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INTRODUCTION

Responding to crises: Europe and Southeast Asia

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Introduction

We live in an age of seemingly never-ending crisis. Financial markets are gripped by one convulsion after another, welfare systems are buckling under the strain of potentially unrealisable expectations, violent transnational non-state groups challenge state authorities and populist politicians and authoritarian leaders employing an old-fashioned nationalist rhetoric are on the rise across the world. The old order is clearly crumbling, but it is far from certain what sort of new one is waiting to be born. It is even less certain what role—if any—regional organisations and identities will play in it.

This is more surprising than it may seem. For all their current problems, regional organisations and responses used to be seen as one of the best potential means to address such crises (Mattli 1999). Whether scholars and policymakers thought this might be achieved through enlightened, voluntary cooperation or under hegemonic leadership, both liberals (e.g. Acharya 2007) and realists (e.g. Kupchan 1998) saw regional mechanisms as important features of the contemporary international order. Even now, when pivotal regional organisations such as the European Union (EU) are themselves in a state of crisis, it is not hard to see why this was the case: cooperating with other states in a regional context pools power resources, spreads the burden of crisis response and diffuses the vulnerability of individual states, helping to overcome coordination problems between states, and potentially providing common frameworks for policy and identity to transform or even transcend deep-seated conflicts.

Yet, regionalism itself is undergoing something of a crisis. The turmoil of the financial markets has undermined the economic performance of the European Union (EU) and has challenged its role as a model of regional integration

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(Beeson and Stone 2013). The welfare provisions of its member states have been dramatically undermined. Both the EU, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the wider neighbourhoods of which they are a part have faced immense difficulties in formulating coherent foreign policy responses to the challenge of international terrorism and the rise of newly resurgent authoritarian states such as Russia and China. Instead of providing common responses to such challenges, regional integration itself has become increasingly difficult and its legitimacy questioned. Its promise of identity reconstruction and conflict transformation remains no longer unchallenged (Diez et al. 2008).

How have ASEAN and the EU responded to these crises? How can we make sense of the crisis of regionalism in a comparative perspective? How can different analytical frameworks help us to understand regions at the present historical juncture? What, indeed, if anything, can regions learn from each other's responses to these internal and external challenges?

In this special issue, we explore these questions through a collection of papers that share a focus on the ways in which the two regions have tackled or perhaps even promoted different crises and their manifestations. In doing so, we follow a strategy of double comparison. On the one hand, we are interested in the extent to which ASEAN and the EU have differed in their experience of, and response to, crises. On the other hand, we want to bring together the different perspectives that various theoretical approaches provide when trying to make sense of regionalism and crisis. This involves a focus not only on one form of crisis, be it economic or political in the narrow sense, but also on the way that different crises may interact and create entirely new, unexpected trajectories as a consequence.

Our goal therefore is to start a conversation across three divides that we see as prevalent in the existing literature. Firstly, there is a divide between regions. Much has been written about either ASEAN or the EU and their respective crisis responses, yet few analyses have attempted to think about the crisis of regionalism across geographies. Second is a divide between policy fields. Most of the studies of crises focus either on economic or on political issues. Yet, because the crises in these different arenas may be interlinked, we need to broaden our gaze to a variety of crises and cross (intra-)disciplinary boundaries in doing so. Third is a divide between theoretical approaches. We strongly believe in theoretical and methodological pluralism, and would like to foster dialogues between different theoretical traditions that so far have mostly engaged their own followers.

Of course, the individual contributions to this special issue cannot bridge all of these divides in and of themselves. Instead, they remain rooted in their own regions, policy domains and theoretical contexts. Yet, by bringing these pieces together in this special issue, we nonetheless hope to take an albeit small step towards a reintegration of the field of regionalism studies and to provide insights to policymakers about the advantages and disadvantages of different responses to crises.

Before we move on to explore in more detail the historical context in which the present crises has unfolded and the responses emanating from our regions, let us clarify our understanding of 'regionalism' and 'crisis'. In terms of regionalism, we want to emphasise a broad understanding that does not see one particular form of regionalism as the model that others have to follow. Instead, we allow for a variety of cooperative and integrative schemes that bring neighbouring states and their people closer to each

other in an organisational framework. We think that it is a matter of empirical analysis whether a more supranational, integrative 'EU way' or the more intergovernmental, cooperative 'ASEAN way' is preferable, and in fact this may vary between policy fields (Söderbaum 2003). Indeed, different regional organisations ought to learn from each other and not set their own experience as the gold standard of regionalism (Diez and Tocci 2017).

