Complexity of the European Union System and its Adaptation Abilities

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The European Union, as a complex political system, is a space where processes resulting from multifaceted and contradictory forces emerge. As a result, building the system's adaptability and stabilisation (pro-integration) capacity requires specific steps and actions. Operating within the EU consists in navigating through contradictory, often mutually exclusive activities whose nature reflects the nature of being a member of a supranational organisation. As a result, building a stable structure seems unattainable, and instead, a structure that is exposed to permanent crises and lack of sustainable growth is created. The aim of the current study is to look at the dynamics of integration processes through the lens of destabilising (crises) and modernising factors, which allow the system to return to the state of relative functional balance.

Key words: *European Union, Integration system, Adaptation, Modernisation, Crisis, Resilience, Complexity.*

Introduction

The increasing systemic complexity of the European Union (EU) stems from less transparent institutional solutions and the need to regulate an increasing number of issues arising from the development of integration processes. During its growth, the EU has had to take on more tasks and competences, while at the same time bringing more European countries into the community. This expansion necessitated a number of adjustments, which were materialised in the implementation of successive regulations, creation of new institutions and links between the subjects of integration. The system became increasingly complicated, which was also influenced by the growing tendency to postpone unresolved problems as "leftovers" for subsequent decision-makers. Determining the needs of the subjects of the integration process and defining good solutions became increasingly difficult and, as a result, decisions were often based on unclear premises.

Due to the adoption of an innovative approach to the analysis of the EU system and its adaptive change, the current study is conceptual. By translating the category of the Complex Adaptive

System (CAS) and the concept of resilience into the conceptual and conceptual reality of the European integration process (from a systemic perspective), the study aims to demonstrate the appropriateness of using these approaches in research on the complexity of the EU system, manifested, among others, in its multidimensionality, fragmentation and lack of a linear pattern of development.

The development dynamics of the European integration process are subject to specific rules, which can be identified on the basis of observations and interpretations of historical integration events. The EU system experienced many phenomena and events that had an impact on its balance or led to destabilisation. Two main factors responsible for influencing the implementation can be recognised: modernisation measures and crisis phenomena. The ways in which these are handled, especially particular crisis management methods, at the same time indicate the specific nature of adaptive mechanisms created in the EU political system. Modernisation processes and crisis events are not linear, but the way they manifested themselves in integration processes to date makes it possible to separate three important time periods, specifying different stages in their development dynamics (Wierzchowska, 2006):

1. 1957-1992. Modernisation in the face of crisis (low level of system complexity with increasing tendency)
2. 1993-2004. Modernisation despite the crisis (medium and high level of system complexity)
3. 2005 – : Modernisation crisis (high and very high level of system complexity)

Each of the stages above represents different economic and political conditions of the integration process, and at the same time, each of them is characterised by a different unpredictability of behaviours of integration subjects (Member States) and the influence of the environment (economic situation, political and humanitarian crises) that disrupt the achievement of the assumed integration goals. This then results in extraordinary and outside-the-box solutions, which further complicates the system. In fact, it is possible to argue the existence of a certain ladder of structural complexity at different stages of integration, which accumulates systemic complexity at the top.

Methodology and Hypothesis

Research on European integration and the phenomenon of the European Union is multidisciplinary and enables drawing upon the achievements of many research disciplines developed to date, including international relations, legal, economic, political or sociological sciences. However, these traditional areas no longer respond to all the needs of social life research, including those related to integration processes. Therefore, it is better to reach for new, sometimes surprisingly original domains, which offer different research tools than those used so far.

Following this line of thinking, the author focused on complexity science. As stated by de Mattos, Miller and Park (2012, p. 1554), there is a growing interest in the complexity science, primarily due to dramatic changes in organisations and governments influenced by globalisation, intense local and global competition, reinterpretation of processes, workforce diversity and continuous innovation. In particular, the relationship between the forces exerted by globalisation processes on the one hand and the barriers hindering the unification of economies on the other, has a strong influence on the increase in the complexity of the contemporary economic and political reality (Vokina et al., 2016, p. 356).

John Turner and Rose Baker (2019) stress that complexity science broadens the reductionist framework of other research perspectives, allowing us to understand not only the parts making up the whole, but also to explain how each part interacts with all the other parts, resulting in a new entity. Authors, following the ideas of Gil Westhorp (2012), also add that individual cause studies in complex systems are pointless, as a comprehensive approach is required to consider the unpredictability of complex systems. Especially in the last two decades, the use of complex systems-based thinking in social science has increased. In contrast to earlier attempts to import these methods and concepts, traditionally used in natural sciences, the social sphere has become more sensitive to the implementation of this approach, especially from the point of view of such attributes as language, organisation, reflexivity and power (Sawyer, 2005).

Complexity science as such has been extended to research on systems which, in line with the tendency to complicate social reality, require a new interpretative perspective. This results in approaches such as General Theory System (GTS) (Caws, 2015; von Bertalanffy, 1972) and Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS).

