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COMMUNICATING THE EUROPEAN UNION IN CRISIS: EUROPEAN COMMISSION CRISIS COMMUNICATION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR REPUTATION AND LEGITIMACY

MA Thesis

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I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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Abstract

The past decade has been crisis ridden for the EU. In addition to the immediate influence, crises damage reputation and legitimacy, by crisis communication this harm can be alleviated. EC, the communicator on the supranational level, acting in the name of the whole EU, has had to deal with these situations.

This thesis views the crisis communication strategies EC uses in three recent and prominent crises: Greek government-debt crisis, migration crisis and Brexit. Adding the tools offered by situational crisis communication theory by Coombs and image repair theory by Benoit to the European studies' general framework, the author, using the methods of discourse analyses, researches EC crisis communication and the social consequences of it for the reputation and legitimacy of EC and EU.

By analysing 231 speeches by the President of the EC and by the commissioners responsible for the most affected policy field in the crisis, the crisis communication strategies are identified. Looking at media response and public opinion, the findings suggest that crisis communication contributes to shaping the context within which the social consequences regarding reputation/legitimacy can occur.

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Introduction

The past decade has been all but bright and stable for the European Union (EU). It has been crisis-ridden and it has provoked the questions of legitimacy of the EU and its institutions. There are several recent crises that still cause a stir and have an impact on the whole EU, these crises have put the legitimacy of the European integration project in question.

The Eurozone crisis as the first from many to hit EU has inspired various authors to reflect upon the EU in crisis. Numerous articles and books have been published that consider this phenomenon searching for causes and possible solutions. Peet and La Guardia propose the key to recovery might be in the disciplining possibility for national governments to go bust (no-bail-out rule) restored and in fiscal federalism with some shared risks to stabilise the euro zone enough to withstand such shock.[1] Despite somewhat dubious reference in the title to the EU having passed the crisis, in his reflection on the Economic and Monetary Union and the Eurozone crisis, Majone poses a question about the limits of the European integration – has an excessive harmonisation produced an unwanted reverse effect? Is this the root cause of instability?[2] Arguing that there is a trend towards further differentiation, Dinan *et al* come to a rather discouraging conclusion that even if the incapacity to provide solutions to the numerous, severe and mutating crises might not lead to the complete EU disintegration, as the value of EU to Member States' governments probably overweighs the need for the ultimate divergence, but to a collapse that brings fourth the restructuring of parts of the policy areas.[3]

Besides substantive crisis, these crises have also resulted in crisis of EU legitimacy. Crisis is a threat to institution's reputation (and therefore to its legitimacy). Legitimacy and reputation are closely interconnected, they are both perceptions of approval of

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[1] Peet, J., La Guardia, A. (2014) Unhappy Union. How the Euro Crisis – and Europe – Can Be Fixed. Economist Books
[2] Majone, G. (2014) Rethinking the Union of Europe Post-crisis: Has the Integration Gone Too Far? Cambrige University Press
[3] Dinan, D., Nugent, N., Paterson E. W. (2017) Conclusions: Crisis Without End? The European Union in Crisis. Palgrave.

organisation's or institution's actions based on stakeholders' evaluation.[4] However, the two concepts are still not the same. Whereas the first is linked to conformity with defined or implicit standards and rules, the second is associated with the positive image of the organisation in the eyes of the stakeholders.[5] Crisis causes damage and this directly influences the way stakeholders interact with the institution. Crisis communication is a tool to minimise the damage, to repair institution's image and/or prevent further damage to it.[6] EU is no different in these aspects from any other organisation, meaning that if there is crisis, its reputation/legitimacy will be damaged. And in face of such danger, the organization might attempt to avert damage to reputation/legitimacy. More precisely, the European Commission (EC), being at the institutional heart of the Union[7], the guardian of the Treaties and the supranational voice of the EU, takes the role of the lead speaker and becomes responsible for crisis communication acts that are designed to minimise damage. Interested in how the EU aims to stem the fallout of its crises, this study therefore investigates the crisis communication of the EC.

While I consider the EU/EC as an organization like any other, and therefore susceptible to being understood in terms of organizational theory, it is still specific in the sense that the position of the EC as one-of-a-kind a supranational institution, that has unique relation towards one group of its stakeholders, the Member States and furthermore the citizens of the EU.[8] The consequences of crisis communication can be assessed by the reactions of the receivers, of which the Member States are by far not the only, but from the aspect of

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[4] King, G. Brayden, Whetten, A. David (2008) Rethinking the Relationship Between Reputation and Legitimacy: A Social Actor Conceptualization. Corporate Reputation Review, Vol 11, No 3
[5] Ibid.
[6] Coombs, W. T. (2007) Protecting Organization Reputations During a Crisis: The Development and Application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Corporate Reputation Review, September 2007, Volume 10.
[7] Dinan, D., Nugent, N., Paterson E. W. (2017) A Multi-dimensional Crisis. The European Union in Crisis. Palgrave.
[8] The relationship between Member States and the Commission can be brought back to the principal-agent duality, in the ideal case there is mutual understanding and support, but when agent oversteps or is perceived overstepping the limits of the responsibilities delegated by principal or underperforms in the eyes of the principal, the arising problem undermines supranational agent's reputation and legitimacy. Promoting the general intrest of the Union and being an executive of the EU, it is also accountable to the citizens, afterall, in addition to being the citizens of the EU, in democracy the Member States' governments (principal) are elected by their citizens and have the right to scrutinise the acts of the agent (EC) chosen by their eletctees.

legitimacy and reputation the most important stakeholders for EC. In order to study the varying impact of EC crisis communication in current crises, this study investigates three crises and the EC crisis communication strategies in those crises.

The present study thereby seeks to address a gap in the existing literature in that no prior research has offered an ample insight into the described problem from this angle. The other authors have explored other, related issues such as EC communication, political communication, EU public communication, as shown below, but they have not explored EC crisis communication and its social consequences[9]. Meyer, in his study of EC communication, is viewing EC's inability to properly communicate as a key factor leading to legitimacy problems. The root cause of these deficiency is found in the specific system of governance that deprives EC from necessary political authority and at the same time enables the Member States' governments to direct the public discontent towards EC and away from themselves.[10] While he has studied the shortages of routine communication, he did not include the arguable even more demanding aspect of EU communication during crisis. EU and EC communication and its various aspects are for example discussed in "Public Communication in the European Union: History, Perspectives and Challenges", this publication contains chapters on EC communication with candidate countries, challenges of the EC spokespersons, public relations of the EC.[11] However, what remains unaddressed is the specific mode of public communication that is crisis communication. There are authors that deal with political communication during crisis, but not the crisis communication by the EC − Mohl and Sondermann have found that public statements issued by euro area politicians, especially, when from AAA-rated country, increased the bond spreads.[12] In light of the specific position of the EC in crisis communication, being the most central communicator, who represents the supranational level and interests, it is therefore

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[9] Engaging in communicative acts, EC as a political actor, brings forward social consequences that are to be understood also as the political consequences.
[10] Meyer, C. (1999) Political Legitimacy and the Invisibility of Politics: Exploring the European Union's Communication Deficit. Journal of Common Market Studies, Vol. 37, No. 4, December 1999.
[11] Valentini, C., Nesti, G. (Eds.) (2010) Public Communication in the European Union: History, Perspectives and Challenges. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
[12] Mohl, P., Sondermann, D. (2013) Has political communication during the crisis impacted sovereign bond spreads in the euro area? Applied Economics Letters, 20:1, 48-61.

worthwhile exploring the crisis communication of the EC. Before the background of the existing literature this research aims to contribute to the existing literature connecting the aspects that so far have been viewed separately or in different dual constellations. This thesis is researching how EC is communicating EU in crisis and what kind of consequences EC crisis communication has from the aspect of reputation and legitimacy of the EC and the EU.

In order to do so, this study brings crisis communication theories into dialogue with the field of the European studies. Whilst discussing crisis and/or legitimacy problems in great length[13], even making the connection between communication and reputation/legitimacy[14], these issues are currently absent from European studies literature, both empirical and theoretical. Despite its interdisciplinary nature, European studies does not provide the tools to describe the crisis communication with necessary precision in order to analyse this topic in depth. This shortcoming can be ameliorated by bringing in crisis communication theories, which by itself represents a contribution to the field of European studies, by adding to its theoretical/analytical tools. Crisis communication theories that form a sub-category of public relations field and are closely connected to organisation theories and social psychology have been applied both on corporations and individual politicians[15], in order to account for the way in which the EU/EC has attempted to deal with the reputation/legitimacy fallout of multiple crises, it is therefore possible, and analytically useful, to draw on these theories.

In light of these aims, this study addresses the question, **what kind of crisis communication strategies the EC deploys and what are the consequences of these**

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[13] Dinan, D *et al* (2017) The European Union in Crisis. Palgrave; Schmidt, V. A. (2015) The Eurozone's Crisis of Democratic Legitimacy: Can the EU Rebuild Public Trust and Support for European Economic Integration? European Economy Discussion Paper. European Union, 2015.

[14] Blom-Hansen, J., Finke, D. (2017) Reputation and Organizational Politics: Inside the EU Commission, EUSA Fifteenth Biennial Conference, 4-6 May 2017; Meyer, C. (1999) Political Legitimacy and the Invisibility of Politics: Exploring the European Union's Communication Deficit. Journal of Common Market Studies, Vol. 37, No. 4, December 1999.

[15] Benoit, L. W. (2015). Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: Image Repair Theory and Research. State University of New York Press; Coombs, W. T. et al (2010) Why a concern for apologia and crisis communication?, Corporate Communications: An International Journal, Vol. 15 Issue: 4, pp.337-349.

strategies for reputation and political legitimacy of the EC and the EU. As the purpose of crisis communication is to minimise the damage to reputation or repair it, and maintain or strengthen legitimacy,[16] crisis communication as discursive practice is expected to shape reputation/legitimacy. Therefore the analysis performed in this research attempts to demonstrate, how the deployment of different crisis communication strategies contributes to social consequences, namely the gravity of reputational/legitimacy loss. Aware of the myriad of factors shaping reputation and legitimacy of EU/EC, no causal claim is being made. Causal theorising is not the aim of this study. Instead, adopting a discursive view on social reality[17], it regards crisis communication as a discursive practice which contribute to shaping the conditions on the basis of which social consequences of a crisis, reputational and legitimacy, eventually manifest themselves. Yet, even if there are many factors that influence the success EC communication in general (see Chapter 2) and therefore also the crisis communication, it is possible to see patterns in how the EC crisis communication works and if it brings about the desired consequences. Moreover, the present study must be understood as explorative in character, there is no public information or data on the EC crisis communication strategies, it is based solely on the public materials, the primary corpus is chosen accordingly.

The research will rely on in depth analysis of the speeches published online and the reception of them, taking into consideration the general discourse they fit into (legislation, political actions, interviews, events, public opinion surveys). The sources that are analysed are obtained via European Commission press release database (RAPID), EC public websites (Eurobarometer, Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM) homepage) and any other online channel available for the researcher.

The study answers the proposed questions by analysing EC crisis communication in three different crises – the European debt crisis, migration crisis and Brexit. Within enhancing

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[16] Benoit, L. W. (2015). Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: Image Repair Theory and Research. State University of New York Press; Coombs, W. T. (2007) Protecting Organization Reputations During a Crisis: The Development and Application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Corporate Reputation Review, September 2007, Volume 10

[17] Fairclough, N. (1992) Discourse and Social Change. Polity Press.

the credibility and objectivity of the research, in one of the crises there will be a narrower focus found e.g. Greek government-debt crisis. The crises are recent ones to be able to fully use the predefined online nature of the sample and to follow the reception/reaction side of the crisis communication which is vital for the examination of the consequences for reputation/legitimacy and evaluation of the impact of given strategies. In case of all crises the texts to be used form the crisis communication side are speeches of the President and the commissioners, with the only exception in case of Brexit, when also the speeches of the European Chief Negotiator have been included. The consequences of the crisis communication for the reputation and legitimacy of the EC and EU in general are viewed, introducing the wider discursive context into which the EC crisis communication places and in which it interacts, the changes it brings about. This is done by looking at public opinion, actions that followed the communication and assessments of the consequences in the literature. The purpose of assessing the social consequences in this way is not to establish a causal link, but to elucidate how the discursive intervention in the form of crisis communication has shaped the conditions before which the consequences of crisis for reputation/legitimacy unfold. For this purpose the secondary corpus of public opinion surveys, academic papers and media articles from relevant periods is used.

In Chapter 1 the theoretical framework of the thesis is being presented. Chapter 1.1. discusses the questions of reputation and legitimacy are both from the angle of political studies and the organisational theory, also their relation with and dependency on communication is viewed. Chapter 1.2. concentrates on the concept of crisis, also EU in crisis and gives an insight into crisis communication theories used in this research. Chapter 2 is dedicated on the routine procedures of the EC's communication, the strategies, means and actors of this field are being presented. Chapter 3 introduces the methodology and research design. The actual research chapters are divided by crises and in two subchapters analyse EC communication and assess it against the reception of it. The thesis is completed by a concluding chapter in which findings are summarised, implications discussed.

1. Theoretical framework

1.1 Legitimacy, Reputation and Communication in Political Studies and in Organisational Theory

In this chapter the notions or concepts of legitimacy and reputation are being discussed – as they are crucial to this research it is important to position them in time and in discourse of both political studies and organisational theory, therefore a brief historic overview and some insights into relevant literature are offered. First we discuss legitimacy as such in a larger context of EU, then turn to the legitimacy of the EC and finally we look into the concepts of reputation and legitimacy in organisational theory, explaining the need to distinguish between the two terms.

Already in 1922 Max Weber[18] distinguishes three types of legitimate rule – charismatic, traditional and legal-rational. Whereas opposed to one charismatic leader or tradition based e.g. tribal traditions rule, the legal rational type of legitimate rule or authority is based on the set of uniform principles, legal and natural law principles govern an individual: "[…] development of the modern state is identical indeed with that of modern officialdom and bureaucratic organizations just as the development of modern capitalism is identical with the increasing bureaucratization of economic enterprise."[19]

Whereas Weber asserts this for the state, this no less applies to the EU. In other words, the "nature of the beast"[20] is legal-rational and already on basis of Weber's argumentation we can see the connections between that type of rule and both the structure and working methods of organisations, the similarities to which we will return later in this chapter. However, in 1994, after the Maastricht crisis[21], this represents a challenge for the EU,

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[18] Weber, M. (1922). Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Tübingen

[19] Weber, M. (1958) The three types of legitimate rule. Berkeley Publications in Society and Institutions, 4 (1), pp. 1-11.

[20] Risse, T. (1996) Exploring the Nature of the Beast: International Relations Theory and Comparative Policy Analysis Meet the European Union. Journal of Common Market Studies Vol. 34, No. 1, March 1996.

[21] Maastricht Treaty ratification crisis in 1992-1993, when Danish voters rejected the Treaty in June 1992 to approve it on second referendum in May 1993 after sufficient opt-outs.

Featherstone notes that Monnet's original ideas of an elitist and technocratic High Authority to watch over and push forward the integration have lost its appeal as it lacks the necessary public support.[22] The threat that is embedded in lack of dialogue about the needs of the public and the morality of power is the one Habermas saw creeping around the corner as early as 1976, when he notes that all norms that do not regulate generalizable, common interests are overstepping the moral boundaries, they are based upon force, constitute a normative power i.e. when a government or another entity filling that position fails to rationally justify its decisions, there is an imminent crisis threat. And this is the crisis of legitimacy,[23] which could be avoided or resolved by undistorted communication.[24] As the legal-rational legitimate rule involves the kind of political legitimacy that is in very large extent based on trust of the governed and agreement and acceptance of those who give the power to rule,[25] it demands constant interaction with subjects or stakeholders to grow the reputational capital and assure the legitimacy[26]. Gurr has put it very simply and elegantly in his 1971 writing: "governance can be considered legitimate in so far as its subjects regard it as proper and deserving of support".[27] This is also the understanding this study adopts.

This all in turn brings us to the concept of **democratic deficit**, that the EU itself defines as seeming inaccessibility of the EU institutions and the decision-making procedures to the ordinary citizen due to their complexity.[28] The position of the researchers in the question of democratic legitimacy of the EU is quite ambivalent. While Moravcsik deems EU democratically legitimate[29], Majone, who held initially the same position[30] reconsiders

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[22] Featherstone, K. (1994) Jean Monnet and the "Democratic Deficit" in the European Union. Journal of Common Market Studies. Vol. 32, No. 2 June 1994.

[23] Habermas, J. (1976) Legitimation Crisis. London: Heinemann.

[24] Habermas, J. (1987) The Theory of Communicative Action Volume 2. Lifeworld And System: A Critique Of Functionalist Reason. Beacon Press

[25] Meyer, C. (1999) Political Legitimacy and the Invisibility of Politics: Exploring the European Union's Communication Deficit. Journal of Common Market Studies, Vol. 37, No. 4, December 1999.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Gurr, T. R. (1971) Why Men Rebel. Stanford, CA: Princeton University Press, p 185.

[28] EUR-Lex, Glossary of Summaries > Democratic deficit, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary/democratic_deficit.html?locale=en [all the online sources in the thesis last used 19.5.2018]

[29] Moravcsik, A. (2002) In defence of the democratic deficit: reassessing legitimacy in the European Union.

himself over time, detecting problems in universal community method of governance and seeing the differentiation as a solution for legitimate governance[31], which with its dangers was briefly discussed in the introduction. Lacking in mutual understanding, that causes democratic deficit, that in turn can cause legitimacy crisis, have their foundation in insufficient communication. EU's legitimacy depends very much on the communication, which thinking back on what Habermas implies, is probably an universal trait in obtaining any kind of legitimacy.

