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Integration/Disintegration Theories and European Union's crescent of crises: 2008-2020

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Abstract

This research analyzes the coherence of the European Union through reflecting upon a theoretical framework (integration and disintegration theories) and a practical case study (the Euro crisis, Brexit, and corona virus). The coherence of the European Union produced a massive debate among scholars of political science. Some scholars argued that these crises have deepened the bonds of integration among European member states; others argued that these crises led to disintegration in many aspects of the European Union. The research is divided into three major theses. The first thesis tackles the primary integration theories and the contributions of the political thinkers who are seeking to formulate disintegration theories. The second thesis investigated the development of the integration process within the EU and the crises that faced it from 2008 till 2020. The third thesis is concerned with the application of some integration theories and disintegration assumptions on the crises. The research concluded that there were some disintegrative indicators within the three crises which could contribute to the formulation of a disintegration theory to the European Union.

Key words: Integration, Disintegration, Crises, European Union.

ملخص

تركز هذه الورقة على دور نظريات التكامل والتفكك في دراسة تأثير أزمة اليورو وخروج بريطانيا من الاتحاد الأوروبي وفيروس كورونا على تماسك الاتحاد الأوروبي. وجادل بعض الباحثين بأن هذه الأزمات عمقت روابط التكامل بين الدول الأعضاء، بينما جادل آخرون بأن هذه الأزمات أدت إلى التفكك في العديد من جوانب الاتحاد. تتناول الجزء الأول نظريات التكامل الرئيسية ومساهمات المفكرين الذين يحاولون صياغة نظريات التفكك. وركز الجزء الثاني على تطور عملية التكامل داخل الاتحاد

الأوروبي والأزمات التي واجهته من عام 2008 حتى عام 2020. بينما ركز الجزء الثالث علي تطبيق بعض نظريات التكامل وافتراضات التفكك على الأزمات المذكورة أعلاه من أجل معرفة ما إذا كانت نظريات التكامل كافية لتحليل هذه الأزمات. وتمكنت الدراسة من استخلاص بعض مؤشرات التفكك من خلال تحليل الأزمات الثلاث والتي يمكن أن تسهم في صياغة نظرية للتفكك.

الكلمات الرئيسية: التكامل، التفكك، الأزمات، والاتحاد الأوروبي.

Introduction

The European Union is well-thought-out as one of the most prominent models of regional integration, representing nearly the stages of integration, commencement with the emergence of the European Economic Community, through the customs union and the common market, then the monetary union and the unification of national policies. However, these sequential mergers faced, and are still facing, several challenges, which the Union was competent to relatively surpass through its institutions and because of the will and eagerness of its member states to make it to the European unification process successful. Nevertheless, over the past decade, areas of European integration have encountered a string of unprecedented crises that have undermined the very foundations of the integration process and casted doubt upon the prospect of the European Union (Webber, 2014).

In 2008, the global financial crisis befallen, which later turned into a European crisis, and then a series of unfolding crises that shuddered the European integration process, including Britain's exit from the Union "Brexit" and the rise of European populist parties, in addition to the escalation of the refugee crisis, all of which led to the emergence of numerous studies reflecting upon the concept of "European disintegration" (Lombardo & Kantola, 2019). The "Corona" pandemic represented an additional challenge which threatened the continuance of the Union and

tested the resilience of European integration at the present time. On the other side of the fence, there was an alternative view which maintained that the Corona pandemic might signify an opportunity to advance integration and reinforce EU objectives. (Bongardt & Torres, 2020). These multiple challenges that confronted the European Union, not only placed pressure on European policymakers, but also represented a challenge for the theories of European integration; as these theories examines how and under what circumstances the integration develops, freezes, or regresses. Hence, these theories should have an appropriate explanation for the impacts of these crises on the European integration process (Schimmelfennig, 2017).

European integration process takes place in three different forms: First, (Deepening) it turns out when political competencies are transferred from the national level to the European level. Second, (Broadening) which depicts EU efficiency gains in new policy areas; and third, (Widening) it arises once the number of EU member states increases through membership enlargement. On the other hand, Political disintegration materializes once supranational EU institutions (for example, the European Commission, European Court of Justice, European Central Bank) lose power, that is, after common policy areas are previously re-nationalized, or once a member state withdraws from the European Union, or at what time both surroundings occur (Schramm, 2019).

Considering the challenges facing the European Union, there is an ambiguity about its future, so there are numerous possible scenarios for this future, including: the scenario that envisages that the European Union will remain to focus on presenting a positive reform agenda. Another scenario forecasts "nothing but the single market", suggesting that the EU is progressively restoring its position in the single market. According to this sight, the 27 EU countries are increasingly focusing on deepening some

crucial aspects of the single market, and there is no collective determination to work together more in areas such as immigration, security, or defense. Another scenario realizes "doing more together," where there is a consensus that neither the European Union alone, nor the European countries alone, can be well-equipped enough to meet today's challenges, so member states decide to share more power and resources. As a result, the cooperation among all member states goes further than ever before in all areas (White Paper on the Future of Europe, 2017).

Research Problem

This research argues that the European Union confronts numerous crises, including the Eurozone crisis and Britain's exit "Brexit" from the EU, in addition to the "Corona" pandemic. These crises strike the bonds of cohesion and solidarity on which the Union is constructed. Consequently, several analysts believe that the Union is going through the most difficult phase in its existence due to the severity and frequency of these crises. The research analyzes these challenges through integration theories, some of which contain ideas related to disintegration, which have recently escalated in the deliberations of the European studies, to the extent that numerous scholars maintained that it is an obligation to crystallize theories of disintegration and not to rely solely on integration theories, to explain the challenges that are facing the European Union (Hooghe & Marks, 2019).

The research draws its theoretical framework from the contributions of the theories of European integration and disintegration. The literature of the European integration process is abundant with various theories that explain the stages of integration, including liberal inter-governmentalism, neo-functionalism and other theories, but there have been limited academic endeavors to examine and develop theories of disintegration. Douglas Webber and Hans Vollaard are best known for addressing issues related to

the theories of regional disintegration. There has become persistent need to develop theories related to regional disintegration to investigate the crises facing the European Union that threaten the erosion of European unity. The theories of European disintegration are anchored upon the assumption that the collapse of the European Union is a possible scenario (Oliver, 2015).

This research tries to test the arguments of integration theories with their traditional tributaries, neo functionalism and liberal inter-governmentalism. It also sheds light on the literature of disintegration and the theoretical contributions related to it, as most European studies neglect the idea of disintegration and focused mainly on integration theories. The main research problem focuses on testing the arguments of the theories of integration and the arguments in the literature of disintegration regarding three crises which are facing the EU (The Euro crisis, Brexit, and the Corona pandemic) in order to distinguish if the theories of integration are sufficient in explaining the current crises or there is a need for the development of disintegration theories, Also, if these crises could lead to more integration or to disintegration. Hence, the key research question is: **Why has the integration of the European Union continued despite the frequency of crises that threaten its possible disintegration?** In an endeavor to answer the key question, the research is divided into three main parts: First, the theoretical contributions concerning the phenomena of integration and disintegration, second, the discussing the crises that are facing the EU, and finally, explaining the crises through integration and disintegration theories to conclude indicators for either integration or disintegration of the EU.

Literature Review

The literature of the European integration process is abundant with various theories that explain the stages of integration, but there have been

limited academic endeavors to examine and develop theories of disintegration. The studies related to this topic could be classified in to 3 categories.

First: Studies related to the theoretical contributions to integration and disintegration

This part deals with the studies related to the theories of integration and disintegration. For integration theories, they do not include a single homogeneous research agenda, but include a wide range of theoretical approaches that differ in terms of their cognitive fundamentals, existential assumptions and analytical focus. As for disintegration, there are not many studies that tackle the term disintegration or the theories related to it, but due to the increase in the challenges that face many entities — including the European Union — scholars try to delve deeper into the concept of disintegration and develop theories to interpret its features.

