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Explaining the leadership crisis in the EU: agency, structure and the struggle between hegemonic projects

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Abstract

This paper analyses the leadership crisis in the EU from a critical perspective. First it sets out an understanding of the state of European integration as the result of competing hegemonic projects across the EU. Drawing on a particular understanding of the structure-agency relationship, the paper explores how competing hegemonic projects are derived from underlying social processes that find their principal expression in domestic politics. Secondly, it applies this approach to offer an interpretation of the 'polycrisis' in the EU, focusing on the Eurozone and refugee crises. The paper offers a critical integration theory perspective on these two crises and their contrasting outcomes: deeper integration in the case of monetary union; but a political stalemate on the refugee crisis along with the unravelling of some existing EU policy.

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Introduction

The European Union (EU) has been enduring a challenging period in its development during the 2010s. The President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker (2016), has characterized the situation as a 'polycrisis'. The EU has struggled to overcome the Eurozone crisis over the period from 2010, including the chronic problem of low growth that has affected a group of member states. The crisis led to a division between the northern creditor and southern debtor member states of the Euro. The influx of refugees in 2015 created a further major challenge at the EU's external borders and, when they became overwhelmed, for the internal 'Schengen' free movement regime. Several states suspended the intra-EU border-free regime in response to the flow of refugees but also due to acts of terrorism. Attempts to find an enduring policy solution—through a distribution of refugees across the EU—led to divisions along an East-West cleavage and an unsuccessful outcome.

These are not the only crises affecting the EU. The June 2016 referendum in the UK yielded a majority vote to leave the EU: Brexit, which amounts to disintegration and is damaging to the EU's stature. Moreover, it was part of a tide of populism and Euro-scepticism directed at the Union. The authoritarian turn in Hungary challenges the EU's values. The EU's neighbourhood resembles an arc of instability as a result of upheavals in Ukraine and Turkey, and the turmoil in Syria and Libya. The election of Donald Trump has placed question marks against the liberal trading order, the framework for European security. These moves along with the USA's planned withdrawal from the Paris Accords on climate change threaten fundamental principles subscribed to by the EU, for instance in its recent 'Global Strategy' document (European External Action Service 2016).

These challenges have placed the EU's integrative capacity under intense scrutiny. The provision of effective governance in policy areas that transcend nation states has been essential to the EU's legitimacy (output legitimacy). The EU is already open to the accusation of weak input legitimacy owing to its remoteness from citizens and the attendant difficulties for them to identify and utilise the different channels of holding the EU to account. A particular feature of the EU's 'crisis years' has been the gaps in the EU's policy responsibilities, notably in relation to fiscal governance and tackling the refugee crisis. Under these circumstances the provision of leadership in the EU has been problematic. This underlying set of problems in EU governance has made it easy for populists to turn the EU into a scapegoat for all sorts of problems. In the academic world the challenges have led to a growing literature on a 'disintegration turn' in the EU (Webber 2014; Vollaard, 2014). It has even led to the EU's ability to survive being questioned (Webber 2017).

This paper is concerned with identifying the reasons behind the EU's leadership problems. In addressing this issue it draws on critical integration theory (CIT) (Bulmer and Joseph 2016). Our research objectives are twofold. First we seek to explain the two crises and why they had different outcomes. Second, we ask why leadership was eventually successful in the Eurozone case but not in the refugee crisis. While engaging with other theories that come to similar conclusions, we

use CIT to draw attention to the way that the EU's ability to provide leadership and respond to a range of challenges is an outcome of competing hegemonic projects. European integration is seen as the outcome of competing positions expressed in relation to these complex challenges and in relation to the EU's further development. We argue here that the EU's ability to provide leadership is dependent upon the ability to find consensus amongst the competing hegemonic projects. Where the contestation between the projects blocks agreement, we argue, the necessary consensus for the provision of leadership is absent. This, in our view, provides greater specificity in explaining the crises and the reaction to them, providing a less rationalist and more socially grounded explanation of the factors, processes and contradictions involved.

Our paper is structured as follows. First, we offer a preliminary account of the Eurozone and refugee crises. We then outline CIT, and its key insights and how it is distinguished from mainstream integration theory. Here we develop an explanation for the EU's weak leadership based on a) the difficulties of coordinating agency, the need to operate under institutional constraints, and c) the need to deal with the impact of wider macro structures. We argue that this three-way model of agency, institutional structure and macro structure allows for a richer picture of the crises of leadership. Third, we highlight how these insights of critical integration theory can be applied to analyse 'crisis Europe'. In the following two sections we apply it to the Eurozone and refugee/Schengen crises. Finally, we conclude.

The crises

Before we explore the insights that CIT may shed on the crises, we first give a comparative overview of their development in order to set out what we are trying to explain. Both were crises in that they threatened the disintegration of the respective policy regime, although this aspect was much more pronounced in the case of the Eurozone because of the huge stakes involved in the single currency. As Chancellor Merkel was wont to put it: if the Euro fails, Europe fails. Although the crises were different in many ways, there are some commonalities that are worth underlining.