General Theory System considers the perspective of open systems, but also presents from the view of system boundaries and stable patterns of relations, which may prove to be incompatible with the analysis of a dynamic and unpredictable integration system. It is also criticised for the lack of adequate reference to systemic complexity and non-linear development, as well as a too mechanistic approach to human systems (Yawson, 2013; Yourks, et al., 2012, cited in Turner et al., p. 4).

Using the perspective of complex adaptive systems in the area of European integration research seems to be a more promising direction of analysis. Complex adaptive systems perspective uncovers many specific features of an integration system, without reducing it to a one-dimensional analytical plane, emphasising simple and structured solutions.
Among the numerous definitions of a complex adaptive system, there are those which stress the plurality of its elements interacting in a complex, heterogeneous way (Albert et al., 2015, p. 2013), or the aggregation of individuals cooperating with each other and co-creating

complex, adaptive patterns of behaviour (Boal et al., 2007, p. 413). John Turner and Rose Baker (2019, pp. 5-8), have collated different interpretations of the term, pointing to at least 30 definitions according to different authors and distinguishing their characteristics. The researchers themselves considered the following as fundamental properties and principles of functioning of a complex adaptive system (see Table 1).

Table 1: Characteristics of Complex Adaptive System; after: (Turner et al., 2019, p. 6-8; partly cited in: Lindberg et al., 2013)

relationship path
non-linearity
the emergence of interactions leading to changes that alter the organisation
non-reducibility
operating between chaos and order
self-organisation
adaptation
history of the system

Following J. Holland (1992, p. 19), we can complete this set by adding evolution, aggregation of behaviour and anticipation. Listing the rules on which complex adaptive systems are based may serve to extend this list, but it will not change the fact that the EU system, based on a specific combination of 27 different state entities with different historical conditions and experiences in building democracy and similar but not identical economic potentials, can be considered a kind of testing grounds for complex systems. The attribution of individual characteristics will only indicate a broader descriptive approach to the issue, but will not significantly strengthen the importance of the assumption made.

In the section dealing with adaptive properties, the concept of resilience was used, which has its roots in the field of ecology and biology, but has already entered the social sciences. Initially understood as the ability of systems to return to equilibrium *ex ante*, it later began to be seen as a dynamic capacity of systems to absorb and easily adapt changes. The concept then spread to psychology, political economics, security science or international relations. In politics and international relations, resilience has been defined as a new form of governance that recognises the impossibility of foreseeing threats, moving away from a logic focused on known threats and prevention of post-Cold War reality. Applied to research on societies and organisations, it underlines the importance of internal capacity of dealing with crises[1]. If we narrow the application of political system concept analysis down even further, it can provide a platform

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[1] See: http://epd.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Resilience-Fact-Sheet.pdf

for explaining systemic dynamics in the process of achieving balance. In the latter sense, resilience appears to be a tool for analysing decentralized, complex and multidimensional structures that naturally face numerous tensions and are constantly being challenged to emerge from crises. By distinguishing properties such as flexibility, bottom-up approach, political sensitivity, a wide range of representational spectrums and a system of overlapping impacts, the resilience concept allows to explain heterogeneous systemic phenomena[2]. For A. Boin, L. Comfort and Ch. Demchak's (2010), the concept of resilience invokes the image of governments capable of responding to a crisis, as well as human resources that can make the most of available resources in difficult circumstances. The compilation of all these elements builds internal resilience and the ability to adapt to ever-changing circumstances of development, increasing the chances of such systems to survive (de Weijer, 2013; Joseph, 2013).

The proposed methodological assumptions, although they do not fit into the main analysis of the European Union system, may enrich the methodological resources used for this purpose.
The interpretation of EU structural and institutional solutions is based on the concept of multi-level governance (MLG), which is derived from research on political systems and allows for noticing the exceptional complexity of the integration system with its strong diversity and interdependence existing between its different levels (Tortola, 2017; Stephenson, 2013). However, there are many criticisms of this approach, due to the lack of comprehensive explanatory capacity (Conzelmann, et al., 2008); however, it is the MLG that enables us to see specific institutional solutions that contribute to shaping and strengthening the internal complexity of the system (permeation of supranational and intergovernmental institutional elements). (See Figure 1).

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[2] Ibidem.