Some studies tackled the concept of integration and its theoretical foundations, including the one made by Oleg Alekseenko and Ilya Ilyin (2016) entitled "The Grand Theories of Integration Process and the Development of Global Communication Networks". This study examines the integration experiences of the world after the First World War. Then it tried to understand the theoretical foundations of the integration concept by presenting two classical theories that explain it: federalism and functionalism. The current research will benefit from this study by learning about integration experiences, as well as the theories presented by it that explain the concept of integration based on their ideas and assumptions. Among the studies that explained in details the integration theories, a book written by Antje Wiener (2019), entitled "Theories of European Integration". This book deals with neo-functionalism, intergovernmentalism and federalism. It demonstrates that these theories are important to explain

integration, but they are not enough to rely on in explaining the case of the European Union, but these theories must be combined as each one of them explains partially one side of the integration process. The current research will benefit from the theoretical contributions presented by this book, and from the idea that it is not possible to rely on one theory to explain integration in any institution or bloc, in addition to benefiting from the application of these theories on the European Union case.

From the studies that shed light on the idea and concept of disintegration is a study for Hans Vollaard (2014) "Explaining European Disintegration". This study criticizes the neglect of the concept of disintegration by scholars and their focus on studying integration theories only. It also considered that integration theories could not explain the complex process of disintegration. The study then presented the theoretical framework developed by Bartolini with regard to disintegration. The current study will benefit from addressing the idea of disintegration, as well as the theoretical framework developed by Bartolini. Hans Vollaard (2018) then spoke in detail about the phenomenon of European disintegration in his book "European Disintegration: A Search for Explanations". The study will benefit from the author's indicators of the phenomenon of disintegration to identify the manifestations of disintegration that can occur. The author's findings could also be taken advantage of, which states that although there are some signs of disintegration, the prospect of immediate and complete disintegration of the European Union is very low.

Second: The political crises that challenge the integration of the European Union (2008-2020)

This part addresses the important challenges that face the EU from 2008 till 2020, the focus will be on examining the euro crisis, the Brexit and the Corona pandemic.

With regard to the euro crisis, there are many writings that talked about its causes and offered some solutions to deal with it. Among these writings is a study presented by Mark Esposito (2014) "The European Financial Crisis: Analysis and Novel Intervention". The study will benefit from knowing the causes and effects of the euro crisis for a number of euro zone member states, and the austerity measures that these countries underwent to face the crisis. The study will also benefit from identifying a number of proposed solutions and strategies to confront this crisis. However, despite the focus of the study on providing a number of solutions to confront the euro crisis, it did not address the role of the European Union institutions and other economic institutions in solving this crisis. One of the studies that worked on putting solutions to the euro crisis is "The Eurozone Crisis: A Consensus View of the Causes and a Few Possible Remedies", edited by Richard Baldwin and Francesco Giavazzi (2015). This book combines the views of dozens of world-renowned economists on the causes of the euro zone crisis, with the aim of focusing on thinking about the causes as a prelude to developing a cure for the crisis. The study will benefit from the views of these specialists in understanding the causes of the crisis and how to solve it. Although the author has criticized different interpretations of the causes of the euro crisis, and the lack of agreement on treatment methods, it is good to look at different views, which may open up more prospects for effective treatment methods and alternatives to solve this crisis.

As for the Brexit, there have been many studies that have analyzed the crisis, including David Baker's (2015) "Britain and the Crisis of the European Union." This book focuses on the subsequent political and economic implications that have greatly affected the EU, as well as analyzing Britain's internal problems. The study will benefit from knowing

the economic and political implications for both Britain and the EU. On the other hand, there are some writings that tried to examine the impact of the Brexit on integration process of the European Union, from them a study written by Anna Moskal (2018) "The impact of Brexit on the European Union's future development in the context of European integration". This study shows that Brexit is a major blow to the European integration, yet it cannot be seen as an irreplaceable loss or as the beginning of the end for the EU. This study will benefit from the scenarios presented in this article regarding the future of the Union and the analysis of each scenario individually.

The Corona crisis is the latest crisis that threatens the European Union in a major way, and there are a number of articles and studies that are speaking and analyzing the effects of the Corona crisis and its impact on the EU and how it has dealt with it, including Ralf Roloff's (2020) study "COVID-19 and No One's World: What Impact for the European Union?" This study can be used to examine how the EU dealt with the beginning of the Corona crisis, and to analyze the individual decisions taken by Member States to protect their interests, even at the expense of other countries, in addition to the recommendations made by the article to improve the union's efficiency in dealing with crises in general, and the Corona crisis in particular. In André Sapir's (2020) article "Why has COVID-19 hit different European Union economies so differently?", it reviews the economic consequences that the EU countries have suffered due to the Corona crisis. This study can benefit from the reasons identified by this article concerning the variation of the economic impacts of the Corona pandemic from one country to the other, as well as the statistical studies related to this issue.

Third: Factors that indicate the possibility of endurance or disintegration of the European Union in light of the crises facing it

This part addresses the factors that suggest the possibility of the European Union to continue or disintegrate in the face of successive crises. There are some studies that suggest that these crises will support European integration, and that integration theories are able to explain these challenges. Other studies suggest that these crises will weaken integration and even lead to the exit and disintegration of other countries, such as Britain, and theories of integration cannot fully explain these challenges.

From the studies that have suggested that the challenges facing the EU will support integration, a study for Patrick Leblond and others (2015) "European integration and the crisis: practice and theory", which focused on how integration theories addressed the euro zone crisis. The theoretical analysis developed by this study could be used to explain the impact of the financial crisis on the European Union. The study's findings on the crisis's ability to deepen European integration among countries can also be used more than ever in the presence of concerns about its survival. The study added that its ideas and contributions showed that there was no crisis using the theories of European integration, as it succeeded in explaining the economic crisis it faced.

On the other hand, some studies have suggested that the crises facing the European Union will weaken its integration and increase the possibility of its disintegration. From these studies, a study by Aleksandra Spaliishedska (2019) "Disintegration of the European Union as the Consequence of EU's Multiple Crises - A Question and Contribution to theory". The study talks about the need to develop theories of disintegration in order to study the consequences of crises on the European Union that make its future unsafe. The thesis of this paper could be used to explore

these crises; there is a persistent need to develop theories of disintegration that would explain the circumstances in which the collapse of the European Union can be possible. The assumptions made by this paper, which would be the basis for the theory of disintegration, could also be taken advantage of. Potential scenarios of disintegration could also be used. This study is one of the few studies that has explained the concept of disintegration and can be a valuable contribution to develop a clear theory for it.

After presenting some of the studies that are related to integration and disintegration processes, this study will address different integration theories that will not focus only on traditional theories such as functionalism, but will also focus on modern theories such as post-functionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism. Moreover, the study will seek to build on what a few scholars have done on disintegration, by trying to identify its indicators and measure it on the contemporary crises facing the European Union, in order to know the common factors that would help the survival or the disintegration of the European Union.

Theoretical Perspectives: European Integration and Disintegration

There is an abundance of literatures which tackled the theories of European integration, but on the other hand, the stages of stagnation, regression and disintegration have not been sufficiently studied. Jan Zielonka contends in his book "Is the EU Doomed?" that numerous studies, especially European studies, have focused heavily on formulating theories of integration and neglected to think about formulating disintegration theories. However, considering the current crises, European disintegration is becoming increasingly possible (Zielonka, 2014, P. 22). The twenty-first century has witnessed significant challenges to the process of regional integration in general and the European Union in particular, which has faced

several crises, including the 2008 global financial crisis, the unprecedented influx of migrants, the upsurge in the number of asylum seekers and the growth of nationalist and Eurosceptic movements. These crises have contributed to rethinking the future of the European Union and its integration process (Szucko, 2020).

It is essential to define the concept of "integration" and its objectives, as well as to reflect upon the most significant theories dealt with by international relations theorists. "Integration" is a process through which a group of national units seeks, out of the collective feeling of their societies, to delegate some of their competence to a higher authority that has the aptitude to take decisions on behalf of them in several areas. The delegation of competences occurs since countries in their integrated relationship link themselves to the new structure according to a prior agreement precisely defined between them (Pentland, 1965, PP. 8-9). Karl Deutsch defines integration as "the achievement of a sense of community within a territory, with the existing of strong institutions and practices, working to bring peaceful change among the population of the territory" (Deutsch, 1957, PP. 5-6).