First, both crises arose to varying degrees from macro-social change. An important point in our argument is that financialization and population movement were already important features of the EU and should therefore be *intrinsic* to our explanatory account rather than simply being presented as 'external shocks'. Financialization had played a key role in the emergence of the global financial crisis, symbolized by the collapse of Lehmann Brothers in September 2008. The volatility of the financial markets also played a major role in the unfolding of the Eurozone crisis. It was not just sovereigns that were the target of speculative action in the financial markets but also some banks due to their exposure to risky lending or sovereign bond holdings. The financial markets are easy to present as anonymous actors 'out there' but they are intrinsic to the Eurozone. By proceeding to monetary union, 'the combination of freedom of capital movement with the removal of exchange-rate risk encouraged rapid integration of financial marketsThe outcome was increased

vulnerability of *all* member states to financial market contagion' (Dyson 2017: 72 italics in original),

Population movements were obviously key to the refugee crisis, with the instability in North Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere explaining why many were prepared to undertake the dangerous and expensive journey to the stability and better living conditions offered in EU member states. Again, it is easy to see the refugee crisis as an exogenous shock but international migration is closely linked to the European integration processes and has spurred it on at times. As Andrew Geddes has noted (2008: 3), 'International migration should not be viewed as some kind of external challenge to the European state system and the EU'.

Both these macro-social phenomena were embedded to different degrees in European integration. The Euro had been created as a way for participants to avoid the transaction costs of currency exchange. Similarly, the Dublin Regulation in relation to asylum claims and the Schengen regime for passport-free travel were already well established. However, both policy regimes were found wanting during the crisis. For both regimes the crisis entailed a domino or contagion effect. In the case of the Eurozone crisis, speculative activity on the financial markets probed the weaknesses of the system. In the migration crisis, refugees sought out optimal border crossings and transit routes in search of access to richer northern European destinations.

Secondly, the EU's ability to respond to the two policy challenges failed to keep pace with the fluid nature of the crises and revealed serious weaknesses in its institutional structure. In both cases the European Commission's authority was not strong because it either lacked formal powers (Eurozone) or clear authority (refugee crisis). Instead the European Council and Euro summits were the institutions where the most important decisions were taken. Yet the need for unanimity in this institution meant that agreed responses were difficult to reach until the crisis assumed systemic properties. Yet, if the European Council was the key decisional institution, in fact decisions in small groups to 'pre-cook' the summits were an important feature (Schild 2017).

At the height of the refugee crisis, in September 2015, the policy response was uncoordinated with multiple conflicting responses. It was difficult to find a common position in the European Council and the Visegrad 4 (V4) states (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) formed a blocking group. The Dublin regime's requirement on registering asylum applications collapsed and some states introduced border controls in departure from the Schengen regime. Germany's welcoming approach to refugees represented one EU position; another was that of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who described the crisis as a 'German problem' (Deutsche Welle 2015). The EU's measures at this stage were trying to patch up an overwhelmed regime. Both crises had challenged existing policy regimes but the Dublin/Schengen migration regime lacked the resilience that could ultimately be rebuilt in the Eurozone.

Thirdly, EU agencies played a key role in both crises. In the Eurozone case the European Central Bank was a central player, having been delegated key powers in the Eurozone regime. President Mario Draghi can reasonably claim that it was the ECB that finally stilled the markets in July 2012, when he made his intervention promising ‘Within our mandate, the ECB is ready to do whatever it takes to preserve the euro. And believe me, it will be enough’ (ECB 2012). The subsequent use of unconventional monetary instruments to provide liquidity and head off deflation seems to support this assertion (Dyson 2017: 62; Henning 2017: 68). By contrast, the role of FRONTEX in the refugee crisis was rather more limited. It lacked the supranational powers of the ECB, for the primary policy instruments in the refugee crisis—border controls—essentially remain in the hands of national authorities.

A fourth similarity relates to the centrality of Germany. In the Eurozone case Germany was the principal creditor state and the one that was in the strongest position to influence the policy solutions, using both shaping and veto power. In the refugee/Schengen crisis Germany was important as the major destination state and because of Chancellor Merkel’s encouraging, humanitarian ‘we can cope’ position at an early stage of the crisis. Yet the power resources that Germany held in relation to the Eurozone were largely absent in relation to the refugee crisis.

Fifthly, the distributional conflict arising from both crises was significant. In crude terms northern creditors and southern debtors represented two camps in the Eurozone. In the refugee crisis an East/West divide opened up because of the reluctance of the V4 states to admit refugees. Across the member states the distributional effects of both crises had a politicizing effect amongst broader publics in line with the definition offered by de Wilde et al. (2016: 4), resulting in: ‘(a) the growing salience of European governance, involving (b) a polarization of opinion, and (c) an expansion of actors and audiences engaged in monitoring EU affairs’. Public opinion in debtor states was opposed to the austerity policies that ensued as part of the rescues, whereas in the creditor states there was opposition to the perceived costs to domestic taxpayers of the rescues. The more populist and at times xenophobic aspects of politicization in the refugee crisis arguably had a more constraining effect on politicians than in the Eurozone crisis (Börzel and Risse 2017).