Defining and contextualising crises

Although the very idea of 'crisis' would seem to have something urgent, decisive and dramatic about it, we also need to recognise that crises may be enduring and long-lasting, even if their resolution or impact may be comparatively rapid. One of the foundational works of modern international relations (IR) theory, after all, is E.H. Carr's (1964 [1939]) *Twenty Years' Crisis* which, as the title suggests, saw crises as anything but short term in their evolution, even if some of their symptoms were brutally dramatic and immediate.

Medical metaphors are commonplace when thinking about crises, and their appeal is not difficult to understand. The sense that things are coming to a head, that a fever may be breaking or that the patient may actually succumb to a particular complaint, seems to capture something important about the extremity and urgency of a crisis situation. In the arena of conventional great power politics and matters of war and peace, the idea that crises of one sort or another might play a decisive—even a therapeutic—role is commonplace (Schweller 2014: 139). The Cuban Missile Crisis is perhaps the most obvious and aptly named example of this possibility, perhaps. The stakes could not have been higher and the consequences could have been truly earth shattering.

And yet even strategic tensions rarely reach such epochal proportions, or they tend not to these days, at least. For the—rather comforting, empirically robust—reality is that inter-state wars of the sort that distinguished much of the period since the nation state was actually established in Europe 400 years or so ago have actually become very rare (Pinker 2012). To be sure, there is plenty of chaos, conflict and even crises around the world, but they are invariably *within* national borders and localised, not threats to the international system as a whole. It is only when the extant system seems to be either incapable of containing and managing what Rosenau (1990) described as 'turbulence', or when disruptive forces become so great that they threaten to overturn or transform the system itself, that a real crisis seems apparent. This was clearly the case during the Cuban Missile Crisis and during the 1930s and 1940s when the prospect of international totalitarianism was a very real prospect. The Great Depression and its links to the rise of fascism is also a reminder of the potentially interlinked nature of crises in economic and political arenas.

Such moments are clearly 'critical junctures' in which nature and continuity of a specific international system and its institutionalised component parts may be called into question and transformed in unexpected ways (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007). Although contemporary IR theorists are understandably preoccupied with the contemporary system of sovereign states, it is important to remember that this is the historical exception rather than the rule, and that other forms of international order are possible (Buzan and Little 2000). Constructivists have usefully pointed out that the beliefs or ideas that people have about the desirability of one system or another may play a

pivotal role in determining precisely which system they create and the way that it operates (Reus-Smit 1999). To understand the significance of this and of the complex, potentially inter-connected nature of crises in ostensibly different issue areas, it is useful to have a brief historical digression to explain the nature of the contemporary international system and the role of regions within it.

For our purposes, therefore, a crisis may be defined as *events that have the potential to change the existing international and/or domestic economic, political or strategic status quo in systematically consequential ways*. But before we explore what form contemporary crises are taking in Europe and Asia, it is important to sketch the distinct contexts from which both regions emerged.

Regions and hegemons in historical context

For anyone interested in trying to make sense of the crises that are currently afflicting Europe and Southeast Asia, it is important to bear in mind the historical context in which these two regionalisation projects have emerged—and from which present circumstances differ. One core aspect of this context in the European case is the experience of two world wars, which profoundly changed the value attached to the power politics of nation states, and provided the spark for the formulation of a variety of regional integration plans for a post-war order (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2006: 17–39). These set the standard for regional integration schemes, which became increasingly fashionable in epistemic communities as a means of creating international order in the 1960s, including in ASEAN's case, even though the actual integration projects often differed fundamentally from the European case.

The regional integration projects of Europe and Southeast Asia thus differ in their historical roots, one being the consequence of war, the other of fashions of international order—and both of these factors are missing in today's world. Most Europeans now have been born after the Second World War, and memory of the war as an 'other' against which European identity may be constructed (Wæver 1998) is waning. And instead of enthusiasm for technocratic regional regimes, there is increasing scepticism towards the relinquishing of sovereignty in the name of some functionalist output.