Integration theories have been formulated primarily with the aim of explaining European integration process. European regional integration commenced in the early 1950s with the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1952. In fact, there is no sole comprehensive theory to explain all aspects of the European integration process, but there are numerous theories. This explains the diversity and the lack of agreement accompanying the development of a specific definition to the concept of integration (Heinonen, 2006, P.49). Yet, it is conceivable to identify the ideas and assumptions developed by different integration

theories; neo-functionalism, liberal-intergovernmentalism and post-functionalism.

First, Neo-functionalism was the dominant theory of European integration process during the 1960s. Neo-functionalism is both an extension and a reaction to traditional functionalism. It revolves around the idea that states cede their powers to regional organizations and institutions, declaring their allegiance to them. It was Ernst Haas who developed the neo-functionalism in his book “The Uniting of Europe” (Wiener et al., 2009, P.3). Spill-over is the key element on which the neo-functionalism is anchored in. Spill-over argues that integration in certain sectors leads automatically to further integration in other sectors. Also, Jane Monet believed that integration in one sector leads to an extension to other sectors (Dunn, 2012, P. 5).

Second, liberal intergovernmentalism is an evolution of intergovernmentalism, founded by Andrew Moravsek in his book “The Choice for Europe” published in 1998. In the 1990s it was the prevailing theory in examining the European integration. Liberal intergovernmentalism, identical to intergovernmentalism, emphasizes on the position of national governments as the key actors in the integration process, but it also includes the liberal model of preference formation, in which national governments have a robust awareness of what their preferences are and follow up by negotiating with other member states. Proponents of liberal intergovernmentalism contend that the negotiating power of member states is considered an important tool in the pursuit of integration. They also see institutions as a approach to create credible commitments to member governments (Moravcsik, 1998, P. 19).

Third, Post-functionalism theory, founded by Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks in 2009, deviates from the optimism of neo-functionalism on

one hand, and the ignorance of intergovernmentalism with the general politicization of the European Union on the other hand. Post-functionalism assumes that regional integration has become an integral part of the mass policy of member states, which means that it has become "politicized", therefore interpretations of regional integration must begin with citizens' positions, collective identities and support for the integration process. Also, the structure of the party systems and party competition concerning European integration must be taken into account, as well as election and referendum systems (Schimmelfennig, 2018, P. 23).

While there has been an abundance of studies that endeavored to explain European integration, there has been slightly theorizing about European disintegration. The subject matter of disintegration remained noticeably absent from the findings of European integration theories until recently. However, due to the consecutive crises confronting the European Union, it turned out to be vital to develop ideas and theories related to European disintegration (Lombardo & Kantola, 2019, P. 63).

There are two foremost findings devoted directly to developing a theory of European disintegration; one by Douglas Webber entitled "European Disintegration? The Politics of Crisis in the European Union" and the other, by Hans Vollaard, entitled "European Disintegration: A Search for Explanations" (Spalińska, 2021).

Theories of disintegration have not given much room for debate within EU institutions and among EU scholars before the Brexit referendum. However, in concurrence with the Brexit referendum, the research of disintegration approaches has begun to gain the attention of numerous scholars as a means of calculating this unprecedented process, as it was the first time a member state chose to leave the European community (Szucko, 2020, P. 623).

There are several trends that contributed to the definition of disintegration, including Webber's definition of European disintegration, where he maintained that it means a regression in a number of points: first, a regression the scope of common policies adopted and implemented by the European Union, second, a decline in the number of member states inside the union, third, a regression in the actual capacity of the EU organizations to make and implement decisions which might be against the will of individual states (Scheller & Eppler, 2014, P. 25). There are a variety of characteristics related to the concept of disintegration, including that disintegration is considered a multifaceted phenomenon, as it possesses political, economic, institutional, regional, social, cultural, and legal dimensions. In addition, it is not a requirement that the occurrence of disintegration in one dimension be associated with disintegration in another. So the disintegration process must be divided and separated in order to explain how each dimension changes. Based on the interpretation of Stefano Bartolini's fundamental writings, Hans Vollaard offered an alternative methodological theory that explains how a political entity can be formed and also explains the possible disintegration of the European Union. Bartolini argued that any political entity can be subjected to disintegration if there is vulnerability in controlling borders and establishing order (Cianciara, 2015, P. 50).

Numerous scholars have recently tried to turn the well-established theories of international relations and European integration upside down and have begun to ask questions about when and how the EU is going to disintegrate, and to be able to answer these questions, they have investigated whether the concepts used by current theories, which try to explain European integration, may also help in explaining European disintegration. However, Douglas Webber noted that current frameworks are

not fully capable of explaining the different levels of disintegration, as demonstrated when trying to apply them to some of the crises facing the EU in recent times, including the Eurozone crisis, Ukraine, Brexit and other crises (Schramm, 2019, P. 1). Some theories that have tried to explain disintegration, particularly European disintegration, as well as some ideas within integration theories that have also tried to explain some aspects of the process of disintegration, will be addressed, and they are: Realism, Neo-Functionalism, Intergovernmentalism, Comparative Federalism, Institutionalism and Post-Functionalism.

First, realism, together with neorealism, are two of the most significant theoretical schools in international relations that can offer a powerful explanation for disintegration, as realism believes that cooperation is always likely to collapse due to the deterministic logic of relative gains. Structural realism also assumed that without an imminent geopolitical or military threat, European countries would begin to view each other with more trepidation; this may lead eventually to the disintegration of the continent's states (Cianciara, 2015, P. 46).

Second, although some neo-functionalists take into consideration the elements of disintegration and even speak out about the term "disintegration", the focus of the neo-functionalists is clearly on integration, not disintegration. Philippe Schmitter and Zeo Levkovridi suggested the so-called neo-functional approach to envisioning regional disintegration (Grosse, 2016, PP. 15-16). Schmitter and Levkovridi proposed various perceptions related to the neo-functional approach towards explaining disintegration, from them : If the benefits of integration are not distributed equally among the member states and their societies, the risks of disintegration increase. As neo-functionalism assigns a major role to experts, who are in supranational institutions and national parliaments,

disintegrative forces can emerge if there is a heterogeneity in preferences between member states and the regional institutions; disintegration may also occur if the regional integration process is not gradual and requires a radical different style of decision-making or conflict resolution (Schmitter & Lefkofridi, 2016, P. 5). Neo-functionalism theorists have attempted to explain the counterfactuals of regional integration, so they put forward the notion of "spill-back", which refers to "a situation in which there is a withdrawal from a set of specified obligations, rules are no longer systematically applied or adhered to, and the scope of action of the society and its institutional capabilities decrease". Neo-Functionalists see "spill-back" as the antithesis of integration (Vollaard, 2018, PP. 17-18).

Third, Intergovernmentalism, addressed obstacles to European integration processes. Liberal intergovernmentalism believes that disintegration can also arise from the bargaining stage among states. Governments may be able to circumvent domestic opposition skeptical of the EU, because skeptical individuals and groups do not have information about negotiations that took place behind closed doors (Vollaard, 2018, P. 52). Finally, Post-functionalism developed several scenarios to explain the process of disintegration and applied them to the European Union. First, there is disconnection between the functional need for human cooperation and the territorial scope of society. Second, this separation has grown in the European Union due to the expansion of the powers of the Union, especially since "The Maastricht Treaty". Third, this increasing separation led to upsurge in mass politicization of issues related to the European Union and European integration. Fourth, in conjunction with this process of politicization, political mobilization has been increasingly taking place on issues related to identity, giving rise to a new political division "national-international axis" perpendicular to the traditional left-right distributive

divide. Fifth, domestic politics turned out to be an increasingly powerful constraint on EU preferences and strategies of member state governments, limiting their scope for mutual concessions and creating a “constraining dissensus” that makes resolving EU disputes more difficult. Sixth, collective politicization and the rise of identity politics are likely to put pressure on the level and scope of European integration.

Post-functionalism works as a theory of disintegration due to the perception regarding collective politicization and the constraining dissensus it fosters, which creates pressure on the level and scope of integration. Hooghe and Marks, one of the pioneers of post-functionalism, did not assert that political disintegration would indeed occur, but rather that there would be increasing pressure towards this direction, depending on the extent to which identity was able to inculcate preferences and politicize European issues (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, PP. 21-22).

