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Crisis, Europe[1]

Is there a crisis *of* Europe? Or, even better, are there several *crises* of Europe? Perhaps, rather differently, there are crises, but *in* Europe? These questions are obviously not the same, however, there is hardly anyone today who would not answer affirmatively to at least one of them. There is a general ubiquitous belief that Europe is going through some kind of crisis. This is not something new, since Europe—or better, what counts as Europe—seems to be in a state of crisis by definition. What does it mean to claim that, and is the term "crisis" appropriate here? Which crisis and a crisis of what exactly? The trouble is that both words, i.e. "Europe" and "crisis", are very loose, and that everything depends on how, first, we define them, and second, how they interrelate. Terminology, as we will try to show in the present essay, does matter. Rather literally, since "Europe" and "crisis" are not just any words. But then what are they? Are they terms, names, notions, concepts, representations, or ideas? Something else, perhaps? What are here, first, the consequences and implications of terminology, and, second, what do the terminological choices reveal or what do they mask? To speak about "Europe" and "crisis" seems to be somewhat natural, self-explanatory, and self-evident, because *there are* several crises in Europe: there is "the crisis of the European (political) project", "the crisis of European identity", "the crisis of the (European) idea", "the crisis of European culture", "the EU crisis", the Eurozone crisis", the sovereign debt crisis (in Europe), the (European) migrant or refugee crisis, the political-military crisis in relation to other "crises at the borders of Europe" (wherever that may be), the crisis of decision-making processes in the EU, the crisis of democratic politics/policies in the EU, the crisis with (right-wing) (European) populism, the Brexit crisis, and so on and so forth.

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Are these crises, "Europe's crises,"[2] interrelated and just varieties of one single crisis? A crisis of what, then? Of Europe, of the EU, of the Eurozone, of the West, or of the world as such? The trouble is that these terms are simply not synonymous. And, the trouble is that the term "crisis" is notoriously loose and vague. As Immanuel Wallerstein put it in 1982: "Crisis is a word that comes easily to the lips. We seem always to be in some crisis or other."[3] Today the situation is not very different. Or, as Nancy Fraser put it: "Whoever speaks of 'crisis' today risks being dismissed as a bloviator, given the term's banalization through endless loose talk."[4] So, despite many changes in these three and a half decades, talk about crisis is (still) ubiquitous, even more, it seems that despite all the changes, the very term "crisis" is precisely here as a vague description of these very changes. "Crisis" describes some changes; more precisely, changes that we do not want or that we do not know what they are really about. "Crisis" is then perfectly suitable for describing the times we live in. These times can be described quite differently and in a variety of ways. For both Wallerstein and Fraser, for instance, despite important differences in their views, we are living in times of transition, times of "interregnum," in times when "the Old is dying and the New cannot be born (yet)." No wonder, then, that "crisis comes easily to the lips." And no wonder that Europe is frequently put in relation to a crisis, since times of transition doubtlessly affect it, yet nobody knows exactly what such times will bring about for it and its role. There are certainly more sides to the coin here. There is, as always, a yawning and moaning discourse about the general societal decline and about the waning of European power—which is nothing but nostalgia for those past (colonial) times, as well as a call to restore them today in the wake of the decline of European power. But this part of the topic does not interest us here. There is also a more detailed and in-depth approach, and the fact is that literature on the topic of crisis and the crises of Europe is really vast and enormous, yet we have here neither the skills nor the time/space to address it properly. Our aim is to intervene in the topic in the form of an exercise. Our rather naive title (re)presents it in a grammatical form: a comma separates the

2 See the compendium of various papers on the topic: *Europe's Crises*, edited by Manuel Castells et al., Polity Press, Cambridge 2018.

3 Immanuel Wallerstein, "Crisis as Transition", in: Samir Amin, Giovanni Arrighi, Andre Gunder Frank and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Dynamics of Global Crisis*, Monthly Review Press, New York 1982, p. 11.

4 Nancy Fraser, *The Old Is Dying and the New Cannot Be Born*, Verso, London & New York 2019, p. 7.

two terms. As such, it pleas for a (temporal) suspension of the relation of both these terms; in the interim it is possible to show some of the consequences of using these terms in our contemporary situation—this is how we here understand the suggestion of Reinhard Kosseleck[5] that "crisis" and "critique" belong together. What interests us here are some implications and presuppositions of the talk about "crisis" and "Europe." In other words, what does the word "crisis" reveal here? What does it enable us to see and, more importantly, what does it hide, mask, and cover up in our present situation?

Crisis, crisis, everywhere!