In case of EU and also EC there is still a need to mention several types of legitimacy. Scharpf defines the **input legitimacy** as the **government by people**, meaning that the governing processes in general correspond to the preferences of the governed (as also shown by Weber and Habermas) and the **output legitimacy** as the **government for the people** i.e. the adopted policies are in general solutions to the common problems.[32] Schmidt defines also the third category of legitimacy, that is **throughput legitimacy** i.e. **governance with the people**, meaning the openness of the institutions to consult and include the citizens.[33] These are the three dimensions that constitute the democratic legitimacy of the EU and also for the EC, but how they operate is different:

> Importantly, the interaction effects of these three legitimizing mechanisms differ. Input and output can involve a trade-off whereby better output performance through effective policy outcomes can make up for little input via citizen participation or government responsiveness, and failed output can still be legitimated by extensive citizen input. Throughput, in contrast, offers no such trade-offs. If of good quality, throughput disappears from view; if of bad quality, it may taint the output policies or skew the input politics.[34]

This means that resultful, solution orientated policy can justify the lesser involvement of citizens' wishes and the lacking communication between governing entity and the governed, also the feeling of inclusion in the policymaking could compensate for the

Journal of Common Market Studies. Vol 40, Issue 4.
[30] Majone, G. (1998) Europe's Democratic Deficit. European Law Journal, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 5-28.
[31] Majone, G. (2009) Dilemmas of European Integration. Oxford.
[32] Scharpf, F. W. (2003) Problem-solving effectiveness and democratic accountability in the EU, MPIfG working paper, No. 03/1.
[33] Schmidt, V. A. (2013) Democracy and Legitimacy in the European Union Revisited: Input, Output and 'Throughput', Political Studies: 2013, Vol. 61, pp.2–22.
[34] Schmidt, V. A .(2015) The Eurozone's Crisis of Democratic Legitimacy: Can the EU Rebuild Public Trust, p. 10.

weaker output. In the current study we have to consider input and output legitimacy, which are directly related to the communication and also visible in the distinction the EC makes in its communication strategy between client groups: "As an executive service, DG COMM ensures that high quality country specific information and analysis are fed into the College's decision making process"[35] i.e. it is listening to its citizens and obtaining input legitimacy and "as a communication service, DG COMM ensures that a simple, clear and understandable message focussed on Commission's priorities is communicated to the media and other multipliers and to EU citizens and engages with them"[36] i.e. convincing citizens that everything is done in their best interest and achieving the output legitimacy. We will return to the structure of communication in EC in Chapter 2.

As we have established the importance of communication in legitimacy, we can take a look, what are the consequences of inadequate communication. The immediate result can be a crisis like it happened in 1999[37]: "Europe was left decapitated last night as the entire European Commission resigned en masse after a devastating report by an independent committee of inquiry which found that they had "lost control of the administration."[38] Meyer argues in his 1999 study[39] that the main reason behind the EC resignation was the unprecedented media attention. He deems the public communication as a major factor that has impact on the political legitimacy of the EU and the communication work done by the EC has a crucial role to play in it. The author is explaining why EC has failed in getting public support by communicating its routine work and has been unable to answer the media adequately during the crisis periods: "The Commission was confronted with legitimacy expectations appropriate to a political, not a technocratic institution. Its inability to meet these expectations showed first and most visibly at the Commission's interface with the

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[35] DG Communication Strategic Plan 2016 – 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/strategic-plan-2016-2020-dg-comm_april2016_en.pdf, p. 10.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Due to the corruption allegations Santer Commission resigned colletctively in spring 1999.
[38] Walker, M. (1999) EU chiefs resign en masse. The Guardian. 16.3.1999, https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/mar/16/eu.politics1
[39] Meyer, C. (1999) Political Legitimacy and the Invisibility of Politics: Exploring the European Union's Communication Deficit. Journal of Common Market Studies, Vol. 37, No. 4, December 1999, pp. 617–39.

media."[40]

And the EC learned from its mistakes by recognising its weaknesses e.g. the White Paper on European Governance[41], and even in the institutional issues database DORIE that is managed by Secretariat-General there is a possibility to search by the theme *Democratic deficit – democratic legitimacy* (the number of hits is currently ta more than 400 documents[42]). After the failure of the ratification of the Constitution it took up a new, more professional and structured approach towards communication:

> Thus the President of the Commission, José Barroso, and Vice-President Wallström have launched a communication plan to improve the public understanding of EU and its activities and to strengthen a common sense of belonging between citizens. This strategy comprises several measures: the publication of programmatic documents, the improvement of already existing services, the adoption of new online tools, and the provision of funds for civil society's initiatives.[43]

This proves that EC understood the role of communication in achieving legitimacy, and is dedicated to improving its performance in all three dimensions of legitimacy by using appropriate tools. As we can also see later in Chapter 2, this direction of communication strategy continues until now and it is continuously evolving to keep up with the developments in general media and public sphere e.g. using digital communication and social media.

EC Directorate General for Communication (DG COMM) measures the success of the communication and the accomplishment of its general objective – making the citizens see that EU is working to improve their lives (output legitimacy) and that they are involved in decisions and policy making (input legitimacy) i.e. the political legitimacy of the EU – against the impact indicator *Percentage of EU citizens having a positive image of the EU[44]*:
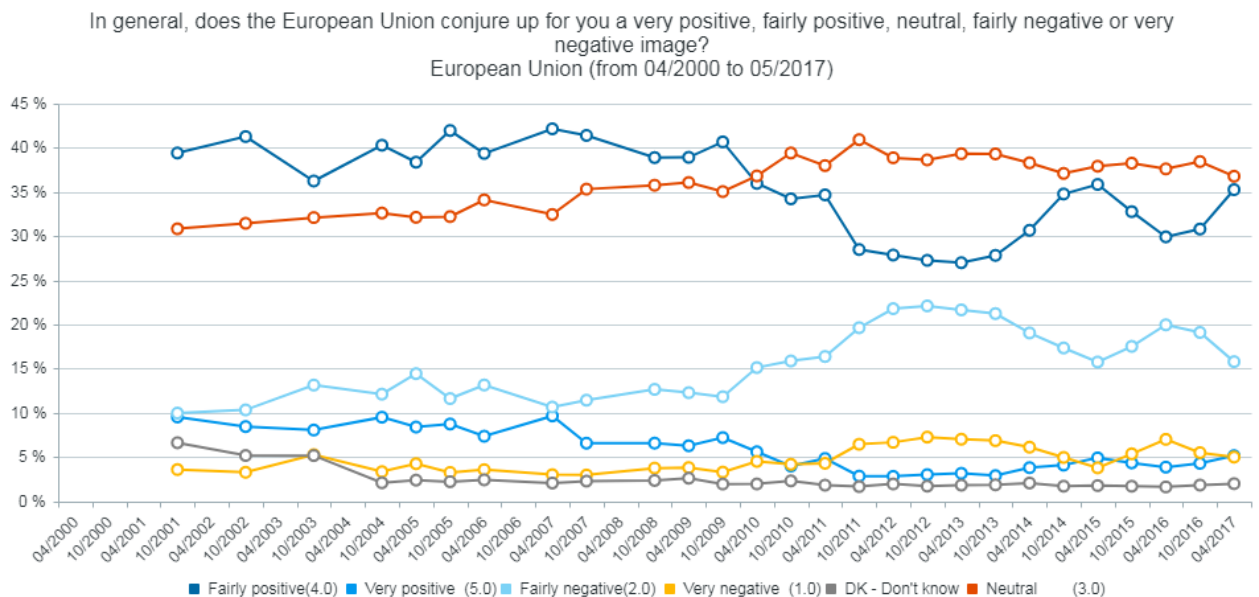
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[40] Ibid, p. 635.

[41] European governance - A white paper, COM/2001/0428 final, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52001DC0428

[42] DORIE database, http://ec.europa.eu/dorie/result.do

[43] Valentini, C. , Nesti, G (Eds.) (2010) Public Communication in the European Union: History, Perspectives and Challenges. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, p. 1.

[44] DG Communication Strategic Plan 2016 – 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/strategic-plan-2016-2020-dg-comm_april2016_en.pdf, p. 8, 14, 20, 28.

Figure 1: Image of the EU

In general, does the European Union conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image?
European Union (from 04/2000 to 05/2017)

Legend: Fairly positive(4.0) ■ Very positive (5.0) ■ Fairly negative(2.0) ■ Very negative (1.0) ■ DK - Don't know ■ Neutral (3.0)

Source: Eurobarometer Interactive

Looking at the chart above already on the first sight there seems to be a certain correlation between the highs and lows of positive perception of EU, which is seen as a measure or indicator of legitimacy both by the EC and by the author of this research, and the timeline of several crises that have hit EU. For example a sharp drop towards negative image can be seen from the end of 2009, when the Eurozone crisis began, it stops at its lowest in 2013 and slowly begins to climb as the economy is recovering. The new decline starts in 2015 during the refugee crisis and the new low is hit in 2016 before the Brexit referendum.

It has been argued if the legitimacy crisis is caused by other crises or if other crises just increase it, at any case there is a consensus, that the connection between crisis and the legitimacy exists and that despite the technically legitimate policies on the output side the only means to regain political legitimacy or input legitimacy is proper communication.[45]

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[45] Schmidt, A. Vivien (2015) The Eurozone's Crisis of Democratic Legitimacy: Can the EU Rebuild Public Trust and Support for European Economic Integration? European Economy Discussion Paper. European Union, 2015.

Crisis also amplifies the structural causes undermining legitimacy, we have to think about the non-transparent policy-making and governing processes, the democratic deficit that we mentioned in the beginning of this chapter.

As the strategies and theories of crisis communication used in this study are mostly used by corporate communication world and in lesser extent by individual politicians (see Chapter 1.2), one might argue, how could they be applicable while observing the crisis communication of the EC. Leaving aside the fact that the Weberian bureaucracy is common to every large organisation, as it is to modern states, the EU in ways being both or none, a hybrid in a way, and the organisational legitimacy theory has the same Weberian roots, the much closer connection can be found in the purpose of crisis communication itself – to restore reputation[46] and through that also legitimacy.

There is a fine distinction between legitimacy and reputation and most of the literature dealing with this domain does not draw this line at all, but for the purposes of this research it seems necessary to still try and find the features that help us separate these two concepts. Legitimacy and reputation are closely interconnected, they are both perceptions of approval of organisation's or institution's actions based on stakeholders' evaluation. First is linked to conformity with defined or implicit standards and rules, second is associated with the positive distinction of the organisation in the eyes of the stakeholders.[47]

When we think back to the principal-agent approach towards interpreting the EU[48], already referred to in the introduction, we can also agree with the following:

> An agency's reputation is a valuable political asset, which increases the autonomy and legitimacy of the agency. It can be used to build political support, to increase formal discretion, to protect the agency from political attack and to build a set of constituencies in the agency's environment. A reputation-based understanding of agency behaviour is based on

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[46] Benoit, L. W. (2015) Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: Image Repair Theory and Research. State University of New York Press.
[47] King, G. B., Whetten, A. D. (2008) Rethinking the Relationship Between Reputation and Legitimacy: A Social Actor Conceptualization. Corporate Reputation Review, Vol 11, No 3.
[48] Kassim, H., Menon, A. (2003) The principal–agent approach and the study of the European Union: promise unfulfilled? Journal of European Public Policy 10:1 February 2003.

the assumption that the agency is driven by concerns of status, legitimacy, and survival rather than budget maximization, monetary incentives, or empowerment.[49]

This means that the adequate communication is means to create or grow the reputational capital. In turn this will boost legitimacy. Besides the direct link that solid reputation is also increasing legitimacy, it has to be noted that the organisations with higher reputation have more flexible conditions of being legitimate in the eyes of the stakeholders. The reputation is based on the comparison with other similar organisations i.e. the more positively distinguished the entity is the higher reputation it has and high status actors can deviate from norms, act in non-conform manner, which is important to keep in mind by examining crisis resolution and communication.[50]

What this discussion above has shown, is the interconnectedness of legitimacy, reputation and communication in relevant contexts for current study, most importantly the demonstration of need for adequate communication in order to achieve legitimacy. Having established the link between communication, reputation and legitimacy, the next chapter leads us to the next chapter that is dedicated to specific and very significant type of communication, namely the crisis communication.

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[49] Carpenter, D. P. (2001), as in Blom-Hansen, J., Finke, D. (2017) Reputation and Organizational Politics: Inside the EU Commission, EUSA Fifteenth Biennial Conference, 4-6 May 2017, p. 3.
[50] Deephouse, D. L., Carter, S. M. (2005) An examination of differences between organizational legitimacy and organizational reputation, Journal of Management Studies , 42:2; King, G. B., Whetten, A. D. (2008) Rethinking the Relationship Between Reputation and Legitimacy: A Social Actor Conceptualization. Corporate Reputation Review, Vol 11, No 3.

1.2 Image Repair Theory and Situational Crisis Communication Theory

In this chapter I am in the first sections going to look into the phenomenon of crisis, what is considered crisis in general sense and defining the crisis for the purposes of current research, also bringing in the crisis typology that is relevant for the strategy choices in crisis communication. The second part of the chapter is dedicated on introducing the crisis communication theories themselves, the works of Benoit and Coombs[51] that form the theoretical backbone of this thesis.

Before we get to the crisis communication theories themselves, we have to specify the concept of crisis itself as understood in this study. Despite the different definitions and uses of the term during history crisis always seems to be an event with big social impact and no predictable end.[52] "Whether crises become moments for positive change depends in part on the rhetorical capacities of those who seek such change to define possible and desirable goals which resonate with people´s needs and wants and are so construed as to make them realizable through mobilizing people to achieve them."[53] The crisis does not have to be something ultimately negative, as perceived in Marxian economics, something that constitutes an extreme dissonance that reproduces itself unless some extreme intervention takes place and a systemic change is achieved[54], crisis can be handled as an opportunity, that with the right treatment e.g. good crisis communication and the resulting legitimization could be an impulse towards positive change.

The crises have become more common, part of daily life, almost a normality, EU entered

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[51] Benoit, L. W. (2015). Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: Image Repair Theory and Research. State University of New York Press; Benoit, L. W. (1997) Image Repair Discourse and Crisis Communication. Public Relations Review, 23; Coombs, W. T. (1999) Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding. Sage Publications; Coombs, W. T. (2007) Protecting Organization Reputations During a Crisis: The Development and Application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Corporate Reputation Review, September 2007, Volume 10.

[52] Stråth, B., Wodak, R. (2009) Europe – Discourse – Politics – Media – History: Constructing "Crises"? The European Public Sphere and the Media. Europe in Crisis. Palgrave Macmillan.

[53] Fairclough, N. (2011) Critical Discourse Analysis in a Time of Crisis. Lecture, https://www.academia.edu/3776000/Critical_Discourse_Analysis_in_a_Time_of_Crisis_2011_, p. 10.

[54] Wolff, D. R. (1978) Marxian Crisis Theory: Structure and Implications. Sage.

the "age of crisis" in 2009-10 and this era has by far not ended.[55] George Soros ironically states in 2015 that the authorities of the EU have become "masters" of mishandling the succeeding crisis events. And at the time EU was juggling five crises at the same time: the Eurozone crisis, Greece debt crisis, migration crisis and the British Brexit referendum as internal challenges and one crisis with external nature – the situation in Ukraine.[56] Soros uses the same expression to describe EU's crisis managing technique that is known from other literature on the subject – *muddling through* the crises. According to Schweiger this is defined as short-term political fixes that bring only temporary respite from crisis.[57] None of the above mentioned crises have been resolved yet and are noticeably affecting the whole EU by causing dissatisfaction with policy results and the whole method of governance. There are many works on Europe in crisis, some focus on the history[58], some on politics[59], some take the perspective of external relations[60], some public sphere and media[61]. There are writings concentrating specifically on the EU and its institutions managing the crises and having an internal crisis from capability-expectations gap that Hill uses to describe the differences between what European Communities had ambitions to do and what it in reality could (or could not) deliver [62] to reflection papers requested already by the institutions themselves e.g. on how to regain legitimacy after crisis[63]. The density of crises has been escalating and simultaneously the doubts about the capability of the institutions, including the EC, have been growing (see e.g. Majone[64]). Leaving all these writings to the

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[55] Dinan, D., Nugent, N., Paterson E. W. (2017) A Multi-dimensional Crisis. The European Union in Crisis. Palgrave.

[56] Soros, G. (2015) Ukraine & Europe: What Should Be Done? The New York Reviw of Books, October 2015, http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2015/10/08/ukraine-europe-what-should-be-done/

[57] Schweiger, C. (2017) The Legitimacy Challenge. The European Union in Crisis. Palgrave.

[58] Koselleck, R. (1988) Critique and Crisis. Berg Publishers Ltd.

[59] Cross, M. (2017) The Politics of Crisis in Europe. Cambridge University Press

[60] Eeckhout, P., Lopez-Escudero, M (2016) The European Union's External Action in Times of Crisis. Hart Publishing.

[61] Triandafyllidou, A. *et al* (2009) The European Public Sphere and the Media. Europe in Crisis. Palgrave Macmillan.

[62] Hill, C (1993) The Capability-Expectations Gap, or Conceptualizing Europe´s Inernational Role. Journal of Common Market Studies, Volume 31, No 3, September 1993.

[63] Schmidt, Vivien A (2015). The Eurozone's Crisis of Democratic Legitimacy: Can the EU Rebuild Public Trust and Support for European Economic Integration? European Economy Discussion Paper. European Union, 2015.

[64] Majone, G (2014) Rethinking the Union of Europe Post-Crisis: Has Integration Gone Too Far? Cambridge University Press, *see also* Nugent, N, Rhinard, M (2016) Is the European Union Really in Decline? Journal of

background and coming back to them at later stages when needed, we have to ask, what is understood as crisis in this research?

As already stated in the introduction, for the purposes of the current study, crisis is defined as a threat to institution's reputation and/or image, it is a situation that has an immediate impact on the relationship with the stakeholders.[65] The natural and inevitable reaction to reputational threat is image repair.[66] When in crisis an organisation has to react and communicate in order to resolve the situation, for the EC this need to respond is aggravated as there are always the political aspects of the crisis to be taken into account and it is the political legitimacy that is questioned in crisis situations. For firms, the capital is at stake, if the worst case scenario happens, they can start anew, under new clean name. For a political entity in the other hand, everything is at skate, there is no other possibility than to handle the situation as best as it can. This demands a more sophisticated crisis communication than for example preventable cluster corporate misdeeds that either happened or not. A crisis demands an answer as it usually includes these two components: the organization is considered responsible for the situation and/or the behaviour of the organisation is felt to be offensive by the stakeholders.[67]

This response is crisis communication strategy. By strategy it is understood in this research anything that actors do or more importantly say in response to crisis. It does not necessarily have to be conscious choice, but the existence of crisis communication is undeniable and therefore also the impact of the strategies on reputation can be observed. There is rarely only one strategy used, there are almost always different strategies combined in crisis situations – these configurations of crisis communication strategies depend on the type of

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Common Market Studies 2016; Peterson, J (2016) Juncker´s political European Commission and EU in Crisis. Journal of Common Market Studies; Dinan, D, Nugent, N, Paterson E. W (2017) The European Union in Crisis. Palgrave.

[65] Coombs, W. T. (2007) Protecting Organization Reputations During a Crisis: The Development and Application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Corporate Reputation Review, September 2007, Volume 10.

[66] Benoit, L. W. (2015). Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: Image Repair Theory and Research. State University of New York Press.

