

# DEVISING MULTI-LEVEL STRATEGIES OF POST-CRISIS RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE

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**REGROUP**

REBUILDING GOVERNANCE AND  
RESILIENCE OUT OF THE PANDEMIC



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Culminating more than a decade of crisis in Europe, the Covid-19 pandemic has opened an important window of opportunity for institutional and policy change, not only at the “reactive” level of emergency responses, but also to tackle more broadly the many socio-political challenges caused or exacerbated by Covid-19. Building on this premise, the Horizon Europe project REGROUP (*Rebuilding governance and resilience out of the pandemic*) aims to: 1) provide the European Union with a body of actionable advice on how to rebuild post-pandemic governance and public policies in an effective and democratic way; anchored to 2) a map of the socio-political dynamics and consequences of Covid-19; and 3) an empirically-informed normative evaluation of the pandemic.



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## Executive summary

This policy brief draws on REGROUP's research outputs on the EU's and member states' response to the COVID-19 pandemic and puts forward a set of policy recommendations for EU policymakers on how to handle future crises. To do so, the paper identifies three main lines of investigation on which REGROUP's work is being conducted - a) EU governance and policies, b) democracy and legitimacy in the EU and c) EU actorness on the global stage. For each of these lines of investigation, the paper discusses contributions from the REGROUP consortium in the form of research papers, external publications and current projects. Finally, based on research findings for each of these dimensions, the policy brief concludes by setting out policy recommendations about possible changes to help the EU to navigate emergency politics in the future. In terms of EU governance and policies, the policy brief presents the following findings. First, the European Council exercised quasi-legislative decision-making powers beyond its Treaty-based agenda-setting functions in the establishment of fiscal instruments addressing the COVID-19 pandemic (emergency governance), thus limiting the legislative role of the European Commission, Council and European Parliament. Second, while significant differences emerged in the content of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs) adopted by EU member states in response to the pandemic crisis, these were often governments that adopted technocratic approaches to meet EU conditionality and the RRF criteria. As a result, they generally focused on investments and reforms, prioritizing a long-term horizon rather than politically rewarding short-term relief measures. Third, during the COVID-19 pandemic, workers with short-term contract, and especially professionals in the cultural and creative sectors, faced significant difficulties as they lost their jobs and often struggled to access unemployment benefits and other forms of public support. With respect to democracy and legitimacy, emergency politics imposed burdens on the constitutionally granted separation of powers at the national level, with several member states witnessing either a 'hyper-executivization' or a 'moderate executivization' of decision-making during COVID-19. Given the centralisation of powers in the hands of the executive during emergency circumstances, a conceptual and normative framework is needed to assess the risks of 'executive domination' in a multi-level emergency governance framework, taking into account citizen control of the executive, parliamentary and judicial oversight and the protection of individual rights. During emergencies, when ordinary democratic processes might be altered or suspended, the centralisation of power in the hands of the executive requires executive actors to discursively persuade both other decision-making actors (i.e. through coordinative discourse) as well as the broader citizenship (i.e. through communicative discourse) that their actions

are indeed legitimate. Finally, as for EU actorness on the global stage, the policy brief finds that the EU is working to move from being a reactive institution with limited capability to anticipate risks to a more proactive one aimed at prevention and early detection of emerging risks. Despite the interconnected nature of today's world and the interlinking of crises, there is a lack of sufficient international cooperative approaches that prioritize foresight and preparedness. This is essential to develop a proactive and resilient global governance framework in the contemporary era of "permacrises". The level of internal cohesion plays a critical role in the EU's capacity to defend its interests and values globally during crises. Instruments and procedures to increase cohesion are needed to expand the EU's ability to navigate global challenges and strengthen its influence on the world stage in periods of emergency.

**Keywords:** EU post-crisis strategies; EU resilience; Covid-19 pandemic.

# Introduction

This policy brief draws on REGROUP's research outputs on the EU's and member states' response to the COVID-19 pandemic and puts forward a set of policy recommendations for EU policymakers on how to handle future crises. To do so, the paper identifies three main lines of investigation on which REGROUP's work is being conducted - a) EU governance and policies, b) democracy and legitimacy in the EU and c) EU actorness on the global stage. For each of these lines of investigation, the paper discusses contributions from the REGROUP consortium in the form of research papers, external publications and current projects. Finally, based on research findings for each of these dimensions, the policy brief concludes by identifying policy recommendations about possible changes to help the EU to navigate emergency politics in the future.