Today it seems not only that crisis is everywhere, but as Gérard Wajcman put it, that it has also "become a normal, everyday course of the world."[6] "Crisis" has become ubiquitous and one wonders how and why. Or, as Timothy Garton Ash put it: "Cryogenically reanimated in January 2017, I would immediately have died again from shock. For now there is crisis and disintegration wherever I look."[7] Both these two statements are surely exaggerations and generalisations, yet they nicely render the general impression of an ubiquitous crisis. But "crisis" has many shapes and many faces; it means different things to different people. Its rough meaning is "that something is wrong with something"; however, it is yet to be specified what exactly "crisis" or "wrong" actually is. So, "crisis", a word, means several things at once. What does it mean, then, to say that "the world is in crisis" and that "crisis is everywhere now"? Is "crisis" really everywhere? Or better, does it affect all the places and spaces of the world in the same manner and in the same way? Clearly not, since for some parts of the world there is no crisis at all, while for others the very term "crisis" is an understatement. Perhaps we should be more careful with words and terms. To say that "the *world* is in crisis" implies that there is "one world," "the world"—would it not be more appropriate to speak about the many "worlds" of our global capitalistic system? The latter is, as Badiou put it, worldless, devoid of any world. From a common-sense perspective, this seems to be sheer nonsense, since there is obviously a "world" out there. However, can we really call it "the world"? Fur-

5 See Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society*, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 1988.

6 Gérard Wajcman, *Les series, le monde, la crise, les femmes*, Verdier, Paris 2018, p. 22.

7 Quoted in: Ivan Krastev, *After Europe*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2017, p. 62.

thermore, what is the *normal*, everyday course of the world? Is not the boundary between the normal and the a-normal, the pathological, as Canguilhem would put it, more complicated and less sharp, more imprecise, than we usually think? Perhaps the very fact that the normal course of the world is now in crisis would also suggest that this is not normal at all? And if, as Marx showed, the capitalistic world or capitalism is prone to crises, this "normal course" today is going from one crisis to another, faster and faster, so that we have a kind of "perpetual crisis". Is not the latter, as Agamben would put it, but a normalised "state of exception"? Is the latter, following Antonio Gramsci's term "interregnum", as Nancy Fraser suggests, to be understood as a situation wherein "the Old is dying and the New cannot be born," or is it, perhaps, as Wallerstein would have it, but a transition to another long-term cycle, to another form or to another centre in the run of capitalism as the world-system? Should we identify it with the times of modernity as such? Or should we, rather, identify it with the whole history of the West, as suggested by Foucault in an interview from 1975? For Foucault,[8] crisis is something eternal, perennial, since there was no single moment in modern Western history that was not permeated with a feeling of some kind of crisis. Does that mean that we should search for our initial answers, as many thinkers from Heidegger and Spengler to Adorno and Horkheimer, Arendt, and Foucault have done by scrutinising the very foundations of the West, its history, and its rationality? While the situation in geo-political terms has certainly changed considerably since their times, and while the critique and criticism of colonial or post-colonial (European) politics, theories, and attitudes have made their impact, a kind of pessimism and gloominess remains with us even today.

Even if Arendt, as the least "pessimistic" among the aforementioned thinkers, and perhaps as the most compatible with today's ubiquitous pro-democratic stance, claims that "the crisis of our time," is at hand, her position is not so straightforward and simple. It is true that in her classic work *Between Past and Future* the term *crisis* appears several times and plays the role of a kind of central guiding motif. For her "this crisis, apparent since the inception of the century, is political in origin and nature."[9] In other words "the crisis of the present world is

8 Michel Foucault, "La politique est la continuation de la guerre par d'autres moyens" (interview with B-H. Lévy), *L'Imprévu*, No. l, 27 January 1975, p. 16 (In: *Dits et Écrits I*, Gallimard, Paris, p. 1570).

9 Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, Penguin, London 1961, p. 91.

primarily political, and [...] the famous 'decline of the West' consists primarily in the decline of the Roman trinity of religion, tradition, and authority."[10] For Arendt "the general crisis that has overtaken the modern world" in fact "forces us back to the questions themselves and requires from us either new or old answers, but in any case direct judgments. A crisis becomes a disaster only when we respond to it with preformed judgments, that is, with prejudices."[11] So, if "a more general crisis and instability in modern society" is visible for Arendt, that also "means that wherever the crisis has occurred in the modern world, one cannot simply go on nor yet simply turn back," since "in every crisis a piece of the world, something common to us all, is destroyed. The failure of common sense, like a divining rod, points to the place where such a cave-in has occurred."[12] Therefore, for Arendt, "crisis" is a call for new thought and action, new views and judgments upon this world. We could say that quite a similar point is made by Foucault in the aforementioned interview, for he claims that politicians, economists, philosophers, and others use the term "crisis" for a description of the present precisely when they lack concepts and when they do not have proper conceptual instruments for its analysis. For Arendt, and for Foucault too, crisis is ubiquitous, yet for them it is not the final word or the final judgement. It is rather a call and a request for new and more accurate theoretical tools, concepts, and descriptions. To state "there is crisis (everywhere)" can just be a beginning, not the end or the final word.

In other words, "crisis" is just a term, not a defined concept. It covers several meanings and they all derive from ancient Greek and medical/juridical discourse (that is why, as we will see later, it also takes the form of a diagnosis of an ill or a disease). Although "crisis" has today become (and perhaps forever was) what Ernesto Laclau would term an "empty signifier," meaning nothing and everything at the same time, it is precisely as such constantly an object of struggles for its interpretation, for a hegemony, for how to and who will define its proper and more precise meaning. It is of crucial importance, then, to specify it further, especially in relation to the predominant views on Europe and the European situation.

