essential for democratic legitimacy but faces substantial structural barriers.

CHAPTER SEVEN: SECURITY, NEIGHBORHOOD, AND COMMON FOREIGN POLICY

The central question of this chapter is how the war in Ukraine has transformed European strategic doctrine and relations with NATO. Priority sources include the European Union's Strategic Compass (2022); Permanent Structured Cooperation documents; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute analyses; and member states' national security strategies.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, represented a geopolitical shock that fundamentally transformed European security thinking. The war shattered post-Cold War assumptions about continental peace, exposed vulnerabilities in energy dependence, and accelerated debates about European strategic autonomy and defense integration.

The Strategic Compass, adopted in March 2022, articulated a comprehensive response including a 5,000-strong rapid deployment capacity, enhanced cyber defense, increased defense spending targets, and strengthened partnerships. The European Peace Facility, established in 2021, has provided over 40 billion euros in military assistance to Ukraine, representing the first time the EU finances lethal equipment delivery to a country at war.

Quantitative indicators reveal the transformation: defense spending across EU member states increased from 153 billion euros in 2021 to an estimated 240 billion euros in 2024, with most countries approaching or exceeding the NATO 2 percent of GDP target; Russian energy imports declined from 40 percent of EU gas imports in 2021 to under 15 percent by 2024, through diversification and renewable acceleration; military aid to Ukraine exceeded 80 billion euros collectively by 2024, making the EU the largest donor.

The historical limits of Common Foreign and Security Policy, rooted in unanimity requirements and limited institutional capacity, have been partially overcome through enhanced cooperation mechanisms and Permanent Structured Cooperation launched in 2017. However, fundamental tensions persist between those advocating deeper integration (particularly France and southern states) and those prioritizing NATO and transatlantic ties (particularly northern and eastern states).

The articulation with NATO remains complex. While the Ukraine war has reinforced transatlantic solidarity, it has also demonstrated the need for European capacity to act autonomously when US attention shifts to other regions. The European Union's comprehensive approach, combining

diplomatic, economic, developmental, and military instruments, offers distinctive capabilities but requires enhanced coherence and resources.

The methodological bias to anticipate is considering strategic autonomy as a total rupture with the Atlantic Alliance, or conversely, underestimating European capacity-building dynamics. A rigorous analysis must acknowledge both the enduring importance of NATO for collective defense and the growing imperative for European strategic agency in an increasingly multipolar world.

CHAPTER EIGHT: ECOLOGICAL AND DIGITAL TRANSITION

The central question of this chapter is how the Union can finance its dual transition while preserving social and industrial cohesion. Priority sources include the European Green Deal and climate legislation (Fit for 55); regulations on artificial intelligence and digital services; and European Court of Auditors reports on green budget execution.

The European Green Deal, launched in December 2019, represents the most ambitious climate policy framework globally, targeting climate neutrality by 2050 and 55 percent emissions reduction by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. The Fit for 55 legislative package, adopted progressively between 2021 and 2023, translates these targets into binding sectoral legislation including emissions trading system extension, carbon border adjustment mechanism, methane regulation, and nature restoration law.

The digital transition, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, encompasses the Digital Europe Programme (7.5 billion euros for 2021-2027), the Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act regulating platforms, the Artificial Intelligence Act establishing risk-based regulation, and the European Chips Act addressing semiconductor sovereignty. These initiatives aim to position Europe as a regulatory leader while building technological capacity.

Quantitative indicators reveal transition dynamics: annual green investment needs are estimated at 477 billion euros, with current public and private flows substantially below this requirement; broadband and 5G penetration varies substantially across member states, with digital divides between urban and rural areas; greenhouse gas emissions have declined 31 percent since 1990, but sectoral progress is uneven with transport and agriculture lagging.

Financing the dual transition requires mobilizing multiple instruments: the EU budget's climate mainstreaming targeting 30 percent of spending; NextGenerationEU's 37 percent climate allocation; the Innovation Fund and Modernisation Fund from emissions trading revenues; the Just Transition Mechanism addressing territorial disparities; and private investment mobilized through the sustainable finance taxonomy and green bond standards.

However, fundamental tensions persist between environmental imperatives and economic competitiveness, between climate ambition and social equity, between regulatory leadership

and technological sovereignty. The carbon border adjustment mechanism, while innovative, risks trade tensions and carbon leakage. The phase-out of combustion engines by 2035 faces automotive industry resistance. The AI Act's compliance costs may disadvantage European startups.