To wrap up, although there are a lot of theories that were developed to study integration from different aspects, there is a persistent need to develop disintegration theories on the other hand, as integration theories are not sufficient to study the disintegrative patterns that are looming, especially with the increasing pressures of current crises that hazard the integration process from many dimensions.

European Union's Crescent of Crises: Practical Perspectives

From the onset, the central objective of European integration process revolved around enhancing the lives of European citizens, particularly after the horrific experiences that Europe faced during the two world wars. The six founding countries of the European Economic Community (EEC) endeavored to create a united Europe by following gradual steps to reach full integration (Laschi, 2021). Despite the persistent efforts to promote European integration, the idea of "crisis" is fixed in the history of European

societies, starting within the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951, then the European Economic Community in 1957, and finally the current European Union in 1992. For instance, the crises experienced by the European Union such as the euro crisis, the Brexit crisis, the migration crisis, the rise of skeptical parties in the European Union, the COVID-19 and other crises have affected the course of the integration process within the European Union. However, the European Union is a unique global model of genuine integration among different countries (Warlouzet, 2014, P. 3).

The evolution of the integration process within the European Union witnessed several stages. Despite the catastrophic events that Europe had experienced during the two world wars, it has largely sought unity and cooperation among its countries. The beginning of cooperation began when France and Germany sought to make an economic alliance, and that came about when the French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman, on May 9, 1950, launched an appeal calling for the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). As a result, France, Italy, Germany, and the Benelux countries (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) positively responded to his call and signed the “Treaty of Paris”, which captivated mainly on several points: ensuring the free movement of goods and free access to sources of production; permanent monitoring of the market; commitment to the rules of competition and the principle of price transparency (“The history of the European Union”, 2021).

The European Coal and Steel Community was designed on April 18, 1951, to standardize coal and iron production in France and Federal Germany. The main feature of this group was to place the coal, iron and steel industries under the control of a supreme supranational authority whose powers include fixing production quotas for all member states. The

formation of the European Coal and Steel Community was not considered an end, but rather a first step in a long-sighted process aimed at achieving further economic and political integration (Rittberger & Glockner, 2010, PP. 1-2).

The success of the Paris Agreement had a positive influence on advancing the EU's march for the better, which encouraged the Europeans to sign a new agreement in March 1957 in Rome, which entered in to force in early 1958. "Rome Treaty" stipulated the establishment of two supranational organizations: the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAA), in order to ensure the gradual convergence of member states' economic policies, facilitating the movement of goods and services and eliminating all cross-border barriers and restrictions (Cuyvers, 2017, P. 28). The European project was consolidated with the conclusion of "Maastricht Treaty" which marked a significant turning point in Europe's history through the principles it put forward, it was considered as a new constitution for the European Union. This treaty made a full transition from the European community to the European Union. Maastricht Treaty had formally expanded the scope and ambitions of European integration concerning common foreign and security policy (CFSP), justice and internal affairs (JHA). In other words, the Maastricht Treaty was a milestone for the EU integration which went beyond the limits of economic integration (Laschi, 2021). Then EU leaders met on October 19, 2007, in the Portuguese capital, to approve the "Lisbon Treaty", which was designed to reform the union's institutions and decision-making process, and replace the European Constitution, which was previously rejected by France and the Netherlands in 2005. The treaty, entered into force on December 1, 2009, amended the Maastricht Treaty, as

well as the treaty that founded the European Community (European Parliament, 2018).

Integration theories contributed to explain the development of the European integration, like, functionalism, neo-Functionalism, intergovernmentalism and post-Functionalism. First, Jean Monnet is considered the modern father of Functionalism. When Monnet established the European Coal and Steel Community, he identified relatively specific and narrow "functions" for the community, predicting that the integration they represented would eventually extend to other areas. Monet believed that Europe would eventually unite not only as an economic union but also as a political union. Functionalists believe that European integration is not primarily controlled by national governments and their voters, but mostly driven by elites and interest groups that transcend national boundaries. Functionalism was the prevailing theory of European integration in the 1950s and 1960s, and then seemed less logical after a series of political setbacks that affected the European integration process. The major setback was the "empty Chair crisis" when French President Charles de Gaulle decided to boycott European institutions because he was against their plans for greater supranational integration. However, functionalism returned to its leading position with the revival of European integration in the 1980s and 1990s, when Jacques Delors was the President of the European Commission (Spolaore, 2013, PP. 9-11).

Second, neo-functionalism argued that when integration materializes, unexpected useful results may occur, such as creating groups that may encourage further integration. Neo-functionalism developed three main pillars for European integration: regional elites looking for effective government, transnational interest groups looking for better representation of their interests, and "spill-over", which drives regional institutions to

achieve further integration. Neo-functionalism did not give much room to ordinary citizens to influence European integration, as reflected in Ernst Haas's book "The Uniting of Europe", where he paid little attention to public opinion, although he was aware of the public criticism of European integration, which is called now Euroscepticism. However, Haas justified his disregard for public criticism based on two reasons: First, he argued that the public opinion was ignorant and did not appreciate the meaning of European integration. Secondly, given the bureaucratic nature of European integration, decision makers were not subject to public scrutiny, as a result, public opinion was not taken into consideration when talking about integration (Kuhn, 2009, PP. 1216-1217).

Third, the pioneers of intergovernmentalism believed that European integration is the result of rational and calculated bargaining between national governments that calculate the costs and benefits of cooperation in the light of their national interest. They also believe that national governments are responsible for achieving national interests, and supranational institutions are tools that are used by them to achieve their own goals. Moravcsik believed that national governments have built European institutions in order to achieve the economic interests of their local constituencies. Intergovernmentalism believes that European integration is rooted in the pursuit of national economic interests (Verdun, 2020, P. 3).

Fourth, Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks presented the post-functional theory of European integration to understand new developments in European politics that cannot be explained by neo-functionalism or intergovernmentalism. They both argued that while regional integration may be caused from a mismatch between efficiency and the existing power structure, the result is political conflict over collective identities rather than

efficiency. For Hooghe and Marks, since the Maastricht Treaty in 1991, it has been appropriate to talk about "Constraining Dissensus" among the European public. European integration has become a highly politicized issue, and policymakers today cannot ignore public opinion at all. European integration has increasingly tangible effects on people's daily lives. Moreover, since the Maastricht Agreement, the decision-making process on European integration has entered the world of partisan competition, elections, and referendums (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, PP. 7-8).

The European Union encountered lots of crises, the Eurozone crisis, Brexit, and the Corona virus crisis, that heavily undermined the very core of the European integration process and casted doubt about the future of the European project. To start with the Eurozone crisis, it first peaked in 2010 and continued to haunt the Eurozone at present. It is the most serious economic crisis in the history of the European Union. The global financial crisis (2008), together with the Eurozone crisis, caused great economic damage that continues to afflict parts of Europe. This economic crisis turned into a serious political crisis leading to a state of conflict among the member states of the European Union. The beginning of the sovereign debt crisis transpired at the time of an economic downturn in Greece, which quickly spread to Portugal, Ireland, Italy, and Spain, threatening the survival of the single currency. As confidence in the stricken economies continued to erode, rating agencies had reduced their creditworthiness to those countries. The debt expanded so dramatically that by 2011, total debt had risen to more than 300% of annual economic output in France, Italy, and Spain and more than 250% in Greece. This situation led to a debate about the possibility of bankruptcy of some member states and leaving the Eurozone or the entire union (Esposito, 2014, PP. 3-4). Europeans found themselves obligated to answer for the first time a fundamental question

about the sacrifices they were willing to make to save the single currency. Since the euro crisis, it has become increasingly clear that European economies are not as strong as prominent politicians and decision makers believe, and that their economy suffers from the same fundamental flaws as the U.S. economy. The European Union and the Eurozone are considered important economic zone to the countries of the world, so this financial disaster that hit Europe did not only jeopardize the European project, but also had wide-ranging implications on the global economy (Daianau, 2014, P. 4).