[67] Benoit, L. W. (1997) Image Repair Discourse and Crisis Communication. Public Relations Review, 23.

crisis, the development of crisis and the audience towards whom the communicative act is directed.[68] It is reasonable though to follow certain logic and consistency in crisis communication, not all the strategies are to be mixed, as the result may be counterproductive. It might cause further harm and discredit the organisation even more than the crisis itself did. As one possibility to give guidance in the choice of strategies, Coombs distinguishes by the level of attributed accountability three separate crisis clusters: 1) victim cluster, 2) accidental cluster and 3) preventable cluster. The victim crises are the type, where an organisation itself is partly a victim of the crisis event, it is not held responsible. Accidental cluster crises involve partial accountability, the organisations ability to operate in proper manner is questioned. Preventable cluster has the stakeholders feeling deceived or put in harms way by organisation´s misdeeds.[69]

In this research the situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) by W. Timothy Coombs will be used, also some aspects of image repair/restoration theory by William Benoit. In his earlier works Benoit referred to the theory as *image restoration theory*, but later named it *image repair theory* as it is not in every case the complete restoration of the image is possible[70]. SCCT is applicable to variety of organisational forms, not only business enterprises. As the EC also can be defined as an organisation, it is reasonable to assume it can also be applied to EC.

There are the primary and supplemental crisis response strategies used in SCCT. Primary SCCT crisis response strategies form three groups based upon perceptions of accepting responsibility for a crisis: **denial**, **diminish** and **rebuild** and the secondary strategies fall under **bolstering** crisis response strategies.[71] Deny strategies are meant to break the connection between an organisation and the crisis, e.g. if there is no connection there is no harm from the crisis, if there is a rumour that causes the crisis, it depends on the acceptance

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[68] Benoit, L. W. (2015). Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: Image Repair Theory and Research. State University of New York Press.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Coombs, W. T. (2006). Code Red in the Boardroom: Crisis Communication as Organizational DNA. Praeger

of the audience, including media to really be convinced that a crisis does not exist or there is no link between crisis and the organisation.[72] The diminish category of strategies implies that the crisis is not as serious as perceived or that the organisations role in it is lesser, that organisation could not control the events leading to the crisis – the purpose is to make the stakeholders accept that the crisis belongs to the accidental cluster and therefore lighten the responsibility burden.[73] Rebuild strategies are the best way to increase the reputational capital by either showing new positive traits in organisation's actions or reminding the contribution done in past. This strategy type includes moral and material help to victims and/or stakeholders i.e. apology or compensation.[74] Bolstering is used to strengthen the organisation's good image, it may include several means to do it e.g. praising the stakeholders, these strategies can be used in combination with three previous ones as they alone do not have the required strength to increase the reputational assets.[75]

William Benoit offers the following types of crisis communication strategies: **denial**, **evasion of responsibility**, **reduction of offensiveness**, **corrective action**, **mortification**.[76] Denial includes denying performing the offensive act, it might be strengthened by saying who did it (truth here is irrelevant).[77] Evasion of responsibility lists several possibilities to reduce the involvement in crisis, e.g. suggesting that due to lack of information it was not possible to avoid the harmful event.[78] Reduction of offensiveness lists six ways to reduce the severity of the acts upon the audience, including minimizing the offensive impact of the act and/or strengthening one's own positive image to withstand the negative, this can also be done by offering compensation.[79] Corrective action means that the organisation will fix

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[72] Coombs, W. T. (2007) Protecting Organization Reputations During a Crisis: The Development and Application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Corporate Reputation Review, September 2007, Volume 10, pp. 171-172.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Benoit, L. W. (1997) Image Repair Discourse and Crisis Communication. Public Relations Review, 23.
[77] Benoit, L. W. (2015). Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: Image Repair Theory and Research. State University of New York Press, p. 35.
[78] Ibid, p. 35-36.
[79] Ibid, p. 36-38.

the problem, this does not necessarily mean admitting to have caused the crisis.[80] Mortification means apologising for the act, it can include accepting the guilt (even if innocent) or trying to stay as vague as possible to admit the minimum amount of guilt.[81]

The combination of these two close theories should offer the best means to determine the strategies used by the EC and give a structured overview that enables us to reach the conclusions about the impact of its crisis communication on reputation, image and legitimacy. The following table constructed for the purposes of this research illustrates the correlations between the two theories:

Figure 2: Strategy correlations in theories of Benoit and Coombs

Coombs		Benoit
DENY STRATEGIES		DENIAL
Attack the accuser		Simple denial
Denial		Shift the blame
Scapegoat		
		EVASION OF RESPONSIBILITY
DIMINISH		Provocation
Excuse		Defeasibility
Justification		Accident
		Good intentions
REBUILD		
Compensation		REDUCING OFFENSIVENESS
Apology		Bolstering
		Minimization
SECONDARY STRATEGIES		Differentiation
Bolstering strategies		Transcendence
		Attack the Accuser
Reminder		Compensation
Ingratitation		
Victimage		CORRECTIVE ACTION
		MORTIFICATION

Table by author[82]

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[80] Ibid, p. 36-38.
[81] Ibid, p 9.
[82] Benoit, L. W. (2015). Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: Image Repair Theory and Research. State University of New York Press; Benoit, L. W. (1997) Image Repair Discourse and Crisis Communication. Public Relations Review, 23; Coombs, W. T. (1999) Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing,

As we can see on the basis of the table *minimization*, *differentiation* and *transcendence* strategies by Benoit correspond to the strategies described under *diminish* category by Coombs, so do *defeasibility*, *accident* and *good intentions* strategies. *Provocation* by Benoit matches *deny* strategies. The only two strategies that have no clear equivalent by other author are *victimage* strategy by Coombs and *corrective action* by Benoit, first belongs among *bolstering strategies* and the second is a type of *rebuild strategy*. For the purposes of this research there is no differentiation made between primary and secondary strategies as Coombs does, because in case of political crisis bolstering seems to have bigger impact than being a mere addition to other strategies.

As we can clearly see, the two theories are very closely connected, Coombs relies strongly on Benoit in his works, he shares the conviction that the communication has the ultimate power in shaping how the crisis and the organization in crisis are perceived by the stakeholders, and this in turn influences organization´s reputation and the attitudes of the stakeholders towards it and its actions in the future.[83] Communication influences the emotions and reputation is affected by the emotions. The main difference between the two authors is the focus – Benoit is a descriptive theoretic who analyses crises cases and studies the strategies used, Coombs makes the missing practical connection between crises communication strategies and their predicted influence on the stakeholders. Benoit observes and interprets how organisations in crisis situation are acting, Coombs gives practical guidelines how the organisations should act to get the wished results.

Both Coombs and Benoit are deeply influenced by **attribution theory** that in psychology seeks to understand how people construct the rationale behind the events, how they make sense of what is happening. Benoit acknowledges the importance of beliefs and values in

and Responding. Sage Publications; Coombs, W. T. (2007) Protecting Organization Reputations During a Crisis: The Development and Application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Corporate Reputation Review, September 2007, Volume 10

[83] Coombs, W. T. (2007) Protecting Organization Reputations During a Crisis: The Development and Application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Corporate Reputation Review, September 2007, Volume 10.

the communication acts that happen between a source and an audience, an organisation and a stakeholder.[84] We have to keep in mind that: "Perceptions are more important than reality. The important point is not whether the business in fact is responsible for the offensive act, but whether the firm is thought to be responsible for it by the relevant audience."[85] It means that the organisation is held responsible for crisis, because the stakeholders believe it to be accountable, the response to repair the image, the crises communication message, is created based on what the audience´s beliefs and values are thought to be like. It is all a guesswork[86], and when these assumptions about the stakeholders are true, the communicative act, an attempt to convince or persuade the audience could be successful, it can change the attitude. Attitude consists of beliefs and values – facts and evaluations, the latter can be favourable or unfavourable, as two stakeholders can share the beliefs, but can have different values, it is necessary to know them in order to repair image by changing the attitudes of the audience.[87] The responsibility (or blame) and offensiveness that we mentioned already above correspond to beliefs and values. Relying on theory of reasoned action by Fishbein and Ajzen, Benoit has 6 recommendations for improving an attitude to repair the image – strengthen beliefs and values associated with a favourable attitude and weaken the ones associated with unfavourable attitude; create a new or revive a forgotten favourable attitude.[88]

The expected outcome of all the crisis communication strategies is the same – repair of the crisis-damaged image and reputation through changed the attitudes of the stakeholders towards the organisation in crisis, which also strongly contributes to legitimacy. For the purposes of this research, the following table presents a brief overview of all the strategies by Coombs and Benoit organised and grouped and gives a short explanation of the crisis situations they are used in and on what purpose.

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[84] Benoit, L. W. (2015). Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: Image Repair Theory and Research. State University of New York Press.
[85] Benoit, L. W. (1997) Image Repair Discourse and Crisis Communication. Public Relations Review, 23, p. 178.
[86] Benoit, L. W. (2015). Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: Image Repair Theory and Research. State University of New York Press, p. 19.
[87] Ibid, p. 19-20.
[88] Ibid, p. 24-25.

Figure 3: Strategy type, its description and use

STRATEGY TYPE	SITUATION/CRISIS TYPE/PURPOSE
Denial	*I did not do that.* Used to fight the rumours and challenge crisis. The purpose is to remove the connection between organization and the crisis.
Attack the accuser	*My accuser is a liar.* Used, when there is an identifiable attacker in case of rumours or challenge crisis. Purpose is to reduce the credibility of the attacker
Blame shifting, scapegoat, provocation	*It was him, not me* or *I did it only after you provoked me.* Used to accuse someone else partly responsible for the crisis or for delays in measures taken. The purpose is to offer the stakeholders another target.
Diminish or reducing offensiveness – excuse, justification, defeasibility, accident, good intentions, minimization, differentiation, transcendence	*I did it, but it was not a big deal, because…* or *I did it for the greater good.* The most diverse strategy group. Used by minimal damage and/or when the organisation has a little responsibility in crisis, otherwise not wise. The purpose is to make the crisis seem less severe or to show that the organization has no power over it. To

Rebuild – compensation, apology or mortification, corrective action	*Because of what happened, I will offer you material or emotional compensation.* Used to improve the organizations reputation by offering stakeholders reimbursement either on the material or immaterial level. The purpose is to offset the crisis by positive actions, communication. The best means to restore and increase the reputational capital.
Bolstering – reminder, ingratiation, victimage	*Think of all the good I have done* or *I am a victim here too*. Used by organisations with already strong reputation, suitable in every crisis type. Based on stressing the good traits of the organisation and or praising the stakeholder's good work. Does no harm in any type of crisis, but not a good tool to build the reputational capital.

Table by author, on the basis of Benoit and Coombs[89]

The table above illustrates how the two theories complement each other, Benoit offering more explanations and theoretical background, Coombs concentrating on putting the theories into practice and making suggestions when which one to use. There are implications which strategy choice is wise or unwise in which situation in Benoit's work as

[89] Benoit, L. W. (2015). Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: Image Repair Theory and Research. State University of New York Press; Benoit, L. W. (1997) Image Repair Discourse and Crisis Communication. Public Relations Review, 23; Coombs, W. T. (1999) Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding. Sage Publications; Coombs, W. T. (2007) Protecting Organization Reputations During a Crisis: The Development and Application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Corporate Reputation Review, September 2007, Volume 10.

well, these are more subtle, but his case studies have more information about political actors, whilst Coombs' attention is mainly on business corporations. Thus combining the two theories gives the most complete frame for exploring the crisis communication of the EC, not the reasons for choosing the strategies, but the social consequences of them, the way, in which they shape reputation and/or legitimacy and if the strategies used increase them as it is the purpose of crisis communication. This typology of crisis communication strategies can consequently be used to analyse EC response to crises.

2. European Commission and Communication

The external communication of the EC is manifold and revolves tightly around President's Cabinet (and the 10 political priorities). There are four closely connected departments i.e. Presidential Services that form the core of EC's strategic planning and coordination of its work, including communication – Secretariat-General, Legal Service, Directorate General of Communication and European Political Strategy Centre.

Secretariat-General is responsible for the communication during law-making process. It handles the interaction with national parliaments – on behalf of the EC it regularly sends the parliaments legislative proposals, green and white papers, communications, the annual legislative programme and other planning or policy documents[90]. The opinions of the parliaments and EC's replies are both made public on a designated website.[91]Secretariat-General is also responsible for the European Citizens' Initiative, which allows EU citizens to participate in the development of EU policies – when an initiative gathers more than one million signatures, it suffices to call on EC to make a legislative proposal. Every successful initiative (4 so far) demands several communication act by the EC (a communication about further steps if taken, press releases, webpage explaining EC's answer and follow up).[92]

The European Political Strategy Center's tasks involve among other activities reaching out to decision-makers, think tanks and civil society at large[93]. They organise public events e.g. conferences, publish a newsletter and in-depth analyses on different topic in diverse domains of interest for the President of the EC.[94]

But the substantial part of EC's external communication falls on **Directorate General for**

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[90] European Commission website: European Commission > Law > Law-making process > Adopting EU law, https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-making-process/adopting-eu-law/relations-national-parliaments_en

[91] European Commission > Secretariat-General > National Parliament opinions and Commission replies, http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/secretariat_general/relations/relations_other/npo/index_en.htm

[92] European Commission > European Citizens' Initiative, http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/initiatives/successful

[93] European Commission website: European Commission > Departments and executive agencies > European Political Strategy Centre, https://ec.europa.eu/info/departments/european-political-strategy-centre_en

[94] European Commission > EPSC > Other publications, http://ec.europa.eu/epsc/publication-types/other-publications_en

Communication (DG COMM).

> In 2016, the External Communication Network and the Internal Communication Network were merged into a Communication Network, co-chaired by the Directorate-General for Communication and the Directorate-General for Human Resources and Security. The two Directorates-General also co-chair the Corporate Communication Steering Committee which was established in 2016 as the high-level decision making body in communication.[95]

DG COMM is handling all the press activities (daily briefings, press conferences etc.), it is also responsible for the press releases database RAPID and EUROPA website, social media activities, Europe Direct networks, Visitors' Centres, representations in Member States etc. DG consists of Spokespersons and four directorates, of which three are directly engaged in different domains of communication – strategy and corporate communications, representations in Member States and communication with citizens[96].

Besides media and public opinion surveys and analysis and overall communication management, including taking care of the corporate image, Directorate General's overall responsibilities also are:
•communicate to the media and public on 10 EC priorities and 36 connected topics
•provide the Spokesperson's Service – around 90 people that support the President and the Commissioners in their press activities in Brussels and in cooperation with representations in all EU countries.[97]

The strategic plan of the department is public as are its annual work plans, activity reports, management plans and Europe Direct activity reports. In the working methods paper published in 2014, there is a following statement: "Communication can only be successful if the Commission speaks with one voice, reflecting the principle of collegiality. Communication should be oriented towards the political and strategic priorities of the

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[95] DG Communication Annual Activity Report 2016, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/aar-comm-2016_en_0.pdf, p. 53.
[96] DG Communication's organisation chart: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/organisation-chart-dg-comm_en_16.pdf
[97] European Commission website: European Commission > Departments and executive agencies > Directorate-General for Communication, https://ec.europa.eu/info/departments/communication_en

Commission."[98] This *speaking with one voice* is achieved mainly by attributing the central coordinative role to Spokesperson's Service that prepares *Lines-To-Take* on all portfolios (contributions from the DGs) and disseminates them through internal database for use on midday press briefing and interviews.

In official documents of DG COMM the three directions of its services are defined, the external communication falling under the keyword *engage*: "Engage: As a communication service, the Directorate-General for Communication ensures that simple, clear and understandable messages focussed on the Commission's priorities are communicated to the media and other multipliers / stakeholders and to European citizens and engages with them."[99] This corresponds to the main goal of the communication stressed in strategy and management documents, which is to bring the EU closer to citizens. But its is not as ambiguous as it sounds:

> Corporate communication thus contributes to the shared objective for external communication by building a better understanding by European citizens of the EU and its strategic priorities. With the 2016 – 2020 Strategic Plan and the Management Plan 2016, DG COMM's overarching objective has now been mainstreamed to become the mandatory objective for external communication for all DGs, so it is now /…/ an objective domain, shared with the whole communication community across all DGs.[100]

It can thus be seen that the communication of and in the EC is moving (and continues to move) towards bigger streamlining, in that sense becoming structurally even more similar to the other entities, institutions or organisations on which SCCT and image restoration theory are usually applied.

Defining the purpose of the communication gets still more specific, when we take a look at the named Management Plan 2016, which states: "Citizens perceive that the EU is working

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[98] Communication from the President to the Commission, The Working Methods of the European Commission 2014-2019, C(2014) 9004, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/the_working_methods_of_the_european_commission_2014-2019_november2014_en.pdf, p. 10.
[99] DG Communication Annual Activity Report 2016, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/aar-comm-2016_en_0.pdf, p. 5.
[100] DG Communication Strategic Plan 2016 – 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/strategic-plan-2016-2020-dg-comm_april2016_en.pdf, p. 8.

to improve their lives and engage with the EU. They feel that their concerns are taken into consideration in European decision making process and they know about their rights in the EU."[101] So it can be said very simply that the main purpose of the EC's communication is to convince citizens that EU exists for them, not above them or even worse despite them. Which leads us back to the inherent and always haunting legitimacy question (see Chapter 1.1).

As for "the communication community" of the EC – it is big. There are around 700 people besides DG COMM colleagues dealing with communication all over the EC. Every Commissioner's Cabinet has its Communication Adviser. Every Directorate General has its own Communication Unit, guidelines and strategy papers defining their specific communication priorities for the year. Heads of Communication Units in DGs and DG COMM (including Heads of Representations and Spokesperson's Service) form the Communication Network that coordinates and streamlines the external communication.[102] It is evident that as far as it concerns the everyday communication, there is a well controlled and coordinated corporate communication machinery at place in the EC. There are targets and indicators set[103] and very detailed, even comprehensive guidelines established on how to evaluate communication[104]. Everything is well envisaged, including the fact that the delivery of the aforementioned objective is dependant on two types of external factors:

1) communication is connected to the actions it supports i.e. legislation and all other activities such as EU funding

2) communication does not take place in a vacuum i.e. is influenced by 28 national public spaces and all the imaginable influences cast upon them in turn.[105]

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[101] DG Communication, Management Plan 2016, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/management-plan-2016-dg-comm-april2016_en.pdf, p. 6.

