1 *The EU as crisis manager*

A new role for the Union

The surprising emergence of the EU as crisis manager

There are few reasons to expect the European Union (EU) to play a role in the management of crises and disasters. The response to such events has traditionally been the remit of national governments. What could the EU – often depicted as a bureaucratic talk shop – possibly add to the efforts of national and local governments?

Quite a bit, as this book reveals. The member states have invested the EU with a significant amount of what we refer to as "crisis management capacity." While often reluctant to transfer more authority to Brussels, member states have shown a sustained willingness to enhance the EU's crisis management capacities. After a large-scale crisis or disaster, member states routinely call for additional EU capacities to coordinate, link, or integrate their response capacities. Few European Council meetings conclude without some call for more crisis cooperation.

The EU has indeed become more visible as a crisis manager in recent years. Consider the following examples:

- In January 2010, a massive earthquake struck Haiti. The EU coordinated the humanitarian response of its member states, sent a police force of 200 Europeans, and created a relief fund for the devastated island.
- In the early months of 2011, popular revolts broke out across northern Africa and the Middle East. The EU sent its High Representative, Catherine Ashton, to newly liberated countries to assess how the EU could help their democratic development.[1] The EU imposed an arms embargo on Libya and discussed the imposition of a no-flight zone. Meanwhile, the southern member states appealed to the EU for a coordinated response to the feared exodus of young Arabs seeking a better future on the European continent.

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- In the spring of 2011, a vicious *E. coli* (EHEC) epidemic in Germany caused the deaths of over 40 people. After Germany informed the European Commission through the EU's Early Warning and Response System, the Commission's DG Sanco (Directorate General for Health & Consumers) took the lead in coordinating an EU-wide investigation and control measures.[2]
- In 2012, the euro's future was cast in doubt and several member states were teetering on the brink of financial disaster. In response, the European Central Bank took a series of unprecedented actions to maintain stability in the Eurozone. Its response to the financial crisis fit a wider pattern of the EU breaking traditions, initiating new policies, imposing new rules, and creating institutions to deal with this and other deep crises.

This book shows that the EU has in place a substantial and growing capacity to initiate and coordinate a shared response to many different threats, crises, and disasters. The EU harbors a wide variety of policies, mechanisms, and institutions that can, and do, facilitate a coordinated response of member states. When member states want to work together to deal with a crisis at home or abroad, they can use EU venues and mechanisms to facilitate a joint response.

These coordination mechanisms fail at times, it is true. When the EU stumbles in response to crisis, often due to the constraints member states imposed on it, these same member states stand ready to criticize the Union as slow and ineffective. But while the EU is far from perfect, it may well be the best option available to its member states. As more and new crises appear on the horizon, member states will have to increase mutual cooperation. That will increase pressure on the EU to act faster and perform better.

The adoption of the Lisbon Treaty has brought some intriguing developments that may have critical consequences for the EU's crisis management role. The High Representative now commands the European External Action Service, which should further enhance Europe's role abroad. The Lisbon Treaty contains the so-called Solidarity Clause, which implores member states to assist each other in case of a terrorist attack or natural disaster. The EU now has a Commissioner dedicated to Home Affairs, a budding Internal Security Strategy, and growing disaster management capacities.

All efforts to enhance the EU's role in the domain of crisis management inevitably encounter a deep-seated problem: there is very little agreement on how crisis and security management efforts – traditionally the responsibility of member states – can be effectively and legitimately organized at the European level. Despite the gradual accumulation of crisis-relevant tools, instruments, and decision venues, national leaders have avoided taking a stance on, or clarifying, the EU's role in managing crises when given the opportunity to do so in major treaty revisions. Despite their regular calls for more cooperation, member states introduced a provision in the Lisbon Treaty that "national security remains the sole responsibility of each Member State" (Art. 4).[3]

There is, in other words, a deep tension between the often pronounced ambition to make Europe (and the world) a safer place and the entrenched principle of subsidiarity that has guided the historic development of the Union.[4] The result, as we show in this book, is an unclear division of competences between the national and European levels.

In this book we describe what kinds of crisis and disaster management capacities the Union has and where these are located in its institutional architecture. We explain why and how the EU has developed these capacities. We explore how the EU can further develop its capacities to deal with the crises that member states will face in the future.

We begin this chapter by exploring the world of crisis and argue that more intensive cooperation between nation states is needed. We provide a brief overview of recent developments in the EU that signify the emergence of a safety and security area in the Union. We then elaborate our research questions, introduce our theoretical framework, and present the outline of this book.