Moving to the Brexit crisis, it is considered a very significant political development in the history of the United Kingdom and the European Union. For the EU, it is a major crisis not only because it is the first time that a member state has withdrawn from the EU, but also because Britain is a special member, as it is a large and powerful country, also the second largest economy in the EU, the third largest member state in terms of population, and a significant net contributor to the EU budget, that's why its withdrawal affected the EU's standing politically and economically (Mustafa and Others, 2020, P. 11). It all started when the UK went to the polls on 23 June 2016 to decide whether Britain should stay in or leave the EU, the result came with a majority of 51.89% who voted in favor of the Brexit, this result surprised the British public, its main political parties, polling organizations, the media and many political scientists. It was expected that Britain's withdrawal from the European Union, which has been deeply intertwined over the past four decades, will have a significant impact on all aspects of the British political and economic life, from immigration policy, agriculture subsidies, criminal justice measures, as well as environmental standards, financial services systems, nuclear energy technology, university student fees, employment laws, and aviation. Brexit's

implications will not stop at Britain's borders, but the entire European continent will be affected. The withdrawal of the UK citizens and political representatives from the EU institutions, including the 73 British members of the European Parliament, means that the balance of power among the remaining member states will change. (Martill & Staiger, 2018, PP. 1-2). The UK played a major role in foreign affairs and defense and has an important international status because it is a permanent member of the UN Security Council and has a high intelligence-gathering capacity, with defense spending amounting to nearly 25% of the EU defense budget. In addition, the UK has many defense capabilities such as research, defense industries and its soft power, all of which have benefited the EU, as evidenced by the British role in supporting integration in these areas, so the British withdrawal will somehow adversely affect integration in these areas. Brexit is not just a British phenomenon, it is a manifestation of the widespread tensions in Europe affecting European integration that started since the 1950s, and it also represents a challenge to the idea of a close union (Whitman, 2016, P. 43).

Finally, the Corona virus crisis, after its initial deployment in China, Europe quickly became the world's center of the pandemic in late March and early April 2020. The crisis has forced all EU members to take unprecedented measures that are not taken except in the war and disasters times to face the unprecedented pandemic of Coronavirus, for example, many transportations has been stopped, restrictions on the movement of the population, except for necessity, as well as the cessation of tourism activities, which are one of the main sources of income in many countries. European countries have tried to contain the virus and its economic losses, with the European Union and its Member States deploying unprecedented financial support measures to mitigate the impact of the

severe contraction of the continent's economies. At the beginning of the crisis, the initial measures taken to combat the crisis were often confused and created resentment among some Member States. In fact, nation-states prioritized the protection of their populations by their immediate reactions to the pandemic rather than a coordinated plan by the European Union, for example, in early March, Germany and France banned the export of medical and personal protective equipment in protest EU officials. In addition, most Schengen countries have closed their borders as a measure to contain the spread of the virus (Guarascio & Blenkinsop, 2020).

During that crisis, shortcomings in the management of the European Union emerged at almost every stage of the process of dealing with the COVID-19 in surveillance, preparedness, and response. This reluctance may explain the limited scope of the powers of the European Union, which calls on Member States to share their preparedness plans without clarifying the mechanisms for enforcing this commitment. Furthermore, the response to the COVID-19 crisis was largely unregulated at the beginning of the crisis, for example, the Health Security Committee, an intergovernmental body consists of Member States working to develop a common strategy to address the crisis, did not agree on common measures, this is because of a legal framework that allowed Member States to adopt unilateral measures in the event of an emergency (Beaussier & Cabane, 2021, P. 1). The EU has failed to provide a huge package of fiscal stimulus for the full benefit of the Member states, making many European states announce their own budget stimulus programs, for example Italy has pledged a €25 billion bailout, and France has allocated €45 billion to mitigate the impact of the virus on business sectors. Some European leaders have been reluctant to issue "Euro bonds" to provide financial assistance to Member States individually during the Corona crisis (Karsh, 2020, P. 157). The European Union acknowledged

its mistake in dealing with the damage done to Italy by the Corona virus, and Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, made a formal apology for the EU's failure towards Italy, despite this, it did not reach agreement on the economic support plan for the Corona crisis until April 10, 2020 (Bergsen and Others, 2020).

On the other hand, some defended the EU's performance towards the crisis, and felt that its response to it was impressive. It was argued that the European Union has allocated 3 trillion euros to resolve the crisis and has been concerned with the development of health measures, border and mobility measures, economic measures and the promotion of viruses and vaccine research. The Integrated Policy Crisis Response Mechanism (IPCR) was launched too early so that coordination, consultation and information exchange between the European Union and its Member States could be regulated in accordance with established procedures. On March 13, 2020, the EU Commission provided a coordinated economic response to the fight Corona virus in the form of a comprehensive catalogue of economic and financial tools and programs. In April 2020, the European Council launched a comprehensive economic response, relying heavily on mechanisms established in the wake of the euro crisis. In late May 2020, Germany and France submitted a proposal of a €500 billion bailout fund to help the EU economy to recover from the impact of Covid-19. These funds are grants to help the most affected sectors and regions of the EU and they are not limited to the proposed €500 billion, but also, they include the EU budget for 2021-2027, which is approaching 1 trillion euros. This German French proposal was a suggestion that could pave the way for a larger deal within the EU and could also end the dispute over Corona bonds (Roloff, 2020, PP. 30-31). To sum up, the European project has passed through many stages to reach its full integration. Many prominent treaties had contributed to the evolution of

the European integration and many Integration theories tried to explain the development of the integration of the European Union started from 1950s.

Integration/Disintegration and the European Crises: 2008 to 2020

For the previous decade, the unfolding crises that confronted the European Union prompted scholars to debate about the future of the European integration process. Some scholars argue the European integration project might fall to pieces, while others argue the multiple crises confronting the Union can generate some useful reforms which could eventually turn it into a more effective and coherent entity. Webber believed that this crisis could lead to a general disintegration or horizontal political disintegration such as Brexit, or on the other hand, lead to further vertical political integration by expanding the official competencies of supranational institutions (Archick, 2018, P. 1). Theories of integration differ regarding the causes, the mechanisms that shape the course of the crisis, and the circumstances that determine the outcome of integration or disintegration. For example, liberal intergovernmentalism contends that, crises in the case of integration are the result of external factors, and their resolution depends on government bargaining driven by governmental preferences. On the contrary, post-functionalism is anchored in negative expectations, as it perceives integration crises characterized by Eurosceptic politicization, which may lead to restricted integration or disintegration. The research focuses on neofunctionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism to analyze the impact of the crises on the integration process, and then using post functionalism besides the main ideas of Webber and Vollaard about disintegration to examine the impact of these crises on the tendency towards European disintegration.

Crises are not brand-new to the path of the European integration as they are key pillars to the founding process of the European project and are often assumed to be useful in moving the integration project forward. Some integration theories have studied and interpreted the crises that the EU has experienced to identify its impact on the integration process, including neo-functionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism (Brack & Gurkan, 2021, P. 2). Both theories shall be used to investigate the impact of the Eurozone crisis, the Brexit crisis, and the Corona crisis on the integration process and to identify the factors that may help in sustaining European integration in the light of those crises.

First, the Euro crisis, from the perspective of “Neofunctionalism”, its origins lie in the unregulated behavior of the Member States. Regarding crisis management and its consequences, they tend to put forward two main reasons: the disparity in transnational interdependence and supranational capacity. Neo-functionalism assumes that in the case of the Eurozone crisis, the links between transnational actors and the interdependence of financial markets have been strong. Additionally, the costs of exiting from the Eurozone were high for all member states, and the ECB had enough independence and resources to maintain and expand European integration (Schimmelfennig, 2018, PP. 973–974). Spillover is a simple and powerful tool for explaining both the causes and consequences of the crisis. Explaining a complex phenomenon such as the Eurozone crisis necessarily involves many causal factors and chains. Most analysts agreed that one of the key reasons for the transition of economic turmoil from the U.S. mortgage sector to the sovereign bond and banking markets in Europe was the asymmetrical institutional composition of the European Monetary Union, which deprived European member states of their monetary autonomy without building compensatory mechanisms in the financial and

banking sectors, which could have helped the euro countries to avoid this crisis or at least mitigate its effects (Tortola, 2015, PP. 129-130).