[102] DG Communication Management Plan 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/management-plan-comm-2018_en.pdf

[103] DG Communication Strategic Plan 2016 – 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/strategic-plan-2016-2020-dg-comm_april2016_en.pdf

[104] Toolkit for the evaluation of the communication activities, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-evaluation-toolkit_en.pdf

[105] DG Communication Strategic Plan 2016 – 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/strategic-plan-2016-2020-dg-comm_april2016_en.pdf

All this arises the question about the crisis communication – the short description above gives a picture of the routine operation, but what rules are to be played by in case of crisis and who can play at all? There is one public document to be found that includes a chapter dedicated to handling crisis situations and crisis communication – a 2013 communication handbook for EU Agencies[106]. It is not much, but some aspects can clearly be noticed based on these guidelines:

- they have been written by someone well familiar with the crisis communication theories
- it stresses the need to coordinate with the Commission and use Spokespersons' Service[107].

It means that in case of practical crisis communication (agencies are dealing with practical matters and also the nature of the potential crisis is logically the same) there are quite simple rules to be followed and decentralised entity is accountable to principal, who supports and takes matters in its own hand if needed.

EC itself rarely happens to find itself in any other kind of crisis situation that demands communication than the ones that are purely political or at least have strong political dimension, so there are no written rules to be found. No wonder – DG COMM exists for the President and the commissioners not the other way around and they are the only ones that have a mandate and power to speak during crisis. In the name of EU, the EC and themselves. Naturally there are teams behind all of them, both from DG COMM and their own cabinets, but they are there to support, provide the background and input, not to define the message.

As a standard EC is verbally not very dynamic, usually the press releases about crisis management measures state dry facts and in the best case include a quote by the commissioner responsible for the policy field or by the President to make it less faceless and give an emotional touch that brings the message closer to the citizens. But as a crisis is

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[106] Communication Handbook for the EU Agencies, December 2013, https://europa.eu/european-union/sites/europaeu/files/docs/body/2013-12-10_communication_handbook_en.pdf
[107] Ibid.

a political situation, it demands the EC as a political actor to step up and assert itself, make statements and give explanations. It is expected by the public and the past has shown that it is the place, where the role and the persona of the President is fundamental e.g. Meyer states that the failed communication of Santer's Commission was in part to blame on his personal and political weakness.[108]

The President and also the Commissioners have the means and the responsibility to speak up. It is in its most visible form done through speeches that are the most personally inclined and elaborate texts we can find among the communication material EC makes public, most direct form of any kind of communication is a speech. Speeches do not deviate from the agreed general targets of the communication, but they say things more clearly, therefore have also the most direct influence on the reputation, it is so also with crisis communication, therefore it provides a very valuable material to study the phenomenon.

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[108] Meyer, C. (1999). Political Legitimacy and the Invisibility of Politics: Exploring the European Union's Communication Deficit. Journal of Common Market Studies, Vol. 37, No. 4, December 1999.

3. Methodology and research design

In this chapter the materials used in this study will be introduced, the principles behind the choice of cases, primary and secondary corpus of texts explained and the research method applied to study them briefly presented.

There are three recent and serious crisis chosen to be studied in this research: the Greek government-debt crisis as the most prominent representative of the Eurozone crisis, the migration crisis and Brexit. While there are differences among those three crisis, they arguably share the decisive characteristic for this study, that is they are affecting the very pillars of the European integration. The crises are different with respect to their nature - while the former two are temporal in nature, the latter is structural. Yet, in terms of consequences, all three can be seen as having long-term consequences, allowing their study alongside each other. Moreover, they are different regarding (1) what they threated, (2) where they come from, (3) competences. The first, Greek crisis, threatened the existence of the Eurozone and Economic and Monetary Union the first brought with it more rigorous fiscal control on EU level and further integration of the internal market and the EMU. It is mainly externally caused and falls primarily under exclusive competence of the EU. The second, the migration crisis, threatened free movement of the people and Schengen area that besides practicalities has also a deep symbolic value and resulted in further integration and streamlining of migration policy, real cooperation between Member States in defending the external borders. It is also externally provoked, but falls under the shared competence. Finally, Brexit is affecting the EU as an entity, the nature of it, the core values, the belief that together the Member States can deliver better than separately – to which results this crisis will lead, is yet to be seen. It is internally caused and EU has the exclusive competence in the issue. But, fundamentally, all three of them are crises, fundamental crises, which require action by the organisation to respond, and which therefore renders them a viable object of study for exploring consequences of crisis communication strategies for reputation and legitimacy.

The methodological frames for analysis are derived from works of Norman Fairclough. Discourse analysis by Fairclough views the meaning of language, the creation and dissemination of language, discourse is a social practice, which corresponds to the whole process of social interaction such as text production and text consumption[109] i.e. communication, including crisis communication. This means that within this framework, crisis communication and its social consequences can be studied. The texts are being studied applying Fairclough's three-dimensional research framework (description-interpretation-explanation).

Figure 4: Three-dimensional framework in which discourse is constituted by text, its production and interpretation, and social context
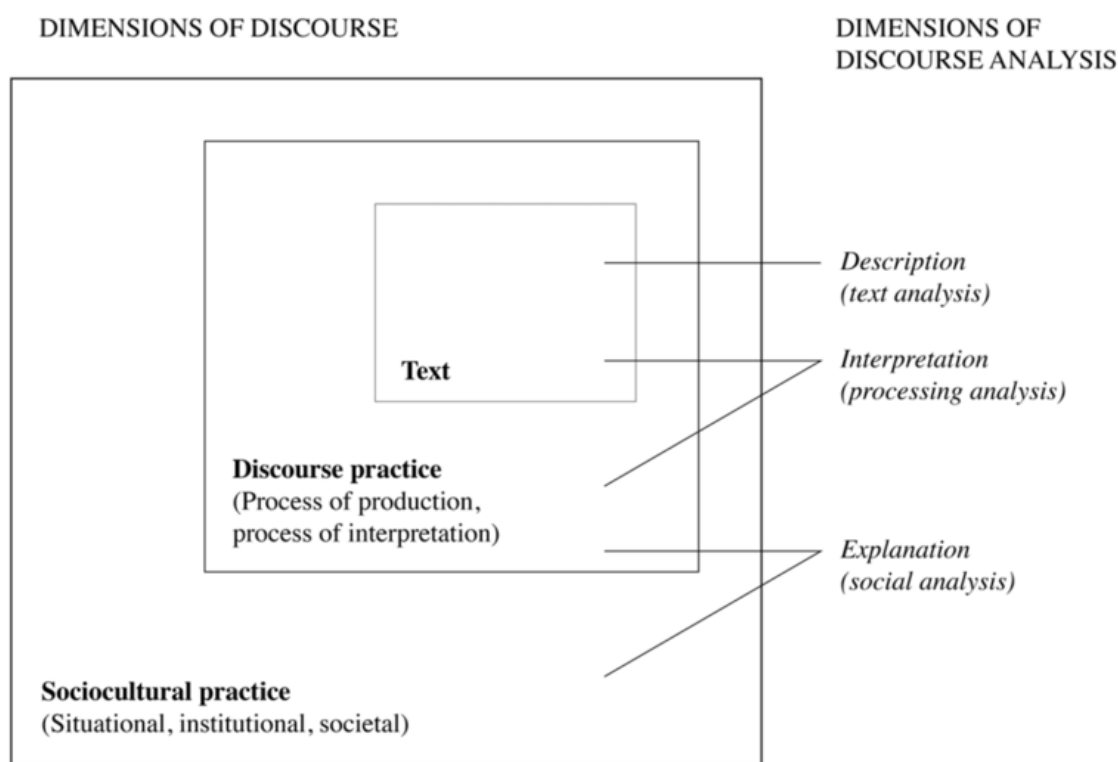
Source: Fairclough[110]

Each of these stages are important to perform the discourse analysis of the material.

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[109]Fairclough, N (1995) Media Discourse. London and New York: Arnold.
[110] Fairclough, N. (1989). Language and Power. London: Longman.

Fairclough's method that combines "close textual and linguistic analysis within linguistics, the macrosociological tradition of analysing social practice in relation to social structures, and the interpretivist or microsociolgical tradition of seeing social practice as something which people actively produce and make sense of on the basis of shared commonsense procedures"[111], seems even more suitable to achieve the aims of this thesis, when we take into account his reservations, that neither the production of the texts require necessarily the full awareness of these practices nor have they be and rarely are aware of the effects of the texts[112]. As we have already stated the possibility (in Chapter 1.2.) that the choice of the crisis communication strategy is not automatically a conscious act, Fairclough's approach to discourse analysis is probably the most efficient tool to study the crisis communication of the EC based on the speeches described above and the social consequences of it, e. g. for reputation and legitimacy, connecting the discursive practice with the wider social practice. "For example, with respect to how objects, places, persons etc are represented in the premises of arguments, how choices in representation contribute to providing reasons for or against particular lines of action."[113]

First the texts are being viewed and the findings presented, the speaker and the audience determined (also the possible sub- or supercategories of the recipient). Subsequently the findings are analysed in order to identify the type of crises (crisis clusters by Coombs discussed in Chapter 1.2.) and the type of crisis communication strategy used (based on theory combination of Benoit and Coombs introduced in Chapter 1.2), the choice of words and expressions is determined by the strategy applied and in turn, as a reverse effect, it is possible to detect, which strategy was used by the speaker, based on the in-depth analysis of the texts. After that the impact of the communication on reputation and legitimacy is established and the conclusions of the chapter on specific crisis drawn. The three dimensions of discourse analysis overlap and require moving back and fourth between

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[111] Fairclough, N. (1992) Discourse and Social Change. Polity Press, p. 72.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Fairclough, N. (2011) Critical Discourse Analysis in a Time of Crisis, https://www.academia.edu/3776000/Critical_Discourse_Analysis_in_a_Time_of_Crisis_2011_, p. 12.

different stages of analysis,[114] which benefits the whole process, making it more consistent and easier to follow.

As there is no publicly available documentation on EC's crisis communication strategies, the most immediate source for studying the phenomenon is the speeches (as also explained in Chapter 2). Even in case of press releases there are more intermediate links between the audience and the communicator (several producers of the text at different stages and media that also interprets a text) and they are most of the time anonymous, at the best case the name of a Directorate General is being mentioned. Speeches in the other hand are direct medium between the speaker and the audience, both the immediate receivers and the wider public, who can watch some speeches in real time, but later on read them all. In addition, as already stated in previous chapter the speeches are held by people, who have the mandate to speak in crisis situations. There are several stakeholders and audiences involved in all these crises. Member States and EU citizens, international actors, victims, organisations. While acknowledging that the primary audience is the one addressed in the speech, all the speeches are held for the whole EU, for the citizens, as they are published via RAPID and as corresponds with the objective of all the EC communication that is to involve the citizens (see Chapter 2). A more exact distinction by types of primary audience and by the speakers is given in the beginning of each chapter.

Speeches analysed in this thesis are all obtained through RAPID (and EU Bookshop), that make available all the speeches held by Commissioners and the President. There is sometimes a disclaimer "check against delivery", therefore it has to be noted that the transcripts are not viewed in current research, only the official published texts. All the analysed texts are speeches even in written form, the genre is deliberately chosen and predetermined, confirmed also by the lexical density analysis (below 40%). Speeches were held on different purposes and in front of different audiences. The primary corpus of texts consists of 4 sets of speeches by the presidents of the EC, the Commissioners responsible for the crisis affected sector(s) and in one case the speeches of a neutral person working for

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[114] Ibid, p. 231.

the EU are added – European Chief Negotiator. There are altogether 231 speeches analysed in this thesis, some are dedicated to crisis in question in relevant chapter, some only mention it, but what they say is as significant, there are: 75 speeches on Greek government-debt crisis, 78 speeches on migration crisis and 78 speeches on Brexit and chosen for the case studies. In addition to the corpus of speeches, the study also draws on academic articles, book chapters on relevant topics to contextualize the findings.

Whereas the primary corpus establishes EC crisis communication strategy, the study relies on secondary or supplementary corpus for the purpose of establishing social consequences of EC crisis communication. It does so on the basis Eurostat data and reports, Eurobarometer and other public opinion surveys, including the full reports, newspaper articles from reliable media sources. This data does not directly show the immediate effect of the crisis communication strategies, as no direct causal link is implied and it is acknowledged that other factors than crisis communication may have affected reputation/legitimacy. Nevertheless this data is still valid, not least since it reflects the reputation/legitimacy criteria the EC itself deploys in order to assess the effect of its everyday communication.

Among the sources used for the background information or for evaluating the social consequences of crisis communication in relation with the legitimacy and reputation are public opinion surveys of Eurobarometer, from which various charts and data based on answers to different poll questions are being used. These are available as aggregated data through Eurobarometer Interactive. Among the questions for assessing reputation/legitimacy in this study are:

1) In general, does the European Union conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image?

2) Trust in European Commission

3) Agreement with key policies of the EU

4) (OUR COUNTRY) could better face the future outside the EU.

The first two questions are related to reputation, the second two to the legitimacy.

Depending on the nature of the crisis, the consequences for reputation/legitimacy are measured either (migration crisis) with a view on EU population as a whole, or (Greek crisis, Brexit), with a view on the particular subgroup most affected. The focus on most affected helps extrapolating the consequences most clearly. The first question, as shown in Chapter 1.1., is being also used by DG COMM itself in measuring the success of the general communication activity of the EC.

4. Crisis Communication of the European Commission during Greek Government-Debt Crisis

4.1 Crisis Communication

In this chapter the first case study is performed, after placing the crisis into context, we are going to view the Geek government-debt crisis and EC crisis communication from 2010-2017. In the second sub-chapter the impact of communication is being measured and some conclusions presented.

The worldwide financial crisis that caused the European sovereign debt crisis affected all the Member States of the EU, the whole Eurozone, but most of all Greece. Greek government-debt crisis started to show late in 2009. Despite the earlier assurance that the measures have been taken and everything is under control with both excessive deficit[115] and the statistics[116], in its 2009 October news release on Euro area and EU27 government deficit Eurostat yet again adds a remark concerning 2008 data provided: "Eurostat has expressed a reservation on the data reported by Greece due to significant uncertainties over the figures notified by the Greek statistical authorities."[117] In April 2010 Greece had no other solution available than to request financial assistance from its European and international partners.[118] What followed is on lesser scale lasting up until now and we can say that we are dealing with a continuing crisis, this perception of course depending on the

[115] European Commission (2005) Recommendation for a Council Decision giving notice to Greece, in accordance with Article 104(9) of the EC Treaty, to take measures for the deficit reduction judged necessary in order to remedy the situation of excessive deficit, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A52005SC0194

[116] European Commission (2010) Report on Greek government deficit and debt statistics, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/4187653/6404656/COM_2010_report_greek/c8523cfa-d3c1-4954-8ea1-64bb11e59b3a

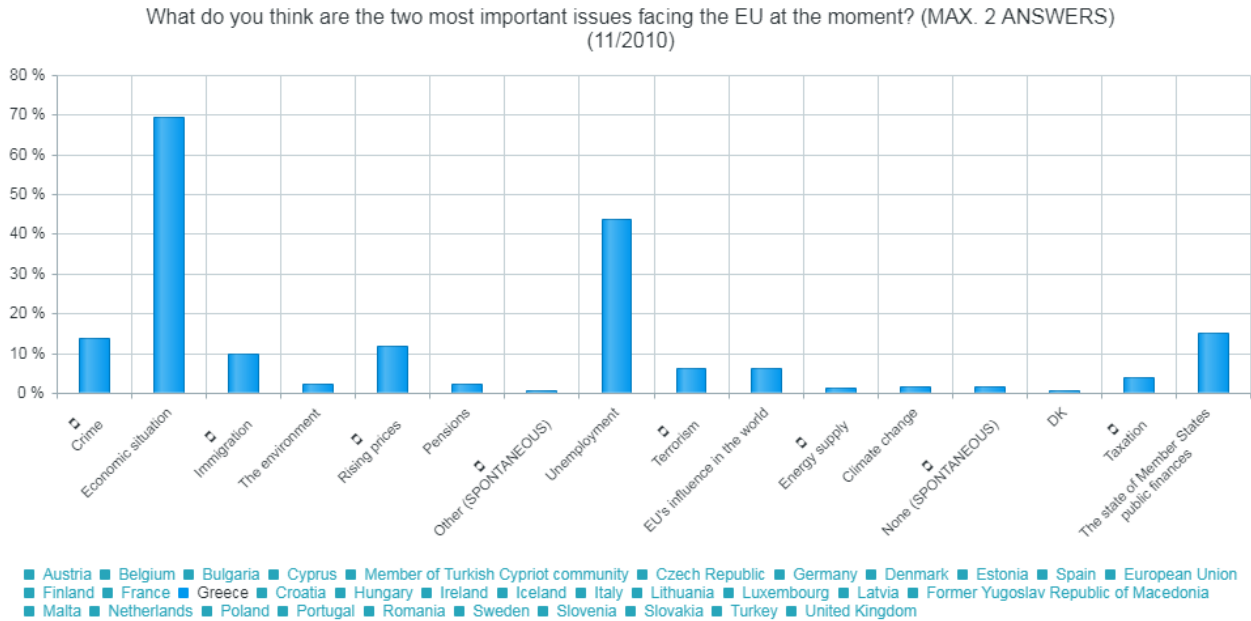[117] Eurostat (2009) Provision of deficit and debt data for 2008 - second notification, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STAT-09-149_en.pdf, p. 2.

[118] European Commission (2017) The ESM Stability Support Programme - Greece, First and Second Reviews. July 2017 Background Report, https://www.esm.europa.eu/european-commission-publishes-report-esm-greek-programme

point of view and how it is framed by media and EU or local institutions, however the fact remains that Greece has so far not exited its "adjustment programme"[119].

At least in November 2010 the main issue challenging the EU in the eyes of 69% of Greek citizens was indeed the economic situation:

Figure 5: Most important issues facing the EU (Greek)

What do you think are the two most important issues facing the EU at the moment? (MAX. 2 ANSWERS) (11/2010)

■ Austria ■ Belgium ■ Bulgaria ■ Cyprus ■ Member of Turkish Cypriot community ■ Czech Republic ■ Germany ■ Denmark ■ Estonia ■ Spain ■ European Union
■ Finland ■ France ■ Greece ■ Croatia ■ Hungary ■ Ireland ■ Iceland ■ Italy ■ Lithuania ■ Luxembourg ■ Latvia ■ Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
■ Malta ■ Netherlands ■ Poland ■ Portugal ■ Romania ■ Sweden ■ Slovenia ■ Slovakia ■ Turkey ■ United Kingdom

Source: Eurobarometer Interactive

The same figure in the whole EU was even higher at 89%:

Figure 6: Most important issues facing the EU (EU in general)

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[119] Dinan, D, Nugent, N, Paterson E. W (2017) The European Union in Crisis. Palgrave.