## Governance and policies in the EU during COVID-19

Research conducted within the REGROUP framework has extensively investigated the governance mechanisms and policies implemented in response to the COVID-19 crisis. With respect to the former, given the large-scale economic and budgetary consequences of the pandemic, a key issue was the mode of EU fiscal governance used (Capati 2023a; 2023b; 2024a). The two major instruments with fiscal implications for the EU - the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and the general regime of conditionality for the protection of the Union's budget (GRC), were both adopted through the ordinary legislative procedure (OLP) following the lessons learnt from the establishment of the intergovernmental European Stability Mechanism (ESM) during the Eurozone crisis (Capati 2023b). In particular, the establishment of the RRF followed an 'ideational change' consisting in two concomitant phases - a first phase of 'ideational collapse' of the previous governance mode (i.e. intergovernmental coordination *à la* ESM) and a subsequent phase of 'ideational consolidation' around a new governance mechanism (i.e. limited supranational delegation as exemplified by the RRF) (Capati 2024a). However, the policymaking process leading up to their approval witnessed a major role for the European Council, the intergovernmental institution *par excellence*. In the establishment of both the RRF and the GRC, the European Council was able to assume quasi-legislative decision-making powers by securing a series of political compromises on the functioning of the two mechanisms, which then served as a sort of 'red line' for subsequent legislative negotiations between the European Commission, Council and European Parliament. This contributed to providing a strong intergovernmental character to a formally supranational policymaking process (Capati 2023a).

With respect to policies, REGROUP's research has focused on the elaboration of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs) by EU member states (Caramani and Cicchi 2024), a prerequisite for the activation of financial assistance under the RRF. In particular, the seven largest recipients of RRF resources - France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Romania, and Spain - were examined with respect to the amount of funds they earmarked for technocratic long-term reforms as opposed to political short-term relief measures. The NRRPs of the seven largest recipients were mainly focused on investments and reforms, prioritising a long-term horizon rather than politically rewarding short-term relief measures. These were elaborated to meet EU conditionality and the specific RRF criteria. While substantial differences emerged between them, partly due to how countries and national socio-economic sectors were asymmetrically affected by the pandemic (Caramani et al. 2023), the NRRPs were all reform-oriented and existing variations could not be explained by the ideological orientation of the governing coalition or the cabinet type (Caramani and Cicchi 2024).

At the same time, certain limitations became apparent, particularly in the fields of labor and social protection. During the pandemic crisis, economic activity among the population sharply declined, many sectors slowed down, and unemployment rose. However, some professionals were more affected than others. For example, cross-border workers were particularly impacted due to border closures, movement restrictions, inadequate coverage by social protection systems in both their home and host countries, and the fact that they are often employed on short-term contracts (Yaroshenko et al. 2023; Haist et al. 2022). Indeed, professionals with a high incidence of short-term contracts and precarious employment were among the hardest hit. In addition to cross-border workers, consider seasonal workers in agriculture and tourism, as well as cultural professionals. The latter vividly exemplifies these challenges, and the cultural sector serves as a valuable case study for understanding broader labor market dynamics and informing more effective policy responses to protect professionals who rely on short-term contracts during crises and emergencies.

Data show that the pandemic profoundly affected the European cultural and creative industries (De Voldere 2021; Triguboff 2022; Vecco 2022). Many workers in these areas lost their jobs and often struggled to access unemployment benefits and other public support, unlike professionals in other fields. The Zurich Centre for Creative Economies highlighted the severity of these issues, noting deep difficulties among these professionals (Grand et al. 2020). Moreover, the emergency exacerbated existing vulnerabilities. The crisis revealed that many fundamental employment practices within the cultural sector were neither robust nor sustainable, largely due to policy flaws. In some European countries, cultural workers have traditionally relied on social security measures designed for the general workforce, which do not accommodate the unique character-

istics of their employment, and so were ill-designed for crisis.