The methodological bias to anticipate is opposing environmental imperatives and economic competitiveness without recognizing industrial synergies (eco-innovation, green jobs), or neglecting digital and territorial fracture risks. A rigorous analysis must acknowledge both the urgency of climate action and the need for just transition policies that maintain social cohesion and industrial competitiveness.

Protecting vulnerable populations and ensuring transitional justice represents a crucial dimension. Energy poverty affects over 50 million Europeans, requiring targeted social policies alongside carbon pricing. The Just Transition Fund, with 19.2 billion euros for 2021-2027, targets coal-dependent regions but requires substantial additional resources to address the scale of transformation needed.

PART THREE: FUTURE SCENARIOS AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The theoretical framework of this part mobilizes work on complex systems resilience and strategic foresight methods to construct and test plausible institutional trajectories. The works of Carl Folke and Brian Walker on resilience, combined with Michel Godet and Paul Schoemaker's scenario methodologies, provide the analytical foundation for evaluating alternative futures.

CHAPTER NINE: MODELS OF FUTURE INTEGRATION

The central question of this chapter is what institutional architectures maximize effectiveness while preserving democratic legitimacy. Priority sources include the Treaties on European Union and on the Functioning of the European Union; Convention on the Future of Europe works; and comparative federalism studies.

Four principal institutional scenarios emerge from systematic analysis, each with distinct implications for effectiveness, legitimacy, and viability.

The federal consolidation scenario envisions deeper integration through treaty revision establishing a genuine European federation with expanded competences, qualified majority voting extension, strengthened Parliament powers, and own resources system. This scenario maximizes policy effectiveness and democratic accountability but faces substantial political obstacles including national sovereignty concerns, referendum requirements, and public skepticism.

The reinforced confederation scenario maintains the Union's current structure while deepening cooperation in specific domains through enhanced cooperation mechanisms and permanent structured cooperation. This scenario preserves national sovereignty while allowing ambitious integration among willing states but risks creating complex differentiation that undermines cohesion and solidarity.

The multi-speed Europe scenario institutionalizes differentiated integration as a permanent feature, with core groups advancing in specific policy areas while others maintain opt-outs or slower integration. This scenario accommodates heterogeneity while preserving Union unity but requires sophisticated institutional architecture to manage complexity and prevent fragmentation.

The common market return scenario envisions partial disintegration, with the Union retreating to its economic core while member states reclaim competences in political and social domains. This scenario responds to sovereignty concerns but sacrifices the achievements of six decades of integration and risks economic fragmentation and geopolitical marginalization.

Quantitative indicators inform scenario evaluation: qualified majority thresholds in the Council; distribution of exclusive, shared, and supporting competences; fiscal and social harmonization indices; and citizen preferences on integration depth measured through Eurobarometer surveys.

Sensitivity analysis tests scenario robustness against exogenous shocks including major energy crises, global recessions, and intensified geopolitical tensions. The federal consolidation scenario proves most resilient to economic shocks but most vulnerable to political backlash. The multi-speed scenario offers flexibility but risks institutional complexity. The common market return scenario maximizes national autonomy but minimizes collective problem-solving capacity.

The methodological bias to anticipate is presenting federalization as a unique solution or conversely as inaccessible utopia, or neglecting heterogeneous national public opinion preferences. A rigorous analysis must acknowledge that the optimal institutional architecture depends on value judgments about sovereignty versus effectiveness that cannot be resolved technocratically.

CHAPTER TEN: SCENARIOS OF FRAGMENTATION OR PARTIAL WITHDRAWAL

The central question of this chapter is under what structural conditions the disintegration process could become legally and politically viable. Priority sources include Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union; comparative analysis of Brexit; and work on exit clauses in international organizations.

The Brexit referendum of June 23, 2016, and subsequent withdrawal on January 31, 2020, demonstrated that European Union membership, once considered irreversible, is in fact reversible under Article 50 TEU. The complex negotiation process, extending over three and a

half years, revealed the substantial costs of withdrawal for both the departing state and the remaining Union.

Quantitative indicators reveal Brexit's consequences: UK-EU trade in goods declined by approximately 15 percent in 2021 compared to 2019 baseline, with additional friction from rules of origin requirements and regulatory divergence; UK GDP growth underperformed comparable economies by approximately 4-5 percent cumulatively by 2024; investor confidence indices fell sharply following the referendum and have not fully recovered; the Northern Ireland Protocol's complex arrangements demonstrate the difficulty of reconciling withdrawal with the Good Friday Agreement and single market integrity.