What do you think are the two most important issues facing the EU at the moment? (MAX. 2 ANSWERS) (11/2010)
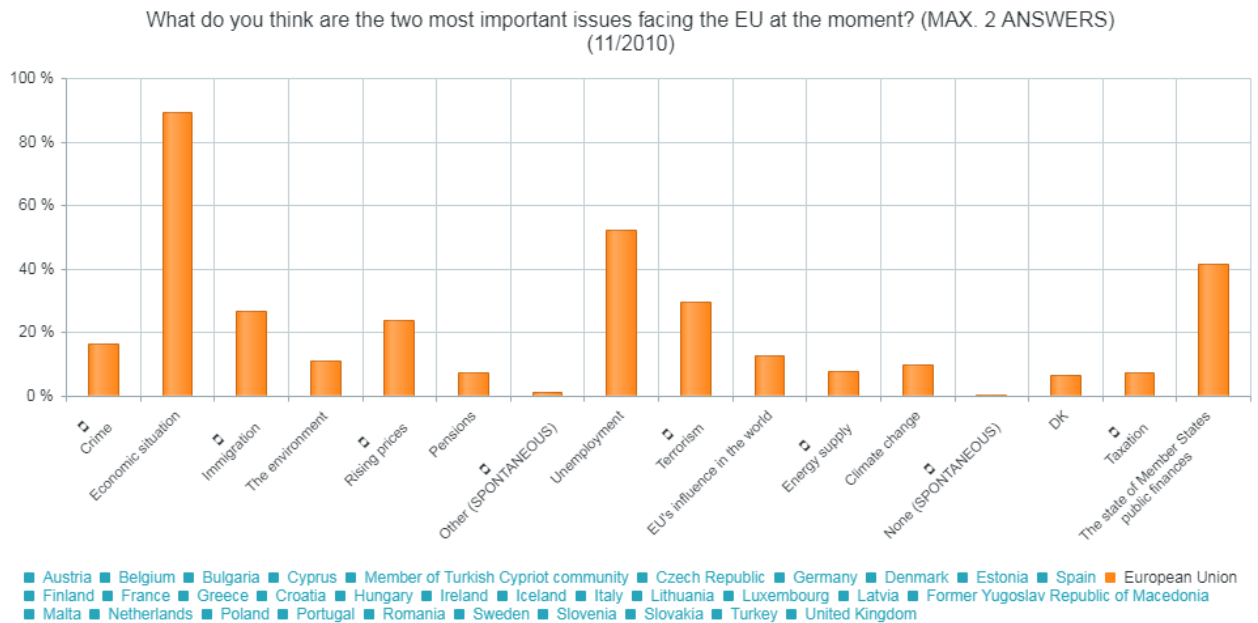
Source: Eurobarometer Interactive

These indicators are extraordinary, matching in their acuteness only the migration crisis yet to come.

EC undoubtedly played an important role in managing that crisis – as one of the members of "troika" it was present in all the financial measures taken to avoid the total economical collapse of Greece and the whole Eurozone.

> In the case of the eurozone crisis in particular, however, there can be little doubt that if no EU agreement had been reached to aid crisis-stricken debtor states, the interest rates they would have had to pay on government bonds would have exploded and the eurozone would have collapsed either partially or completely.[120]

Besides that concrete measure, all the legislative initiatives to tackle the general Eurozone crisis, to help the banks to recover, to avoid further damage and similar future scenarios were initiated by the EC. By 2014 EC had proposed nearly 30 sets of rules to ensure all financial actors, products and markets are appropriately regulated and efficiently

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[120] Webber, D. (2017) Can EU Survive? The European Union in Crisis. Palgrave, p. 337.

supervised. The rules form a basic framework for all Member States and support a properly functioning Single Market for financial services.[121]

What EC has done, i.e. the crisis management measures, is well documented, recognized and visible. What the EC has said – the crisis communication – is maybe not so noticeable, although there are many reasons for it, and the lack of communication has played its part in legitimacy crisis at the time:

> However technically legitimate to the experts, a policy's effectiveness and performance has to be judged according to the extent to which it resonates with citizen values, builds identity, and conforms to a community's normative principles of distributive justice, fairness, or equity. Performance as judged by technical actors is insufficient on its own for legitimization. Outcomes also require a kind of 'Weberian' legitimacy, meaning that they must also resonate with citizens' substantive values and principles, and are therefore perceived as acceptable and appropriate—and not just as matching citizens' (technically established) interests.[122]

Greece is the first and most extreme case of sovereign debt crisis in the Eurozone, in addition to the very obvious consequences, it also gave an enormous blow to EC's own credibility and reputation as it represents the second level in the governance system of the common currency that despite of the problems detected already earlier failed to set better controls to guarantee that the first level of governance (national) could be trusted.[123] From the perspective of the EC the Greek debt crisis could unquestionably be defined as a threat to reputation and therefore also to legitimacy (see the crisis definition in Chapter 1.1) of the whole EU as it was exposed that one of the major achievements of the integration project, the Economic and Monetary Union was not designed to function in the time of crisis. This kind of revelation causes damage and the credibility loss directly influences the way stakeholders interact with the institution.

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[121] European Commission (2014) A comprehensive EU response to the financial crisis: substantial progress towards a strong financial framework for Europe and a banking union for the eurozone, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-14-244_en.htm

[122] Schmidt, Vivien A (2015). The Eurozone's Crisis of Democratic Legitimacy: Can the EU Rebuild Public Trust and Support for European Economic Integration? European Economy Discussion Paper. European Union, 2015, p. 12.

[123] Dinan, D., Nugent, N., Paterson E. W. (2017) The European Union in Crisis. Palgrave.

The primary text corpus to analyse EC crisis communication strategies during the Greek government-debt crisis is divided into two: texts from the time of Barroso's (second) Commission and from the period of Juncker's Commission, altogether covering the time span from 2010-2017. The first group contains the speeches of EC president José Manuel Barroso (48 speeches from 2010-2014) and vice-President and commissioner responsible for economic and monetary affairs and the euro Olli Rehn (5 speeches from 2010-2012). Into the second group there are compiled the speeches of president Jean-Claude Juncker (13 speeches from 2015-2017), commissioner responsible for economic and financial affairs, taxation and customs Pierre Moscovici (7 speeches from 2014-2017) and commissioner responsible for financial stability, financial services and capital markets union Jonathan Hill (1 speech from 2015). The speeches are all in various extents mentioning the Greek crisis. The texts are obtained via RAPID and from EU Bookstore (State of the Union addresses).

Speeches were held on different purposes and in front of different audience. It is reasonable still to make the following broad division represented in the tables, because it plays a role in choice of the crisis communication tools:

Figure 7: Speeches by Barroso's Commission

Year	Press conference	Speech in Parliament	Other
2010	2	2+1R	1
2011	5+1R	6+1R	2+1R
2012	6	4+1R	1
2013	1	1	3
2014	3	4	8

*+1R are speeches of Olli Rehn

Figure 8: Speeches by Juncker's Commission

Year	Press conference	Speech in Parliament	Other

2014	1M	-	-
2015	3+1M	2	3+1H
2016	-	1	3+1M
2017	2M	1	2M

*M stands for commissioner Moscovici, H for commissioner Hill

As shown in Chapter 1.2 in SCCT Coombs distinguishes three crisis clusters: 1) victim cluster, 2) accidental cluster and 3) preventable cluster. Without going into too much detail, it can be determined that Greek debt crisis falls from the viewpoint of the EC at first under the first category, the **victim cluster** – the organisation is also the victim of the crisis, it involves weak attributions of crisis responsibility and therefore mild reputational threat.[124] In other words, objectively EC could not be blamed for the Greek crises, but it was greatly affected by it, victim through the potential damage to the Eurozone, one of the landmarks of the European integration project. As a "guardian of the treaties" it had to take action i.e. manage the crisis and communicate with the stakeholders. Later, as the crisis continues and escalates, EC has to defend itself against direct accusations from many stakeholders, the loudest of them of course the Greek:

> As EU leaders gather in Brussels to solve the Greek crisis, Athens and Brussels should share the blame for having let the country fall down its slippery slope. There are some responsibilities that fall onto Brussels. /…/ José Manuel Barroso, Joaquin Almunia and some of their other colleagues in the European Commission must at some point re-think what they and the large bureaucracy they oversee did wrong over these years to slowly push Greece [to] the present situation[125].

So in the end the crisis still falls in the **accidental cluster**, where the organisational actions leading to the crisis were unintentional and the reputational threat increases from minimal

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[124] Coombs, W. T. (2007) Protecting Organization Reputations During a Crisis: The Development and Application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Corporate Reputation Review, September 2007, Volume 10.

[125] Roubatis, Yiannis (2011) Barroso and Commission are also to blame for Greek crisis. Euractiv 23.6.2011, https://www.euractiv.com/section/euro-finance/opinion/barroso-and-commission-are-also-to-blame-for-greek-crisis/

to moderate.[126] This is also supported by the shared responsibility in governing the common currency mentioned above: "Caught right in the middle of the changeover from the first to the second administrations of José Manuel Barroso, the Commission watched the early stages of the crisis with a mix of complacency and bewilderment."[127] In the very beginning of the crisis in 2010 Barroso representing the EC is assertive, expresses his *full support and solidarity*, he assures that *there is no doubt that Greece's needs will be met in time*, he (as well as Olli Rehn) have *word of condolences for the families of the victims of the violence in Athens*, president says that EC *is doing what is needed on all fronts*. Greece is being assured that there are support packages ready and waiting and its reform plans and efforts acknowledged. These statements can be regarded the initial steps to answer the ethical responsibilities: "To be ethical, crisis managers must begin their efforts by using communication to address the physical and psychological concerns of the victims."[128]

Also they indicate that the direction is taken towards the **compensation strategy**, one of the three **rebuild strategies** (see Figure 3). And also the **ingratiation strategy** is strongly present, that involves the stakeholders being praised: "Greek government has put forward a solid and credible package that will steer its economy on a sustainable path and restore confidence."[129]

From 2011 onward it is already evident that the crisis is there to stay and Barroso states that the *solution is not a sprint, but a marathon*, more *solidarity and cohesion* in Europe is needed to cope with the crisis – *more Europe* and *better Europe*, *europhobics and eurosceptics are making aggressive remarks*, there *is cacophony of criticisms, counter-*

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[126] Coombs, W. T. (2007) Protecting Organization Reputations During a Crisis: The Development and Application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Corporate Reputation Review, September 2007, Volume 10.

[127] Featherstone, K., Papadimitriou, D. (2017) Greece: A Crisis in Two-Level Governance. The European Union in Crisis. Palgrave, p. 238.

[128] Coombs, W. T. (2007) Protecting Organization Reputations During a Crisis: The Development and Application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Corporate Reputation Review, September 2007, Volume 10, p. 165.

[129] Barroso, J. M. D. (2010) Statement to the European Parliament prior to the meeting of the Heads of State and Government of the Euro Area, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-10-211_en.htm

criticisms, magic bullets and miracle panaceas. By discrediting the condemning parties and blaming them for escalating the crisis –**attack the accuser** strategy is taken.

The **compensation strategy** giving the material and moral means for stakeholders to resolve the crisis is being continued: "Greece is, and will remain, a member of the euro area."[130] Though, taking into account the shared responsibility, the help does not come entirely without reservations: "Greece must implement its commitments in full and on time. In turn, the other euro area members have pledged to support Greece and each other."[131] Olli Rehn stresses the need to be ready to *adapt* the crisis management tools to be *credible and effective* and that EC *stands by Greece*. Both of them give information on crisis response measures already taken and to be taken in the future – the **corrective action**.

Later stages towards the end of the term of the Barroso's Commission already show some optimism as some measures taken have shown results: "So don't tell me structural reform is unnecessary or unproductive"[132], says Barroso in 2014. Also Greece is said to be is *proudly assuming its role at the helm of the European Union*. This indicates the use of **bolstering** strategies, both **reminder** of one´s good work and the **ingratiation**, the stakeholder is making efforts and is therefore earned the right to be proud. The **compensation** strategy is still running strongly.

With the change of the Commission in the end of 2014 also the tonality of statements changes into more emotionally charged – due to the new President´s personal style and redefinition of EC´s mission to become a political one: "This crisis has also been a crisis of legitimacy – at all levels. Economic governance is not about legal rules or numerical percentages: it is about people and it is about political decisions that affect them. It is about political responsibility and political accountability."[133] In the eve of Greek referendum on

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[130] Barroso, J. M. D. (2011) European renewal – State of the Union Address 2011, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-11-607_en.htm

[131] Ibid.

[132] Barrosos, J. M. D. (2014) Speech by President Barroso on the Greek Presidency, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-14-17_en.htm

[133] Juncker, J.-C. (2015) Speech by President Juncker at the European Parliament Plenary session on the

bailout conditions the crisis has heated up again, Juncker is using in his speech in parallel to **ingratiation** (*great Greek nation*, *Greek people are very close to my heart*) **attack the accuser** and **blame shifting strategies**: "There is talk of an ultimatum, of a 'take it or leave it' deal, of blackmail. But who is behaving like this? Who? Where are they coming from, these insults and threats, these misunderstandings and unfinished sentences which fuel the imagination of those who hear them and lead them astray?"[134] Jonathan Hill, the commissioner responsible for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union is backing the President up in the speech held next day, saying that he was *absolutely right to stress* the need to offer a solution that satisfies also the expectations of the lenders. He also chooses to **attack the accuser**: "[…] it was the Greek Government who walked away from the table, who walked away from compromise."[135]

On EU-China business summit in December 2015 Juncker is making the problems in Europe seem smaller: "I do not know how to apologise, but I had to do what I had to do this morning because we are trying to resolve what we call the Greek crisis in Europe and I had to spend some hours on that."[136] This refers to applying the **diminish** or **reducing offensiveness** strategies.

Later on, as the new crises emerge, the President dedicates himself more to them, the communication in Greek crisis is left on the shoulders of Commissioner Moscovici, who is responsible for economic and financial affairs. He is usually not talking about the Greek crisis separately or specifically, he is speaking about all the crises at hand and is therefore headed in the direction of comprehensive crisis communication acts and more general prospect. In 2016 he states that more political Europe with solid legitimacy is needed. Brussels is being blamed of *being an elitist bubble*. EU is getting further away from

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Economic and Monetary Union, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-15-6328_en.htm

[134] Juncker, J.-C. (2015) Transcript of President Jean-Claude Juncker's press conference on Greece, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-15-5274_en.htm

[135] Hill, J. (2015) Building a stronger single market in capital, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-15-5290_en.htm

[136] Juncker, J.-C. (2015) The EU and China: A solid partnership - Speech by President Juncker at the EU-China Business Summit, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-15-5278_en.htm

citizens due to the lack of *tools* to use on all the levels (legislative, governance, working processes, democratic elections), which indicates **defeasibility** strategy. National governments, nation states are not willing enough to work together – this refers to the **scapegoat** strategy. But as a new trait an apologetic tone is appearing, the commissioner is acknowledging accountability towards citizens – *vision* and *positive narrative* is needed to tackle the general legitimacy deficit and actions. He recognizes that EU has let the people down – it is as close to **apology** or **mortification** as it can get in the case of the **accidental** crisis and proposes his vision for regaining the lost trust. In 2017 he assures that the Greek have done well, the Grexit danger has passed and envisages a "strong Greece in the heart of the eurozone."[137] Hereby EC has returned to the **ingratiation** strategy.

The analysis of the EC's crisis communication in the Greek crisis shows that due to the changing nature of the crisis type from **victim** cluster to **accidental** cluster there is also a shift in strategies used. At first EC deploys **compensation** and **ingratiation** strategies, but as the crisis deepens and the responsibility is more strongly attributed, it turns to the mix of strategies from **rebuild** and **bolstering** families, combining it with the **attack the accuser** strategy sporadically, answering to the allegations of media and Member States. When the crisis enters the next phase, the **diminish or reducing offensiveness** strategy family enters the picture. Against this background, the next section is going to explore the consequences for reputation and legitimacy in Greek crisis.

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[137] Moscovici, P. (2017) Speech by Commissioner Moscovici at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-17-286_en.htm

4.2 Reception and the Evaluation of the Consequences for the Reputation and Legitimacy

In the second subchapter of this case study, we will place the crisis communication into social context, we will study the reception and impact of the communication. To find out about the influence of the communication strategies determined in the first subchapter, the social consequences of this practice – i.e. the effect on reputation/legitimacy – needs to be brought into view. While having pointed out that the audience of the crisis communication are the citizens of the whole EU, the focus of this section is more narrowly confined to Greece as the most affected by the crisis and reputation/legitimacy loss or gain is most visible and relevant here.

From one side Greek outright blame the EC and feel that their needs have not been met: "Furthermore, instead of contesting the IMF on its recent admission of errors on the Greek bailout as commissioner Olli Rehn did, Barroso should openly admit that mistakes were made and formally apologise to the Greek people. Only then can the commission move forward with credibility."[138] It is a direct reference to the vast damage done on the organisation's reputation and it is not a single voice saying it:

> […] from 2010 (when the first MoU was signed) there is a drastic change in the image of the EU in Greece, with negative attitudes surpassing positive attitudes (and from 2011 surpassing also neutral attitudes) and displaying a constant upward trend, which peaked in 2013 at 54%. This means that for the first time in 2013, the majority of Greeks held a negative image of the EU.[139]

It can be illustrated by the Eurobarometer charts reflecting the situation in November 2013 – against the negative image perceived by 54% of Greek citizens, only 28% of the EU citizens in general share the same perception:

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[138] Chatzimarkakis, J. (2013), José Manuel Barroso should apologise to the Greek people. The Guardian, 07.07.2013, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jun/07/jose-manuel-barroso-apologise-greek-people-imf

[139] Katsikas, D. (2015) Fragmentation and Exclusion: Understanding and Overcoming the Multiple Impacts of the European Crisis (Fragmex). D.2.4 Policy Paper on Greek public discourses and attitudes on the role of Germany and the EU in the Greek Crisis, http://www.fragmex.eu/myfiles/Policy-Paper-on-Greek-Attitudes-and-Public-Discourses-on-Germany.pdf, p. 7.