As with cross-border and seasonal workers, cultural and creative professionals often rely on non-traditional business models and employment structures, characterized by flexibility and discontinuity. Their careers are inherently project-based, with alternating periods of employment on short-term contracts and periods of inactivity. This particular employment pattern is confirmed by the fact that a third of the cultural workforce in the EU-28 is self-employed—more than double the average across all fields (Kea European Affairs 2020). Some European countries, such as France (Debonne-Penet 1980; Menger 2011) and Belgium, have developed tailored social security and welfare measures for cultural professionals. Other member states, including Italy, have long applied standard provisions that do not fit well with the unique nature of cultural and creative work. This misalignment has restricted the access of the European cultural workforce to essential benefits like unemployment, maternity, and sickness support.

The dramatic and visible situation during the pandemic, when services and activities within the audiovisual, performing arts, and culture sectors were shut down, prompted a re-evaluation of existing policies and practices, emphasizing the need for greater resilience and sustainability for these professionals in the post-pandemic era. Some countries, like Italy, have adopted comprehensive reforms to ensure cultural professionals have access to special welfare and social instruments tailored to their needs. Additionally, although most issues related to working conditions fall under the jurisdiction of member states, there is now a discussion about the potential for EU action aimed at structurally transforming the sector towards more resilient, fair, and sustainable practices. For example, in 2023, the European Parliament passed a resolution emphasizing the importance of improving the working conditions of cultural and creative workers and called for the establishment of a legal EU framework to enhance their social and professional status.

The situation described has shown the risk of policy gaps becoming evident during crises that exacerbate these issues and allows drawing conclusions relevant not only to the cultural sector but also to other domains with similar employment structures. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance for the public sector to be equipped with robust empirical evidence about the situations of professionals navigating precarious employment structures. This is necessary to ensure that social protection schemes are capable of addressing the challenges they face during crises and effectively absorbing systemic shocks.

# Democracy and legitimacy in the EU during COVID-19

Research conducted in the framework of REGROUP has also focused on the crucial issues of democracy and legitimacy in the EU during the COVID-19 pandemic. The urgency of the crisis frequently demanded quick political action by national and EU executives, who often imposed comprehensive restrictions on individual rights, limitations to parliamentary involvement in the democratic policymaking as well as challenges to judicial oversight (Böck and Kettemann 2024; Fossum and Lord 2023). At the EU level, while no major power shifts took place between EU institutions, executive action in response to COVID-19 presented at least two major problems. First, despite the strong legal powers of the European Commission in the regulatory policies of the single market and the related freedoms, as well as its ability to initiate infringement procedures (Art. 258 TFEU), the supranational executive did not take any steps to put an end to the prolonged border closures and travel bans enacted by the member states after the outbreak of the pandemic crisis, which constituted a serious threat to the right of free movement. Second, the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) within Next Generation EU (NGEU) provided the European Commission with the powers to raise large-scale debt on the financial markets on behalf of the Union, thus mobilising resources for the member states in the form of both loans and grants. This is unprecedented in the history of the EU and raises questions about democratic control over the use of those funds by the European Parliament as well as judicial oversight by the European Court of Justice (Böck and Kettemann 2024). At the national level, three groups of countries were identified - those witnessing a substantial use of executive powers, a moderate use of executive powers and a balanced use of executive powers respectively. The first group concerns those member states in which a ‘hyper-executivization’ took place, whereby the national government was able to centralise decision-making powers without explicit parliamentary authorisation. This was the case in countries like Belgium, Ireland, France, the United Kingdom and Italy, with far-reaching implications for the constitutionally granted separation of powers. The second group includes member states experiencing a ‘medium level executivization’, in which a period of strong executive action in the aftermath of the pandemic outbreak was followed by a rebalancing in the relation between national government and parliament. Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain fall within this group. Finally, the third group consists of member states in which the relation between national government and the legislature was balanced throughout the pandemic crisis, with no significant trend towards executivization. While these countries witnessed strong executive measures, the national parliaments were able to fully retain their competences of input and control (Böck and Kettemann 2024).