Figure 1. Multi-level governance – European Studies Hub; hum.port.ac.uk
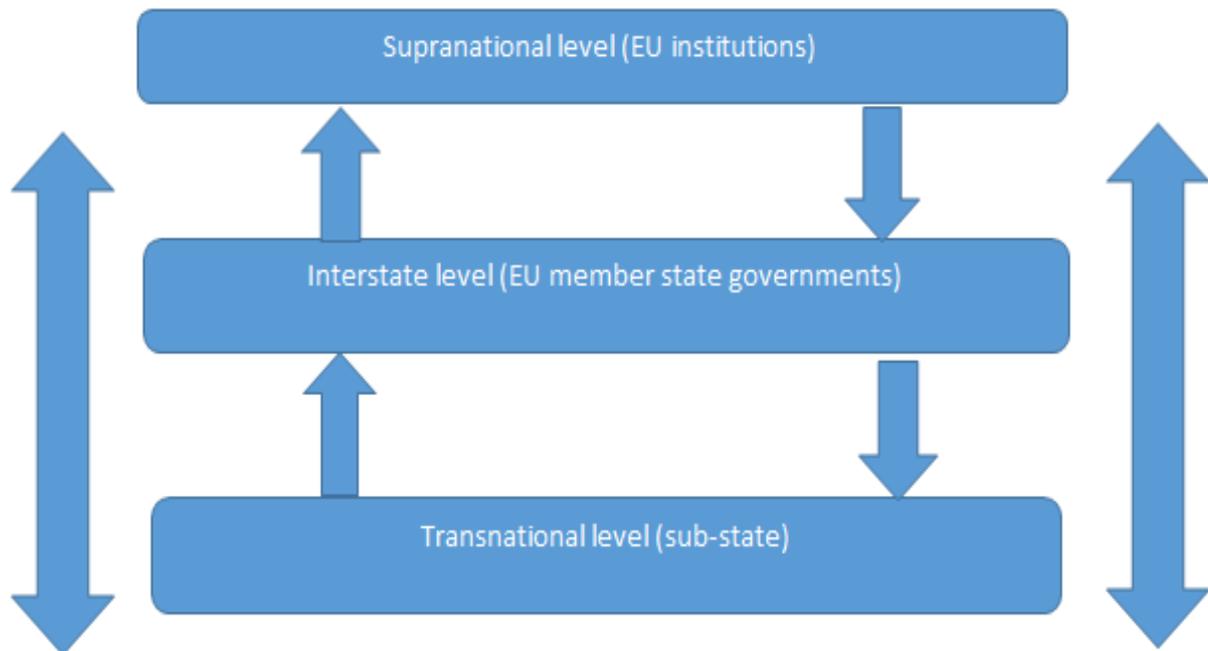
The main element of the multi-level governance approach is the perception of the integrative architecture as a multi-level structure: supranational, intergovernmental, national, subnational and the complex relationships between them. Gary Marks, Liesbet Hooghe and Kermit Black were among the first to propose this perspective for the EU system. According to this notion, integration is characterised by:

- The assumption that the state has no monopoly over policy-making at European level or the aggregation of national interests, and that decision-making powers are shared between national and non-state subjects. These are mainly supranational institutions - European Commission, European Court of Justice and European Parliament. They have an independent influence on policy-making which cannot be derived from their role as representatives of state authorities;
- Recognising that joint decision-making entails a significant loss of control for individual state enforcers. Decisions taken on a lowest common denominator basis are only available for part of the EU arrangements. In most cases, decisions concerning regulations enforced throughout the EU (e.g. harmonisation of regulations on product standards, working conditions, etc.) are a zero-sum game and always result in a profit or loss for the individual states.
- The fact that political arenas are interconnected, rather than interlinked. Although the state level remains important for the shaping of government preferences, the multilevel model rejects the view that sub-national subjects are involved in the former. Instead, sub-national subjects operate in national and supranational arenas, creating supranational associations

in the process. States no longer monopolise the links between national and European subjects, but they are one of many actors questioning decisions taken at different levels. The complex relations in domestic politics do not at national level, but also include the European level (Marks et al, 1996, p. 346).

The research hypothesis of the study is that the European Union is a complex system in which processes with unpredictable and non-linear developments occur. The adaptation mechanisms of the integration system are based on balancing the impacts of modernisation and crises. Their serious and prolonged disruption causes an impaired stabilisation capacity, which can lead to systemic crisis.

Premises and Manifestations of the European Union Political System's Complexity

The European Union is a complex integration project that has been developing since the end of the Second World War through intensive changes. During the various stages of its transformation, the European integration structure has sought the best and most effective ways of development, evolving towards an increasingly advanced form of cooperation. Numerous modifications and transformations were carried in the process, in all areas of integration, with particular emphasis on the political, institutional, legal and axiological spheres. The European political community is not a by-product of functional expectations and narrow economic interests. On the contrary, it is shaped by deep misunderstandings between political actors about the organisation of political life in Europe (Hooghe et al., 1998, p.26).

For a political scientist, European integration is a structure that emerged from processes which extended cooperation, but has crossed the boundaries of traditional regional cooperation. European integration is a specific case in the interpretation of political phenomena, especially the supranational political system. Simon Hix, one of the precursors of this approach, who compared the European Union to an international organisation or a classic federal system, rejected these possibilities, demonstrating their inconsistency with the solutions applied in the Union (Hix et al, 2011, p.12-13). At the same time, Hix confirms that the EU functions in a way similar to the traditional political system described by Gabriel Almond and David Easton (Almond, 1965; Easton, 1957). In fact, the EU is a *sui generis* political system, which does not restrict researchers in their comparisons with other political systems, including the state system (Jachtenfuchs, 1998, p. 42), and does not exempt them from researching the system's specific nature (Andersen, et al., 1993; Lebfried et al., 1995). It lacks first-class systemic features included in the concept of sovereignty, such as constitutional law, external and internal security instruments, redistribution model, and secondary elements appear instead of them, such as executive management, case-law of courts, financial decisions in the area where the integration system has autonomy (Szczerski, 2008, p. 86). The European system is not fully developed and we are operating within an "alternative contradictory construct" (Szczerski, 2011, p. 57). It is

based on the constant tension between the Community interest and particular national interests. These contradictory interests are then transferred to the individual system layouts, making it a complex contradiction. Dissonance and lack of harmony also occur on the power sharing level: the Council and the Commission regularly dispute the division of the executive power, the European Parliament clashes with the Commission and national Parliaments feel alienated from the Union and are critical of the role of the European Parliament in the decision-making process (Leonard, 2000, p. 42).