A second decisive historical factor is the nature and impact of 'American hegemony' (see Beeson 2006). First, American hegemony was and—to an intensely debated extent—still is the definitive influence on the international order since the Second World War. Both the EU and ASEAN emerged in the form they did in large part as a direct consequence of the international order that the USA was instrumental in creating, yet this order has been under challenge for some time (Layne 2012; Pape 2009). Second, the impact of American hegemony was very different in Europe and East Asia and this has had long-term 'path-dependent' consequences that continue to shape and delimit political and institutional possibilities at the regional level to this day (Beeson 2005; Hemmer and Katzenstein 2002).

In Europe, American influence was influential, perhaps decisively so, in encouraging the war-ravaged states Western Europe to reunite in opposition to what then seemed the very real and credible threat posed by the Soviet Union. This impulse was manifest in the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and eventually the EU itself, which emerged from within the overarching geopolitical context of the Cold War and self-conscious process of institution-building that was undertaken under

American leadership. Significantly, the so-called Bretton Woods institutions, which also emerged at this time—the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and what would become the World Trade Organisation—are also suffering from major credibility problems, culminating in doubts about their durability and efficacy.

Things were very different in East Asia. Geopolitical fault lines ran directly through the region and effectively divided it until the Cold War ended. Significantly, American power was instrumental in entrenching these divisions through a system of bilateral 'hub-and-spoke' alliance relationships with the likes of Japan, South Korea, Australia and the Philippines. As Victor Cha (2016: 4) points out, this meant that the USA 'exercised near-total control over the foreign and domestic affairs of its allies, and it created an asymmetry of power that rendered inconceivable counterbalancing by these smaller countries, on their own or in concert with others.' In East and Southeast Asia, therefore, region-wide cooperation of a European variety was simply not possible. Even the more geographically limited institutional innovation that eventually occurred in Southeast Asia was, despite some notably lofty rhetoric, much less ambitious in political, economic and strategic reality.

The kind of institutions, rationales and capacities that emerged in Western Europe and Southeast Asia were noticeably different as a consequence of this historical legacy, too. ASEAN's original member states—Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines—and Thailand—were either newly independent or, in Thailand's case, still preoccupied with regional security. Protecting rather than pooling newly-achieved sovereignty was the overwhelming priority (Beeson 2003: 364–5). It still is. Indeed, one of the most fundamental differences between the EU and ASEAN is the respective attitudes towards national autonomy. The sort of sovereignty pooling and highly institutionalised patterns of cooperation that have—until recently, at least—characterised European attitudes are an anathema to their Asian counterparts.

Indeed, what is arguably ASEAN's most distinctive contribution to international diplomacy—the so-called ASEAN Way—is *designed* to ensure that no member feels compelled to do anything they do not feel comfortable with. The ASEAN Way is consequently predicated on the politics of the lowest common denominator, with members relying on voluntarism, informality and consensus to agree on policy (Acharya 2001). ASEAN's tiny secretariat has neither the capacity nor the authority to actually implement policies members might find unpalatable. There is simply no parallel in Asia to the EU's formidable, institutionalised capacity for policy development, implementation and—where necessary—enforcement, despite some claims about the supposed influence of the European model (Jetschke and Murray 2012).

Such differences have been reflected in the development of both regions, too. While both the EU and ASEAN have had expansionary phases, in ASEAN's case, the emphasis has been very much on 'widening' rather than 'deepening'. The incorporation of additional members with wildly different forms of political organisation and levels of economic development has proved relatively unproblematic as a consequence. The bar for membership of ASEAN was set remarkably low and there is no doubt that this has made the organisation less effective. By contrast, the EU's historical ability to achieve some of its more ambitious reforms is at least partly attributable to the different degrees of institutional capacity. Recently, however, political ambivalence about the goals the EU was collectively supposed to achieve has undermined this comparative advantage.

The management and impact of crises

Expectations matter. The fact that the EU was seen—not least by policymakers in Brussels—as the benchmark for successful regional integration and development meant that expectations about its ability to manage problems was high. Indeed, an academic cottage industry grew up around the idea that 'normative power Europe' embodied principles and practices that other nations would be wise to replicate (Manners 2002; Whitman 2011). There was, in short, a degree of self-satisfaction and complacency about the achievements, status and future trajectory of the EU that has made its recent problems all the more acute. Nor have such problems been confined to the technicalities of managing Greece's debt problems or the extent of monetary stimulus to be employed by the ECB, for example. On the contrary, both the competence of the EU's technocrats and rationale for their policy initiatives have been subjected to a withering series of critiques (Lapavitsas et al. 2012).