Figure 9: Image of the EU (EU aggregated, Greek)

In general, does the European Union conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image?
(11/2013)
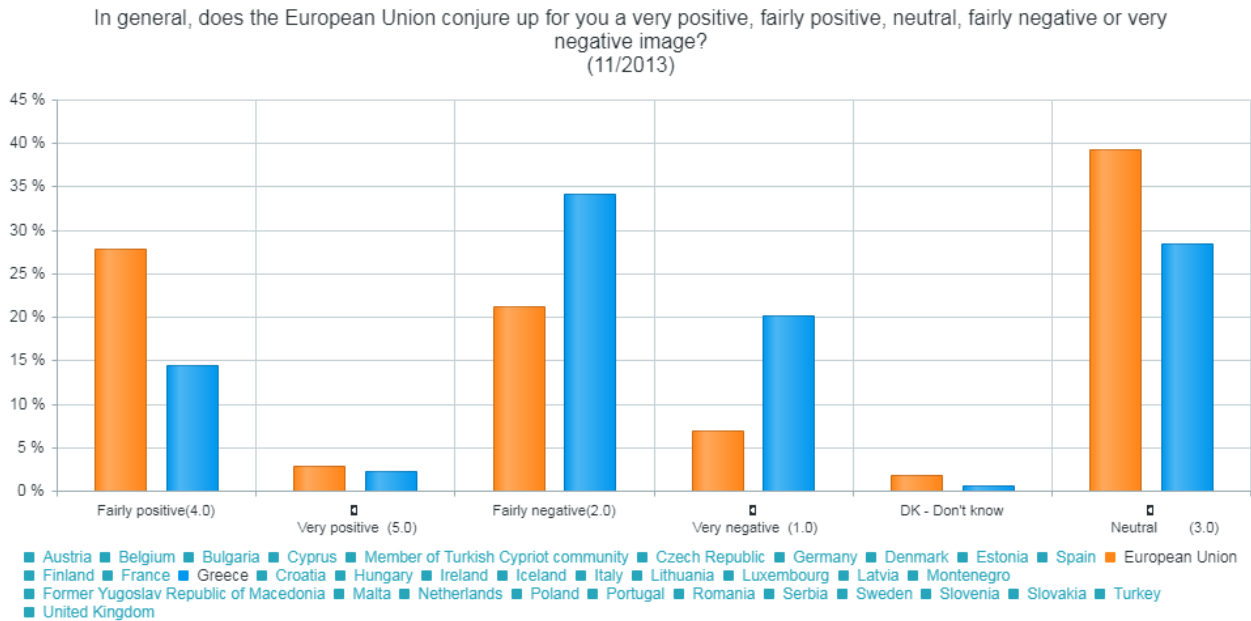
Source: Eurobarometer Interactive

But the damage is not irreparable and the situation altogether not completely hopeless as the belief in the legitimacy of the EU remains quite strong:"[…] Greek citizens do not reject the EU as a whole. […] a solid majority of Greeks (ranging between 54 -59%) believe that their country would not fare better outside the EU, while an even higher majority (ranging between 62-65%) support the monetary union and the common currency."[140]:

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[140] Ibid.

Figure 10: Greece could better face the future outside EU

Please tell me for each statement, whether you tend to agree or tend to disagree?
(OUR COUNTRY) could better face the future
outside the EU
Greece (from 11/2012 to 05/2017)

■ Total 'Agree' ■ Total 'Disagree' ■ DK - Don't know
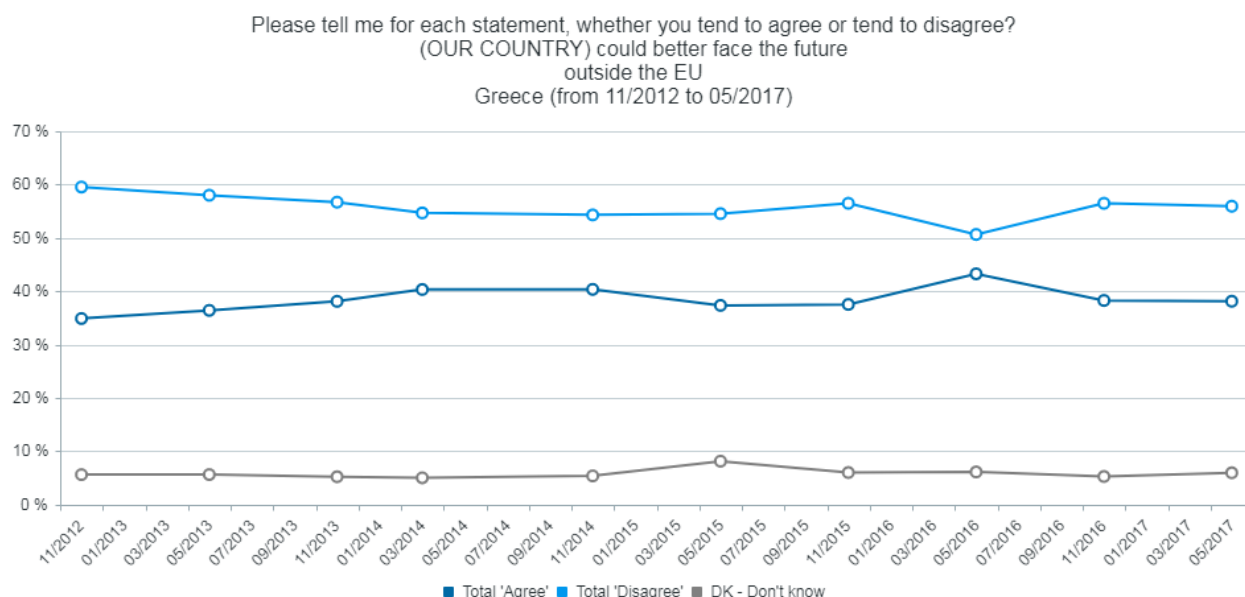
Source: Eurobarometer Interactive

General public is also not on favourable position, at least not in the early stages of the crisis: "Leaders have been heavily criticised, particularly by investors, for not taking decisive action to end the crisis."[141] Later on the responsibility is being attributed more to the Greek government, but the EC is still not out of the woods:

> An Ipsos survey of citizens of nine European Union countries finds most people hold the Greek government responsible for the ongoing debt crisis. Some 88% say the Greek government is a great deal, or a fair amount, to blame for the crisis –rising to 94% among German respondents. The German government was mentioned by 46%, attracting less blame than the Greek populace, the IMF and the European Commission overall.[142]

"During this period, anti-German stereotypes resurfaced in the Greek public sphere in parallel with increasingly mainstream Euroscepticism".[143] The media analysis of the crisis

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[141]   BBC News (2011) Barroso outlines plan to resolve eurozone debt crisis, 12.10.2011, http://www.bbc.com/news/business-15279017

[142] Ipsos (2015) EU citizens hold Greek government responsible for debt crisis, https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/eu-citizens-hold-greek-government-responsible-debt-crisis

[143] Michailidou, A. (2015) 'The Germans are back': Euroscepticism and anti-Germanism in crisis-stricken

period reveals that behind the scepticism towards EU and the part Germany played, there can be found struggles between people and political elites on one side and the contradictions of different political ideologies on the other.[144]

Indeed, the Greek parliamentary parties also engage in **blame shifting**. The two mainstream parties ND and PASOK, who have alternated their place as a governing party since 1974 before SYRIZA overpowered them in 2015, mostly blamed each other and the external actors, including EU. Three radical parties KKE, SYRIZA and LAOS blamed external actors/elites and mainstream parties for collaborating with them, SYRIZA being the most careful in negative attitudes towards the external elites as it sensed the possibility for taking power.[145]

Soros in turn places the most blame for the unfavourable outcome on strong German influence in EU, that made the others go along with poor judgement:

> The European authorities under German leadership mishandled the Greek crisis. They started out by providing emergency loans to Greece at punitive interest rates; they imposed their own program of reform and micromanaged it instead of allowing Greece to take ownership and control of the reforms; and they always lent too little too late. The Greek authorities are far from blameless but the primary responsibility lies with Germany because it was in charge. The Greek national debt has become unsustainable but the European authorities are now unwilling to write down their loans to Greece.[146]

Every actor involved in the Greek government-debt crisis is finding the other one partly or entirely responsible for the situation and this does not serve their reputation well. The trust in EC makes in Greece a rapid decline in 2009 and stays remains then almost stable at 20% from 2012 (EU average being much higher, remaining between 35-45%):

Greece, National Identities 19(1) 2015.
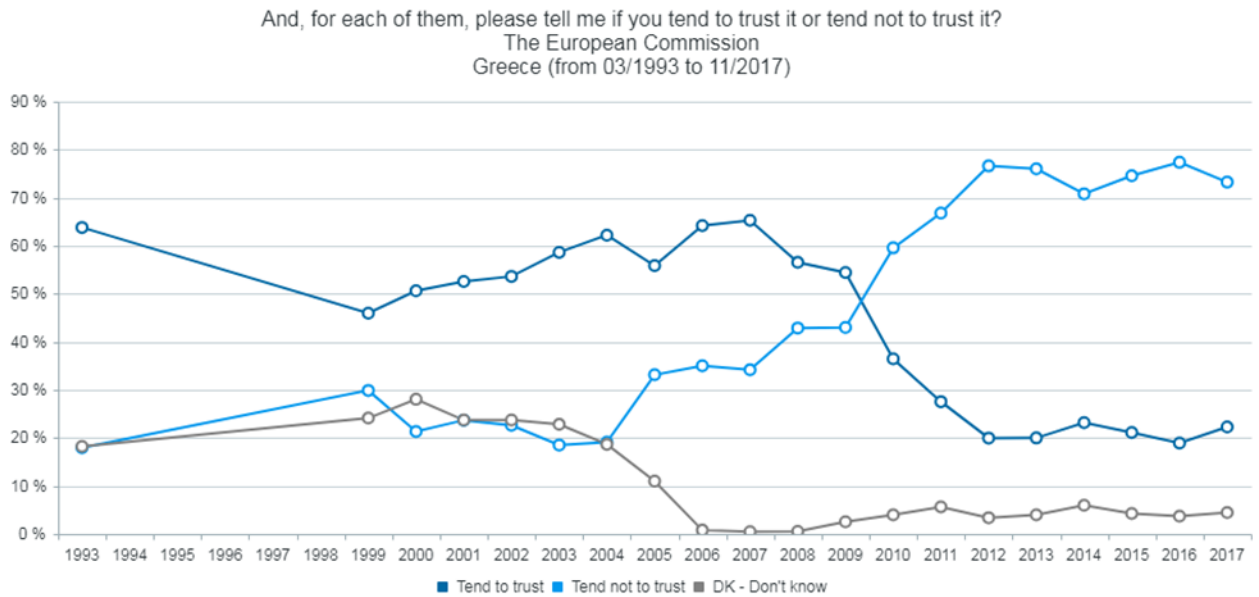
[144] Ibid.

[145] Vasilopoulou, S. *et al* (2014) Greece in Crisis: Austerity, Populism and the Politicsof Blame. JCMS:Journal of Common Market Studies, 2014, Volume 52. Number 2. pp. 388–402.

[146] Soros, G. (2015) Ukraine & Europe: What Should Be Done? The New York Reviw of Books, October 2015, http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2015/10/08/ukraine-europe-what-should-be-done/

Figure 11: Trust in the European Commission (Greece)

And, for each of them, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it?
The European Commission
Greece (from 03/1993 to 11/2017)

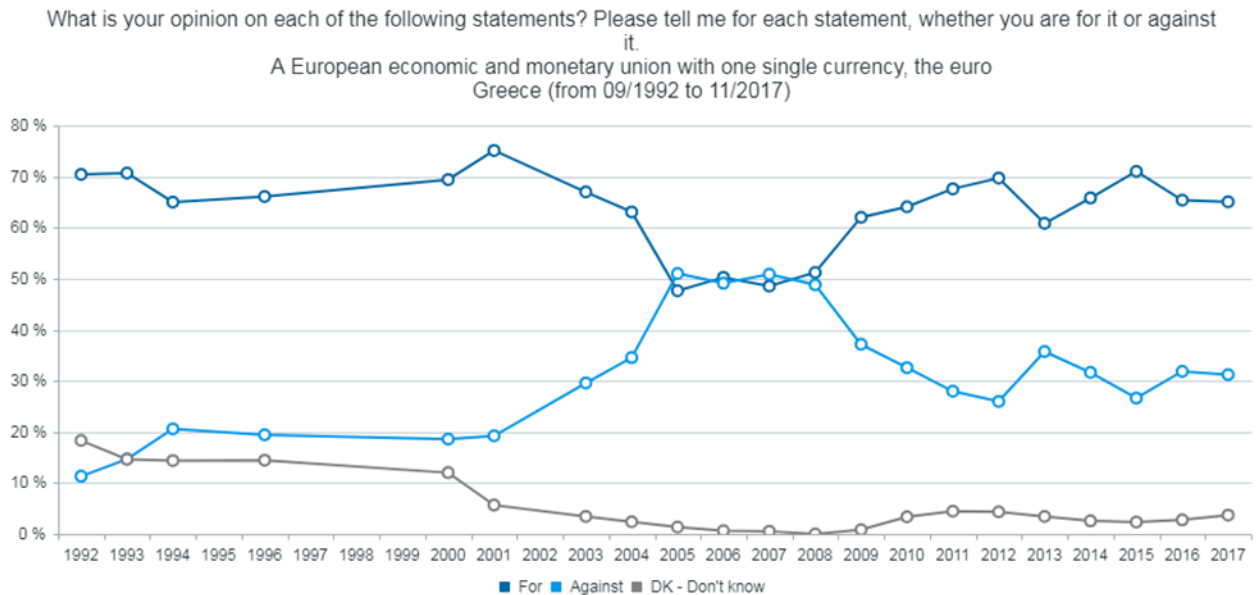■ Tend to trust ■ Tend not to trust ■ DK - Don't know

Source: Eurobarometer Interactive

Still, the support for actions taken at the supranational level i.e. the belief in legitimacy of the EMU and euro achieve a new high from the end of 2009, staying between 60-70% (EU average always being over 50%):

Figure 12: Are you for or against the European economic and monetary union with single currency, the euro (Greece)

What is your opinion on each of the following statements? Please tell me for each statement, whether you are for it or against it.
A European economic and monetary union with one single currency, the euro
Greece (from 09/1992 to 11/2017)

■ For ■ Against ■ DK - Don't know

Source: Eurobarometer Interactive

What the above shows is that during the Greek crisis, the EC and EU suffered remarkable loss of reputation, legitimacy indicators on the other hand remain on the positive side. This means that while the crisis communication strategies deployed by the EC did not succeed in preventing reputational loss, they managed to contribute to maintenance of legitimacy. While no direct causal link can be established between EC crisis communication and up/down in reputation and legitimacy, the EC's discursive interventions can still be seen as contributing to the conditions under which these changes in reputation/legitimacy became possible.

5. Analysis of EC crisis communication during the Migration Crisis

5.1   Crisis Communication

The migration crisis that hit the EU in the beginning of 2015, is in the scale and nature similar to the Eurozone crisis, affecting many different dimensions of integration project[147], and again demanding the European countries to show the solidarity with the fellow EU Member States.

According to Eurostat in 2015 1,2 million first time asylum seekers were registered in EU, the number that had more than doubled itself in comparison to the previous years figures[148]:

Figure 13: First time asylum seekers
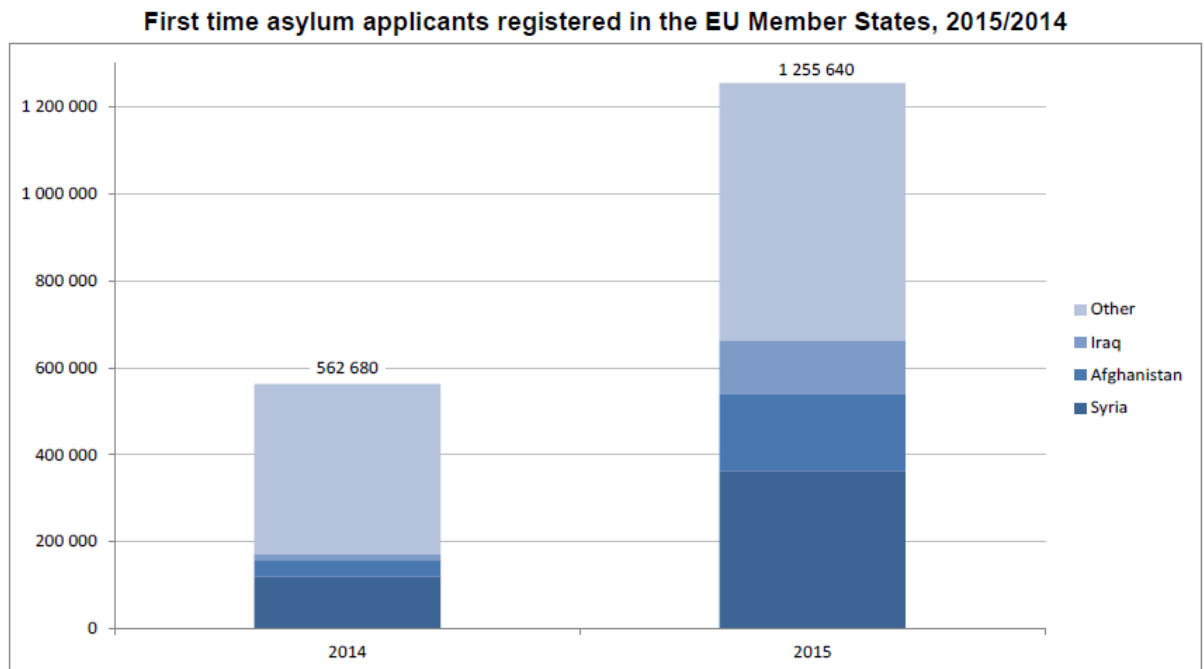
Source: Eurostat

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[147] Dinan, D, Nugent, N, Paterson E. W (2017) A Multi-dimensional Crisis. The European Union in Crisis. Palgrave.
[148] Eurostat (2016) Asylum in the EU Member States. Record number of over 1.2 million first time asylum seekers registered in 2015. Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis: top citizenships. Eurostat Newsrelease, 4 March 2016.

Even though the migration crisis can be considered temporal by its nature as is the Eurozone and Greek government-debt crisis, both of them having come at least to the slow-burning phase if not being entirely resolved, its impact on the EU and single market was significant. Migration crisis affected deeply one of the core elements of the single market – free movement of people and the Schengen system that makes this feature operational. This also contributed to the following crisis we will take a look at in the next chapter, the Brexit.[149] In migration crisis the EU is perceived to have more accountability than in Greek crisis, first due to the background, EU has not been effective in its external politics to ensure the stability in its neighbourhood, and second the legislative means to deal with such an amount of immigrants were insufficient. Whilst the latter was brought up to date quite fast, the first is still lacking results.