The institutional level, as one of many platforms for integrative cooperation, focuses on the difficulties and complexities of the whole process. The EU institutions create a unique system of connections between competences, people and functions. Their activity takes place in a networked environment, which allows institutions to exchange power and responsibilities in different areas of integration policy and at different stages of the EU decision-making process (Hix, 1998, p. 38-65). The institutional space created in this way creates testing grounds of different agents and structures cooperating with each other on different levels, while governmental structures still remain important. The unique network of institutional connections created in this way (and further constantly re-created) is exposed to constant disruptions, inconsistent stimuli directed from different parts of the system environment. The specific nature of the EU institutional space is the way in which the national environment participates, the variability of which significantly models the arena of institutional struggle both in the domain of intergovernmental and supranational activities. The result of these interdependent activities is an internal contradiction of the system. The mechanisms of interdependence between the different participants in the European system are complex. The plethora of governance levels indicates a diversity of decision-making centers which do not counterbalance each other in their respective competences. In practice, it is the member states who shape the structure, decide on the attribution of competences and the institutional architecture. As a result, they determine the survival of the entire community.

The EU is the embodiment of dynamic policy, as it is a project under construction. Significant transformations in composition and functions have never been linear. The unpredictable changes in the representation of national actors (each parliamentary and presidential election leads to changes in the representative teams of member states) have the potential to increase ideological (axiological) diversity. Changes also occur as a result of internal processes, and often through the creative interpretation of the limits of the Treaties by the Court of Justice. This allows the EU to be seen as a symbiotic policy body (Shuibhne, 2010) and at the same time indicates the non-linearity of changes in the integration process.

The complexity of the whole integration system also corresponds to other characteristics of the concept of a complex adaptive system. Fragmentation of the system is also evident (it consists of different policies, implemented on different legal bases, suggesting a lack of functional unity

in the system), as well as interactive interdependence (the whole decision-making process is based on cooperation between different state and non-state actors), the feedback rule (arrangements at European level are verified in the countries during EP elections), agents' cooperation (negotiations involving state and non-state actors), autonomy (Member States are autonomous for certain areas of integration where the EU has no competence) or self-organisation, based on the principle that none of the individual participants in the integration process has sole control over the process of change, which is subject to self-organising forces drawn both from within the system and from its environment. In practice, these are the results of the aspirations of the largest Member States, the need to consider regional coalitions, the impact of geopolitical conditions or unforeseen events that force modifications at a previously assumed pace and direction of the integration process. The whole system can also be destabilised by the decision of a single participant in the integration process, as demonstrated by Brexit. The decision of the British people to leave the EU requires an in-depth analysis, although arguments related to the opportunistic approach to integration processes are very often put forward (Dallago & Rosefield, 2019, p. 101).

The Dynamics of Change in the EU – Between Crisis and Modernisation

The EU's complex institutional and legal system is subject to particular dynamics of change. It is determined by two factors, which are at the same time two states in which the integration process may occur. These are modernisation and crisis. They determine the nature of the changes taking place, their pace and scope. The way they interact has led to an increasing internal complexity of the mechanisms and systemic solutions of European integration. As a result of these changes, the designed and implemented directions of the integration process were also modified, which caused the movement of system elements on a supranational scale, which is referred to as intergovernmentalism.

Modernisation in a European Environment

Modernisation in the integrative process is seen primarily in teleological terms, through the lens of its main assumptions. In this sense, it can be said that modernisation is a situation in which the existing system is deconstructed in order to replace it with a system with different characteristics (Nowak-Far, 2011, p. 64). The establishment of the European Communities and earlier efforts to deepen cooperation between European countries after World War II initiated a significant deconstruction of the existing system of cooperation between nation states in Europe. Integration as a process in itself has the characteristics of modernisation, as it significantly remodels the relations between the various national systems and changes the characteristics of cooperation in an international environment. The process of European integration has been programmed to help European countries achieve better economic performances, multiplying the common good, which can only be realised in conditions of peace

and prosperity. Therefore, it can be considered that the aims of the integration process have an integrated, coded modernisation change as a direction of activities undertaken to implement treaties. The model of development of economic integration from the customs union, through the common market union, economic and monetary union to the not yet achieved full economic union, shows best the modernisation assumptions of the whole process. On this basis, legislative decisions are made and projects implemented, which materialise the general goals of modernisation.

In the face of integration, modernisation is implemented through a number of modifications which take on a progressive dimension and are a practical reference to the objectives contained in the documents that constitute the European Union. It is important to stress that in integration, modernisation reflects the close and complex relations between the worlds of politics and economics, which certainly complicates the achievement of the desired effects. The problem of the relationship between politics and economics is also an important aspect in contemporary research on the institutionalisation of change (Frey & Steiner, 2012, p. 11).