Sixthly, both crises had been developing for some years before they assumed crisis proportions. The Eurozone had witnessed a scale of lending in southern Europe and Ireland that was exacerbated by the compression of interest rates in the single currency. Capital flows from the ‘hard-saving core of the monetary union – above all Germany but also Netherlands, Finland and Austria’ were part of this and resulted in growing current account deficits by 2007 ‘in Greece, Cyprus, Portugal, Spain and Ireland, in that order’ (Sandbu 2015: 39, 40). At the same time the Eurozone lacked ‘embeddedness’ (McNamara 2015), a supporting financial union (Jones 2015) and a supporting fiscal union (Jabko 2015). Similarly, the refugee crisis had been developing for many years. At an early peak in 1992 there were over 600,000 asylum-seekers in Europe, and some 480,000 in Germany alone due to the Yugoslavian civil war. (see Geddes 2008: 9). The

Dublin Convention was designed to control these numbers and prevent applications being made in multiple EU states ('asylum shopping'). However, fundamental weaknesses in the system were not resolved, notably reliance of the system on the effectiveness of administrative arrangements in 'first arrival' states, such as Greece, Italy, Malta and Cyprus. Ineffectiveness meant those refugees avoiding registration at first entry became a matter for the EU's internal border (or Schengen) regime. Hence the two crises had origins well before 2009/10 and 2015 respectively.

Despite these commonalities the crises had distinctive features. Not least amongst these were the respective outcomes for the EU. The Eurozone crisis led to enhanced EU powers and leadership was present. By contrast, the refugee crisis caused elements of both the Dublin Regulation on asylum applications and the Schengen border system to break down: in other words policy disintegration (Webber 2014: 342). Leadership was sporadic and contested. We explore these specific features when applying CIT below.

Existing literature

There has been a growing literature on theoretical interpretations of the two crises. Our focus is on integration theory only.¹ In a first batch of literature neo-functional, intergovernmental and post-functionalist interpretations of the Eurozone crisis were offered. Schimmelfennig (2012, 2014) and Niemann and Ioannou (2015) offered neo-functional accounts. For instance, Niemann and Ioannou (2015) argued that the functional 'dissonances' in the design of EMU, i.e. imbalance between monetary and fiscal integration, spurred functional spillover. They also argued that interest groups, financial markets and supranational actors played an important role in the resultant redesign of EMU (2015: 205–212). Schimmelfennig's account, now updated to compare the outcome of both the Eurozone and refugee crises (Schimmelfennig 2017), emphasizes that variation in the levels of transnational interdependence and supranational capacity between the two crises explains why institutional path-dependence led to a strengthening of the Eurozone but not of the Dublin/Schengen regimes.

Schimmelfennig (2015) also offered an intergovernmentalist account of the Eurozone crisis. In this account he emphasized the 'game of chicken' between the principal government protagonists on the creditor and debtor sides. Intergovernmental brinksmanship, especially on the part of Germany was very important. In a later comparative paper offering an intergovernmentalist account Rittberger et. al. (2017) have offered a comparative explanation of the two crises. They contrast the chicken game in the Eurozone crisis, whereby creditor states were able to force through a reform of the Eurozone around the preferences of Germany, with the refugee crisis. They argue that the latter represented a 'Rambo game', whereby the states least affected (especially the V4) blocked change to the existing, failing policies.

Finally, Börzel and Risse (2017) compare the merits of the above approaches alongside an application of the postfunctionalist theory of Hooghe and Marks (2009). Postfunctionalism highlights the constraints on policy-makers of increasing politicization of EU policy. As Börzel and Risse demonstrate (2017: 1),

this politicization impaired 'an upgrading of the common European interest in the Schengen crisis'. Postfunctionalist assumptions 'got the story right', they argue (Börzel and Risse 2017: 19), while pleading for greater attention to identity issues. Yet they argue that postfunctionalism failed to explain how and why deepening of integration took place in the Eurozone case.

We cannot do justice to the detailed argumentation presented in all these articles, each of which sheds valuable insight and offers order to what were often disorderly events during the crises. Instead we identify a number of points of critique.

First, the different theories of the current crises succumb to the 'blind men and elephant' problem (see Puchala 1971). They offer pictures, or snap-shots if we are being more critical, of different parts of the crises but are unable to make full sense of the whole. Some analyses place more emphasis on exogenous shocks and global interconnectedness, others on rational action and calculation. Some emphasize unintended consequences, while others look at deliberate attempts at either political mobilization or depoliticization. While we find a lot of valid arguments in the various positions presented, they do not add up to a coherent whole.

Secondly, an account of structure is largely lacking in the mainstream theories mentioned above. These theories deploy a different type of social ontology where wider social structure, in keeping with rationalist understandings of international relations², is reduced to exogenizing processes (external shocks). Interdependency is understood in the rationalist sense of systemic pressures inducing calculating behavior, rather than in the more social and historical sense of wider social relations and particular institutional dynamics outlined here.

Thirdly, in keeping with our understanding of the structure-agency question, a richer account of social structure, rather than switching attention away from it, provides the basis for a better understanding of the complexities of social agency. We seek to do this through an account of competing hegemonic projects, understood in relation to institutional and macro social structures, but embodying specific agential interests and understandings. This helps understand the necessity of leadership and the factors that weaken or undermine this at the EU level.