A new world of crisis: modern vulnerabilities, urgent threats, and impossible challenges

We live in what Ulrich Beck calls "the global risk society" (Beck 1992, 2008; cf. Perrow 2007). Climate change, tilting geopolitics, new forms of terrorism, and financial upheaval – these are but a few of the "known unknowns" that challenge the Western way of living. These security

threats originate from many sources, cross political and functional boundaries with ease, and have the potential to affect a wide variety of critical infrastructures (LaPorte 2007). Their potential for devastation is immense (OECD 2003; Lomborg 2004; Posner 2004; Missiroli 2006; Perrow 2007; Alemanno 2011; Helsloot *et al.* 2012).

Societies have always faced a wide variety of threats to the safety and well-being of their citizens.[5] War, famine, severe weather, earthquakes, floods, and epidemics have brought societies to the brink of collapse (Diamond 2005). It is no wonder, then, that crisis management – the set of activities aimed at minimizing the impact of a crisis – has traditionally been recognized as a core function of the state (Rosenthal 1980; Schmitt 1985). In times of crisis, people look to their leaders (elected or not) to protect them from the looming consequences. A failure to do so inevitably undermines the legitimacy of the governing elites and their institutions (Boin *et al.* 2005).

Research shows that governments typically find crisis management no easy task (Rosenthal, Charles, and 't Hart 1989; Schneider 1995; Rosenthal, Boin, and Comfort 2001; Kettl 2004; Boin *et al.* 2005; Drennan and McConnell 2007; Sylves 2008). Planning and preparing for the unknown and unexpected – the proverbial black swans – tests the limits of what bureaucracies are designed to do (Clarke 1999; Taleb 2007).[6] During a crisis, governing elites wrestle with the challenges of sense-making (creating a shared picture of the situation), making critical decisions with limited or incorrect information, coordinating a large-scale response with many actors, and communicating effectively with the public and stakeholders. There are many things that can go wrong during a crisis (Boin and 't Hart 2010).

And these crisis governance challenges are not getting any easier. The critical importance of creating effective crisis management structures and practices is cast in a new light by the changing nature of threats to modern societies. Two developments, in particular, conspire to raise the stakes.

First, threat agents are changing. New technologies fuel progress, but they also "bite back" (think of infrastructural breakdowns, cyber warfare, and engineered viruses).[7] Climate change may bring natural destruction and altered living conditions (Brauch *et al.* 2008). The rise of artificial intelligence, the cheapening of DNA-modification techniques, and the preparations for cyber warfare can create

unforeseen and perhaps unimaginable crises (Dror 2001; Krepinevich 2009). Traditional threats – epidemics, terrorism, technological failure, fires, floods, riots – will still be with us, of course. But they may take new and unforeseen shapes (Rosenthal, Boin, and Comfort 2001).

A second, more insidious development compounds the effects of the first. As modern societies relentlessly weave their critical infrastructures into a global fabric, new vulnerabilities of many kinds are being created. The modern, open society has helped to generate gains in prosperity that seemed unimaginable just a few decades ago (the EU is a textbook example). But the same drivers of prosperity also enable threat agents to infiltrate these societies through the mechanisms of integration. Terrorists, technical failures, financial crises, and health epidemics exploit our modern systems, which allow them to unleash disruption and destruction (cf. Turner 1978).

Two recent crises – the Icelandic ash cloud and the breakdown of the financial system – underline the global reach and escalatory potential of modern crises and demonstrate the serious challenges these crises pose to public authorities (Boin *et al.* 2005; Ansell, Boin, and Keller 2010; Alemanno 2011). Prevention is nearly impossible, as crises can originate in faraway domains and travel across transboundary systems that cannot be shut down without incurring huge costs.

National governments are ill equipped to address these complex challenges (Boin 2005; Lagadec 2009).[8] When national bureaucracies have to work across policy boundaries or geographical borders (with other national bureaucracies) to face urgent threats, paralysis looms large (Rhinard 2009).[9] In light of future crises, they will need a way to overcome these barriers and work together. The EU is increasingly the place where such attempts are being made.

Looking for EU capacities: three crisis domains

This book identifies capacities that the EU can use to facilitate a coordinated response of its member states to large-scale crises and disasters, wherever these may occur. Few crisis management scholars have studied the EU. Students of the EU, in turn, have traditionally studied particular areas of crisis management such as the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) (Howorth 2007; Jones 2007), the area of Justice and Home Affairs (Mitsilegas, Monar, and Rees 2003; Lavenex and Wallace 2005), health security (Sundelius

and Grönvall 2004), terrorism (Bossong 2008), critical infrastructure (Pursiainen 2009), or intelligence cooperation (Walsh 2006). We employ a comprehensive approach in our study of the EU's crisis management capacities.