Modernisation impacts the European integrative process in a recurring cycle of events: differentiation – adaptation – integration. This is a continuous process of differentiation, which leads to adaptation and then integration of new solutions. It materialises in the form of transformations leading towards democratic solutions, economic achievements or the implementation of new technological solutions (although there is no shortage of more distant or critical positions on such an understanding of the consequences of modernisation events (Sztompka, 1975; Fukuyama, 1989 & 1998; Jabłoński, 2002). In the face of the current complex processes with different connotations, modernisation is a prudent and thoughtful pursuit of what gives a chance for survival or further development.

Differentiation was the starting point of integrative efforts in the 1950s, when the first attempts to build integrative structures were made. The pursuit of equal opportunities for the development of European countries was an important motive in pro-integration activities, which does not, however, contradict the assumption that at the same time the values of cultural diversity of member states were respected. This principle is expressed in the slogan: unity in diversity. It can be considered a reflection of a philosophy of the integration process. The pursuit of adaptation, which is a consequence of a state of differentiation, means making efforts and actions to implement common solutions and maintain balance and adapt to the complexities of integration. Integration is the achievement of a state assumed at the starting point and can be read as an effect of adaptation. Integration means successfully incorporating the context of diversity into the process of adaptation and achieving a balance between the pursuit of diversity and unity.

The European political space is directed towards modernisation, but its immanent qualities make it a process that is difficult to predict. To a large extent, this is determined by specific institutional solutions, including the problem of permeation of areas of operation in supranational and intergovernmental institutional solutions (Rosamond, 2000, p. 119). In addition to the structural factor, aspects of diverse aspirations and opportunities for influence and legitimacy are important, which affect the achievement of modernisation objectives in the EU (Wierzchowska 2011, p. 210-212).

The implementation of the aims of modernisation in integration process depends on many determinants which create the modernisation environment in the European integration process. These include: axiological assumptions, features of the system, its readiness to absorb change and the influence of external factors. The combination of these circumstances determines the actual course of the modernisation process.

Crisis in the European Integration Process

Crisis is a disruption of the integration process, which is subject to constant loss and regaining balance, which triggers adaptive (creative and anticipatory) processes.

The tendency to create crises in the process of European integration results from the processes of differentiation taking place and the frequent adoption of half-way solutions that satisfy only some of the participants in the system. It can be assumed that the mechanism of complexity in the EU system is the foundation for explaining crisis phenomena in the EU. Its elements include the need for legal systems to adapt to the needs of functioning within the system of European law, the increase in the complexity of national law that arises as a result of these processes, the controversies arising from many political decisions that follow and/or condition these modifications, the intensification of political discussions in the EU and, as a result, the increase in controversies and disputes that often lead to new legal solutions and subsequent modifications within the legal systems of member states. They form a series of consecutive phenomena: (see Figure 2)

Figure 2. Complexity Emergence Mechanism in the EU System. Own Elaboration Based on Figure 14.1, The 'Vicious Circle' of the Institutional Dynamics in the EU; (Wessels, et al., 1996, p. 363).
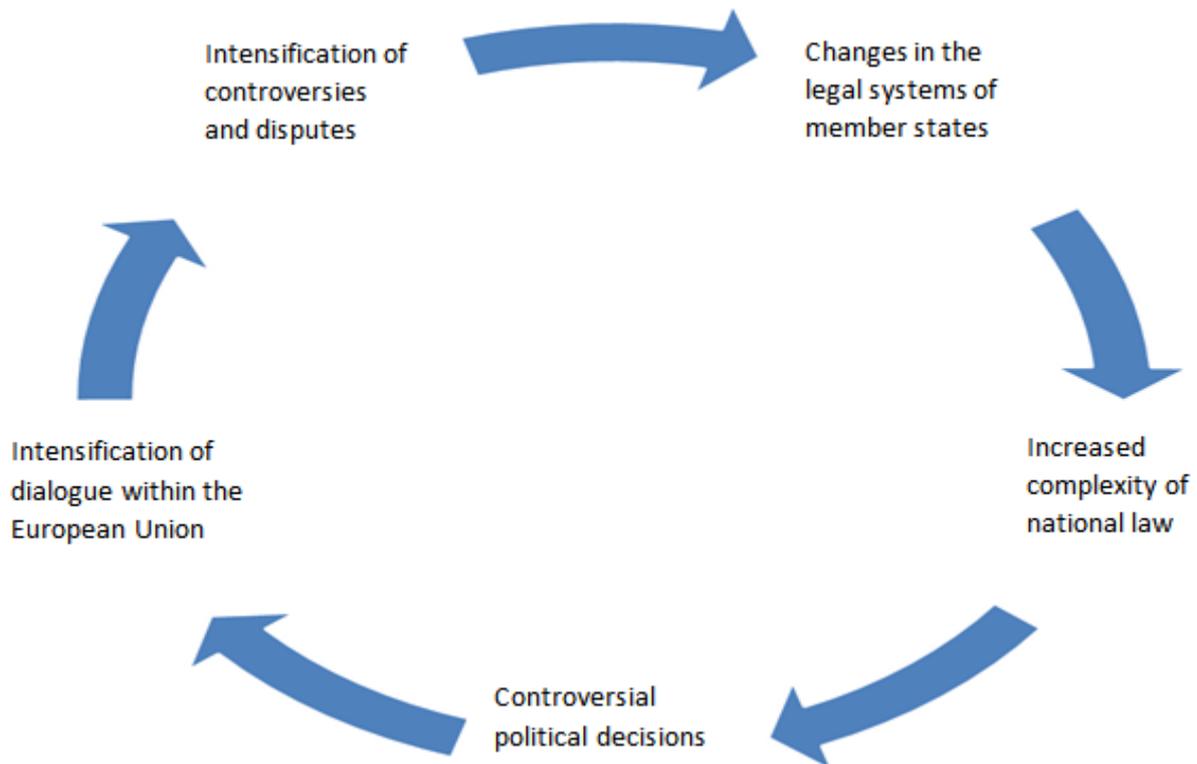
A closed circuit is created. In order to participate in the EU decision-making process, national institutions must improve their efficiency and adapt to the specific requirements of the system. The increasing participation of national actors in the community's institutional system increases the complexity of this system. This leads to intensification of debates during joint meetings, which undoubtedly increases conflicts and controversies. There is therefore a need to take steps that will lead to more efficient decision making, which in turn increases the importance of the EU sphere itself and attracts new actors to take part in decision making. This brings us back to the starting point, which is the participation of national institutions in the European system. For the latter, national institutions will always remain ambivalent in the sense that:

"Further convergence of national systems will not be fully achieved because national parliaments – and national institutions in general - are not participating in the system with the prospect of 'dilution' in an increasingly integrated institutional 'hotch-potch.' They will strive to maintain their independence and participate in the system as long as it is useful for them to complete their tasks and as long as it is necessary for their survival" (Wessels et al., 1996, p. 365).

These complex processes within the EU structure give the EU a multi-faceted character and at the same time expose it to an easy loss of stability, which depends on the cooperation of many different subjects.

Crises are unintentional, disruptive developmental incidents that result from varied conditions. They appear naturally, as a result of the clash of different visions of development, which leads to conflicts, and these can turn into a crisis. This seemingly simple chain of events leading to a crisis is becoming more complex in the case of the EU, which generates the complexity with which member states, before participating in the integration process, rarely had a chance to come into contact. The consequences of a crisis in a multi-level and not entirely responsive structure such as the EU are even more complex.

Numerous crises and conflicts, the lack of a unified direction in the development of integration often force the participants of the system to introduce *ad hoc* changes, which are rather "fire extinguishing" than planned and long-term modifications. As J. Staniszkis points out, referring to the crisis situation in the EU after 2008, European integration was dictated by EU structure from the very beginning, which aimed at the gradual elimination of the actors of the integration, that is, at the abolition of the leading role of the state. Subsequent changes in the form of integration, which are currently not possible, have been codified (treaty amendments). The crisis has undermined this form of integration (a supranational one) and actors (member states) have again come to the fore (Staniszkis, 2012, p. 36-44).

The EU crisis became particularly serious after 2008 (the beginning of the eurozone crisis), although according to some researchers, the year 2004 should be treated as the starting point (Kraus, 2008, p. 7). From the difficult situation arising from the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty, through the problematic discussions surrounding the Lisbon Treaty, to the financial crisis and the resulting crises of values, legitimacy, institution, leadership, vision of integration, the EU was in a state of perpetual crisis. The phenomenon of the crisis spread incidents can be linked to the multi-level nature of the EU system. The crisis is moving from one integration level to another, which is caused by the strong interdependence between the different levels of cooperation and the network of the integrative system.

Modernisation and crisis are the effects of the integration system, and at the same time they are a condition for its development. These two coexist, leading to adaptive measures in the system. Modernisation efforts lead to improved and new ways of functioning of the EU, while crises are the result of poorly calculated rationale or earlier inefficient implementations. Together they shape the dynamics of the integration process and determine the adaptive potential of the whole system.

Adaptive Processes in the Complex Systemic Reality of the European Union

Considering that the EU political system is a unique, *sui generis* arrangement of relations and connections between various entities which exist and operate functionally at different levels of cooperation in the process of European integration, it should be assumed that its adaptation mechanisms are also of a specific nature. As a complex and tense and conflict-prone integrative structure which, through its characteristics, can encourage new solutions by going beyond national egoisms, the EU contributes to the generation of very complex problems. Comparing this with state systems, it can be observed that the difference lies primarily in the factor of stability. Internal social environments of state systems are capable of greater homogeneity than the 27 integrated European social communities (Pietraś, 1990, p. 134).

If one assumes that adaptation is the ability to maintain one's internal environment in a changing environment with the reservation that the time to adapt the system cannot be longer than the pace of changes occurring in the environment (Wyciślak, 2013, p. 46), one can see the scale of the issues that the integration system is facing in this respect.