Fourthly, our approach places greater emphasis on the role of domestic politics. This is in contrast to the other approaches with the possible exception of postfunctionalism, which does emphasize political mobilization versus attempts to depoliticize the crisis into technocratic debates. We emphasize the domestic and the bottom-up because we see the need for hegemonic projects to secure a base of support and degree of legitimacy. This tends to happen at the domestic level, while attempts to provide leadership at the EU level are hampered by a lack of social embeddedness.

Fifthly, for all their insights, the different theories underplay the role of German leadership in relation to the two crises. Instead of accounting for the specificities

of German political and economic leadership, the theories seek explanation in more general hypotheses about decision-making – either through rationalist or game-theoretic accounts of actors' behaviour, functionalist accounts of spillover or rationalist accounts of the effects of global interconnectedness and exogenous shocks. By contrast, our approach places importance on the role of German leadership within the EU, but looks at how this is influenced and constrained by domestic-level processes of hegemonic contestation.

Critical integration theory, leadership and EU contestation

In our analysis we adopt critical integration theory in order to develop a view of European integration as a complex outcome of competing hegemonic projects. We address the EU's crises by locating them within the integration process itself, rather than seeing them as the product of this particular moment. We challenge the view that the growing crises – Brexit, populism, the refugee crisis and ongoing Eurozone crisis – mean we are now locked in a spiral of disintegration (Webber 2014; Vollaard, 2014). Rejecting teleologies of integration and disintegration, we theorise crises and integration together as part of a complex process. We do this through the notion of hegemonic projects in order to explain why current crises raise such fundamental questions about EU leadership. We argue that these projects filter directly into the integration process, so the effect of crises is understood in relation to hegemonic projects and political struggles.

As well as scepticism towards teleologies of integration and disintegration, CIT questions the assumptions behind competing mainstream views of integration, such as neofunctionalism, postfunctionalism and intergovernmentalism. We recognise their insights but wish to challenge the functionalist, rationalist and unitary aspects of these theories, placing more emphasis on a relational understanding of the integration process that starts from the bottom up and emphasising the importance of political contestation. We are keen to emphasise the complex, multilevel character of integration, but place particular emphasis on specific national and domestic dynamics. To do so, we oppose existing theories by concentrating our attention on a) the role of hegemonic projects; b) the contestation between distinct political and economic dynamics that exist in complex interrelationship and often tension; c) the specificities of integration itself, rather than reading off integration as an effect of some other process or dynamic. This last observation is a counter-point to neofunctionalism, postfunctionalism and intergovernmentalism and their overreliance on arguments about functional spillover, exogenous shocks and rational decision-making.³

To better understand these dynamics, we develop a three-way relationship between agency, as expressed through hegemonic projects, the European institutional structure through which this agency is filtered, and wider macro-structural conditions that influence both agency and institutions. We distinguish between the macro-structural processes where we locate the initial causes of the two crises and the institutional structures that mediate these crises but which have their own internal dynamics and path dependencies. This institutional framework is characterised by multi-level governance or different scales and complex, fluid and overlapping jurisdictions of governance. In this view the EU at

any time represents the instantiation or outcome of struggles driven by various economic and political dynamics.

By contrast, the macro-level is understood as the underlying causes and contexts for integration. This includes the global economy, financial infrastructure, and geopolitical and strategic context, new securitization processes, the changing role of the state, changing state–society relations, the shift to new forms of governance, developments within civil society, and demographic change. Financialization and migration flows are the key macro-level features that shaped the two crises.

Finally, and most relevant to this article, we look at the role of agency. Rather than looking at this through rational actors, game theory and the effect of exogenous shocks, we argue that agency and the question of leadership should be considered in relation to the wider macro-context, the dynamics of institutional structure and the need for domestic legitimacy. Agents may seek to shape the integration process in accordance with wider structural changes, such as developments in the global economy or the general trend towards new forms of governance. This is consistent with what Gramsci (1971: 120) calls ‘passive revolution’. However, agents may resist these changes and develop policies that are at odds with the general underlying conditions, particularly if they are seeking legitimacy at the domestic rather than the EU level. They may act in accordance with the EU’s institutional framework, or try to act against it. In all cases, this agency may come up against significant obstacles that limit, inhibit or prevent the fulfilment of the agents’ intentions. Moreover, while this agency may be intentional, the outcome of the actions may be uncontrollable or have unintended outcomes and effects, both at the macro-structural and institutional levels. This allows us to talk of the complexity of various processes without having to resort to either the functionalist argument that these processes have their own dynamics or logic, or the instrumentalist view that outcomes are purely the result of conscious interests or actions. Functionalist accounts of the crises allow for some discussion of unintended consequences while current discussions around postfunctionalism get at some of these issues through the idea of politicisation-depoliticization. We agree with the importance of these perspectives, but try to give the discussion more specificity through our focus on competing hegemonic projects and their location within structural and institutional contexts.