A distinctive institutional configuration of multi-level emergency governance thus



emerged after the COVID crisis. Such multi-level emergency framework was largely based on the exercise of coercive powers at the national level, such as those needed to deal with the consequences of a generalised health emergency (e.g. the activation of lockdowns), and on the development of coordination powers at the EU level, which aimed at solving collective action problems (e.g. the procurement and distribution of vaccines across EU member states) (Lord et al. 2023). Because emergency circumstances often tend to centralise decision-making powers in executive institutions as they require swift political action at the highest level, a risk of ‘executive domination’ emerges when citizens cannot exercise control as equals, parliaments or courts are constrained in their oversight of executive action, and individual rights are arbitrarily suspended (Lord et al. 2023). Centralisation of powers is convoluted in the EU’s multi-level governance system as the EU and the national level tend to overlap across policy fields, with a parallel strengthening of both the EU’s dual executive, the European Commission and the European Council, as well as of national executives (i.e. governments). In principle, however, the need for executives to act quickly and decisively in a crisis is not necessarily an obstacle to *ex ante* and *ex post* accountability by elected representative bodies. These can always specify procedural standards *ex ante* or evaluate policy responses *ex post*.

A conceptual framework to understand multi-level emergency governance during the COVID-19 pandemic and a normative framework to evaluate how that played out in terms of executive domination can thus be applied to understand changes in powers that includes public equality, parliamentary and judicial oversight and the protection of individual rights (Lord et al. 2023). Regarding the first, it was not enough for EU member states to ensure that their emergency measures are consistent with the principles of democracy and the rule of law as they were also confronted with collective action problems stemming from the transnational scope of the crisis. At the same time, coordination between member states was also not enough because adopting a comprehensive policy response that exploits economies of scale required forms of coercion and enforcement that can only be exercised at the national level. A multi-level emergency system was thus envisaged based on the use of coercive powers at the national level, consistently with the national democratic principles of rule of law, individual rights and accountability, as well as on the exercise of coordinative powers by EU institutions to facilitate collective action in the face of the emergency. As for the normative framework, a question remains as to whether and to what extent the European policy response to the pandemic emergency followed the democratic requirements of ‘non-domination’, thus distinguishing between desirable forms of ‘executive prominence’ from undesirable forms of ‘executive dominance’ (Lord et al. 2023, p. 20). Executive dominance necessarily impinges on individual rights, parliamentary and judicial oversight and/or public control with political equality, and manifests itself in either a horizontal (e.g. in

the relations between executive, legislature and courts), vertical (e.g. in the relation between executives and the public) or constitutive dimension (e.g. in the relation between executives and individual rights).

Evaluations based on executive dominance in the EU's response to the pandemic crisis also inevitably point to broader questions about the legitimacy of such a response. Any legitimacy assessment rests on three distinct legitimacy criteria, namely political responsiveness to citizens (input legitimacy), the quality and transparency of decision-making procedures (throughput legitimacy) and the effectiveness of the policy response (output legitimacy) (Schmidt 2013; 2020). These mechanisms can be further elucidated through a 'democratic audit' involving a range of criteria and indicators based on citizens' everyday expectations of legitimate governance (Fossum and Lord 2023; Schmidt 2024). Especially in times of crisis, when ordinary democratic processes might be altered or suspended, legitimacy depends to a greater extent on legitimising efforts by policymakers themselves. The democratic constraints that may come with the centralisation of power in the hands of the executive require policy actors to discursively persuade both other decision-making actors (i.e. through coordinative discourse) as well as the broader citizenship (i.e. through communicative discourse) that their actions are indeed legitimate (Schmidt 2024). Using these premises, REGROUP's research has examined discursive legitimising efforts by EU and national policymakers in three cases, including the initial lockdowns and border closures following the pandemic outbreak, the strides towards the establishment of the Health Union and the adoption of the RRF within NGEU. Here, discursive powers refer to actors' ability to convey their ideas about the EU's policy response to the pandemic crisis through different types of discourse, including coordinative discourse among political leaders in the context of policymaking, and communicative discourse directed to the public. With regard to border control and national lockdown, member states' political leaders used their discursive powers to build citizen trust in the unprecedented restrictive measures adopted in response to the health emergency, thus paving the way for a generalised acceptance of those measures. With respect to the Health Union, after an initial phase in which the member states resisted sharing medical equipment, national policymakers promoted discourses of solidarity which favoured the European Commission's role in vaccine procurement as well as citizen trust in the management of the health emergency. Finally, on fiscal rules, a new 'deliberative consensus-seeking' emerged through solidarity-based discourse, which led to the establishment of the RRF within NGEU. This marked a stark contrast with the previous Eurozone crisis, when discursive persuasion was limited and legitimacy at risk (Schmidt 2024).

