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# Editorial: The politics of crises—The crisis of politics in Central and Eastern Europe

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## Editorial on the Research Topic

### The politics of crises—The crisis of politics in Central and Eastern Europe

The history of politics can be assessed as a history of crises and over the past decade a series of “tectonic” changes that fall into the category of crises have been seen. The financial crisis of 2008 assessed as the starting point, followed by the migration crisis of 2014–2015, the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020–2021, and the escalation of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine in 2022, all have sharpened the conflicts among nation states, and have significantly transformed and reshaped the relations and the balance of power between political and constitutional institutions and actors.

The global financial and debt crisis has highlighted the vulnerability of the networked financial system built up since the 1980s, which has marginalized nation states, and the huge exposure resulting from the weakening of democratic control and state supervision of financial markets and their key players (Essers, 2013). Mitigating the effects of the financial crisis was primarily the responsibility of nation states, which intervened deeply in the economic process to an extent that went far beyond liberal, free market solutions. This has led to state solutions, including retroactive changes to individual contractual relations (see the example of Hungary) (Egedy, 2012). The economic crisis has also shaken up relations between the Member States of the monetary community, leading to rethink the division of powers between the European Union and the Member States. The most famous example was the PSPP-decision by the German Constitutional Court (Feichtner, 2020).

The migration crisis has posed a new type of challenge to European governments and modified their cooperation in the European Union. European countries were confronted with the impact of conflicts that had arisen in other regions (notably the Arab Spring and the Syrian civil war), and responded in sharply different ways, ranging from proclaiming the “Willkommenskultur” (Germany) to building border fences (Hungary).

No event since the Second World War has had such an impact as the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic as it triggered serious government action in terms of social distancing, vaccine procurement and immunization coverage, as well as in the measures aimed at mitigating the economic impacts of the epidemic (Schwab and Malleret, 2020). Some states tried to handle the epidemic and manage its consequences within the normal legal framework, while others (e.g., Hungary) introduced special legal order (e.g., state of emergency or its special types).

The most recent overall crisis was provoked by the Russian–Ukrainian war, again generating different responses from national governments. The majority of EU Member States have provided military assistance to Ukraine, but some Member States (like Hungary and Slovakia) have chosen a different path even in favor of peace with Ukraine. The

Russian–Ukrainian war can be defined as a crisis not only because of the danger of escalation and its' economic impact, but also due to the new cracks it caused in the “European project”.

This broad overview of recent crises illustrates that both the frequency and depth/intensity of crises have increased. This is where the concept of multiple crises, forming a context of permacrisis (Papadakis et al., 2025) originates. At the level of public policies, permacrisis legacy indicates the importance of an organized, effective and inclusive nation state.

The papers of the Research Topic highlight this need and the challenges and dilemmas it poses. Crises that cause repercussions in political systems also force policymakers to question routines and previous beliefs. While these crises may increase the resilience of political systems, they may also generate counter-processes. For example, the centralization of power may strengthen populist aspirations.

Younger democracies, such as those in Central and Eastern Europe, are proving to be particularly sensitive to crisis stress tests. Thus, although their model value is more modest than that of the sample states, they may attract even more academic interest.

The Research Topic pays particular attention to all three dimensions (policy, polity and politics) as it analyses institutionalized policy-making, public policy responses to the challenges posed by crises, the institutional effects (changes in the functions of state political institutions, changes in the system of separation of powers, in particular with regard to parliaments, governments and constitutional courts and the recent changes of political parties and politics, especially changes in the phenomenon of presidentialization).

The 21 authors hail from almost every country in Central and Eastern Europe, including Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Serbia. This means they can provide authentic insights into national crisis management issues and solutions.

Smuk's article provides a comprehensive framework for interpreting the constitutional-level rule changes in the Visegrad countries in response to crises. Garayová's article also focuses on the Visegrad countries, presenting the legal situation of migrant and refugee children in these countries. The article by Lukács et al. reflects on the effect of demographic challenges caused and/or exacerbated by crises, namely employment policy, examining the EU dimensions of the issue as well as the specifics of the CEE region.

Using a comparative methodology, Beretka and Osze examines constitutional interpretation in the Hungarian, Serbian and Croatian contexts. The article by Erdos et al. provides a unique comparison, reviewing the assessment of a national measure by various judicial bodies, including the Hungarian Constitutional Court, the Strasbourg Court and the Luxembourg Court. It highlights the differences in the constitutional, human rights and EU law constraints on the legislature. Tanács-Mandák describes the latest developments in presidentialization in Hungary, which have altered the balance of power between the executive and legislative branches. Kurunczi also examines a topic of interest to political science and public law in relation to the development of social participation in lawmaking during times of crisis. Two studies deal with local governments: a conceptual paper on the principle of subsidiarity and its implementation amid typically centralizing crisis management efforts (by Varga) and a case study on the practice of framing the theme of crisis by the

Municipality of Budapest (by Pál). Two studies address public policies, namely criminal policy responses to the challenges posed by crises: Vácsi presents the constitutional implications of a unique and new institution of Hungarian law, the reintegration detention, while Gellér examines the formative influence of EU law on the division of powers between the EU and its Member States through the institution of the European arrest warrant, which also has a fundamental impact on Member State sovereignty. Further public policy issues related to the latest technologies are discussed, including recent developments in EU space policy and opportunities for CEE (by Bartóki-Gönczy and Malinowska), and the evolution of digital sovereignty in response to crisis policy (by Hukó et al.).

The studies in this Research Topic not only present the diversity of crisis phenomena, but also the wide range of state responses (crisis-management) to them, including policymaking, lawmaking, law enforcement, and their judicial and international control. It should be emphasized that most of the papers highlight the interdependence and mutual influence of politics and public law, which is a significant contribution to the literature on the politics of crises, as it may be of interest not only to political scientists and public law practitioners and academics, but also to researchers in new technologies (space technology and communications). In addition to its thematic focus, the geographical scope of this Research Topic is also noteworthy: democracies in Central and Eastern Europe are less stable than those in Western Europe, so crisis management in these countries involves a number of solutions, some of them unconventional (e.g., population policy, extensive price regulation), which make this region particularly interesting for comparative governance studies. Along with our gratitude to all the authors and reviewers, we should add our most sincere thanks to the prestigious, “Frontiers in Political Science” Journal and in particular the Publishing Manager, Dr. Gabriele Sak, as well as Luisa Moratelli and Adele King, for providing us the opportunity to develop and deliver this Research Topic to the public. We trust that the Research Topic and the studies it contains will contribute to stimulating academic discourse and drawing attention to the scientific analysis of crisis management in Central and Eastern Europe.

## Author contributions

FT-M: Writing – original draft, Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. CE: Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Conceptualization, Writing – original draft.

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