A focus on hegemonic projects looks at attempts by the leading groups to mobilise support in favour of a far-reaching programme of action. Leadership derives from attempts by these groups to articulate their main interests while winning wider popular support through incorporating other social groups and fractions and attempting to resolve conflicts between particular interests and a more general interest (Jessop 1990: 208). Gramsci’s approach emphasises that leadership is never given and that even the economically dominant groups are required to put forward a programme of action and to defend this against rival challengers. The exercise of leadership and the balancing of interests takes place across the multiple terrains of politics, the economy, civil society and the state.

Groups must already exercise significant leadership in such areas before they can become hegemonic (Gramsci 1971: 57).

Leadership at the European level is emergent out of and dependent upon projects that are located primarily within member states and at the domestic level. Agency is more strongly embedded at the level of the member state governments and the social, economic and political forces organised within the member states. By contrast, agency at the European level is far less socially embedded, indeed European elites are peculiarly 'disembedded' and enjoy less legitimacy. Consequently, emergent hegemonic projects are more vulnerable to various challenges and accordingly supranational leadership is strongly constrained.

What happens at the EU or supranational level is therefore an emergent outcome of domestically grounded, competing projects. In order to account for this, we identify five projects that have shaped integration over recent decades. We use the terms deployed in neo-Gramscian analysis by Buckel (2011: 643–644; see also Kannankulam, 2013; analogously from a normative approach, see the 'polity-ideas' in Jachtenfuchs et al., 1998). The projects should be understood heuristically as simplifications or broad contours of more complex and nuanced contestation. This is especially the case when exploring the Eurozone crisis since the distinct thinking of ordoliberalism offers valuable insights into the policy solutions that were advocated.

It is not controversial to suggest that the dominant hegemonic project influencing European integration is a neoliberal one (for instance, see Van Appeldoorn, Drahoukoupil and Horn 2009). Advocates of this position, including certain governments and business interests, push for EU competitiveness in global trading and production, liberalization of the single market and EU external trade policy and limits to the EU regulatory burden. However, the neoliberal project has been forced into compromise on some of these issues, incorporating more rules-based ordoliberal arguments that first found expression in the design of Economic and Monetary Union (EMU).

While the neoliberal-ordoliberal project is dominant, it faces significant challenges from competing projects. One of these is a national-social hegemonic project promoted by various centre-left and trade union advocates. In opposition to the neoliberal project, the aim is the preservation of strong social systems at member-state level, assured through maintaining a more interventionist nation-state role to facilitate domestic redistributive outcomes. A third hegemonic project is national-conservative and brings together political forces resisting further integration. It gains its base of popular support from those perceived to have lost out from globalization and who are resistant to cosmopolitanism and typically also immigration. It has become much more significant during the crisis, reflecting the rise of Euro-scepticism as well as reaction to the refugee crisis. Fourth, a pro-European social-democratic hegemonic project, though now much weaker, continues to press for a 'social Europe'. Supporters of a 'social dimension' to EU integration sought to ally with the European Commission in order to secure market-correcting measures at a supranational level. A fifth

hegemonic project is a left-liberal one that focuses on human rights, women's rights, cosmopolitanism and environmentalism. European integration is supported from an idealistic standpoint, while also being subject to critique when it fails to live up to the normative standards of a rights-based outlook. This is arguably a looser hegemonic project than the others, reflecting a post-materialist outlook.

In reality, of course, compromise is needed between these different hegemonic projects, and that becomes clear when they are applied to the real world of EU governance. However, if one project predominates, the prospect for leadership in the EU is greater.

Analyzing the crises through critical integration theory⁴

Eurozone crisis

The Eurozone crisis commenced in the second half of 2009, following on from the global financial crisis. May 2010 was the point at which the German government finally recognized the systemic nature of the Eurozone crisis. The EU/Eurozone member states initiated a rescue and then wholesale reform of the policy regime.⁵ The reforms recognised the crisis had different manifestations as it unfolded: high levels of public debt, e.g. Greece and Portugal; and over-leveraged financial institutions (Ireland and Spain). European institutional structures were found wanting in their capacity to mediate the crisis. EMU's fiscal surveillance regime—the Stability and Growth Pact—had failed to anticipate the debt problems and clearly was deficient. Further, no rescue fund was in place. Finally, banking supervision was needed to create a firewall between banks and sovereigns.

Temporary rescue funds were established and later, in 2011, the permanent European Stability Mechanism, circumventing the 'no bail-out clause' in the treaties. Financial assistance programmes were agreed for Greece (May 2010; March 2012; August 2015); Ireland (November 2010); Portugal (May 2011); Cyprus (March 2013); and for financial recapitalization only (Spain June 2012). Already before the first Greek rescue the Van Rompuy Task Force had been established to explore strengthening fiscal surveillance. Its report was endorsed in October 2010 and led on to the Six-Pack and Two-Pack measures enhancing surveillance. Further reinforcement came with the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance signed in March 2012, although outside the EU framework owing to objections from the British and Czech governments. The overall institutional design of EMU has been reviewed on several occasions: for instance, the Van Rompuy Report, the December 2012 Four Presidents' Report to the June 2015 Five Presidents' Report and associated Commission papers. Reform is ongoing. All these steps reflected recognition by Eurozone states that retention of the Euro was the top priority, thus setting in train a pattern of path-dependence.