Before we explain how we identify EU crisis management capacities, we should say something about our choice of terminology here. More specifically, we should explain our use and interpretation of the word *crisis*.

The term *crisis* has enjoyed popular use across academic disciplines as well as in everyday conversation. In these discourses, the term is used in different and varying ways. Virtually all definitions refer to some threat that must be urgently averted or addressed in order to avoid dire consequences. But threat agents and objects of threat can vary widely, depending on what definition is used (Boin 2005). It is, thus, crucial to specify what "crisis" – a central concept in our book – means.

Let us begin by adopting a very generic definition of crisis, in terms of "a perceived threat to the core values or life-sustaining systems of a society that must be urgently addressed under conditions of deep uncertainty."[10] This definition pertains to a wide variety of threats and disasters, which can play out at the local, regional, continental, or global level.

It is important to point out the subjective nature of this crisis definition. In this approach, it is a crisis when political-administrative elites conceive of a situation in terms of a serious threat that requires an urgent response. If politicians and policymakers do not recognize a threat even if many others do (think of climate change or pension deficits), it is an ignored crisis at best. We should, therefore, consider how this generic crisis concept relates to threat perceptions in the community of EU scholars and practitioners.

That is easier said than done. Different policy communities within the EU have different ideas about which threats the EU should face and address; the same can be said for EU scholars who, depending on their object of study, wield different threat conceptions. There are quite a few scholars who use the term *crisis management* to describe what takes place in the EU's policy area of common security and defense (Smith 2003; Howorth 2007). Many speak of "crisis" in reference to the recent financial and economic implosion in Europe (Begg 2010; Baldwin, Gros, and Laeven 2010). Students of the EU's Justice and

Home Affairs domain primarily refer to such perceived threats as the uncontrolled influx of migrants or impending social unrest when they use the term *crisis* (Liddle and Diamond 2010; Johns 2011).

Rather than imposing one encompassing crisis definition on these various communities, we have inductively (based on our reading of the literature and our conversations with many policymakers) identified three "crisis types" currently occupying the attention of EU policymakers (and scholars). In this book, we distinguish between the national crisis (Type I), the external crisis (Type II), and the transboundary crisis (Type III).[11] All three types have elicited a sustained response – in terms of agenda attention and capacity building – from the European Union and its member states. As a result, the EU's capacities are spread over different policy communities. Those capacities are the focus of this book.

The national crisis (Type I). At times, a country may face a disaster that outstrips its capacity to respond. Classic examples are floods (the 1953 flooding of the Dutch province of Zeeland stretched national capacities to the limit), earthquakes (the 1980 earthquake in southern Italy killed thousands), and forest fires (the southern member states regularly experience forest fires that run out of control).

We speak of an overwhelmed state when the available resources are not (or no longer) sufficient to alleviate the suffering of the victimized population. This rarely happens. Most developed nations are prepared to deal with natural disasters, terrorism, explosions, epidemics, collective violence, and even war.

But when the unthinkable happens, member states can call on the EU to coordinate assistance from other states. The Solidarity Clause in the Lisbon Treaty enjoins member states to assist an overwhelmed member state. The EU has in place a Civil Protection Mechanism to facilitate cooperation between member states willing to help out a disaster-struck member state. Over the years, this Civil Protection Mechanism has grown into a network of standby experts, a database of available resources, and an organizational structure (the Monitoring and Information Center) that can coordinate rapid resource sharing in times of need.[12]

It is good to note here what will *not* happen in a Type I scenario. First, the EU cannot "take over" or step in as a crisis manager. The EU has no legal or political authority to do that, nor could it currently perform this task if a member state asked. Second, the EU will not

monopolize the support function. Member states are free to invoke bilateral assistance or request help from international organizations such as the Red Cross. The EU, at best, supports national governments in a Type I scenario.

The external crisis (Type II). When EU officials or scholars use the term *crisis*, there is a good chance they are referring to an international conflict, a large-scale disaster, or a failed state outside EU territory. Archetypes include the Balkan Wars, the Turkey and Haiti earthquakes, the civil war in the Congo, and the revolution in Libya (for which an EU "crisis management" mission was approved but never deployed). Using the term *crisis* in this way became dominant in the 1990s when the EU sought to develop a Common Foreign and Security Policy and was looking for a niche in the international arena to assert its presence (Cottey 2007).

The combination of joint military units (created as a result of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy), humanitarian funding mechanisms (handled by DG ECHO), and the Civil Protection Mechanism (described above) has provided the EU with capacity to act in foreign hot spots. The EU has, for instance, assisted in disaster zones in Turkey, Morocco, and Asia, offered support to US authorities after Hurricane Katrina, and assisted flood-stricken towns in Central Europe and Algeria. The EU now routinely deploys civil protection experts, police authorities, judicial advisors, and civil administration officials to help stabilize postconflict regions anywhere in the world.