[10] *Ibid*, p. 140.
[11] *Ibid*, pp. 173, 174.
[12] *Ibid*, pp. 185, 194, 178.

For the purpose of illustration, let us take a short detour concerning the well-known case of an economic crisis that happened more than ten years ago. In the vast secondary literature thereupon it is now consensually called "the economic crisis of 2008" and it shook the USA first, but then quickly moved across the Atlantic to Europe too. Although from today's perspective it might seem that "you had to see it coming," it came as a total surprise to almost everybody. Especially to mainstream economists, who—as Krugman has shown—in the beginning of this century even tried to ban words such as "crisis" and "recession" from their vocabulary,[13] despite the fact that after WW II there were more than 160 economic crises all over the world. The crisis, so they say, is now all over; however, its vast proportions have left consequences for global capitalism as well as for Europe, and, most importantly, for our common future too. The question whether this was "just a crisis" or something more sinister is still hotly debated today. How to describe it, then? What term is appropriate for it in its relation to Europe? We will here briefly pick just three of such descriptions from among many, which all avoid the term "crisis" and speak instead about a "Grand Recession," a "catastrophe," and, in relation to Europe, a "decline." The first term comes from Thomas Piketty, author of the best-selling *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, the second from the equally bestselling work *The Making of the Indebted Man* of Maurizio Lazzarato, and the third from the historian Adam Tooze in his recently published work *Crashed. How a Decade of Financial Crises Changed the World*. Each of them, of course, provides several arguments in support of the author's terminological choice.

Piketty claims the following:

> The global financial crisis that began in 2007–2008 is generally described as the most serious crisis of capitalism since the crash of 1929. The comparison is in some ways justified, but essential differences remain. The most obvious of these is that the recent crisis has not led to a depression as devastating as the Great Depression of the 1930s. Between 1929 and 1935, production in the developed countries fell by a quarter, unemployment rose by the same amount, and the world did not

[13] Krugman mentions here Robert Lucas, the winner of the 1993 Nobel Prize in Economics, who claimed in 2003 that "the central problem of depression-prevention has been solved." See: Paul Krugman, *The Return of Depression Economics and the Crisis of 2008*, Penguin, London 2008, p. 9.

> entirely recover from the Depression until the onset of World War II. Fortunately, the current crisis has been significantly less cataclysmic. That is why it has been given a less alarming name: the Great Recession. To be sure, the leading developed economies in 2013 are not quite back to the level of output they had achieved in 2007, government finances are in pitiful condition, and prospects for growth look gloomy for the foreseeable future, especially in Europe, which is mired in an endless sovereign debt crisis (which is ironic, since Europe is also the continent with the highest capital/income ratio in the world). Yet even in the depths of the recession, in 2009, production did not fall by more than five percentage points in the wealthiest countries. This was enough to make it the most serious global recession since the end of World War II, but it is still a very different thing from the dramatic collapse of output and waves of bankruptcies of the 1930s. Furthermore, growth in the emerging countries quickly bounced back and is buoying global growth today. The main reason why the crisis of 2008 did not trigger a crash as serious as the Great Depression is that this time the governments and central banks of the wealthy countries did not allow the financial system to collapse and agreed to create the liquidity necessary to avoid the waves of bank failures that led the world to the brink of the abyss in the 1930s.[14]

Lazzarato picks another angle of the story. He claims that we are now in a situation when we are already going from one financial crisis to another. He speaks in this context about "a period of permanent crisis," which he calls "'catastrophe' to refer to the discontinuity of the concept of crisis itself." Why "catastrophe"? Because for Lazzarato we are now facing a new economy, "the debt economy," which

> has deprived the immense majority of Europeans of political power, which had already been diminished through the concessions of representative democracy. It has deprived them of a growing share of the wealth that past struggles had wrested from capitalist accumulation. And, above all, it has deprived them of the future, that is, of time, time as decision-making, choice, and possibility.[15]

[14] Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First* Century, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Ma.) & London 2014, p. 472.

[15] Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man*, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles 2012, pp. 123–124; 8.

For Tooze, the crisis of 2008 had disastrous consequences too, but viewed from another perspective. The following, rather long, passage is related to the fate of Europe faced with this economic crisis:

> Far from being beneficiaries of EU crisis management, business was one of its casualties, and the European banks above all. Since 2008, it is not just the rise of Asia that is shifting the global corporate hierarchy. It is the decline of Europe. This might ring oddly to Europeans used to hearing boasts of Germany's trade surplus. But as Germany's own most perceptive economists point out, those surpluses are as much the result of repressed imports as of roaring export success. The inexorable slide of corporate Europe down the global rankings is clear for all to see. Though we might wish otherwise, the world economy is not run by medium-sized "Mittelstand" entrepreneurs but by a few thousand massive corporations, with interlocking shareholdings controlled by a tiny group of asset managers. In that battlefield of corporate competition, the crises of 2008–2013 brought European capital a historic defeat. No doubt there are many factors contributing to this, but a crucial one is the condition of Europe's own economy. Exports matter, but, as both China and the United States demonstrate, there is no substitute for a profitable home market. If we take the cynical view that the basic mission of the eurozone was not to serve its citizens but to provide European capital with a field for profitable domestic accumulation, then the conclusion is inescapable: Between 2010 and 2013 it failed spectacularly. And not first and foremost as a result of missing eurozone institutions, but as a result of choices made by business leaders, dogmatic central bankers and conservatively minded politicians. [...] Rather than an autonomous actor, Europe risks becoming the object of other people's capitalist corporatism. Indeed, as far as international finance is concerned, the die has already been cast. In the wake of the double crisis, Europe is out of the race. The future will be decided between the survivors of the crisis in the United States and the newcomers of Asia. They may choose to locate in the City of London, but after Brexit even that cannot be taken for granted. Wall Street, Hong Kong and Shanghai may simply bypass Europe.[16]

Without going into further detail regarding any of these three descriptions, it is clear from the passages quoted that they seek a more appropriate way of think-

[16] Adam Tooze, *Crashed. How a Decade of Financial Crises Changed the World*, Allen Lane, London 2018, pp. 16–17.

ing and talking about "economic crisis". The latter is too vague; it has to be supplemented by other terms and notions to gain more nuanced and specific descriptions for the current situation and predicaments Europe finds itself in.

Perhaps we should add that for those authors the term "crisis" is in a way too mild, too optimistic, since for them the state of things is more serious and more sinister than the term "crisis" might suggest. The term "crisis" namely also implies that however dire, terrible, or horrible things are, the "patient" (in our case: Europe) is not dead yet. That is why many are claiming that every crisis is an opportunity, a challenge. Why? Because the term "crisis" is vaguely interchangeable with "unrest", a change (a rather an undesired one), a "conflict", but this "diagnosis", based on the judgement that an acute and severe state of things has been achieved, also entails that everything is not yet lost, because one is not at the end, but at a "turning point" between a fortunate and an unfortunate change in the state of the evaluated entity. So, a crisis is an opportunity to change things for the better. A "critical situation", a "crisis situation", is surely an acute situation, it borders on the "pathological" and it threatens the goals of the persons involved. It demands (our) action, solution, decision. It searches for the sense and meaning of a situation; it is related to judgement—for Aristotle, to judge, *krinein*, is a "determination of what is just" (*Politics*, 1253a35). This judgement pertains to those who are in power, who govern: "For both governors and governed have duties to perform; the special functions of a governor are to command and to judge." (*Politics*, 1326b11)[17].

"Crisis" therefore implies several things at once: judgement, decision, choice, alternative, opportunity, solution. As such, it is a call, a request, a demand, that something has to be done, but at the same time it is also a kind of consolation, solace: there is still hope. And, as is well known, where the latter exists, there is also fear. The term "crisis", therefore, is split into its optimistic and pessimistic sides, split and torn between hope and fear. Both hope and fear—as Hegel knew perfectly well—are signs and companions of desire: *our desire* when something is concerned and when it is described as being "in crisis". We are therefore not

[17] Quoted from: Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle. The revised Oxford Translation*, edited by Jonathan Barnes, Volume Two, Princeton University Press, New Jersey & Chichester 1984, p. 1989, 2105.

indifferent to this "something", or in our case "Europe", in the statement "Europe is in crisis."

Turbulent, dark, savage, mighty, and yet impotent

Any talk about "the crisis of Europe", "the European crisis", or "Europe's crises", is far from neutral. It namely implies, as we just saw, our own position in relation to Europe (or what counts for us as "Europe"), our claim that "something is wrong with it," and yet at the same time covers this up, since it is a kind of diagnosis that remains optimistic. When we talk about "the crisis of Europe" we also surreptitiously talk about our desire, our hopes, our fears, our anxieties, and our despair concerning what we observe, witness, and *describe* as happening with Europe, to Europe, and in Europe. And, last but not least, the very term "Europe" is not so self-evident and clear as it may seem.

It namely designates several things at once. It is a term designating a continent, a name for it, and at the same time a geo-political project regarding which it is in fact nearly impossible to find any consensus about what it actually refers to. The real problem and real perplexity with Europe starts at this level. Is it a name, a notion, a concept, an idea, or a project? For some philosophers, such as Husserl, it is an idea,[18] while for other philosophers it means various things: "At this point, however, it must be noted that in the relevant philosophical literature on Europe, 'Europe' is not only referred to as a concept or an idea. A frequent appellation is also that of a 'figure'. And there is a long list of other names as well: an image (Paul Valéry), a category (Alain Badiou), a schema (Denis Guénoun), and even, reflecting the ambiguities and limitations of all these terms, 'a little thing' (Jacques Derrida)."[19] What is Europe then? For Gasché, "it is a conception that is always only in the making, never closed off, and structurally open to future transformation and change. Thus the question arises of what precisely it is that one calls by the name of Europe. And this does not simply ask what the name Europe refers to, but, in addition, it asks about the kind of term Europe is."[20]

[18] For more on this, see: Rodolphe Gasché, *Europe, or the Infinite Task. A Study of a Philosophical Concept*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2009.