Banking sector reform commenced from 2012, resulting in another package of legislation to provide stronger European surveillance of major banks, a

resolution mechanism and a deposit guarantee fund. Measures started to come into effect from 2014 but remain incomplete (Dyson 2017: 60-61).

In terms of ability to offer leadership at the European level, we argue that Germany has played a decisive role in the resolution of the Eurozone crisis even if it did so with reluctance. It had already placed a decisive imprint on the original design of EMU, including of the ECB (Dyson and Featherstone 1996). It was the largest creditor, with its banks also exposed through loans to southern Europe. The ordoliberal grounding of its policy provided guidance to finding solutions. Chancellor Merkel delayed intervention until systemic risk was clear because early intervention was regarded as sending the wrong signal to other debtor states about German willingness to support them. Indeed, Ulrich Beck (2013: 52) regarded delay as part of 'Merkiavellianism', to instil German stability culture in the Eurozone.

Politically, Germany had a strong hand to play because of Chancellor Merkel's eminence amongst the EU leaders in the European Council, and this was to grow as other leaders lost office at elections or were pushed aside amidst the crisis, e.g. Berlusconi. Economically, Germany was powerful in structural terms, with unemployment and government debt comparatively low, while its economy was performing pretty well. The Franco-German axis weakened as the Eurozone crisis unfolded owing to deteriorating fundamentals in the French economy and then a divergence of priorities after the election of President Hollande in May 2012. Before then, however, President Sarkozy was willing to support Germany (the 'Merkozy' phase) in return for some smaller concessions (Euro summits were seen as a step towards France's long-term wish to establish an 'economic government').

The German approach to policy was guided by four procedural considerations (see Kietz 2013: 35-6):

- conditionality, requiring debtor states to undertake domestic structural reforms to recover their budgetary position through an improvement in competitiveness;
- aid would be granted only at *last resort*, when the debtor state's financial position jeopardises the stability of the system as a whole;
- member states' liability should be capped and joint liability avoided because of incompatibility with EU treaties and the German Basic Law; and
- veto powers should be retained (unanimous decision-making) on individual rescue arrangements.

It should be clear that the successful achievement of these considerations gave Germany considerable leverage. However, it was enhanced further by the content of German preferences. Collectivizing debt into Eurobonds was unacceptable to Germany (veto power). Involvement of the IMF and oversight by the European Council, by contrast, were further stipulations of Berlin because of a lack of trust in the European Commission as a protector of the rules (Dyson 2017: 57-8). By the time that the re-design of EMU came onto the agenda a set of measures was agreed that largely reflected German preferences, with support from Sarkozy. Fiscal rules were tightened through the introduction of a

balanced-budget rule, a debt-brake for states exceeding the 60 per cent debt-to-GDP threshold, and other compliance mechanisms that were required to have strong legal standing (Bulmer 2014: 1254). The Two-Pack, Six-Pack and Fiscal Compact provided the EU framework.

Behind Germany's approach lay the rules-based ideas of ordoliberalism. Because of the time pressures, Germany's centrality to Eurozone diplomacy and the asymmetry of power between Germany as creditor-in-chief and the debtor states an ordoliberal project held sway (shaping power) in tackling the crisis. Key components to the project were a strong commitment to monetary stability and fiscal conservatism ('sound money'), self-reliance and concerns about moral hazard (debtors needed to take charge of their own destiny) and resolute rejection of a 'transfer union'. In short the burden of adjustment was placed on debtors.

But this was not just an intergovernmental play, as there was a powerful set of domestic forces behind this approach. Timothy Garton Ash (*Handelsblatt* 2012) captured this by arguing that Berlin had to be attentive to the 'four big B's': the populism of the tabloid *Bild Zeitung*; dissent in the Bundestag (the German parliament); the reluctance of the Bundesbank; and rulings from the Bundesverfassungsgericht (the Federal Constitutional Court, FCC). These were all real concerns, representing both politicization (*Bild* and the Bundestag) and more technocratic interventions by institutions with real prestige and public support in Germany (and the scope to politicize matters). During the 2009-13 federal government (CDU/CSU/FDP) a number of parliamentary votes on the crisis could not secure a coalition majority; votes from the opposition Greens and SPD were needed (Wonka 2016). In short the ordoliberal hegemonic project was rooted in German domestic politics. The federal government in Berlin could only agree to a solution at Eurozone level if it met these concerns at domestic level. Economists and even the President of the Bundesbank were critical of the path taken, claiming to be the true defenders of ordoliberal principles and it was on judgments of the FCC that the future of the Eurozone hung at times.