The legal mechanics of disengagement involve withdrawal negotiation under Article 50(2), a transition period maintaining most EU law application, and future relationship negotiations covering trade, security, and cooperation. The precedents of Greenland's 1985 withdrawal from the European Economic Community (while remaining an overseas country and territory of Denmark) and the Algerian independence from France in 1962 (though predating the current treaties) offer limited analogies.

Structural brakes on fragmentation include the single market's economic benefits, Schengen's mobility advantages, regulatory interdependencies, and the political costs of uncertainty. However, these brakes are not absolute, as Brexit demonstrated. The contagion effect feared by many has not materialized, with no other member state seriously contemplating withdrawal, but this reflects specific British circumstances rather than structural impossibility.

Counterfactual analysis explores alternative trajectories if the United Kingdom had remained in the Union or if other states had activated Article 50. The UK's continued membership would have maintained the second-largest economy and a major military power in the Union but would have perpetuated internal tensions over integration depth. Hypothetical exits by other states (Italy under Lega-M5S government 2018-2019, or Greece during the 2015 crisis) would have generated substantially different dynamics given eurozone membership and economic vulnerabilities.

The methodological bias to anticipate is overestimating the procedural ease of withdrawal or underestimating the systemic costs of exit, or neglecting political contagion effects and potential reintegration dynamics. A rigorous analysis must acknowledge both the legal possibility of withdrawal and the substantial economic and political costs that make it a last-resort option.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: LESSONS FROM HISTORY WITH ANALYTICAL RIGOR

The central question of this chapter is what historical collapses offer relevant lessons or analytical limits for the European Union. Priority sources include Soviet archives and studies on USSR dislocation; work on Yugoslav fragmentation; and research on British and French post-imperial transitions.

Historical comparison offers valuable analytical perspectives but requires methodological rigor to avoid false analogies. The European Union differs fundamentally from historical empires and federations that have disintegrated, including the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in its voluntary character, democratic foundations, and integration through law rather than coercion.

The Soviet Union's dissolution in December 1991 resulted from the convergence of economic stagnation, nationalist mobilization, elite fragmentation, and Gorbachev's failed reform attempts. The USSR was a centralized, authoritarian federation where republics had formal secession rights but no realistic capacity to exercise them until the central state's collapse. The European Union, by contrast, is a voluntary association of democratic states with genuine sovereignty and established exit procedures.

Yugoslavia's violent disintegration between 1991 and 2001 resulted from the convergence of ethnic tensions, economic crisis, the death of Tito's unifying authority, and the rise of nationalist leaders exploiting identity politics. The Yugoslav federation lacked democratic legitimacy and relied on authoritarian cohesion, making it fundamentally different from the democratic European Union.

The methodological bias to anticipate is applying imperialist or totalitarian analytical frameworks to a voluntary and democratic organization, or neglecting the European model's specificities including member state consent, democratic anchoring, and integration through law. A rigorous analysis must acknowledge both the value of historical comparison for understanding disintegration dynamics and the fundamental differences that limit direct analogy.

Relevant lessons include the importance of economic performance for political legitimacy, the dangers of unresolved national questions, the role of elite behavior in either preserving or undermining unity, and the critical importance of maintaining credible exit options to preserve voluntary commitment. However, these lessons must be adapted to the European context rather than directly transferred.

The European Union's specific characteristics as an organization of peaceful integration through law, with voluntary membership, reversible commitment, and democratic foundations, make direct historical analogies misleading. The Union's strength lies precisely in these characteristics, which distinguish it from historical empires and federations that relied on coercion or authoritarianism.

CHAPTER TWELVE: INSTITUTIONAL RESILIENCE MECHANISMS

The central question of this chapter is through what mechanisms the Union has demonstrated its adaptation capacity to systemic shocks. Priority sources include European Commission

reports on crisis management; academic work on organizational resilience; and evaluations of the Union's Civil Protection Mechanism.

The European Union has demonstrated remarkable resilience through successive crises, adapting its institutional architecture and policy instruments while maintaining fundamental coherence. The eurozone crisis generated the European Stability Mechanism and banking union. The migration crisis prompted Dublin system reforms and Frontex strengthening. The COVID-19 pandemic produced the unprecedented NextGenerationEU recovery instrument. The Ukraine war accelerated strategic autonomy and defense integration.