The migration crisis hit Europe with full force in 2015, but it started to unfold and show its signs already in 2014, that is the reason the speeches under analysis are from the time frame 2014-2017. The corpus is formed of the speeches by President Juncker and by the Commissioner Avramopoulos, who is responsible for the migration, home affairs and citizenship. The broad division between the types of speeches to be viewed is the same as in previous chapter:

Figure 14: Speeches by Juncker and Avramopoulos

Year	Press conference	Speech in Parliament	Other
2014	2A	1A	2A
2015	1+13A	4+2A	3
2016	5+7A	2+4A	9+12A
2017	1+2A	3	1+4A

*A marks the speeches by Commissioner Avramopoulos

When we take a look at the crisis clusters, this crisis is different, it is not without human

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[149] Buonanno, L (2017) The European Migration Crisis. Introduction. The European Union in Crisis. Palgrave.

victims. The number of fatalities among refugees trying to cross Mediterranean during the crisis in 2014-2017 is roughly around 4400, the highest in 2015, when 1769 refugees lost their lives[150].

What complicates the nature of this crisis communication even more, is the fact that the victims – the refugees – themselves are not the primary target of the communication. The stakeholders are, Member States and citizens impacted by the flood of people trying to reach safety by any means. In the contrary to other crisis viewed in this thesis, from the very beginning EC acknowledges that it is partly responsible for the crisis or at least for the unhappy faith of many victims: "*One* of the reasons for so many lost lives is that *it is too difficult* for people seeking protection to enter the EU *legally*"[151], states Commissioner Avramopoulos in the end of 2014. That places the crisis into immediately into the **accidental** cluster. EU recognises the role it has to play in the collective responsibility, even in blame that is equally attributed to EU, USA, NATO and other actors that have contributed to the instable environment in Middle East over the past years. Commissioner Avramopoulos says in reference to the Mediterranean Crisis as the crisis was called back then, that: "The EU as a whole must increase its commitment to the global resettlement efforts, and all Member States should contribute to that effort."[152]

As the crisis starts to unfold in the end of 2014 Commissioner Avramopoulos expresses in his speeches the need for *urgent action*, *working together*, *cooperation*. In all the speeches he held during 2014, taking up his mandate as a commissioner, he is stressing the *strong political* will to deal with the *highest migratory pressure since the Balkan crisis*. Conveying this message continues until January 2015: "Europe has to take charge. We have no time to spare. Together, we will move forward with commitment and resolve."[153] This all refers to precrisis measures taken, which is something new in case of the EC. Coombs

[150] IOM Missing Migrants Project, https://missingmigrants.iom.int/
[151] Avramopoulos, D. (2014) Fundamental Rights: the Pillar for EU Migration Policy, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-14-1601_en.htm
[152] Ibid.
[153] Avramopoulos, D. (2015) Recent human smuggling incidents in the Mediterranean, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-15-3262_en.htm

introduces in his works three-staged approach to the crisis management/communication – precrisis, crisis event and postcrisis[154]. Whilst in the case of Greek crisis there was no detectable precrisis action (at the same time EC was already dealing with the general financial crisis), in the case of migration crisis we can see the result of the risk assessment, there is a potential and imminent threat seen in migration sector that demands attention, action and preparation.

And the crisis was well predicted (after Lampedusa[155] and regarding the continuously growing pressure on external borders it was not too hard) and from the 2015 the actual crisis communication starts. In January 2015, after more major refugee ship tragedies[156] Commissioner Avramopoulos expresses *deep sorrow and compassion* for the victims, and *declares a war* on smugglers. He is combining **corrective action** (**rebuild strategy**) with **concern for the victims**, that Coombs does not include as a separate strategy, but mentions as adjusting information that should form the part of the initial crisis response.[157] In April President Juncker declares that *our* response has been *inadequate*, from the middle of the speech it is evident that the **us** is only the European Council, whose actions are not ambitious enough. He is distancing him and the EC. He also says that the claims about the limitations of Frontex mandate are *not true*, referring to the excuses made not to operate in international waters. There is the lack of *general will* to do so. Juncker is personal and emotional: "To be honest, I have had enough of poetry. I find the rhetoric of concern attractive at first but not all the time."[158] As he is urging towards more constructive action he is using **corrective action** of **rebuild** strategy family, which is mixed with **blame shifting** and **attack the accuser strategies** (statements made by the other actor are not true)

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[154] Coombs, W. T. (1999) Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding. Sage Publications, p 33.

[155] On 3 October 2013 the ship carrying migrants sank near the iland of Lampedusa, resulting death toll was around 360 victims.

[156] From 12.-18. April, approximately 1200 refugees lost their lives in ship wrecks, while passing Mediterranean.

[157] Coombs, W. T. (2007) Protecting Organization Reputations During a Crisis: The Development and Application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Corporate Reputation Review, September 2007, Volume 10, p 172.

[158] Juncker, J.-C. (2015) Speech by President Jean-Claude Juncker at the debate in the European Parliament on the conclusions of the Special European Council on 23 April: 'Tackling the migration crisis', http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-15-4896_en.htm

– EC is ready to take the decisive steps, but the Council (and Member States) do not have enough *shared solidarity*, which also combines elements of **excuse strategy**, belonging to the family of **diminish or reduce offensiveness strategies**.

This rhetoric is continued by Commissioner Avramopoulos, who is very assertive in speech held before Parliament: "It was time for the European Commission to fulfil its fundamental role as the engine of European integration, taking action on the big challenges of our times."[159] He is talking about *realistic* Agenda with *concrete* measures to be achieved by *shared effort*. So we can see the **rebuild strategies** strongly ongoing. **Victimage** and **ingratiation strategies** kick in, when appropriate and where the immediate audience is more involved in crisis e.g. speech on the island of Kos, where the Commissioner assures that EC is not *faceless bureaucratic and administrative machine*, but consists of real people, who are also *hurt*, when seeing *shipwrecks* and *drowning children* broadcasted. He continues praising the islanders for being very *hospitable* therefore creating *one of the most inviting destinations*. He says it is something *the residents of Kos can be proud of*. This strategic line goes on while visiting Austria, where he *can only praise the country for its relentless efforts*, while also thanking neighbouring Germany (later, in speech held in Germany, he specifies that the *German approach is an embodiment of the European spi*rit). Interestingly he uses much of the exact same expressions he did in Greece e.g. "[…] the refugee crisis is not just Austrian, Hungarian, Greek, Italian, or German. It's a European crisis."[160] He is only varying the succession of the countries in the sentence, it could be intentional, to stress the message, but could also be the sign of pressure under which the Commissioner and his speechwriters are. The same thought sounds also in Zagreb, Ljubljana, accompanied by thanking Croatia and Slovenia. All this work is done in the name of the European Agenda on Migration (**corrective action** strategy), including its most controversial measure – the relocation scheme[161] based on "quota system".

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[159] Avramopoulos, D. (2015) Opening Statement by Commissioner Avramopoulos at the European Parliament Plenary Debate on the European Agenda on Migration, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-15-5008_en.htm

[160] Avramopoulos, D. (2015) Remarks by Commissioner Avramopoulos following his visit to Austria, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-15-5605_en.htm

[161] Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL

In State of the Union speech in 2015 President Juncker is again using **attack the accuser strategy**: "There has been a lot finger pointing in the past weeks. […] And more often than not fingers have been pointed from national capitals towards Brussels.[…] We could all be angry about this blame-game. But I wonder who that would serve."[162] By accusing the Member States of blame shifting, the open critique used as a weapon to reduce the responsibility of the EC.

The same combination of strategies are being used by the President and the Commissioner throughout the 2016 as well, only there is a noticeable shift towards the **attack the accuser and blame shifting strategies**. Avramopoulos in March: "Closing borders, playing the blame game and taking distance from the problem are obviously not the solutions."[163] In April he repeatedly stresses that *fragmentation makes us vulnerable*, he is urging for *solidarity and responsibility*, bringing in the legal obligation imposed by Treaties and warning that otherwise there are *dire consequences* to be faced. In June he states that Member States *should speed up their efforts*. In September he recognizes there has been some success achieved and results delivered, but yet again feels the need to stress that solidarity is *not only moral* responsibility, but *legal responsibility enshrined in the EU treaties*. *All Member States* must make the effort – we have to remember, it is the time shortly before the Hungarian quota referendum[164]. By December the Commissioner sees the situation calming, still reiterating his message throughout the year: "But, let me also repeat once again that no single Member State should be shouldering such responsibilities

establishing a crisis relocation mechanism and amending Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third country national or a stateless person, 2015/0208 (COD), http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1485254578131&uri=CELEX:52015PC0450
[162] Juncker, J.-C. (2015) State of the Union 2015: Time for Honesty, Unity and Solidarity, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-15-5614_en.htm
[163] Avramopoulos, D. (2016) Remarks by Commissioner Avramopoulos during his visit to Idomeni, Greece, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-16-828_en.htm
[164] Kingsley, P. (2016) Hungarian referendum decides whether to slam the door on migrants. The Guardian, 1 October 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/01/hungarian-referendum-slam-door-migrants-new-era-europe

alone."[165] And he returns to the **excuse strategy** regarding the Dublin transfers[166], saying it is not the decision up to EC.

While in State of the Union speech President Juncker acknowledges that the EU *has started to see solidarity*, he says, that more is needed and *it must come from the heart*, *it cannot be forced*. He is plain and straightforward also in his speech held in October, making parallels between the Eurozone and the refugee crisis: "In both cases, the crisis revealed that our integration was incomplete. […] In critical areas, the rules were still national."[167] He also states that the *EU acted as a crisis manager* and stresses its central role in *finding solutions where solidarity was missing*. He is using a mixture of **blame shifting strategy**, and **excuse strategy** that constitutes of minimising the responsibility.

Ingratiation strategy that is scarcely used in case of EU Member States, moves towards external partners as the scope of crisis widens and need for partners is clear, Commissioner Avramopoulos: "I have said before that Turkey is a partner of the EU, and that the EU is a partner of Turkey."[168] He states that Turkey *has made impressive progress*.

In 2017, when the crisis had lost its urgency, the President is recognising that the initiatives related to migration and the refugee crisis of the Maltese presidency *are totally in line with the intentions of the EC* and adds that Malta is a small country with great ambitions. Yet again, in May he reminds once again the importance of solidarity, a *virtue* in need to be *rediscovered*. In May Commissioner Avramopoulos states the need to move forward from the *crisis-modus*, and by noting that *the difference between now and just two years ago, is*

[165] Avramopoulos, D. (2016) Remarks by Commissioner Avramopoulos at the press conference on the state of play of progress under the European Agenda on Migration and the presentation of the action plan on travel document security, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-16-4326_en.htm

[166] European Commission > Migration and Home Affaires > Dublin transfer, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/content/dublin-transfer_en

[167] Juncker, J.-C. (2016) Speech by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker at the 20th anniversary of the European Policy Centre - "The road to Rome: from crisis management to governing the EU", http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-16-3433_en.htm

[168] Avramopoulos, D. (2016) Remarks by First Vice-President Timmermans and Commissioner Avramopoulos at the Readout of the College Meeting of 6 April 2016, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-16-1289_en.htm

like night and day, and that EU has achieved *more in the past two years than what was possible in the twenty before it* in September, we can see that the crisis is counted resolved from the side of the EC by using **ingratiation** and **reminder strategies**.

The EC's crisis communication strategy during the migration crisis can be seen to mostly relying on **corrective action**, **blame shifting**, **attack the accuser, excuse** and **ingratiation** strategies. **Excuse** and **blame shifting** were being used during periods, when corrective action was missing the impetus, **ingratiation** was used on motivational purposes. In the following, the consequences for reputation/legitimacy of these crisis communication strategy will be looked into.

5.2 Reception and the Evaluation of the Consequences for Reputation and Legitimacy

Besides the temporal nature of the crisis, there is one other feature connecting the migration crisis to the Eurozone crisis, this is the great difference of views between Member States and an unbalanced power position and influence of one Member State in particular – Germany.[169] To complicate things further, whilst monetary policy in euro countries belong among the exclusive competencies of the EU and it could take at least some of the measures to tackle problems more easily, migration crisis affects several fields, none of them an exclusive competence of the Union.

As there were unprecedentedly many fatalities during the crisis and it was easy to engage the public concentrating on them, media played a great role in conveying a very monochrome picture of the whole migration crisis, framing it by using strong imagery and populist political rhetoric:

> Journalists have adopted ways of reporting that are not always conducive to sophisticated analysis, resorting to sensationalism in order to package and present the "refugee crisis" in a way people can readily understand and consume. The mere visibility of some facets of migration, such as boatloads of people cramming a tiny and barren island, have all the elements of newsworthiness that ongoing, massive socio-political, economic, and demographic changes do not. When time and material resources are limited, journalist visits are fleeting and their focus is on harvesting images of shipwrecked dinghies if and when a tragedy occurs.[170]

The media has been repeatedly blamed for failure to portray the refugees *as human beings with lives that are worth sharing*, media has been accused of failing their responsibility to present the refugees acting with us in the world instead of creating an image of voiceless mass, who is been acted upon.[171]

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[169] Dinan, D. et al (2017) Conclusions: Crisis Without End? European Union in Crisis. Palgrave, p. 360; Bulmer, S., Paterson, E. W. (2017) Germany and the Crisis: Asset or Liability? Palgrave, p. 212-230.

[170] Wallace Bowman, H. (2017) Opinion: The European refugee crisis is a communications disaster. Here's why, Devex > News, 18 October 2017, https://www.devex.com/news/opinion-the-european-refugee-crisis-is-a-communications-disaster-here-s-why-91215

[171] Chouliaraki, L., Stolic, T. (2017) Rethinking media responsibility in the refugee 'crisis': a visual typology

Similarly the measures taken and solicited by the EC were not very attractive nor potentially well selling in the eyes of news media. This all played a role in how the EC crisis communication was received. Only the most controversial of the Migration Agenda measures – the relocation quotas – got wide media coverage in all Member States. This visibility was (and is) in several Member States used as a political leverage to boost support for right-wing anti-migrant politics (most prominently in Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic and Poland),[172] but it suspectedly also deepened euroscepticism in United Kingdom, playing its part in Brexit vote results[173].

The main message of EC crisis communication during migrant crisis – more solidarity is needed – seems to have failed even after the formal victory in the European Court of Justice, the migration policy is headed towards better protection of external borders and placing the problem outside of EU.[174]

On the other hand, in the beginning of crisis 34,9% of citizens tend to trust and 45,7% tend not to trust the EC, the institution´s reputation is low, it is the second historic low point since the question features on Eurobarometer, it was lower only in May 2014, when the trust indicator was at 32,4% (which might be attributed to the heated situation in Ukraine):

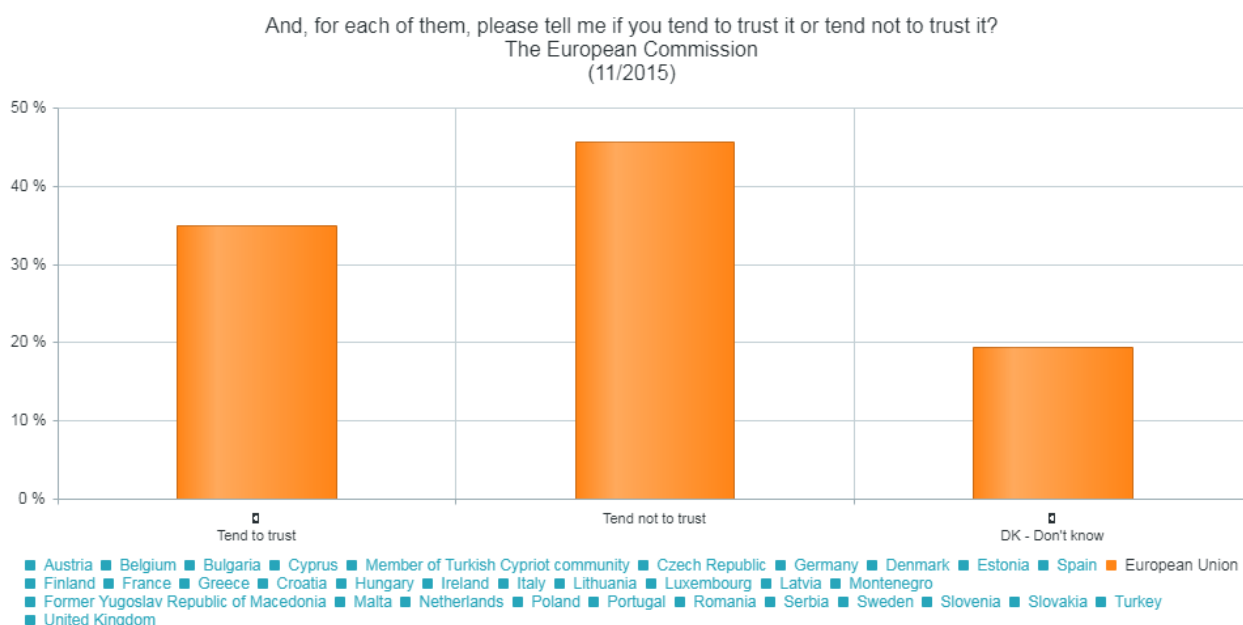**Figure 16: Trust in the European Commission 11/2015**

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of European news, Media, Culture & Society 2017, Vol. 39(8) 1162–1177.

[172] Hasselbach, C. (2016) Referendum in Hungary: Orban has already achieved his goal, DW.com, 2.10.2016, http://www.dw.com/en/referendum-in-hungary-orban-has-already-achieved-his-goal/a-35937072 ; EU sues Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland over low refugee intake, DW.com, 7.12.2017, http://www.dw.com/en/eu-sues-czech-republic-hungary-and-poland-over-low-refugee-intake/a-41691870 ; European right-wing leaders meet in Prague, slam EU and immigration, DW.com, 16.12.2017, http://www.dw.com/en/european-right-wing-leaders-meet-in-prague-slam-eu-and-immigration/a-41825795

[173] Dinan, D, Nugent, N, Paterson E. W (2017) Conclusions: Crisis Without End? The European Union in Crisis. Palgrave. p. 366.