The Eurozone crisis created an unusual set of circumstances. To regain control over the situation from the financial markets, avoid the possible collapse of the Euro and massive disruption to intra-EU trade, Germany was able to secure its economic ideas as a hegemonic project to bring order to the crisis. With this account it should be noted that we draw attention to some features that other accounts neglect: that politicization need not be a constraint to deepen integration (cf Börzel and Risse 2017); that institutional path-dependency requires agency, namely the Berlin government (Schimmelfenning 2017), and a reliance only on games between governments omits why the positions were adopted in the first place, namely domestic stipulations (Rittberger et. al 2017). Furthermore, even if reluctantly (Paterson 2011), Germany did step forward to play the role of hegemon, combining its diplomacy, structural power, veto and shaping power, and the unavoidable demands of domestic politics. That Germany was not a benign hegemon (Morisse-Schilbach 2011) and did not conform to Kindelberger's presumptions about the role (see Blyth and Matthijs 2011) should not detract from its ability to mobilize an ordoliberal hegemonic

project that was difficult to resist under the very special circumstances of the crisis. Yet the hegemonic project comprised ordoliberal ideas, financial resources (the rescues) and took advantage of the asymmetrical interdependence of the member states. Not only that, it found resonance amongst the other creditor states such as the Netherlands, Finland, Austria and, until Hollande's election, France. This conjuncture of circumstances created the necessary support amongst the creditors to build legitimacy for the ordoliberal project. Unusually for an EU that operates via complex deals and political fixes, an ordoliberal hegemonic project had been exported to the EU and institutionalised with sufficient strength to arguably make it hegemonic in the Eurozone.⁶

Yet the ordoliberal project also predominated because of the absence of an effective rival project. There was no obvious defender of a more solidaristic social democratic project, whether a national or supranational variant. Debtor states were not in a position to advance such a model. France scarcely offered an alternative after Hollande's election and that was too late. Germany blocked Eurobonds, which would have been a key component of a supranational variant. Arguably the clearest rival project to the ordoliberal one was collapse of the system, which would have brought incalculable economic consequences.

Refugee crisis

The crisis reached its acute phase in 2015 because of the sheer volume of refugees crossing primarily to Greece and Italy as entry points to the EU. Frontex reported 1.83 illegal border crossings in 2015.⁷ Eurostat (2017) reported asylum applications running at about 1.3m in 2015 and 2016. These were figures of great magnitude; the main precedent being when there were 672,000 asylum applications in 1992 arising from the Yugoslav civil war (Buonanno 2017: 102). In 2015 it was the rising numbers of refugees from the Syrian civil war that boosted the figures, although countries of origin remained very diverse. With migration responsibilities divided between the EU and member states, and the latter responsible for most of policy implementation, this was a massive challenge.

At the heart of the EU's Common European Asylum System (CEAS), established in 2003, is the Dublin Regulation (previously the Dublin Convention, signed in June 1990). Its key principle is that an asylum seeker must register in the 'first arrival' member state to avoid 'asylum shopping'. Other parts of the CEAS aim to provide consistent application of procedures across the EU and of how 'protection' is granted. It was an incomplete system because member states wanted to retain control over 'regular' immigration from states outside the single market.

The Dublin regime had already suffered implementation gaps, not least inadequate administrative capacity in first arrival states, such as Italy, Spain and Greece. With the surge in numbers the pressure on Greece was enormous and the failure to cope was the first point of collapse of the regime. Germany's Federal Office for Migration and Refugees invoked the 'sovereignty clause' (Article 3.2) of the Dublin Regulation on 21 August 2015 (AIDA 2015). First arrival states could wave through Syrian refugees seeking to reach Germany but unleashing wider consequences. This decision then placed the Schengen regime

under stress, as internal borders became flashpoints. Chancellor Merkel's 'we can cope' statement (FAZ 2015) at her annual summer press conference at the end of August was welcoming and encouraging for refugees. It suggested endorsement of a left-liberal hegemonic project supporting humanitarian goals and a cosmopolitan stance. Yet it added to the stresses on the Dublin/Schengen regimes by in effect weakening them before any alternative could be put in place. It was only in September that the EU started to make a response. But by this time there had been chaos in Budapest train station, Hungary was preparing to build border fences and Germany had reintroduced border controls with Austria.

Germany held some strong cards to play in the refugee crisis. Chancellor Merkel's prestige was even higher in 2015 and the German economy even stronger than at the outset of the Eurozone crisis. Moreover, she showed none of the reluctance evident in 2010. However, there were a number of diplomatic difficulties. International consultation had only been undertaken with the Austrian Chancellor Faymann. The German preference for a re-distribution formula for refugees found no great resonance across the EU. To be sure, 'first arrival states', notably Greece and Italy, were keen. But there was no possibility to exert leverage on other states because the refugees had arrived: in many cases at their preferred destination state.

A September 2015 arrangement to re-allocate refugees, proposed by the European Commission, was agreed by qualified majority vote, with the three V4 states over-ruled.⁸ The scheme had little effect.⁹ In fact, Commission proceedings were launched against three V4 states in summer 2017 for non-implementation. As Rittberger et. al. note (2017: 15), there were different interests amongst 'destination states', such as Austria, Germany, Sweden, France and others and 'non-affected states', such as the V4, the Baltic states, the UK and others. Making progress was extremely difficult: a March 2016 Commission package that proposed fundamental overhaul of the CEAS regime has made little headway due to incompatible member state positions and pressure from populist groups. The Franco-German relationship was ineffective as a vehicle for building alliances and there were bilateral disagreements within it (Schild 2017).