At one level, this debate has occurred among the increasingly despised 'elites' that are seen as the principal architects and beneficiaries of processes associated with 'globalisation' (Wolf 2016). This is not an exclusively European phenomenon, of course, but Brussels has become synonymous, although not always deservedly, with being out of touch, incompetent, over-privileged insiders in precisely the same way that those 'inside the Beltway' have in the USA. The political consequences have been rather similar, too. Britain's decision to leave the EU may have had many distinctively British causes, but it was clearly driven by the same sort of nationalist impulses that underpinned the election of Donald Trump: political dynamics that are entirely incompatible with an institution like the EU.

Alienation, disaffection and a rising tide of reactionary ethno-nationalism represent an existential threat to the EU in a way that has no parallel in ASEAN. While there is also a growing band of nationalist and authoritarian leaders in Southeast Asia, too, this is likely to have much less impact on the region's institutional architecture for two principal reasons. First, expectations about ASEAN's ability or desire to undertake major political reforms or manage regional crises are uniformly low; meeting such expectations is not difficult and principally restricted to the occasional bland statement about the need for regional cooperation. Second, authoritarian and nationalist leaders have historically had little problem in adjusting to the 'ASEAN Way'. On the contrary, from its inception, ASEAN has had to accommodate the political reality that many of its members were neither democratic nor interested in 'progressive' policies, much less being compelled to do so by a powerful external entity (Jones 2012).

Rather paradoxically, therefore, the EU has been undermined by the heightened expectations that many observers—not least the broader population of Europe itself—actually have about the organisation itself. The EU has been instrumental in reinforcing a political discourse that has emphasised the centrality of the EU and benefits that have flowed from it. The assumption was that it was an inviolable part of Europe itself and of its increasingly transnational sense of identity and common purpose (Bruter 2005). Even before an unforeseen migration crisis upended this view, it was apparent that not everyone within the EU shared such assumptions, that a common sense of identity was thinly realised at best, and that the image of a 'marble cake' in which identities intersect in many different ways may be more appropriate (Risse 2010). The migration crisis and its dramatic impact on the domestic politics of even the most committed of European countries such as Germany and France revealed potentially fatal flaws and fault lines in

the European project (Hall 2012). The key questions now are firstly, whether there are enough compelling 'functional' and/or geopolitical reasons to keep the European project on track, and secondly, whether Southeast Asia's less demanding and ambitious style of regional development will actually prove more durable.

Regionalism, crises and the transformation of international society

Focusing only on hegemonic leadership and misguided expectations would present a one-sided picture of regionalism at the present historical juncture. Instead, we need to return to the historical context in which regionalism unfolds and the unravelling of the international order as we know it. In that sense, there is a broader crisis in which both ASEAN and the EU are set, and it is a crisis of the core norms of international society. For the most part of the Cold War world, these norms were limited to a traditional view of sovereignty and non-intervention in what Buzan (2004: 45-8) has called a 'pluralist' version of international society, which he sets against a 'solidarist' understanding in which claims made by individuals play a more important role, and the status of states as the sole bearers of rights and duties in international politics is mitigated.

This debate is important for our context because the crises of regionalism can be seen as part of the increasing contestedness of what one may see as the solidarization of international society. In the post-Cold War world, a moment of enthusiasm for redefining sovereignty and deepening international law towards the inclusion of individual rights claims became prevalent. It led to the widening of security, for instance in the concept of human security, the creation of the International Criminal Court and the formulation of the Responsibility to Protect. Regionalism played its role in this context, both because regions such as the EU had themselves developed deeper international societies on a regional level that could serve as a model for such a solidarization (Diez et al. 2011) and promoted it (Ahrens and Diez 2015).