Quantitative indicators reveal resilience dynamics: crisis response times have decreased from months in the eurozone crisis to weeks in the Ukraine response; mobilized recovery funds have grown from 500 billion euros in 2010-2012 to 750 billion euros in 2020-2026; cross-border cooperation in crisis management has expanded through the Civil Protection Mechanism, with over 200 activations between 2019 and 2024.

Institutional resilience in the European context encompasses the capacity to absorb shocks without fundamental disruption, to learn from crises and adapt policies, and to reform while maintaining core values and objectives. This resilience rests on multiple mechanisms including the flexibility of the treaty framework allowing interpretation and adaptation; the role of transnational networks of experts, civil servants, and judges maintaining continuity; the capacity for enhanced cooperation allowing avant-garde integration; and the fundamental commitment to European integration across the political spectrum despite disagreements on specific policies.

However, resilience is neither automatic nor infinite. The eurozone crisis revealed fundamental design flaws requiring substantial institutional innovation. The migration crisis exposed solidarity deficits and legitimacy challenges. The rule of law crisis in Hungary and Poland demonstrates the limits of enforcement mechanisms. Each crisis tests the Union's adaptive capacity and reveals both strengths and vulnerabilities.

The methodological bias to anticipate is confusing emergency reaction with durable structural transformation, or overestimating response coherence while neglecting inter-institutional tensions. A rigorous analysis must acknowledge both the Union's demonstrated resilience and the substantial challenges that remain unresolved.

Prospective resilience indicators include the diversity of responses available (institutional flexibility), learning capacity (policy adaptation based on experience), and normative flexibility (ability to reinterpret rules while maintaining coherence). Strengthening these capacities requires continued institutional innovation, enhanced democratic legitimacy, and sustained political commitment to the European project.

PART FOUR: GLOBAL CONSEQUENCES AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The theoretical framework of this part draws on international regime theory and global governance approaches to analyze the impact of European trajectories on the global system. The works of Robert Keohane, Joseph Nye, and John Ikenberry provide the analytical foundation for understanding the European Union's role in the liberal international order.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: REPERCUSSIONS ON THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

The central question of this chapter is how a major mutation of the European Union would reconfigure global economic and security architecture. Priority sources include International Monetary Fund and World Bank reports on regional prospects; United Nations Security Council analyses; and work on multilateralism and global public goods governance.

The European Union represents the world's largest single market, the second-largest economy, the largest development aid donor, and a major regulatory power whose standards often become global benchmarks through the Brussels effect. A major transformation of the Union would have profound global repercussions across economic, security, and governance dimensions.

Economic repercussions would include macroeconomic shocks affecting global value chains, trade patterns, and financial stability. The European Union accounts for approximately 14 percent of global trade in goods and services, 16 percent of global foreign direct investment stocks, and provides development assistance representing 0.49 percent of gross national income collectively. A significant disintegration would disrupt supply chains, reduce market size, and diminish regulatory influence.

Security repercussions would include reconfiguration of European and broader neighborhood security architecture, with implications for NATO, relations with Russia, and stability in the Middle East and Africa. The European Union's comprehensive approach combining diplomatic, economic, developmental, and military instruments provides distinctive capabilities for crisis management and conflict prevention that cannot be easily replicated by individual member states.

Impact on multilateral organizations would be substantial, as the European Union is a major contributor to United Nations budgets and peacekeeping operations, a key player in World Trade Organization negotiations, and a leading advocate for rules-based international order. A weakened Union would diminish multilateral effectiveness and potentially accelerate the shift toward power-based international relations.

Lessons for other regional integration projects include the African Union, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and Mercosur, which face similar challenges of balancing sovereignty and integration, managing heterogeneity, and building legitimacy. The European experience offers both positive models and cautionary tales for these projects.

The methodological bias to anticipate is considering European weakening as automatic gain for other powers without measuring systemic contagion effects, or neglecting global economic and security interdependencies. A rigorous analysis must acknowledge both the specific consequences of European transformation and the complex interconnections of the global system.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: THE GLOBAL BALANCE OF POWER

The central question of this chapter is how major strategic poles adjust their doctrines in response to the European project's evolution. Priority sources include national security strategies of the United States, China, and Russia; Union partnership documents with Africa, Middle East, and Latin America; and specialized think tank analyses.