As most of the comparative papers point out, domestic politics was a key factor. In this respect Germany was no different. Bavaria, as the state bordering Austria and at the German 'frontline' of the refugee flows was strongly critical of the Berlin government's policy. Governed by the CSU, this party is inside the federal coalition and the Bavarian sister-party of Merkel's CDU. Further, the events at Cologne station at New Year 2016, where women were harassed and young migrant men were held to be the culprits, gave momentum to a change in public opinion away from the initial welcoming approach. The rise of the Alternative for Germany, originally set up as an anti-Euro political party, and which secured strong electoral results in March 2016 state elections, prompted the Berlin government to adjust its position through a series of measures, such as increasing the number of 'safe countries' to which refugees could be returned. Eventually it was Chancellor Merkel's diplomacy with Turkey leading to a March 2016 agreement that effectively outsourced the issue. However, this instance of leadership did not relate to building a supranational solution.

What is clear within Germany is that the government's own position was inconsistent. It had an uncertain position and, uncharacteristically, Merkel got out of step with public opinion for a while. Merkel's original approach seemed to endorse a left-liberal hegemonic project of humanitarianism and fair distribution to the victims of the Syrian civil war. However, it came under strain as outlined above and became pragmatic rather than adhering to a broader vision or project.

At EU level the situation was even more confused with a resort to beggar-thy-neighbour policies. The V4 states successfully formed a group obstructing a consensus. Hungary's position was aligned with the national conservative hegemonic project. This project is itself highly sceptical about the transfer of powers to the EU. Hence this is a hegemonic project that is scarcely going to offer leadership conducive to further integration. Across many member states public opinion constrained policy, as anticipated by post-functionalism. This weakened the collective ability of political elites to offer leadership. Cultural and identity issues were brought into play as part of a wider involvement of mass politics. Not only was there no scope for the predominance of a hegemonic project. It was also not fertile territory for finding a compromise between different projects. Under this circumstance, and with the European Commission unable to act on its own, there was no prospect for the transfer of powers necessary to strengthen the EU's capacity to act.

Conclusion

Our research objectives were to explain the two crises and the reasons for their different outcomes and to address this in terms of leadership via the notion of competing hegemonic projects. We did this by giving an explanatory role to agency (understood through hegemonic projects and the ability to offer leadership), the EU's institutional structure (and its weaknesses), and wider macro structures. Although this article has placed more emphasis on the role of agency, the three need to be seen together.

The literature on the crises tends to reduce the macro-level to interdependence and exogenous shocks. By contrast, we see macro structures as providing the complex social context within which agential projects emerge. In this sense, they are not just impacting on projects and causing them to change, but are conditioning of them in the first place. This is in keeping with a structure-agency approach that emphasises the constant interplay between structures and agents, with hegemonic projects as a possible mediating point (Bulmer and Joseph 2016: 2)

CIT also emphasises the role of the EU's institutional structures. In part the weakness of response to the crises is located at this level where both the EMU's fiscal surveillance regime and the Common European Asylum System were found wanting. The response to the crises differed because of the greater commitment to retaining the euro and the leadership—initially reluctant—that was offered by Germany and its ordoliberal-inspired hegemonic project. The depoliticized core institutional role of the ECB can be contrasted with the much weaker

arrangements provided by the Dublin/Schengen regime. We can contrast the use of rescue funds as side-payments that helped the resilience of the Eurozone, but they were only used in the refugee crisis to find an external solution: side-payments to Turkey.

In accounting for the crises and the emergence of different outcomes, we developed the notion of competing hegemonic projects, principally located at the domestic level. We looked at how these are emergent at the EU level and noted how a more coherent ordoliberal project was able to become hegemonic in response to the Eurozone crisis while there was little scope for the predominance of a hegemonic project in response to the refugee crisis. In the first case German leadership was essential in finding a solution while in the second case a hegemonic position was under challenge at the domestic level and from other EU states.

Key steps in European integration are most typically package deals around treaty reforms, where a new compromise is identified between competing hegemonic projects. Historically Franco-German compromise and joint leadership were important in the European Council. The two crises present contrasting evidence: leadership around the German ordoliberal project in one case and a failure of leadership or of finding a compromise in the other.

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¹ For reasons of space we have omitted new intergovernmentalism here. To our knowledge there is no comparative application of it to the two crises as yet.

² I.e. variants of neorealism, neoliberal institutionalism, interdependency and regime theory.

³ We also use neo-Gramscian theory to recognize European integration as an emergent social process in its own right rather than as simply part of wider capital and class dynamics (see Bulmer and Joseph 2016: 728-9).

⁴ We acknowledge that these case studies draw on joint work between Simon Bulmer and William E Paterson on Germany and the EU crises: see Bulmer and Paterson (2017).

⁵ For overviews of the crisis, from which we draw, see Dyson (2017) and Henning (2017, Chapter 4).

⁶ We note that the proposals did not impact on the role of the ECB. We also note that the ordoliberal fiscal rules will only be hegemonic if they are strongly implemented: a task for the European Commission.

⁷ See European Parliament Research Office infographic, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/infographics/migration/public/index.html?page=migration>, accessed 29 June 2017.

⁸ Four states opposed the decision: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania (but of the V4, not Poland)

⁹ By June 2017 the measure to relocate 160,000 refugees from Italy and Greece had led to only 20,869 re-locations: see https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170613_factsheet_relocation_and_resettlement_en.pdf, accessed 29 June 2017.