The "Spill Over" mechanism with its functional and political types provides an important vision for understanding the integrative steps taken during the crisis. Concerning functional Spillover, the explanation for progress in achieving deeper economic integration during the euro crisis management process can be traced back to steps taken to ease functional pressures arising from an incomplete structure established in Maastricht. Some dysfunctions were detected during the euro crisis, which led to significant integrative pressures (Niemann, 2021, PP. 128-129). Regarding political spillover, it focuses on the integrative role played by non-governmental elites by discussing the role of interest groups, especially those representing large companies; they have a strong preference for greater integration. Some of the poll results from Grant Thornton's 2013 International Business Report indicate that 78% of Eurozone entrepreneurs are positive about the overall impact of joining the euro, 94% support the euro's survival, and 89% support further economic integration (Grant Thornton International Business Report, 2013).

Anchored in liberal intergovernmentalism, national preferences are shaped by the economic interests of powerful local interest groups. Substantive agreements reflect the range of national preferences and bargaining power. The Euro crisis is considered as an external economic shock that threatens the welfare and independence of member states. The Eurozone's response to the crisis can be explained by government negotiations based on the partial convergence and partial divergence of the interests of member states and aims to enhance the credibility of member states' commitments to the single currency. National preferences in the euro crisis were shaped by a combination of common interest resulting from the

desire for integration by maintaining the euro on one hand, and differing preferences on integration requirements for the distribution of crisis adjustment costs, on the other hand. While the negotiations resulted in a cooperative solution to avoid the collapse of the Eurozone and enhance the credibility of member states' commitments, asymmetrical interdependence led to burden-sharing and institutional determination, which often reflected the preferences of Germany and its allies (Bulmer & Joseph, 2016, PP. 727–728). In its interpretation of the euro crisis, liberal intergovernmentalism relies on the analysis of national preferences and intergovernmental negotiations. Concerning states' national preferences for that crisis, all Eurozone countries supported deepening economic integration to manage the actual and potential negative repercussions of interdependence created by the debt crisis. According to their preferences, states were divided into two camps: the first camp consisted of northern European countries: Germany, Austria, Finland, and the Netherlands, they preferred austerity measures and fiscal discipline, as well as minimum assistance to crisis-hit countries. The second camp, in contrast, was in a worse economic and financial situation. It consists of heavily indebted Southern European countries: Greece, Ireland, Spain, and Portugal, they preferred to exchange debt and adopt softer economic policies. Accordingly, they have pushed for the "Europeanization" of sovereign debt and flexible adjustment policies. Although all actors had a strong common preference to avoid the collapse of the Eurozone, they also sought to avoid the burden of adjustment. It is clear from the previous explanation that governments are the dominant actors in managing the Eurozone crisis, which is in line with the assumptions of liberal intergovernmentalism (Schimmelfennig, 2018, P. 1538).

Second, the Brexit crisis, Ernst Haas, one of the pioneers of neo-functionalism, established his interpretation of the Brexit crisis on the study of the effect of "Spillover". Brexit was driven by the growing feeling in Europe that national sovereignty was diminishing due to the growing tendency of supranationalism of the EU, and that countries would become more independent and wealthier if they chose to become independent from the EU. This view was caused not only by the increasing number of crises that the EU has faced in recent decades, but also by other important issues such as the free movement of people and the Eurozone crisis (Tindal-Clarke, 2020, PP. 50-51). Neo-functionalism realizes interdependence and supranational rules and institutions as instruments of EU unity in the face of Brexit, rather than as instruments of interstate bargaining. Likewise, the EU's shared preference for maintaining the single market provides another blow to the UK, as it means that countries would rather invest in their relations with the EU than the UK. According to Gary Marks and Liesbet Hooghe, the threat of economic disruption is a powerful disincentive to Brexit. Moreover, neo-functionalism highlights the cost of the Brexit that cuts long decades from EU rulemaking and adjudication (Hooghe & Marks, 2019, P. 1123). Brexit also revives other issues, such as Scottish independence. In Scotland, EU institutions were an integral part of the work of the state, with the European Union funding many Scottish initiatives, and therefore the Scottish Government and institutions were more in conformity with EU institutions. This is the result of integration, which has affected Scotland through the "Spillover" effect. This strong relationship between Scotland and the EU prompted Scotland to vote for remaining within the EU. Thus, Scottish independence talks began again, because of their preference to remain within the EU, rather than outside it with the United Kingdom, this demonstrated the gradual shift of loyalty towards

supranational institutions, which citizens perceive as better and more beneficial alternatives than national institutions (Cavlak, 2019, PP. 71-74).

Liberal intergovernmentalism rationalizes the Brexit crisis by assuming that the United Kingdom left the European Union because it felt that this will enhance their economic interests. Liberal intergovernmentalism also assumes that the EU is creating linkages between European economies, so limiting them by leaving the EU would be detrimental. About Brexit, Liberal intergovernmentalism considered that such an exit had no fundamental impact either on the United Kingdom or on the European Union as a whole. The view that Brexit is a secondary phenomenon is logically consistent with two fundamental assumptions of (liberal) intergovernmentalism: first, that the course of European integration depends on the benefits of cooperation that occur through intergovernmental negotiations; and second, intergovernmental transactions are not depending on the results of the referendum but on economic interests, relative strength, and credible commitments. Based on these assumptions, Brexit can be seen as an illusory event with a range of implications for UK domestic policy but not on the UK's association with the EU. An alternative scenario developed by Michelle Cini and Amy Verdun, known as the "Centrifugal trajectory" that foresees a more positive future for Europe once removing the stumbling block of British membership, as historically the United Kingdom had often hindered and had not participated in many important moves towards greater integration. Liberal intergovernmentalism concluded that the lesson behind the Brexit, may be that leaving the EU is too expensive for the leaving state not to the supranational entity itself (Martill & Staiger, 2018, P. 15).

Anchored in neo-functionalism, the coronavirus has affected many sectors: health, economic, transportation and other sectors which indicated that there is a high level of interdependence among these various sectors. It

can therefore be said that the COVID 19 pandemic has shown the impact of "Spillover" in the European integration process, as it has not only led to health integration, but also to economic integration (Alcaro & Tocci, 2021, P. 13). At first, coordination and risk assessment were not accurate, but later, the European Commission performed a pivotal role in responding to the pandemic, also there has been increase in the efficiency of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. Moreover, the ECB played an important role in relaxing the fiscal rules to reduce austerity restrictions on member states for the Southern countries. Although, in the first stages of the pandemic, member states were unable to agree on a Recovery Fund or even a new budget, which could have provided a broader response to the crisis, the threat of economic imbalances and the demands of the supranational authorities, have led to the launch of "European Recovery and Debt Fund", which has helped in increasing the level of European integration (Samur, 2021, PP. 11-12). Neo-functionalism indicates that the establishment of crisis management mechanisms, such as the European Financial Stability Facility and the European Stability Mechanism, symbolizes an integrative step in the field of the Economic and Monetary Union of the European Union. Further integration during the economic management of the corona pandemic would also lead to more "Spillovers" (Sharma, 2021, PP. 136-137). The use of the European Stability Mechanism for health-related purposes was necessary and was approved by both member states and supranational elites, making it an example for "political spillover". Similarly, the European Investment Bank's decision to allocate €200 billion to SMEs along with SURE, which promised to lend €100 billion to member states to protect workers' jobs during the pandemic, gives an example for "cultivated spillover", concerning anti-unemployment measures (Zeevaert, 2020).

