The global financial crisis and its particular manifestations in Europe have been the subject of a rich literature written by economists and political scientists and which created a diverse set of approaches to the analysis. While there is generally a consensus about the economic origins of a crisis born in the United States and the existence of a spillover mechanism towards Europe, there are many interpretations of the particular weaknesses of the European project which allowed the crisis to have such a pervasive and structural impact.

Loredana Radu’s *Criza economică în Uniunea Europeană. O perspectivă comunicatională* offers a complex and insightful vision revealing that at the root of Europe’s issues lies a resilient identity crisis which has the effect of disorienting and confusing institutional actions undertaken to address the financial and political problems of European Union Member States.

The book is structured on three general layers of analysis focusing firstly, on linking the economic and political strains of the financial crisis to the legitimacy issues faced by Europe in the last decade, secondly, on the multiple strains of euro-scepticism affecting the population of EU Member States and measures to address it and thirdly, on a review of the media coverage crisis-related topics in Romania’s online press.

In the first part of the book, the author highlights various explanation models for the problems facing Europe and argues that, while the profound economic issues were undoubtedly an important trigger for the current distress, an explanatory approach based on the weak legitimacy of the European project is very effective in revealing how fundamental European principles may be threatened by vision-lacking political decisions. This section of the book contains a consistent review of the literature addressing EU’s legitimacy issues, in particular those involving EU institutions’ democratic capacity and the ability of European citizens to identify with the EU as well as their feelings towards the entire project.

Various potential solutions to such issues are identified, such as supporting a more cosmopolitan approach to the EU identity, and the book also refers to a set of strategies already in place to recover a sense of legitimacy for Europe before its citizens. The author, however, underlines the instrumental nature of such strategies, and reveals a certain lack of consensus with regards to an explicit broader purpose that the identified remedies may have.

These strategies are generally implemented in the context of a very nuanced and conflicting notion of “Europeanization”, the “fuzzy concept”, as identified by certain scholars and are integrated into a distinct notion of a “Eurosphere”, which is essentially the *locus* for the main challenges posed by the crisis.

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*Sorina DUMITRU*


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The author argues in favour of an empirical approach to the analysis of the complex nature of Eurosceptic sentiment throughout the EU, which is included in the second part of the book. These chapters offer particular focus on the mechanism implemented in order to conduct Eurobarometer type research as well as the actual content and results of such research in the period between 2008 and 2012. This research reveals that European institutions have faced a continuous decrease in the level of trust granted by EU Member State citizens.

In particular, it is revealed that the European Central Bank have been confronted with an acute confidence crisis in the past years, which may be indicative of the fact that the institution’s responsibilities in formulating Eurozone monetary policy have made it a target for people’s frustrations with other measures undertaken by Member States during the same period.

Based on the data revealed by the analysis, Radu argues that a vicious circle of lack of trust is being created which contributes to the political unrest in the EU. The vicious circle stems from the fact that the uncertainty fed by scepticism breeds a particular defeatism of the public with regards to approaching European topics.

This section of the book also tackles a perceived “gulf of communication” between the EU and citizens of the member states and addresses the need for an EU communication policy. Such a policy has been formally adopted by the EU in the past decade, but the author argues that the focus has been mostly on supplying the arguments for the existence of such a policy less on the specific way in which such a policy would function or other concrete methodological and effective implementation measures that will need to be undertaken.

There is also a focus on how other set-backs faced by the European project in the past century (such as the 1992 refusal by Denmark to ratify the Maastricht treaty, the 2005 French and Dutch referendum on the European Constitution) have shaped the communication strategy of the EU and reactivated the need for transparency and for better orienting the decisional landscape of the community towards the role played by the citizens. In the context of the present crisis, the author points towards a mixed messaging phenomenon consisting in two opposing communication patterns to the public: one leading towards strengthening the European public sphere and a different one which could even result in its dissolution.

The review of EU crisis illustrations in the Romanian media is preceded by an analysis of a set of data regarding the impact that the crisis had in new EU Member States and in Romania in particular. Special attention is granted external financial assistance understandings and the implementation of austerity measures adopted as a result (widely perceived as imposed by the IMF and the EU, but still politically attributed to Romanian governance of the time).

The final section of the book, reveals the content analysis and the results of a research conducted based on 11,570 articles published by two major online media news providers: hotnews.ro and ziare.com. The study generally inquires about the visibility of crisis related news covered as well as the relevant actors involved during two separate sampled periods: the first sample period (April – May 2009) largely coincided with the entering into the financial support arrangements with the EU, IMF and other international institutions, and the second sample period (October – November 2011) coincided with Romania’s participation on the EU Summit on the euro-zone crisis.

The study reveals that between the two sample periods, the visibility of crisis related news has grown by a significant amount, most notably on hotnews.ro where the number doubled. The author argues that in 2011, hotnews.ro began to play an important role in setting the agenda of crisis media coverage and that this visibility has a positive effect in that it offers multiple approaches and an overall balanced content on the topic.
With regards to the illustration of relevant actors involved, the study shows that domestic actors have been more widely covered in the 2009 sample period, with EU and non-EU actors sharing an equally smaller coverage. By comparison, in the 2011 sample period the EU actors significantly dominated this type of news while coverage of both Romanian and non-EU actors decreased.

The analysis of the data included in the book reveals a tendency to “personify” the crisis, with more illustration of relevant actors being present in the 2011 sample period and more focus on EU actors. While the apparent “Europeanization” of the media discourse does reveal a certain degree of added maturity to the analysis of the crisis in the news, the author also draws a poignant reminder of how this contributes to the image of the EU in the larger context of scapegoating tendencies generally present in Romanian news coverage.

Loredana Radu’s book offers an insight into the nature of a larger context of communication issues faced by the EU and rightfully points out the impact that improving such issues may have on taking more conclusive political decisions to address Europe’s crises. It also dives into a very specific illustration of such issues in Romania’s press, laying the ground for potential future research on how such data may be utilized by stakeholders in the future in order to improve coverage of EU topics in the interest of the community and its citizens.