[19] *Ibid*, p. 9.

[20] *Ibid*.

Europe is also a name for a certain political project, which throughout history has had many different versions. For a long time it seemed that Europe—colonial, imperial Europe—is simply identical with the West. As historian Norman Davies, among others, has shown,[21] throughout history Europe has had different meanings as well as the idea of "the West" or of "Western civilization". Its name can be traced back to the ancient Greeks, who saw their free land as the antithesis of the despotisms of the East, especially Persia, but they did not consider themselves to be Europeans. But they, ironically perhaps, lay down the matrix of Europe's self-understanding since the Greeks believed themselves to be in the middle, between the Orient and the West, between Asia and Europe. In a similar vein, Europe itself has always considered itself to be split, split from within and divided from "the rest", "the remainder", "the Other". Europe throughout history had been prone to wars, tragedies, and disasters up until the end of WW II. It is precisely this fate that was addressed after the war by many, for instance by Churchill in his famous speech of 19 September 1946. If for Churchill Europe was defined by its tragedy and plight, the only way to avoid this fate would be to "build a kind of United States of Europe." Churchill evokes Europe as a wound to be healed and in that context there is a solution in the form of a dream of a unified body of Europe, a dream about healing the division and cut in the middle of Europe. As Étienne Balibar put it after the fall of Berlin Wall in 1991: "The question here is not whether the balance is equal (it isn't, at that), but how, in this merciless dispute, comes to be constituted the dream of an 'end of the division' and, consequently, the imagination of Europe as a *unified body* that has been *cut up* and needs to be sewn back together. Following the disappearance of one of the two blocs, the struggle itself is vanishing, which in fact constitutes a great trial of truth: now or never is the moment for the dream to materialize, for Europe to rise up, renewed or revitalized. This is also the moment when the dream risks being smashed into pieces."[22] This, in a nutshell, is the main political reason for today's EU (apart from more important economic reasons). The primary aim of the EU in this context is not only to avoid war(s), but also to heal the wound and split.

[21] Norman Davies, *Europe: A History*, Pimlico, London 1997.

[22] Étienne Balibar, *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, translated by Jameson Swenson, Princeton University Press, London & New York 2004, p. 90.

Europe itself has been and still is understood primarily in terms of plight, wars, and tragedy—of a wound to be healed. If the EU is a way to heal it, it is, nonetheless, not (the whole) Europe. Europe and the EU, however, share some formal features. As joint projects, they both share some structural presuppositions: they are a joint venture of at least two national states in Europe or European countries. This venture presupposes and starts from the fact that Europe was split from the very beginning. Europe and the EU are by definition split into various countries, various institutions, various views, dreams, conceptions, visions, and fantasies. Here, however, the strict similarities between the EU and Europe (at the abstract level, where we are now) stop. While Europe seems to be a question, the EU is an answer, although whether it is the right one, one has to add, is still a matter of debate.

Europe is namely by definition a paradoxical entity: one that constantly questions its own identity, borders, and frontiers: "Where does Europe begin and end?"[23] If Europe is an agent, it is but a paradoxical one, because its desire and its will are constantly *in question*. In that way, Europe is a model split subject, and therefore a model *hysterical* subject, a subject that does not know what it really wants: What does Europe want?[24] In a way, we could say that the *modus vivendi* of Europe is not only a *split*, or *being split*, but also a *question*: a question of what counts in and what counts out, a question concerning its borders and frontiers. In an exaggerated way, one could even say that when we say Europe we are actually simultaneously putting a question mark next to it (Europe=Europe?): "It is not simply ironic that all critique of Europe must ultimately seek its resources in the theory and practice of self-questioning that is itself characteristic of European 'identity'."[25] Europe is a question also to itself, and in that context one could repeat Hegel's famous dictum about the secrets of the Egyptians, which are secrets to the Egyptians. To say that Europe is always in question means to acknowledge that this not an easy thing to bear or an easy position to be in. A question as such, as a grammatical form, is namely

[23] Anthony Giddens, *Turbulent and Mighty Continent. What Future for Europe?*, revised and updated edition, Polity, Cambridge 2014, p. 151.

[24] See: Slavoj Žižek and Srečko Horvat, *What Does Europe Want?: The Union and Its Discontents*, Columbia University Press, New York 2014.