# Global governance and EU actorness during COVID-19

Research under the REGROUP framework has contributed to underscore that the contemporary era is marked by frequent, diverse crises that expose systemic vulnerabilities and challenge traditional governance models. Particularly, Greco et al. (2023) reveal that each crisis not only amplifies existing trends but also underscores unresolved issues and inadequacies in previous responses, thus rendering the world order increasingly uncertain, fragile, and unpredictable.

In this context, the EU has recognized that effective crisis management requires the ability to anticipate a wide array of potential threats and to implement long-term policies. In fact, the EU is progressively transitioning from a reactive institution with limited risk anticipation capabilities to a more proactive approach focused on prevention and early detection of emerging risks (Renda 2024). European institutions are increasingly adopting tools that promote ‘anticipatory governance,’ a method more adept at timely responses to developing events (Fuerth 2011). For instance, the von der Leyen Commission has integrated strategic foresight into its major initiatives. Employing methods such as horizon scanning, megatrends analysis, and scenario planning, strategic foresight contributes to enhance the EU’s political agenda by exploring plausible future developments (European Commission 2022). Moreover, the EU is exploring innovative, anticipatory regulatory techniques that allow regulators to identify emerging challenges, and test solutions to them (Armstrong et al. 2019). An example of this is the encouragement of ‘regulatory sandboxes’ across Europe in sectors like fintech and artificial intelligence. These instruments allow innovating companies to test new products and services under temporary regulatory exemptions and regulators to better understand the risks and benefits of emerging innovations, using the findings to inform more effective regulation (Attrey et al. 2020; Knight and Mitchell 2020; European Supervisory Authorities 2019; 2020).

The efforts described are crucial for enhancing the public sector’s ability to identify emerging trends, detect early warning signals, understand policy implications, and adjust regulations to mitigate adverse events as they develop. However, REGROUP research finds that the EU’s crisis responses remain limited and that its policymaking continues to be characterized by short-term perspectives, siloed policy design and analysis (Lausberg 2024). Additionally, the findings highlight a lack of sufficient cooperative approaches that prioritize foresight and preparedness at the international level, which is fundamental in developing a proactive and resilient global governance framework. In today’s interconnected world, where traditional geographic boundaries are less relevant, crises are interlinked and lead to extended spillovers (Greco et al. 2023; Laus-

berg 2024). Large-scale crises cannot be analysed in isolation but trigger a series of cascading events, necessitating a broad scope of response and a variety of coordinated instruments for appropriate mitigation (Renda 2024).

The EU's capacity to effectively manage crises depends not only on external factors such as international cooperation on foresight and preparedness strategies but also on internal dynamics, as demonstrated by other results of REGROUP research on global governance and crisis response. Notably, internal cohesion was identified as a crucial factor in enhancing the EU's resilience against global challenges and its ability to assert influence on the world stage during crises.

More precisely, REGROUP placed particular focus on how crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine have influenced Europe's ability to act on the international stage (Eisl and Rubio 2024). The study evaluates several EU policy responses to these crises. Key initiatives assessed include the joint vaccine procurement and the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) during the pandemic, alongside collective gas procurement and the International Food and Resilience Mission (FARM) following the Ukraine conflict. Each initiative is evaluated for its effectiveness in advancing the EU's global standing and ability to pursue collective goals.

The findings reveal varying impacts on the EU's capacity to uphold its interests and values worldwide, referred to as 'actorness.' The vaccine efforts, supported by strong solidarity among EU member states and effective use of the Union's emergency competences, were notably successful. Conversely, measures like joint gas procurement were less effective in enhancing EU actorness, hindered by the lack of member state cohesion, exacerbated by the asymmetric effects of the energy price crisis. Both COVAX and FARM faced significant hurdles due primarily to geopolitical tensions, limited international cooperation, and a considerable lack of solidarity among EU member states. Thus, a major conclusion of the REGROUP research about the EU's actorness is that internal cohesion plays a crucial role in its development during crises.