The integration system is based on elements representing contradictory natures and trends, which is due to its complex nature. Therefore, achieving continuous compliance in cooperation, as well as long-term resilience, requires the skillful application of solutions that would reconcile these antagonisms, while at the same time benefiting from their pros and development potential. See Figure 3.

Figure 3. Conditions for Emergence of Adaptation Mechanisms in the EU System; Own Elaboration
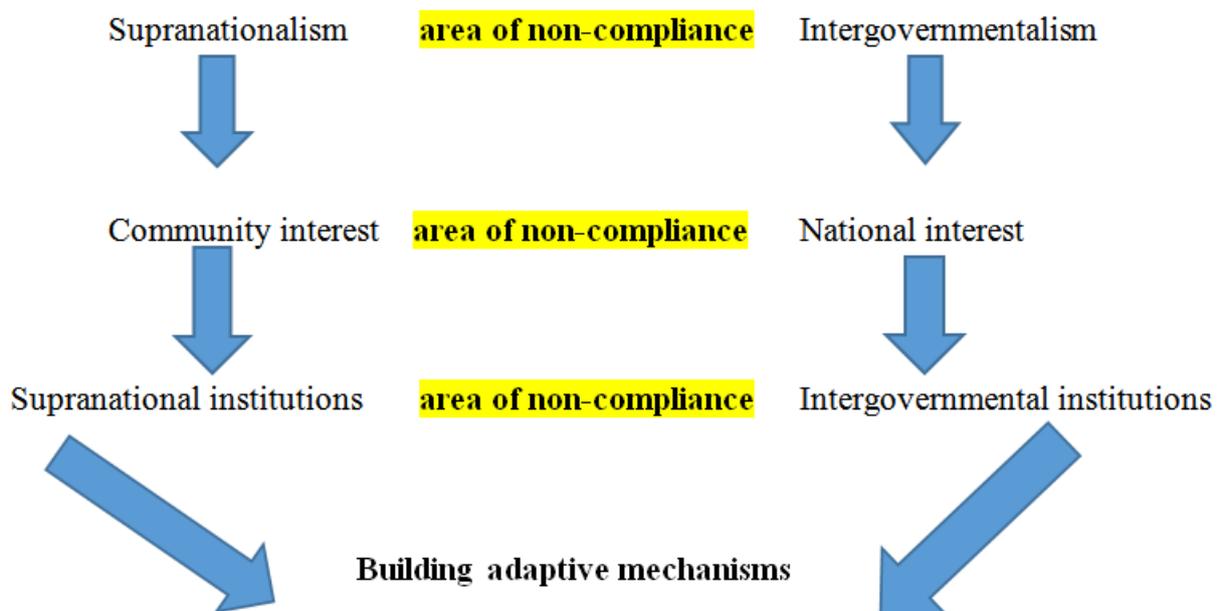
Applying the Concept of Resilience in Explaining the EU's Adaptive Potential

For research on supranational integration space, resilience is a way of explaining the adaptive properties of the EU political system, which are characterised above all by a specific combination of purposeful and predictable action with unpredictable turns which correct the original assumptions. It is thus an interpretation of the mechanism of maintaining or losing systemic equilibrium (Wierzchowska, 2017, p. 19).

If we assume that the concept of resilience goes beyond the technical approach to development emphasising narrowly conceived security issues, then we can consider that resilience also applies to the political system, as far as the motives and behavior of the actors in that system are concerned[3]. The interpretation of the EU in terms of the political system is, to a large extent, a perspective of the participants in the integration process, who build its institutions and make laws, enter into mutual relations and create policies. Resilience can therefore be a tool used to effectively discover the nature of adaptation mechanisms in the EU system, which is in permanent suspension, a state of internal struggle. The question is, what affects the fact that this system maintains its functionality in the long term (regardless of the assessment of the current situation)? Referring to the argumentation based on modernisation and crisis impacts and their variable intensity, it should be assumed that at different stages of EU development there is a different need and necessity to establish compromises leading to increased functional efficiency of the system (fulfilling integration goals) or to the increase of resilience characteristics (rebuilding functional mechanisms in the post-crisis reality) (see Table 2).

Table 2: The Way Resilience is Linked to the Factors of Crisis and Modernisation. Own Elaboration

Type of relation	Effects of resilience
Balanced relationship	natural co-occurrence of pro-development (modernisation) and crisis-generating elements; resilience is, above all, a flexible way of reconciling these two trends
Disturbed relationship	modernisation and crisis-generating elements, as a result of deepening contradictions begin to function in opposition, which hinders the existence of the system; in this case, resilience is the ability to regenerate forces that are under strain as a result of growing tensions and differences.

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3 See: http://epd.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Resilience-Fact-Sheet.pdf

Seriously disturbed relationship (loss of equilibrium by the system):	modernisation is entering a stage of crisis in which no clear and realistic modernisation activities that can be interpreted as success of the integration process can be observed. Instead, an accumulation of crisis phenomena occurs, which reinforce and trigger one another. The European Union is entering a state of systemic crisis. Resilience begins to manifest its function, which is strongly corrective, and allows for "bouncing back."