[25] Gasché, *Europe, or the Infinite Task*, p. 7.

far from innocent, benevolent, or benign. As Aaron Bodenheimer has shown,[26] a question as such is by its very nature obscene. Its goal is to make a hole in its addressee. As such, a question is an ideal weapon of authority (recall police interrogations and interpellations) as well as a weapon against it, since it wants to lay bare its ignorance and/or imposture. There are no neutral or innocent questions. Neither a simple question like "Daddy, why is the sky is blue?" nor the often-heard "Europe, what do you want?" is a benign question. Even if Europe were to answer the question about what it wants, even if it were to say that it wants an *x*, immediately another set of questions would arise: But—what do you *really* want? Don't you know what you *really need?* Etc. Being split and defined by a question is not something easy or even cosy. That is one more reason why Europe finds itself frequently in quite obscene situations and why it is by definition seen as indecisive, hesitant, irresolute, uncertain, unsure: "To have politics, one has to decide, but Europe does not decide upon anything."[27] Even capricious, whimsical, and dangerous:

> there are many who confidently pretend to know what exactly Europe has stood for, and continues to stand for—namely, a hegemonic phantasm and moribund worldview. By depicting Europe and the West as a homogeneous power of domination over the rest of the world, postcolonial criticism of European imperialism, and its construction of non-European cultures, knows perfectly what Europe is. Indeed, it knows it so well that it itself indulges in the same lack of differentiation of which it accuses the West in its relation to its others. It thus turns "Europe" into the blind spot of its own discourse. As indicated, to invoke the name Europe, apart from referring to its location, culture, and history, is also to intimate something else: it is to suggest a concept or idea—a concept or an idea called "Europe"—even though it may not be immediately clear to what content such a concept or idea is assigned.[28]

This abstract level of Europe as a political project can be illustrated in many ways. Let us pick only a couple of examples taken from very recent literature

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[26] Aaron Ronald Bodenheimer, *Warum? Von der Obszönität des Fragens*, Reclam, Stuttgart 1985.

[27] Jean-Claude Milner, *Considérations sur l'Europe. Entretiens avec Philippe Petit*, Éditions de cerf, Paris 2019, p. 37.

[28] Gasché, *Europe, or the Infinite Task*, p. 16.

on the topics of Europe and its crises. We will start with the following claim of Manuel Castells in his text "Achilles' Heel: Europe's Ambivalent Identity":

> Identity is clearly central to the future of the EU. Yet available evidence suggests that while most European citizens hold multiple identities, national identity tends to be more salient than European identity, and the forced integration project, the economic crisis and the growth of immigration have resulted in an identity crisis for Europe. For a small minority of Europeans, largely members of social and economic elites, the EU is a cosmopolitan project in which transnational and transboundary relationships are only likely to grow. For many others, instead, it is linked to processes of globalization and marketization that have largely excluded them. Recent events have created pulls in each direction [...]. Indeed, it is my hypothesis that it is in the realm of values, of new values, where we could find the seeds of a potential European identity. [...] Moreover, the mere enumeration of these values shows that while they are a reasonable wish list, it may not be easy to combine them in a coherent set, beyond their popularity in public opinion. So, these elements of a European project, while they must be materials to work with, cannot be asserted as a finished model to be imposed. In a fully democratic, multicultural, multiethnic Europe, exposed to global flows of communication and information, no project can be imposed from the state. And yet, the problems raised [here] are still relevant. While national and local identities will continue to be strong and instrumental, if there is no development of a compatible European identity, a purely instrumental Europe will remain a fragile construction, whose possible, future wrecking would trigger major crises in European societies, and around the world.[29]

For Castells, the EU is Europe, but even this simplified and amputated Europe, if we may put it that way, has a serious problem with its own identity, which for Castells himself is *ambivalent*. However, for Castells the real trouble consists in the fact that this identity has yet to be produced "spontaneously from below" and cannot be imposed in an authoritarian manner "from above":

> Thus, even if there is no clear European identity model, there still can be identity in the making, that is a process of social production of identity. In other words,

[29] Manuel Castells "Achilles' Heel: Europe's Ambivalent Identity" in: *Europe's Crises*, ed. by Manuel Castells et al., Polity Press, Cambridge 2018, pp. 191–192.

> it is not possible to create, artificially, a European identity, but European institutions could help the development of a series of mechanisms that, in their own dynamics, would configure the embryos of this shared system of values throughout Europe. It is by engaging in social experimentation, by letting society evolve by itself, but helping to constitute a European civil society, that we could see the emergence of a new, strong, European identity in the foreseeable future. Because if a European identity project does not emerge, nationalist resistance identities from retrenched nations will prevail, eventually dooming the European dream.[30]

These two rather long passages taken from Castells nicely present the predicament of Europe: even in its mutilated version of the EU it has a major problem with its own identity, which has to be resolved or we are all doomed.