Yet a number of factors such as the increase in humanitarian interventions and increased resistance to such operations, but also the challenges posed by international terrorism, have led to a backlash against solidarization. This backlash creates a crisis for regionalism in two senses. Firstly, it undermines the transformative agenda of regionalism. If regions are seen as moving international society towards more solidarity, which certainly underpins EU foreign policy, then the rise of pluralist conceptions of sovereignty and the return to nationalist conceptions of politics and economics undermines and challenges the whole raison d'être of this foreign policy. Secondly, and arguably even worse, the changing context of international society also undermines the solidarist projects of regional integration internally, as nationalist and populist actors are encouraged and strengthened by a global discourse of nationalism. Thus, the EU at least finds itself challenged by both the confrontation with the likes of Erdoğan, Putin or Trump, while its economic crisis internally is reinforced by state leaders such as Viktor Orban whose conception of European integration has little in common with the idea of transcending a pluralist society of states.

The approach(es) of this special issue

We are dealing therefore not with one crisis but with several interlocking and often mutually reinforcing crises, the analysis of which requires a multiperspectival approach

that does not reduce the complexities of these interlocking crises into a single dimension. Most of the existing literature, however, follows such a simplifying path. The articles collated in this special issue can of course not cover the current crises of regions from all possible angles. Yet, by bringing them together and asking our contributors to engage in linkages across policy fields and approaches, we hope to be able to contribute to an opening of the debate.

Thus, the papers included here address the various aspects of crises which we have outlined above. They do so by looking at either ASEAN or the EU, but link their analyses to those of the region that is not in their own focus. And they do so by writing from a variety of theoretical perspectives implicit in this introduction—from political economy analyses of regions as part of a crisis of capitalism to classical realist analyses of leadership to English School approaches to the study of the role of regions in the normative crisis of international society. They also differ in their assessment of the impact of crises—while some stress the potential disruptions, others downplay the degree of crises and emphasise the productive effects on transformation.

The first two papers take up the theme of hegemonic leadership and argue that in both ASEAN and the EU, the continuation of crises is due to a lack of leadership. In the first paper, Gerry Strange takes issue with the prevailing trend especially in critical political economy and sees Germany as exercising too little rather than too much hegemonic leadership. Defending national interests but not wanting to mark a clear way forward in a situation of competing conceptions of a common currency is thus a recipe for reinforcing rather than getting out of crises. This is complemented by Mark Beeson's more comparative historical approach, similarly showing a lack of leadership in Asia during the financial crisis, and discussing the problematic effects of a 'long-distance' leadership by third parties, in this case the USA.

In contrast, Jürgen Rüland, in his contribution, while taking up the issue of the financial crisis and continuity, focuses on ideational factors and shows how in the case of ASEAN, the 1997/8 crisis led to a debate about reform but ultimately failed to fundamentally transform the basic tenets of Southeast Asian regionalism. Instead, the author stresses the importance of 'cognitive priors, or previously existing core concepts in a given discourse, as an element of path-dependency in the persistence of institutional patterns. This is followed by Sasha Quahe's paper that focuses on the effects of crises and shows how the Eurozone crisis crowded out other concerns, in this case climate change, and made it more difficult to come to policy solutions.

The final two papers shift theoretical and empirical focus as well as the assessment of crises. Theoretically, they look at political crises from the angle of the English School of international relations, and its conception of regional international societies. Both emphasise to some extent the normality of what we perceive as crisis. For Kilian Spandler, Brexit throws up general questions about how regional international societies manage their membership. The paper argues that membership decisions in both ASEAN and the EU reflect normative 'standards of civilisation' that arise from contestation and thus crises-prone processes over what norms should prevail among states of an international society. In the final paper, Bettina Ahrens sees the widely perceived foreign policy crisis of the EU as a result of structural and normative ambiguities within the European regional international society. To the author, such ambiguities arise from the simultaneity of individual and state claims that are inherent to a solidarist international society such as the EU. However, rather than being a source

of disintegration, these ambiguities, Ahrens claims allow normative change. In that sense, the paper not only provides a positive note to end on, but also takes up themes of earlier chapters in challenging potential leaders to acknowledge ambiguities and use them productively, and in problematising the undisputed content of normative frameworks as 'cognitive priors'.

Rather than simply sitting next to each other, the contributions thus provide a multifaceted picture of crises that makes us re-think some of our assumptions about crises and the ways in which regional organisations are implicated in and respond to them. This can, of course, only be the opening of a conversation about regions in crises. However, we strongly believe that such an opening is overdue if we want these crises to generate a new sense of regionalism rather than make regions and the orders they produce disappear.

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