## Policy recommendations

**The EU should establish innovative fiscal tools to prepare for the next macro-economic crisis.**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU was able to achieve major institutional change in its financial assistance practices thanks to the establishment of the RRF, which contributed to mobilising massive resources to the benefits of the member states through

the large-scale emission of common European debt. The RRF is integrated into the current EU's multiannual financial framework but will expire in 2027. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU should consider enhancing its fiscal resilience to better prepare for future macro-economic crises. In this respect, the EU should evaluate a set of innovative fiscal tools aimed at improving economic stability, fostering growth, and ensuring rapid response capabilities in future crises. These tools include but are not limited to a permanent European Stability Fund, creating a Digital Euro, implementing counter-cyclical fiscal policies as well as the more politically controversial issuance of Eurobonds. These measures would not only mitigate the adverse impacts of future crises but also promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth across the Union.

**Member states should ensure they have dedicated units to effectively mitigate the adverse effects experienced by professionals who rely on short-term contracts during crises and emergencies.**

Regarding European policies during the pandemic, certain limitations were apparent, especially in fields with a high prevalence of short-term contracts and precarious employment. The cultural and creative sectors illustrate these challenges well. The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted significant vulnerabilities within this field, exposing and intensifying existing gaps in foundational practices. Numerous cultural professionals dependent on short-term contracts lost their jobs during the pandemic and faced substantial challenges in accessing unemployment benefits and other public support, unlike their counterparts in more stable sectors. This discrepancy arises because many cultural workers have traditionally relied on social security measures designed for the general workforce, which fail to address the sector's characteristic short-term employment and economic precarity. Therefore, a crucial lesson from the crisis is that member states need dedicated units to mitigate the impacts on professionals in precarious contracts during crises. These units should manage the smooth flow of data and information crucial for emergency responses, such as the number, condition, and income of affected workers, and adopt a forward-looking approach to developing tools and procedures, such as inclusive and adequate unemployment benefits, to effectively mitigate adverse effects. The ultimate goal is to enhance the capacity to prevent policy gaps in social security from only becoming evident during shocks that exacerbate these issues, and to ensure all essential prerequisites are in place to effectively absorb systemic shocks.

**During emergency politics, the European Council should focus on agenda-setting and remain accountable to the European Commission, Council and European Parliament throughout the lawmaking process.**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Council in practice enjoyed emergency

powers and came to exercise quasi-legislative decision-making functions in the adoption of the RRF and the GRC. This could conflict with the spirit of EU Treaties, which provide that the European Council shall not exercise legislative functions, negotiate or adopt EU laws. Members of the European Council gathered behind closed doors and secured a series of political compromises on the specific content of the EU's policy response to the pandemic crisis through their official Conclusions. Such compromises substantially constrained subsequent legislative negotiations between the European Commission, Council and European Parliament. Because the EU's supranational system is organised around a plurality of decision-making institutions accommodating diverse communities of interest, the European Council's role during the pandemic *de facto* distorted this balance of power. This largely contrasts with decision-making patterns in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, where the European Commission has been shown to exercise forms of supranational entrepreneurship in policy fields in which it traditionally held a weak position, such as foreign and security policy, often to the detriment of the European Council itself (Capati, 2024b; Håkansson, 2024). In the future, the European Council should consider focusing on its agenda-setting functions, providing other EU institutional actors with a broad range of policy options for consideration in the EU's response to crises. Following political guidance by the European Council in the context of agenda-setting, the European Commission, Council and Parliament should start legislative negotiations taking into consideration the policy measures identified by the Heads of state and government, while at the same time retaining a margin of discretion with respect to the ultimate policy response. To this effect, they should also consider setting up internal policy units to timely monitor, discuss and evaluate the work of the European Council during emergency circumstances.