This way of talking about predicament and its solution is not an isolated case. Europe is, as Keith Lowe put it, a "savage continent," or, as historian Ian Kershaw wrote in 2018, "a strange mixture." Kershaw's description is in general terms in line with Castells's: "Europe's history after the Second World War has been a heady mixture of great achievements, severe disappointments and even disasters, as the crises of recent years have graphically demonstrated. It has indeed been a roller-coaster ride of ups and downs [...]."[31] Europe, or better, the EU, has a problem with is its identity: "What the European Union has been unable to accomplish is the creation of a genuine sense of European identity."[32] However, nobody knows what the future will bring to us: "What will happen in the decades to come is impossible to know. The only certainty is uncertainty. Insecurity will remain a hallmark of modern life. Europe's dips and turns, the ups and downs that have characterized its history, are sure to continue."[33]

Similar descriptions of Europe can be found in recent literature on Europe and crisis: on one hand, there is Europe as dangerous, yet Europe (or the EU) is its own solution. The problems of Europe, or the crises of Europe, have only one cure: more Europe, or simply, more EU. Let us briefly mention these solutions found in Giddens, Judt, Bauman, Krastev, and Gasché, regardless of their differences. Gasché, to begin with, thinks that there is no one or final decision, since

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30 *Ibid*, pp. 192–193.

31 Ian Kershaw, *Roller-Coaster. Europe 1950–2017*, Penguin, London 2019, p. 541.

32 *Ibid*, p. 544.

33 *Ibid*, p. 562.

he sees Europe as an "infinite task." Gasché's project is really an interesting one, but we will not go into it here. For our purposes, here it suffices to mention Gasché's open reminder at the beginning of his book of what will be excluded from his topics. He openly admits that although his book

> is indeed a book on Europe, it does not deal with "Europe" simply as some past or present entity or as some geopolitical, legal, and cultural entity that is yet to be created [...]. I do not intend to broach the intricate problems that this unification, and the establishment of a transnational European identity, pose in practice. There will be no discussion of the long and difficult history of Europe's inner and outer borders, nor of all the trouble this history continues to represent today in a united Europe. I will not address the issue of what sort of legal and political unity a united Europe should have [...]. This book will also not be concerned with the Europe promoted by the current economical and financial Caesarian powers of the continent, in short, with the undoubtedly crucial question of whether the attempts to turn Europe into a primarily economic zone, or to shape it into a political construction on the basis of a still to be adopted (provisional or definite) European constitution, are sufficient to construct a Europe that would meet the various expectations at the heart of the project of a United Europe. Undoubtedly, the question of whether or not a Europe (understood as an economic power that is competitive among the world markets and that is politically united by a constitution whose prime goal is merely to further cement its economic clout) does justice to the expectations and dreams for Europe that are fostered by its cultural, political, and legal traditions is a highly significant one. But this issue will have to remain in the background here. Finally, this book will not inquire into the resistance that the unification of Europe actually encounters on a daily basis, at every step, in its inner or outer conflicts—whether merely ideological or violent and bloody—conflicts that have repeatedly bedeviled the establishment of a United Europe.[34]

It is precisely this last feature of Europe excluded from treatment in Gasché that is in the foreground in the majority of the recent literature on Europe. Giddens, for instance, calls Europe a "turbulent and mighty continent": "The EU's problems remain serious and dangerous."[35] The EU for Giddens is simply equated with Europe: in his book he uses the terms "the EU" (or "the Union")

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34 Gasché, *Europe, or the Infinite Task*, p. 3.

35 Giddens, *Turbulent and Mighty Continent*, p. 3.

and "Europe" interchangeably. But for Giddens even the EU is split, divided, not into two parts, but into three: into what Giddens calls the EU1, EU2, and paper Europe: "Turning the Union into a community of fate in a positive sense means building solidarity and feelings of belonging to the EU as a whole rather than only to its constituent nations or regions. I believe these developments are not possible but necessary if Europe is to emerge from its malaise."[36] So, for Giddens, Europe is defined by a danger and malaise, while historian Tony Judt spoke about Europe (or is he speaking about the West in general?) as being beset with an "ill"—"ill fares the land"[37]? What is that "ill"? For Judt, something is profoundly wrong with the way we live today: we cannot go on living in a similar manner. The economic crisis of 2008 was, for Judt, a reminder that unregulated capitalism is its own worst enemy. And yet we seem unable to conceive of alternatives. If it is to be taken seriously again, Judt posits that the Left must find its voice. The choice will no longer be between the state and the market, but between two sorts of state. It is thus incumbent upon us to re-conceive the role of government. If we do not, others will. "We need to learn to think the state again. After all, it has always been with us." Europe is perhaps not defined by an "ill", but by a disease, or as one of the most famous contemporary sociologists Zygmunt Bauman has put it: "That the disease which brought the European Union into the intensive-care ward and has kept it there since, for quite a few years, is best diagnosed as a 'democratic deficit' is fast turning into a commonplace. Indeed, it is taken increasingly for granted and is hardly ever seriously questioned."[38]

Perhaps this is not the real issue, as Ivan Krastev in his recent book *After Europe* claims: "It is fashionable these days to discuss the crisis of the EU in terms of either the Union's democratic deficit or its cosmopolitan makeup. But what's really at its core is the crisis of a meritocratic vision of society."[39] For Krastev, "crises are a dividing factor" of Europe: "In reality, all the crises that Europe faces today divide the Union one way or another. The eurozone crisis divides the union over a north–south axis. Brexit highlights the division between the core and the periphery. The Ukraine crisis divides Europe into hawks and doves with

36 *Ibid*, p. 8.