In order to develop resilience mechanisms, adequate legal and institutional instruments are used, which are later introduced into the system (see Table 3).

Table 3: Institutional-legal Resilience Mechanism; Own Elaboration

Institutional/legal instrument
Enhanced cooperation: art. 20 TEU, art. 326-334 TFEU - allows for the establishment of closer cooperation between countries that wish to implement certain commitments more rapidly, but only within the framework of the Union's non-exclusive competences;
Flexibility clause: art. 352 TFEU - possibility to take decisions within the Union without an explicit legal basis (when necessary to achieve EU objectives);
Simplified procedures for the revision of Treaties: allow the long procedure for amending the Treaties to be "bypassed" via the so-called "passerelle clause;"
The preliminary procedure and the case law of the CJ: by ruling within this procedure, the EU judiciary creates precedents to which it then refers to in other cases. This makes the functioning of the case law system more flexible;
Opt-outs: a number of exemptions applied to certain countries, allowing them not to participate in certain arrangements which other countries were (are) obliged to do; these are elements of a wider phenomenon of differentiated integration;
Informal decision-making rules: trilogues – organisation of an informal trialogue between representatives of Parliament, the Council and the Commission at stage I and II of the ordinary legislative procedure;

> **Transitional periods for the implementation of certain requirements/derogations from certain requirements:** allow for delaying, sometimes postponing indefinitely, the fulfillment of Treaty objectives.

All the legal and institutional instruments presented, if used, contribute to a greater flexibility in the integration process, allowing its participants to respond adequately to situations requiring individual decisions. This is certainly a sign of adaptation to circumstances where a complex system, not equipped with adequate resilience-building capabilities, could remain helpless.

However, resilience is not programmed to be a barrier against all tensions and difficulties arising in novel circumstances and changing intensity. It is, one might say, two-faced - it manifests itself in the fact that it saves the process of integration from the troubles it creates. Increasing flexibility leads to greater diversity. In this way a cycle of interactions is created. Starting from the original assumptions of the system, it moves on to the stages in which its development takes place through constant differentiation (deepening, widening) and the need to correct unforeseen situations which are the result of these processes. Mechanisms and solutions that become systemic elements to help deal with crisis situations are being developed. The system learns to function in such conditions, but at the same time begins to assimilate them as inherent and natural. It becomes resilient, but also more susceptible to further tensions. The paradox, then, is that resilience leads to greater sensitivity, which in turn builds further resilience mechanisms (Wierzchowska, 2017, p. 35).

In this context, solutions based on differentiated integration mechanisms have gained particular adaptive importance. Multi-speed Europe integration, variable geometry or strengthened cooperation seem to be the only way to reach an agreement between many partners, especially when not all are able to cope with the equally high pace of integration processes (Gotz 2013, point 10). Deepening cooperation within the framework of implemented policies or the admission of new countries has always been a challenge for the pace of implemented integration projects. At the end of the 80s and the beginning of the 90s, however, two particular factors coincided in Europe, which led to an increase in the use of the tools of differentiated integration: intensive efforts to build the common market, the collapse of the Eastern block and the emergence of strong aspirations towards building a new community of democratising countries (Riedel, 2018, p. 214). The consequences of this process are related to the widening of the gap that results from letting some countries fulfill their obligations with delays (e.g. situations such as the exemption of the United Kingdom from the obligation to use the euro or to belong to the Schengen area, the exemption for Denmark in its participation in defense policy, or the so-called transitional periods applied to the newly acceding countries since 2004). This kind of adaptive behavior has both adjusting and potentially disintegrating consequences.

Conclusions

Has the history of the integration process, based on cooperation between member states, created well-functioning mechanisms to safeguard the system against loss of equilibrium? Does the complexity, which is an inherent and indisputable feature of the integration process, condemn the EU system to functioning in a constantly crisis-like reality, or is it perhaps a special chance to protect it from complete loss of adaptability?

From the very beginning, the process of building strong ties in Europe was burdened with crises and the emergence of many dysfunctional solutions. As integration processes deepened and contradictions grew, the rules of integration also became more complicated. The deepening of supranational mechanisms gradually modified the philosophy of the European Union. Intergovernmental systemic solutions gave way to supranational arrangements.

However, the emerging system should not be seen only through the prism of conflict. Rather, we should talk about tension, which permeates the system and provokes a constant redefinition of historically established meanings of such notions as national sovereignty or raison d'etat. Intergovernmentalism and supranationalism are not conflicting states in the integration process. They are complementary rather than contradictory in current EU activities. This relationship is not static and the emerging community-based nature of the system goes beyond the traditional understanding of community.

It also affects the system's ability to adapt. Skillful continuum of supranationalism and intergovernmentalism makes it possible to extract exceptional predispositions to stabilize the system consisting in a wide range of flexible instruments that can be used.

It is important not to fall into the trap of building a vision of integration in which vulnerability to conflict within the EU is explained in a simple way, as a response of divided member states no longer able to support common views in supranational governance mechanisms (Rosefielde, 2019, p. 143). In fact, complexity permeates all the planes on which the integration process is based and is constantly being redefined under the influence of changes in the EU system and its environment.

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