Liberal intergovernmentalism considers the recession caused by the coronavirus to be a major challenge not only for member states but also for supranational institutions that have had to deal with the economic and social repercussions caused by the pandemic. The unequal reactions taken by member states' governments consistently illustrate the dynamics of power in this crisis. This refers to the assumption of liberal intergovernmentalism on the idea of national preferences that ultimately dominate the agenda of member states. A clear set of preferences was formed by member states to achieve the desired results in proportion to their interests. The bargaining took place between two groups of countries: countries with better economic status (Sweden, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, and Austria) on one hand, and on the other hand, economically affected member states (including Spain, Greece, France, and Italy). States that were less affected by the crisis were in a better bargaining position when concluding the agreements needed to combat the repercussions of the corona virus (Sapir, 2020, PP. 3-7). The national interests of member states have differed about the financing of the large European recovery plan. Italy, Greece, and Spain faced relatively high interest rates on their government bonds and were reluctant to accept strict conditions for ESM loans, as they would have serious consequences. Because Corona bonds, in contrast to ESM loans, would be without strict EU control over national spending and with low interest rates, nine Eurozone governments, including Italy, France, Greece and Spain, appealed to adopt these bonds. On the other hand, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, and Finland felt that if corona bonds were approved, they would bear higher interest rates. Referring to its uncertain legal basis and the risks of its adoption, Germany and the Netherlands rejected corona bonds. There have been many bargaining attempts among

member states to reach compromise solutions to satisfy all parties (Smith-Meyer, 2020).

Although neo-functionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism differ on the causes, processes and driving forces behind European integration, both approaches have one common feature which is, giving priority to national or supranational elites, as well as to economic interest's groups at the expense of the population. In other words, it is the elite who makes and negotiates decisions in the European Union, with the contribution of transnational society and supranational institutions. However, considering recent developments in the European Union, it is not enough to adopt the analysis of the decisions of the elite alone, as public opinion has become an important factor in analyzing political debates on European integration. The rise of Eurosceptic parties in several Eurozone countries, besides the changes in the ruling coalitions in more than ten EU countries in recent years, as well as growing popular protests in some countries, are all indicators of Europe's changing political dynamics and are also new constraints on EU reform. This shows that the EU's response to the Eurozone crisis, and other crises, cannot be understood by using the dominant theories of European integration only, without taking the domestic policy of member states into consideration, which has often been ignored due to the lack of public interest in the European Union (Vilpišauskas, 2013, PP. 369-372).

Europe is witnessing a clear rise of skeptical right-wing parties, particularly after the Brexit. Considering these developments, an increasing number of literatures predicted that economic and political turmoil can lead to European disintegration. It is noticeable that public opinion has become an influential factor in directing the course of the European political system, so public skepticism in Europe has become a major challenge to the

integration of the European Union. After Brexit, mass-based disintegration, which originated from the public, posed a challenge to the integration of member states suffering from the growing skepticism of their people towards the EU. The impact of the crises experienced by the European Union will be analyzed using the post-functionalist theory and disintegration assumptions of Douglas Webber and Hans Vollaard (Walter, 2018, P. 1). Post-functionalist theory can be used to explain disintegration because it contains two main principles: mass politicization and Constraining Dissensus, as they represent a great pressure on the level and scope of integration (Golyner, 2020, PP. 115-116).

There have been many attempts to develop theories of disintegration, the most famous of which are Webber and Vollaard. Webber argued that traditional integration theories are not sufficient to explain what is taking place in the contemporary period of the European Union, since they do not consider the role of domestic politics, particularly political parties, and anti-EU sentiment. Webber defines disintegration as a "reduction" in the scope of common and implemented policies by the European Union; number of member states; the formal capacity and actual capacity of the EU organs to take and implement decisions, if necessary, against the will of the member states. Webber says that by looking at the experiences of regional organizations historically, it can be noted that most of them failed, and therefore this is not far away from the EU itself (Webber, 2011, P. 2).

Vollaard criticized existing integration theories for not addressing the disintegration of the European Union. Drawing on the work of Stefano Bartolini, Vollaard argued that if a disintegration occurred it would be for the following reasons: the weakening of the external cohesion of the European Union, which means that the union was unable to penetrate all areas of public policy; Also, European integration has become a constant

source of dissatisfaction, as the weakness of external cohesion restricts the political structure within the union, which means that discontent within the European Union cannot be easily expressed without the appropriate institutions, in addition to that European skepticism leads to a partial exit within the union and a vote for other countries to exit completely (Rhodes, 2019, PP. 2-3). Vollaard argued that an exit does not necessarily mean that member states leave the political formation entirely, but that a partial exit may occur, when member states withdraw the resources, they provide or refuse to carry out orders from the political center (Pircher & Loxbo, 2020, P. 1271).

Firstly, the Eurozone crisis, post-functionalism gives priority to domestic politics and more specifically to politicization. The intense functional pressure of EU coordination had been met with increasing resistance to supranational solutions, owing to the emergence of the crisis in domestic politics (Jacoby, 2015, P. 188). Frank Schimmelfennig pointed out that the euro crisis had produced all the necessary ingredients for post-functionalism in European integration. In fact, the developments of the crisis at the European Union level had profound impacts on national governments, such as: overthrow of governments, popular unrest, and the rise of Euroscepticism (Schimmelfennig, 2014, P. 325). Increasing politicization at the national level has led to a “Constraining Dissensus”, in which citizens' opinions regarding EU affairs have been highly polarized, and public opinion has become a constraining force over political elites. This politicization has limited the room for maneuver for national governments and EU elites. Concerning the Eurozone crisis, identity conversations have mostly revolved around the degree of solidarity required in a multi-level system of government. Indeed, skeptical EU actors realized the crisis as an opportunity to fight against Brussels, because the crisis

touched the national identity nerve, and so they worked to mobilize public opinion around an equation based on “us against them” division (Börzel & Risse, 2018, P. 16). Based on this analysis, it can be concluded that despite the post-functionalism’s emphasis on the negative impact of politicization related to Euroscepticism on the mass level of European integration, it did not reach the point of complete disintegration, but it made intergovernmental negotiations more difficult and led to a regression in supporting the European integration process and increasing skepticism about it.

Concerning the disintegration assumptions and the Eurozone crisis, when this crisis took place, mass-based disintegration increases in many EU countries. Also, there were two remarkable events that clearly threatened the European integration process. The first event was the referendum in Greece against the bailout terms of the European Union and the proposed “troika” in July 2015, which was a reaction to the pressure imposed by the European Union and the International Monetary Fund to accept a very strict austerity programme. The second event, which came almost a year later, in June 2016, was the holding of the Brexit referendum (Terzi, 2020). The first event plunged the Eurozone into its biggest crisis, as after years of deep economic crisis and months of faltering negotiations with creditor countries, the Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras called on the Greek people to vote in a referendum on the conditions proposed by the international creditors in return for allocating more rescue funds (Scott, 2015). The 2015 Greek bailout referendum could be described as a disintegration referendum because it was widely seen as a vote on the country's continued membership in the Eurozone. Referendums on disintegration are defined as referendums that either explicitly aimed to withdraw partially or completely from an international institution or are seen as pursuing an objective that violates the

rules of the international institution to the extent that the membership of the member state in the institution is called into question (Walter and Others, 2016). Several scholars have discussed the worst-case scenario that the euro crisis could have produced, which is the disintegration of the Eurozone. The measures taken by the member states and the European Central Bank helped to contain the scenario of the collapse of the Eurozone, but its situation remains worrying. From an economic point of view, the crisis led to a decline in investments, high unemployment rates, reduced purchasing power, increased poverty, and growing inequalities. Politically, the crisis has widened the gap between the North and South countries in Europe, as the Northern countries, led by Germany, expected from the southern countries to show their ability to grow without accumulating public and private debts and to undertake structural reforms that deal with tax evasion and corruption (Chopin & Jamet. 2016, PP. 3-4). Although the threat of the Eurozone disintegration had been overcome, it has become increasingly difficult to be certain that the economy will continue to play the unifying role it has been assigned since the beginning of European integration process.

Secondly, the Brexit crisis, post-functionalism depends on the masses and politics in explaining this crisis. Schimmelfennig argued that the motives for leaving the EU are in line with post-functionalism assumptions, and predicted that because of weak institutional bargaining power, countries that seek to break up like the United Kingdom, need to soften their demands and make concessions to the EU when negotiating withdrawal terms. Hooghe and Marks also emphasized that the Brexit referendum depicts the tensions between functional integration and national resistance, which have not been linked before (Czech & Krakowiak, 2019, P. 598). Post-functionalism is considered a window on the decision to hold the

referendum, and the tensions in the Conservative Party that shaped the UK's bargaining strategy in a later period. All in all, the Brexit referendum illustrates the tension between the functional pressures for integration and the nationalist resistance that is part of a broader divide across Europe. (Hooghe & Marks, 2019, PP. 11-12).