37 Tony Judt, *Ill Fares the Land*, Penguin, London & New York 2010.

38 Zygmunt Bauman, *A Chronicle of Crisis: 2011–2016*, Social Europe Edition, London 2017, p. 89.

39 Krastev, *After Europe*, p. 87.

respect to dealing with Russia. But it is the east–west divide that reemerged after the refugee crisis that threatens the future survival of the union itself."[40] Krastev is therefore not afraid to paint a critical and gloomy picture of Europe, but at the end of the day he stays optimistic: "The argument of this short book is that the [European] Union is going through a really bad time today, torn apart by numerous crises that damage confidence in the future of the project among citizens across the continent. So the disintegration of the Union is one of the most likely outcomes. Yet, paradoxically, 2017 comes with a renewed source of hope that was lacking in 2016. No one expected the outcome of the Brexit vote or the American presidential election. The shock inspired by these twin events sends us a message that we do not understand the world as well as we thought we did. In 2017, we therefore face a very different dynamic. We are not only aware that the unthinkable can happen,"[41] but what if is this "unthinkable" has already happened? What if "the unthinkable" is not to be understood in the sense that one day Europe may find its way, but in the sense that Europe (as the EU) has already found and founded a wrong (neoliberal) way?

All the quoted descriptions of Europe's predicaments and crises do not really question the way Europe has succumbed to neoliberalism, especially after the crisis of 2008 and the subsequent austerity politics/policies. In the briefest terms: if one speaks about the crisis or crises of Europe, one simply does not question the foundations and functions of today's EU.

The EU, as it is today, is presumed to be the cure for Europe's woes and predicaments. The presumption of all this talk about the "crisis of Europe" is that more Europe in the form of the existing EU will "heal the wound." Europe is seen as a danger and simultaneously as its own solution, illness, and cure, in the same manner as the notion of *pharmakon* in Plato is viewed by Derrida. "Europe" is a perfect example of that: the same thing that caused the trouble will rescue and solve it, or as Slavoj Žižek citing Wagner put it: "The wound can be healed only by the spear that smote it." All the talk about the "crisis" in and of Europe is therefore a variant of what Žižek calls a "Hölderlin paradigm":

40 *Ibid*, p. 44.
41 *Ibid*, p. 109.

> More generally, the whole of Judeo-Christian history, right up to our own post-modernity, is determined by what I am tempted to call the Hölderlin paradigm, which was first articulated by Saint Augustine in City of God: "Where the danger is grows also what can save us. (*Wo aber Gefahr ist wächst das Rettende auch.*)" The present moment appears as the lowest point in the long process of historical decadence (the flight of the gods, alienation…), but the danger of the catastrophic loss of the essential dimension of being-human also opens up the possibility of a reversal (Kehre)—proletarian revolution, the arrival of new gods (who, according to Heidegger's late work, are the only ones that can save us), and so forth.[42]

This paradigm, to stay at an abstract level, is present in the central statement of the Mont Pelerin Society from 1947, which laid the foundations for neoliberalism. This statement is: "The central values of civilization are in danger."[43] What if the cure for this danger, neoliberalism, has turned into a poison, as the economic crisis of 2008 and its after-effects have proven to be for Europe?[44]

There is then a strict dividing line in answering this question and it is related to the term "crisis": those who think that Europe is in crisis do not find the way the EU functions today to be problematic or neoliberal, while those who do not use the term crisis but seek more appropriate terms for a description of the current situation abandon the term "crisis" and turn around the "Hölderlin paradigm": Europe is no more; we have to end (*this)* Europe, neoliberal Europe,[45] we have to rebuild a different, *Left* Europe and EU. What we have now as the EU is but "a transnational juggernaut haphazardly thrown together and rolling in a neoliberal direction."[46]

In other words, inside Europe as it is, inside the EU, "crisis" is nothing but a method of neoliberal governance:

42 Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View*, MIT Press, Cambridge (Mass.) & London 2006, p. 76.

43 Quoted in: David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005, p. 20.

44 Tooze, *Crashed*, p. 17.

45 See: Dimitris Alakoglou, Cédric Durand, Razmig Keucheyan, Stathis Kouvelakis, Costas Lapavitsas and Wolfgang Streek, *En finir avec l'Europe*, La Fabrique éditions, Pariz 2014.

46 Costas Lapavitsas, *The Left Case Against the EU*, Polity, Cambridge 2019, p. 19.

But we must not isolate the 'Greek crisis' from the 'European crisis' or the 'global crisis'. They are aspects of a generalized war to change the world in accordance with the norms of capitalist rationality. [...] Neoliberalism continues to be imposed on societies, which it transforms using economic blackmail. The ongoing war waged by creditors is conducted by all available means: blackmail over jobs, financial strangulation, and fear of privatization. The term given it acts as a mask: 'the crisis'.[47]

47 Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, *Never-Ending Nightmare. The Neoliberal Assault on Democracy*, translated by Gregory Elliot, Verso, London & New York 2019, p. 120.