The United States has historically been the European Union's strongest external supporter, viewing European integration as strengthening the transatlantic alliance and promoting liberal democratic values. However, US policy has become more complex, with tensions between support for European unity and preferences for bilateral dealings on specific issues, between encouraging European defense capacity-building and maintaining NATO primacy, and between cooperation on shared challenges and competition on trade and technology.

China's relationship with the European Union combines deep economic interdependence with growing strategic competition. The EU is China's largest trading partner, while China is the EU's second-largest trading partner. However, increasing concerns about unfair trade practices, intellectual property theft, human rights violations, and geopolitical assertiveness have led to the EU's 2019 characterization of China as simultaneously a partner, competitor, and systemic rival.

Russia's relationship with the European Union has fundamentally deteriorated following the 2014 annexation of Crimea and 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Previously based on energy interdependence and selective cooperation, the relationship is now characterized by confrontation, sanctions, and strategic competition. Russia views the European Union as a US instrument for extending Western influence eastward and seeks to undermine European unity through disinformation, political interference, and energy coercion.

The European Union's southern and eastern neighborhoods represent spaces of influence projection and partnership building. The European Neighborhood Policy, Eastern Partnership, and Union for the Mediterranean attempt to extend European norms and stability without offering membership prospects. However, these policies face challenges from limited resources, conflicting priorities, and the complexity of partner countries' domestic situations.

Emerging South-South alliances and the rise of middle powers create both challenges and opportunities for European influence. The European Union must navigate between maintaining traditional partnerships and building new coalitions with emerging powers, between promoting

universal values and respecting diverse political systems, and between regulatory leadership and technological competition.

The methodological bias to anticipate is representing international relations as a zero-sum game without recognizing structural interdependence, or neglecting partners' internal dynamics including domestic politics and economic constraints. A rigorous analysis must acknowledge both the competitive dimensions of great power relations and the cooperative imperatives created by global challenges.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The central question of this chapter is what concrete reforms can strengthen the Union's cohesion, legitimacy, and capacity for action. Priority sources include European Commission legislative proposals; European Economic and Social Committee and Committee of the Regions opinions; and contributions from European citizen networks.

Institutional priorities should focus on decision-making simplification through extended qualified majority voting in areas including foreign policy, taxation, and social policy, while preserving unanimity for fundamental treaty changes. Strengthening the European Parliament's role through enhanced legislative initiative and oversight powers would improve democratic accountability. Clarifying competences through a comprehensive review of subsidiarity and proportionality would address legitimacy concerns.

Balanced economic governance requires combining budgetary discipline with strategic investment, fiscal rules that allow counter-cyclical flexibility while ensuring sustainability, and enhanced social convergence through minimum standards and mobility. The completion of banking union with European deposit insurance, capital markets union for private risk-sharing, and genuine fiscal capacity for stabilization would strengthen the eurozone's resilience.

Coordinated migration policy must balance solidarity with control, combining effective border management, fair asylum procedures, legal migration pathways, and integration support. The full implementation of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, enhanced Frontex capabilities, and genuine responsibility-sharing mechanisms would address current deficits.

Common narrative construction requires European education initiatives, transnational media development, and enhanced civic participation. The European Citizens' Initiative should be reformed to reduce signature thresholds and increase impact. Transnational party federations should be strengthened to create genuine European political debate.

Quantitative indicators for reform success include average legislative adoption times, citizen satisfaction with Union functioning, and cohesion instrument effectiveness. Regular monitoring through Eurobarometer surveys, Commission reports, and independent evaluations would track progress.

The methodological bias to anticipate is presenting ideal reforms without considering national constitutional, budgetary, and political constraints, or neglecting the necessity of citizen buy-in for reform legitimacy. A rigorous analysis must acknowledge both the desirability of ambitious reforms and the political feasibility of incremental progress.

CONCLUSION: BETWEEN COLLAPSE AND TRANSFORMATION

The European Union possesses demonstrated adaptation capacity, but this capacity is neither automatic nor infinite. Fragmentation scenarios are legally possible but politically costly, while deepening scenarios require fragile political consensus. Democratic legitimacy, effective solidarity, and strategic capacity constitute the three inseparable pillars of European resilience.

Rejecting historical determinism, this study affirms that the Union's future depends on collective choices, institutional compromises, and citizen engagement. Recognizing structural tensions between national diversity and unity of action, between shared sovereignty and democratic responsibility, is essential for realistic assessment of possibilities and constraints.