Concerning the disintegration assumptions and the Brexit crisis, it appears at first glance as a manifestation of European disintegration, both theoretically and practically. Behind this move, there was a belief that the British can do better without the rules, regulations, and structures of the European Union, which have become so rigid and constraining for the British society and the economy. Jeremy Richardson argued that what happened is considered a clear failure of the idea of Supernationalism, as coercion in the European Union governance replaced politics based on the pursuit of consensus and respect for national diversity (Richardson, 2018, P. 121). Bartolini and Vollaard argued that the process of European disintegration means that actors and resources cannot remain trapped within the EU, and that subsequent partial or total exit impairs the political structure within the union, as well as the union's ability to impose borders and implement decisions. Drawing on Bartolini's framework, Vollaard analyzed four testable proposals for how the European Union would disintegrate. The subject of Brexit fits well Vollaard's fourth proposition on how the lack of clear mechanisms to leave the European Union displeases Eurosceptics and induces a partial exit. This also fits Webber's argument about the importance of looking at each member state's domestic politics because how a partial exit might unfold will vary according to each country's political context. Therefore, the stronger the resentment of Eurosceptics, the fewer voice options at the EU level, the lower European loyalty, the more likely states could leave the EU (Vollaard, 2014, P. 1153).

In sum, Brexit signified a turning point in demanding more literature contributions dealing with disintegration. According to the assumptions of Webber and Vollaard, Brexit is an indicator to the process of disintegration because of Britain's peculiarity, also it sets an example that other countries can follow if they encounter difficulties. Numerous countries have threatened to leave the union totally or partially, especially with the increasing pace of European skepticism, this is considered among the indicators of disintegration mentioned by Webber, Vollaard and other scholars of disintegration theories.

Finally, post-functionalism argued that transnational crises, such as the Corona crisis, are highly politicized, because their risks are high. Controversy has arisen within member states about striking the appropriate balance between public health measures that have restricted individual liberties and economic imperatives. Post-functionalism argued that political responses to the economic fallout of the Corona crisis are constrained by local partisan competition, and it also revitalized the division between supporters of European Solidarity and supporters of National Solidarity (Rittberger, 2021, PP. 17-18). Politicization has played an influential role during the coronavirus crisis. In health policy, populist parties accused member states' governments of either delaying the lockdown or implementing harsh measures such as mask rules and lockdowns. In general, health policy has become more politicized due to its overlap with the political decision-making process. Likewise, the lack of coordination and delays in vaccinations have led to further politicization and polarization at the local level of some Member States and at the European level (Brooks & Geyer, 2020, PP. 1060-1061). Concerning the economic sphere, politicization was not limited to the local mass political arena, as politicians sought not only to persuade their own voters but also other European voters

to make them support the recovery fund. The resistance of the Frugal Four, Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Sweden, cannot only be explained through unequal interdependence, but also by looking at their domestic politics. For example, the group's leader, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, was worrying about his political fate if he did not become frugal enough, as 61% of Dutch voters did not support the EU's recovery plan. Naturally, this limited the options available to the Dutch leader at the EU level (Samur, 2021, PP. 12-13).

Concerning the disintegration assumptions and the coronavirus crisis, the pandemic has increasingly threatened notable achievement of European integration which is, the Schengen area, which was called into question during the height of the migration crisis in 2015, when several member states suddenly imposed border controls to stem the wave of refugees seeking to enter the European Union from the Balkans and the Mediterranean. This prompted the Commission to make proposals to strengthen the Schengen area. And with the spread of the Corona pandemic, EU member states have once again rushed to impose unilateral border controls, which have impeded the free movement of goods, in blatant disregard of the rules of the EU's internal market. As a result, the pandemic has raised urgent questions about the resilience and sustainability of the European integration project (Fabbrini, 2021, PP. 23-24). The pandemic has also put a barrier between member states and the European Union regarding vaccines against Covid-19. In the absence of the European Union's competences in the field of health policy, and after the individual actions of the major member states, the European Union decided in the summer of 2020 to coordinate the procurement of vaccines by mandating the Commission to negotiate purchasing agreements with multinational pharmaceutical companies on behalf of all countries. However, coordination

problems and cost concerns have made the Commission slower than other government authorities in concluding procurement contracts. As a result, a shortage of vaccine supplies emerged in the spring of 2021. In this context, member states quickly negotiated bilateral deals with pharmaceutical companies, or made partnerships with third countries to develop vaccines. The catastrophic failure of the European Union's vaccination plan contrasts with the rapid and successful implementation of the United Kingdom and the United States of America, and this reflects the fundamental flaws that exist in the institutions and positions of the European Union and reveals the disturbing state of the European project (Krugman, 2021).

To sum up, Neo-functionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism, although they have different assumptions, they both agreed that the Euro crisis, the Brexit, and the coronavirus deepened the integration among the member states in the European Union. On the contrary, Post functionalism, although it is considered one of the integration theories, contended that the three crises imposed negative impacts on the integration process and led to the appearance of a lot of disintegrative forces, also Webber and Vollaard, who represent the disintegrative trend, maintained that the three crises recoiled integration process and raised the danger of European disintegration.

Conclusion

The EU has encountered numerous and unfolding crises that negatively affected its integrative pathway. A key result of those unfolding crises was the materialization of theoretical perspectives that endeavored to explain the prospects of European disintegration. In other words, European integration theories were no longer sufficient to analyze the recent crises and the disintegrative forces that became apparent in the European Union. Karl Deutch argued that integration is not successful unless it is done on the

formal and the grass root levels, and from the analysis of the impact of the Euro crisis, Brexit, and the corona virus on the EU, it was found that these crises led to the rise of Euroscepticism among political parties and the masses of numerous European countries. This is an obvious piece of evidence that European integration process is backsliding. As there is no single comprehensive theory that explains all aspects of integration process, also there cannot be a single theory that can explain all aspects of the disintegration process. Several integration theories have tackled disintegrative ideas, but they are not sufficient. Post-functionalism is the most prominent integration theory that tackled the ideas of disintegration, it is considered the closest theory to the ideas of Webber and Vollaard about disintegration.

Neo-functionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism were used to analyze the integrative forces behind the three crises, while post-functionalism and disintegrative assumptions of Webber and Vollaard were used to analyze the disintegrative forces behind the crises. Accordingly, neo-functionalism and Liberal intergovernmentalism claimed that these crises have strengthened the integrative ties among EU member states; on the other hand, post-functionalism in addition to Webber and Vollaard contended that these crises led to a regression in integration and the presence of numerous indicators of disintegration crystal clear.

Although some integration theories can explain disintegration, as in the case of post-functionalism, which is very close to Webber and Vollaard's assumptions about disintegration, there is a need to develop theories of disintegration that address the various aspects of this process. The research contends that disintegration does not necessarily mean a complete collapse, which is the most extreme aspect of it, but there are a number of indicators that have been addressed, including partial exit, total exit, inability of

supranational institutions to implement appropriate mechanisms and decisions in the face of crises, failure to establish exit mechanisms, decline in national loyalty, loss of confidence from national governments and peoples and monopolization of the decision-making process by one country or several ones in supranational institutions. Considering the previous crises, the negative implications of these crises have not been recovered due to the absence of effective mechanisms to do so and the fragility of the EU institutions. Although numerous countries threatened to leave the EU, they retreated from doing this step, this not because all their problems arising from these crises have resolved or because of their loyalty to the union and cooperation among its members, but rather because of the fear of potential losses that may result if they left the EU. The apparent coherence of the union does not mean that the integration process is going well, especially with the presence of numerous indicators of disintegration. Undeniably, there has been a significant regression in the European integration process and several indications of disintegration have emerged, and this contradicts the primary goals that the European Union was anchored in. As a result, there is a need to revise integration theories to tackle the disintegration aspects and to develop a distinct disintegration theory that primarily focuses on the future aspects of European disintegration.

The research recommends digging deeper into the disintegration theories of the European Union. Other researchers are highly required to pinpoint the repercussions of the Ukraine crises as a grave source of threat to the cohesion of the European Union and whether such crises would lead to integration or disintegration of the European Union in the future.

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