### **National parliaments should continue to be involved even during emergency circumstances.**

The COVID-19 pandemic constituted a significant challenge for democracy in EU member states, adding up to risks already posed by illiberalism and authoritarianism. Following the outbreak of the pandemic crisis, most member state governments activated emergency powers to deal with the urgency of the situation. Emergency powers implied a significant centralisation of decision-making in the hands of national executives, to the detriment of national parliaments. In several cases, even as the intensity of the pandemic declined, member state governments continued exercising emergency powers for over three years, raising doubts about effective parliamentary control and democratic involvement in national response measures. This tendency has had far-reaching implications for the separation of powers as well as for constitutional checks and balances in national democracies. In the future, consistent with the need for swift executive action demanded by the crisis, national governments should consider involving to some

greater extent national parliaments in the elaboration, definition and implementation of policy measures to strengthen the democratic legitimacy of the political process. For instance, this could be achieved by streamlining national legislative procedures, so that parliamentary action can also take place in a timely manner and policy response measures can be thoroughly discussed by parliaments before the final approval.

### **Discursive legitimization of executive action should be enhanced.**

During emergency circumstances, when swift action at the highest political level becomes necessary and limits to accountability and responsiveness may follow, the legitimacy of political decisions depends to a large extent on political leaders' discursive legitimization of their activities, for instance by providing updates and information about the unfolding of the crisis itself as well as justifications for their decisions. While in the aftermath of the pandemic outbreak it was assumed that executive actors at both the national level (i.e. governments) and the EU level (i.e. the European Commission and the European Council) had the legitimate authority to centralise decision-making powers in order to ensure a quick policy response to the health and socio-economic crisis, later on the EU's and national reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic became politicised and contested. Political leaders and institutional representatives at both the EU and the national level should consider legitimising strategies for their emergency policy measures based on discursive efforts aimed at persuading other decision-making bodies as well as citizens of the legitimacy of their action. Such legitimising strategies would benefit from more frequent reports from incumbent leaders on response measures, for instance through regular public statements, parliamentary hearings and media interviews.

**To enhance the framework for crisis governance, management, and response, the EU should persist in adopting anticipatory governance tools and foster international cooperation in this area.**

The current global order is marked by high levels of uncertainty, fragility, and unpredictability, further complicated by frequent and often interrelated global shocks. Twenty-first-century challenges often amplify trends from previous crises, highlighting unresolved issues and the inadequacies of past response efforts. This underscores the need to avoid short-sighted approaches and adopt strategies that prioritize foresight and preparedness. In response, the EU is transitioning from a reactive institution with limited risk anticipation capabilities to a more proactive stance focused on prevention and early detection of emerging risks. It should persist in adopting anticipatory governance tools and strive to bolster its capacity to manage future challenges by mobilizing adequate staff and funding. Moreover, the EU should promote international cooperation

for employing such strategies. In today's interconnected world, crises are interlinked; thus, collaboration at the international level is essential to develop a proactive and resilient global governance framework. To enhance the collective capacity to identify emerging and long-term trends and proactively manage crises before they evolve into systemic global shocks, the EU could foster a global network for sharing knowledge and resources. For instance, it could promote the utilization at the international level of platforms that enable more effective and comprehensive data collection and implement advanced monitoring systems and predictive analytics. The overarching goal is to create a more interconnected and responsive global community, equipped to handle the complexities of a rapidly changing world. By leading these efforts, the EU would enhance its management of global complexities and protect future progress from potential crises, thereby strengthening its role as a key player in securing a stable and secure global future.

**To enhance its global influence during crisis and emergencies, the EU should develop tools and procedures to strengthen internal cohesion among member states.**

The global influence of the European Union in different crises has not been significantly shaped by external factors or the geopolitical environment. Furthermore, the formal distribution of competences between the EU and the member states in specific policy areas has proven to be less critical, as the European Union can invoke emergency competences during crises. In contrast, the degree of internal cohesion has consistently played a pivotal role. Crises such as those triggered by COVID-19 and the Ukraine conflict underscore the urgent need for policies that bridge national disparities and align member states with the Union's overarching objectives. It follows that the European Union should consider prioritizing the development of tools and procedures to align member states priorities in order to boost its ability to project its values and safeguard its interests on the international stage during crises and emergencies. By strengthening internal cohesion, the European Union could enhance its diplomatic leverage and increase its effectiveness in international forums. This could contribute to expanding its capacity to navigate global challenges and strengthening its influence on the world stage.



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