The distinction between verified facts, probable trends, and structured hypotheses maintains analytical rigor and ethical responsibility. Avoiding political instrumentalization of scenarios, privileging methodological transparency and analysis reproducibility, constitutes the intellectual duty of researchers in European affairs.

Future research perspectives include deepening work on transnational democratic legitimacy and European citizen participation mechanisms; developing composite institutional resilience indicators applicable to other regional organizations; and exploring interfaces between European law, artificial intelligence, and data governance in the digital era.

The European project remains an unprecedented experiment in peaceful integration through law, democracy, and voluntary cooperation. Its challenges are substantial but not insurmountable. Its achievements are remarkable but not irreversible. Its future depends on the wisdom, courage, and commitment of those who believe in its founding ideals of peace, democracy, and solidarity.

The stones of European integration, like the Arch of Berà analyzed in companion research, speak to us across time. They remind us that civilizations endure through the institutions they build, the values they uphold, and the solidarity they practice. The European Union, at its crossroads, must choose not between collapse and transformation but between different forms of transformation. The choice is ours, and the responsibility is immense.

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KEYWORDS IN TEN LANGUAGES

ENGLISH

European Union, Integration, Fragmentation, Institutional resilience, Democratic legitimacy, Eurozone crisis, Migration governance, Populism, Strategic autonomy, Ecological transition, Digital transition, Differentiated integration, Constitutional resilience, European governance, Policy recommendations

العربية

الاتحاد الأوروبي، التكامل، التفتت، المرونة المؤسسية، الشرعية الديمقراطية، أزمة منطقة اليورو، حوكمة الهجرة، الشعبوية، الاستقلال الاستراتيجي، الانتقال البيئي، الانتقال الرقمي، التكامل المتميز، المرونة الدستورية، الحوكمة الأوروبية، توصيات السياسات

ESPAÑOL

Unión Europea, Integración, Fragmentación, Resiliencia institucional, Legitimidad democrática, Crisis del euro, Gobernanza migratoria, Populismo, Autonomía estratégica, Transición ecológica, Transición digital, Integración diferenciada, Resiliencia constitucional, Gobernanza europea, Recomendaciones políticas

FRANÇAIS

Union européenne, Intégration, Fragmentation, Résilience institutionnelle, Légitimité démocratique, Crise de l'euro, Gouvernance migratoire, Populisme, Autonomie stratégique, Transition écologique, Transition numérique, Intégration différenciée, Résilience constitutionnelle, Gouvernance européenne, Recommandations politiques

DEUTSCH

Europäische Union, Integration, Fragmentierung, Institutionelle Resilienz, Demokratische Legitimität, Eurokrise, Migrationspolitik, Populismus, Strategische Autonomie, Ökologischer Übergang, Digitaler Übergang, Differenzierte Integration, Konstitutionelle Resilienz, Europäische Governance, Politische Empfehlungen

ITALIANO

Unione Europea, Integrazione, Frammentazione, Resilienza istituzionale, Legittimità democratica, Crisi dell'euro, Governance migratoria, Populismo, Autonomia strategica, Transizione ecologica, Transizione digitale, Integrazione differenziata, Resilienza costituzionale, Governance europea, Raccomandazioni politiche

TÜRKÇE

Avrupa Birliği, Bütünleşme, Parçalanma, Kurumsal dayanıklılık, Demokratik meşruiyet, Euro krizi, Göç yönetişi, Popülizm, Stratejik özerklik, Ekolojik geçiş, Dijital geçiş, Farklılaştırılmış bütünleşme, Anayasal dayanıklılık, Avrupa yönetişi, Politika önerileri

中文

欧盟，一体化，分裂，制度韧性，民主合法性，欧元区危机，移民治理，民粹主义，战略自主，生态转型，数字转型，差异化一体化，宪政韧性，欧洲治理，政策建议

РУССКИЙ

Европейский Союз, Интеграция, Фрагментация, Институциональная устойчивость, Демократическая легитимность, Кризис евро, Миграционное управление, Популизм, Стратегическая автономия, Экологический переход, Цифровой переход, Дифференцированная интеграция, Конституционная устойчивость, Европейское управление, Политические рекомендации

PORTUGUÊS

União Europeia, Integração, Fragmentação, Resiliência institucional, Legitimidade democrática, Crise do euro, Governação migratória, Populismo, Autonomia estratégica, Transição ecológica,

Transição digital, Integração diferenciada, Resiliência constitucional, Governança europeia, Recomendações políticas

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