However modest these operations may have been, they mark the arrival of the EU as an international crisis manager. The EU's ambitions in this regard find their most astute pronunciation in the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS). The ESS identifies crisis events deserving EU attention, ranging from failed states to global warming, from terrorism to natural disasters. It takes a comprehensive view of crisis, explicitly linking internal and external threats, civilian and military capacities, and natural and man-made disasters.

External crises and disasters pose complex challenges. One challenge is of a diplomatic nature: the EU and its member states must operate outside their domain of sovereignty and therefore need to create legitimacy for any intervention it seeks to initiate. It must work with affected countries and international organizations to gain access. This challenge is compounded by the complexities of international operations in crisis areas. Getting resources to disaster or

war-stricken areas is no easy task.[13] All this requires negotiation of a third challenge: the EU needs to align the national interests of its member states and facilitate a coordinated and well-resourced response.

While the EU still finds it hard to operate with one voice on the world stage, it has become quite successful, in a somewhat stealthy way, in putting together joint missions to faraway hot spots.

The transboundary crisis (Type III) differs from both other types as it plays out at the transnational level, affecting more than one member state at the same time, often with an impact on multiple sectors or systems. We speak of a transboundary crisis when the life-sustaining systems or critical infrastructures of multiple member states are acutely threatened.[14] The crossing of boundaries thus sets this class of adversity apart from its more localized brethren (the Type I and II crises).

We should, for example, think of breakdowns of the Internet, electricity production, gas supply, or air control systems. Freak weather events, possibly as a result of climate change, can cause problems that affect entire regions.[15] We can think of virulent forms of pandemic influenza or large-scale attacks with chemical or biological weapons that incapacitate large swaths of the European populations and affect schools, businesses, and public services.

A transboundary crisis has no – or at least not one – Ground Zero. This crisis type is extremely complex: it expands in severity and transforms as it moves and crosses infrastructures that themselves are complex and difficult to understand. It can easily create an authority vacuum since it is not clear who "owns" the crisis and who must deal with it. This authority vacuum allows familiar tensions to play up and feed off each other: nation states versus international organizations; central authorities versus local first responders; public organizations versus private interests; state concerns versus citizen fears.

The SARS epidemic is a good example. Its characteristics or causes were ill understood when the disease rapidly proliferated from the southern provinces of China to at least 37 countries. While the number of known fatalities was relatively low (less than a thousand), its effects were widespread. The disease affected the travel and tourism industry, tarnished the reputation of Toronto (as the disease mysteriously lingered in the city), and forced Chinese authorities to revamp their crisis management system.

Europe has faced its share of transboundary crises, including the Chernobyl disaster, the "mad cow" epidemic (BSE), electricity failures, and the Icelandic ash crisis. One of the transboundary types that periodically reappears has to do with illegal immigrants. When, in the 1970s and 1980s, Vietnamese boat refugees and Tamils fled to Europe, they overwhelmed asylum procedures of several member states (adding to the rising antiforeigner sentiments in economically depressed Europe). The refugee flows caused unexpected crises in the member states (Alink, Boin, and 't Hart 2001). This and other refugee crises disclosed Europe's lack of policy coordination and the absence of diplomatic cooperation to stem the flows.

National governments cannot deal with these crises unilaterally, nor can they isolate themselves from these threats. The world – especially Europe – has become too connected and too intertwined to avoid the reach of these crises. It has become nearly impossible to close borders and "decouple" critical infrastructures. Imagine trying to close airports in the Netherlands, while Germany and Belgium keep theirs open. Consider the hoarding of vaccines in one country, when that country's own safety depends on containing a disease in a faraway place in Europe.

Transboundary crises by their very nature require a collective response. A network of local, national, and international actors must be cobbled together. This network has to be adaptable and scalable (Ansell, Boin, and Keller 2010). It has to cross boundaries among units, organizations, sectors, professions, and political jurisdictions; it must be able to validate information, facilitate and communicate decisions, and coordinate the implementation of these decisions.

If there is one domain in which we expect the EU to provide critical assistance (or, in EU speak, to "add value") to national efforts, it is probably this transboundary crisis domain. This book shows that the EU has more capacities in this domain than previously understood. It also reveals that it is the least developed of the three crisis domains.

An institutional framework for analysis

We seek to explain why and how the EU has developed the crisis management capacities it has. How did supranational rules, procedures, venues, and action repertoires emerge and become embedded in each of the EU's crisis domains? How did these structures