[174] Barigazzi, J. (2017) Orbán wins the migration argument. Politico.eu, 15.9.2017, https://www.politico.eu/article/viktor-orban-migration-eu-has-won-the-argument/ ; Huet, N. (2017) Amnesty warns against 'outsourcing' migrant crisis to Libya. Euronews.com, 31.8.2017, http://www.euronews.com/2017/08/31/amnesty-warns-against-outsourcing-migrant-crisis-to-libya

And, for each of them, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it?
The European Commission
(11/2015)

Source: Eurobarometer Interactive

By the end of 2017 the trust in EC had regained its usual level at 42,2 %, growing by 10% during that period:

Figure 17: Trust in the European Commission 11/2017

And, for each of them, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it?
The European Commission
(11/2017)
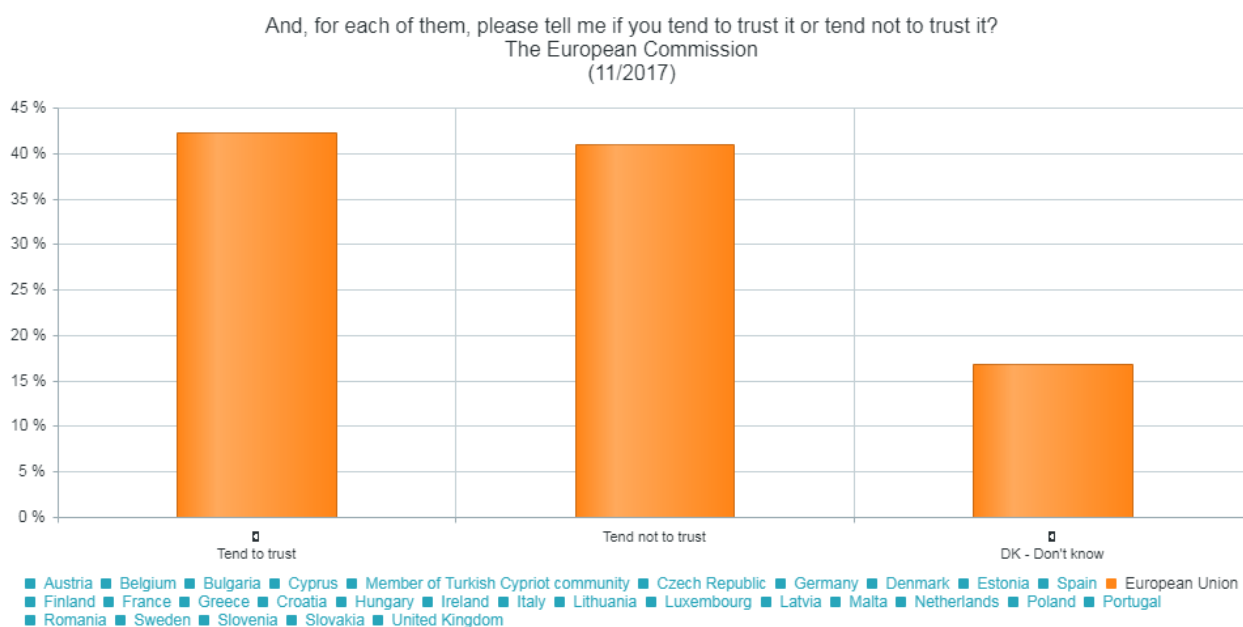
The fluctuation in trust level (that is in correlation with reputation) can be explained by the crisis itself and the measures, including crisis communication measures, taken to answer it, the latter repairing the reputation and increasing the trust in the institution. The relationship between public opinion and the negative influence of crisis periods has been established.[175] In a study dedicated to the immigration and public opinion in EU, it has been pointed out that the attitudes towards immigration itself are highly contrasting, being most negative in Central and Eastern Europe, where reluctance towards actions of solidarity is evident, but it is also noted, that this division does not coincide with the with the differences between positive and negative attitudes on the EU[176].

There could be a conclusion drawn that even if the concrete measures and crisis communication have a different reception throughout the EU, causing the decline in positive perception of the EU (and EC), there is no doubt in legitimacy of EU level actions and the necessity of the institution itself. The following two figures illustrate this quite well, the support for the common action in migration issue is extremely high, staying at around 70% throughout the crisis:

Figure 18: Are you for or against the common European policy on migration (EU)

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[175] Jacques Delors Institute (2016) EU, despite everything? European public opinion in the face of crisis (2005–2015).
[176] Jacques Delors Institute (2017) European public opinion and the EU following the peak of the migration crisis.

What is your opinion on each of the following statements? Please tell me for each statement, whether you are for it or against it.
A common European policy on migration
European Union (from 11/2014 to 11/2017)

For ■ Against ■ DK - Don't know
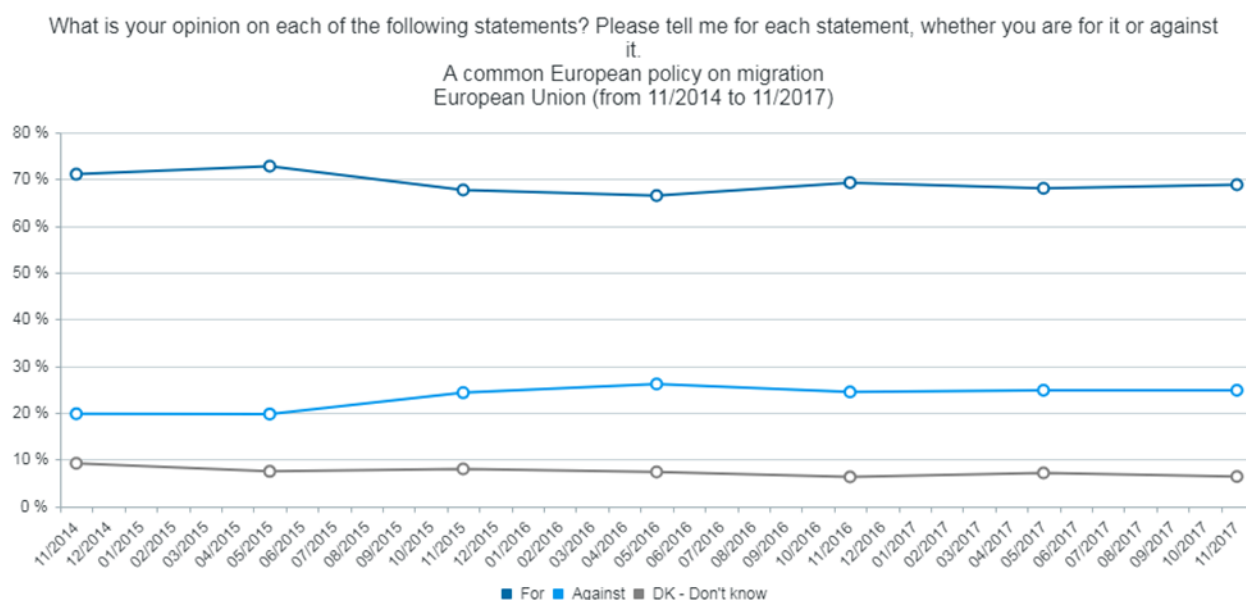
Source: Eurobarometer Interactive

Comparing it with the data from Hungary, that has one of the most hostile immigration attitudes in EU, we can see that the support rate is lower, declining from 70% in 2015, but still staying around 50% (e.g. the contribution of immigrants is deemed positive only by 14% of Hungarians):

Figure 19: Are you for or against the common European policy on migration (Hungary)

What is your opinion on each of the following statements? Please tell me for each statement, whether you are for it or against it.
A common European policy on migration
Hungary (from 11/2014 to 11/2017)

For ■ Against ■ DK - Don't know
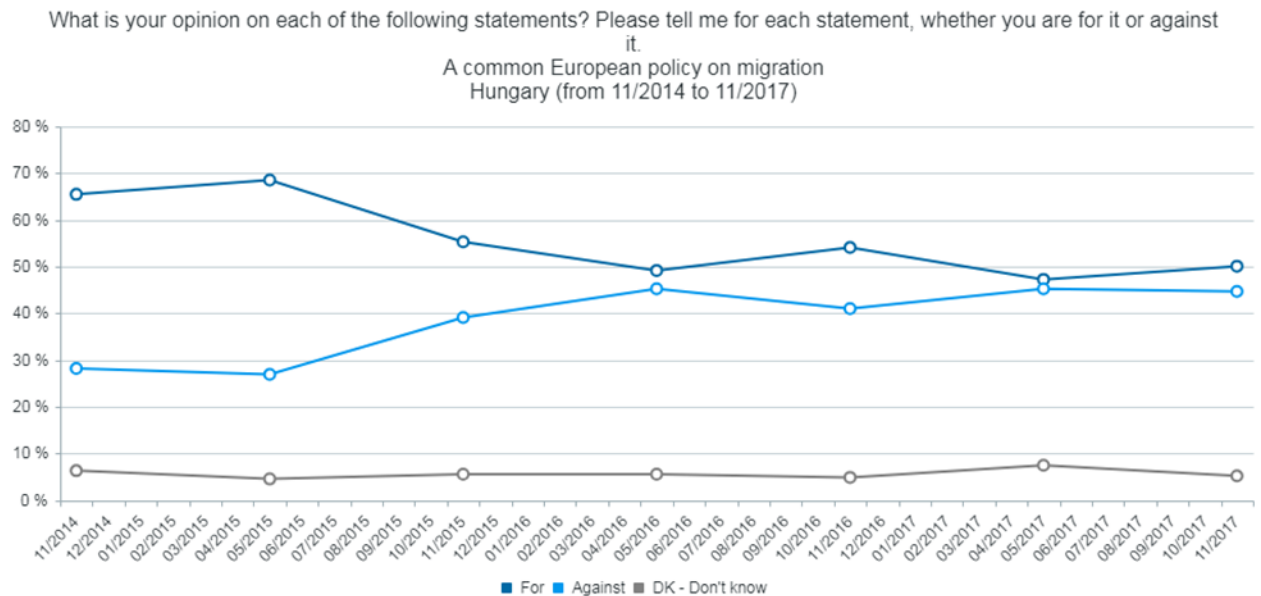
Source: Eurobarometer Interactive

Given the strategies the EC deployed in this crisis, the outcome reflects, that while the reputational loss occurred, it was diminished by use of suitable strategies at appropriate occasions. The communication on corrective actions was strong this time, it contributed to the acceptance of EC approach on all levels, citizen´s support to common action in that policy field is strong. Against this background, we can conclude that in this crisis that the legitimacy of the EC and EU is not harmed. Once again, while no causal inference can be made, this still depicts the social consequences which unfolded against the background of the discursive intervention – crisis communication of the EC.

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6. Analysis of EC crisis communication around and after the Brexit referendum

6.1 Crisis Communication

This chapter is dedicated to the third case study – similar to the others, the contextual frame for the crisis is offered and then the analysis of the speeches performed. The second part of the chapter will measure the impact of the crisis communication strategies used.

The United Kingdom has always been unlike the rest of the EU, be it due to historic baggage of once being the biggest empire in the world or because of clearly different economic and trade interests that had to be protected, its special relationship with the United States or all of these reasons and more, the fact is that UK has the most opt-outs from EU legislation.[177]

The differences in public opinion also illustrate this distinctiveness, when we take a look at the surveys:

Figure 9: I feel safer in EU (UK)

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[177] Jones, B *et al* (2018) Politics UK, Routledge, New York.

Please tell me for each statement, whether you tend to agree or tend to disagree?
I feel I am safer because (OUR COUNTRY)
is a member of the European Union
United Kingdom (from 10/2004 to 11/2012)
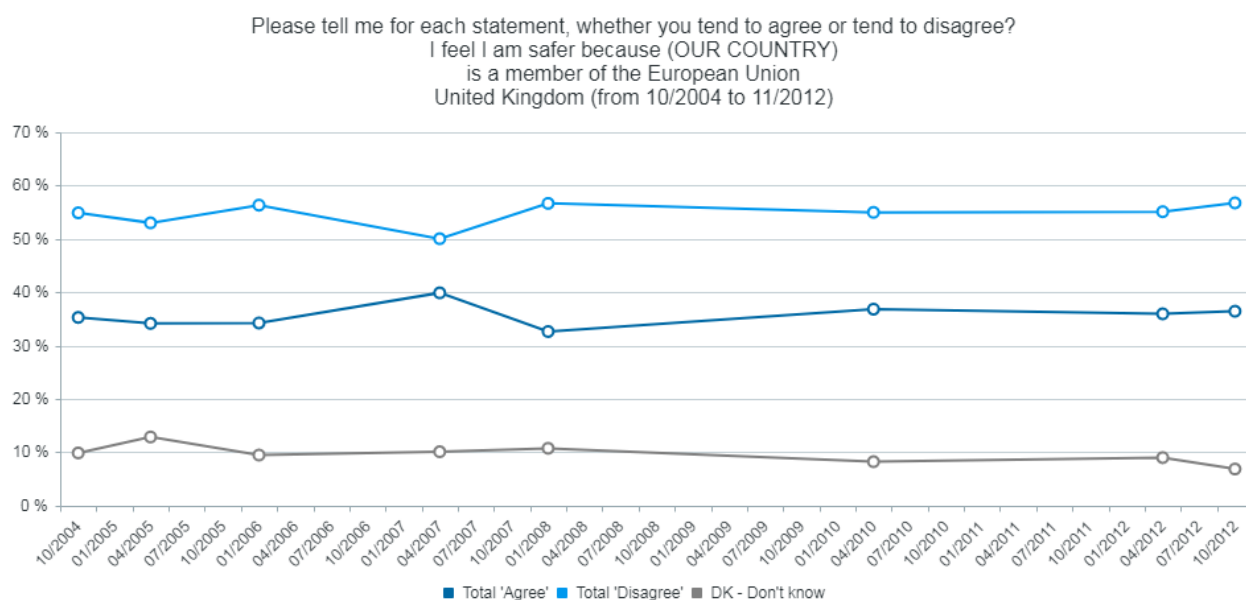
Source: Eurobarometer Interactive

As opposed to EU average during the same period:

Figure 10: I feel safer in EU (EU in general)

Please tell me for each statement, whether you tend to agree or tend to disagree?
I feel I am safer because (OUR COUNTRY)
is a member of the European Union
European Union (from 10/2004 to 11/2012)

Source: Eurobarometer Interactive

The same convinced opposition is also seen towards the economic benefits EU has to offer:

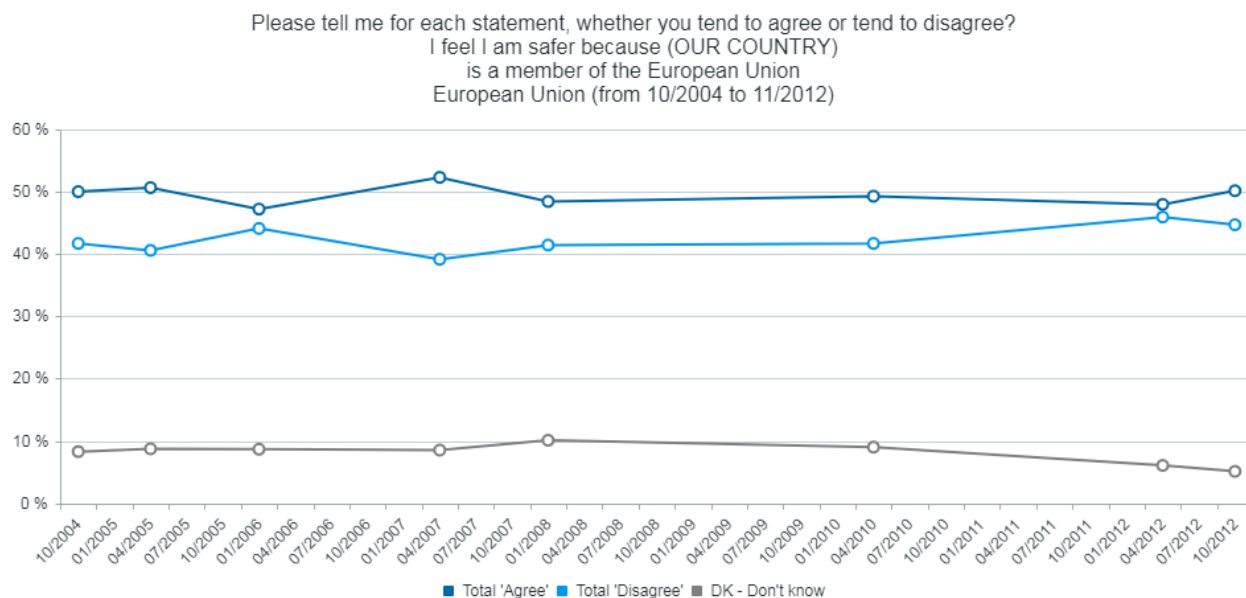**Figure 11: I feel, my country is economically stable in EU (UK)**
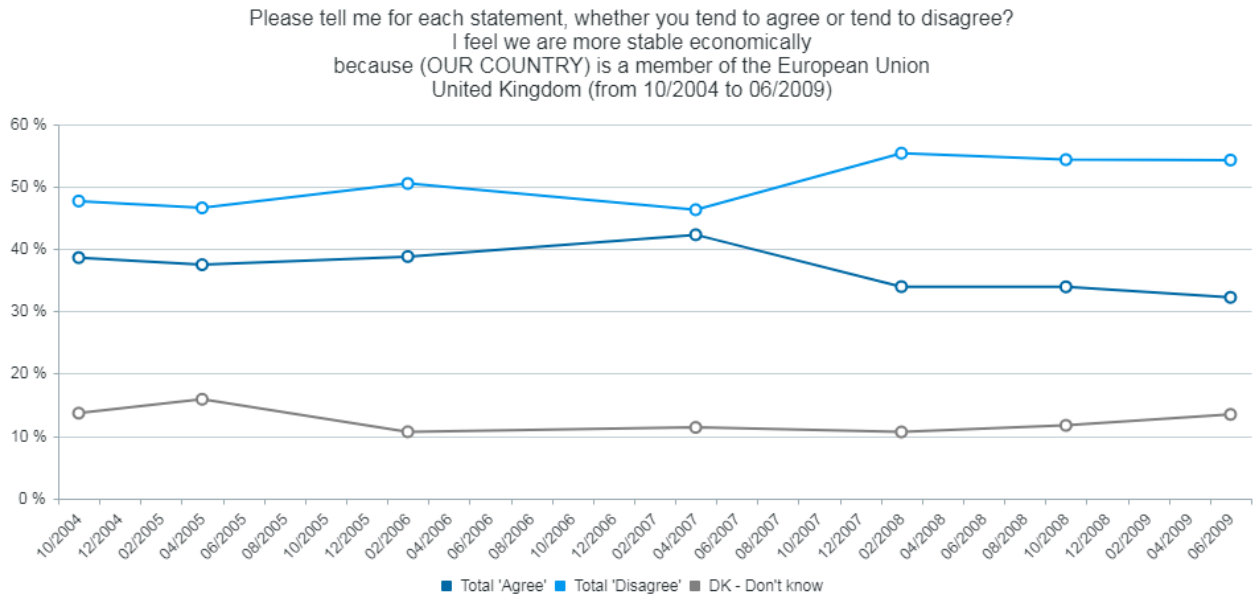
We can see that neither the security nor the economic reasons to belong to the EU have made their way deep into the hearts of British EU citizens. Looking at the history and the UK-centred communication and public sphere of the country, it is not surprising.

Still, when UK voted to leave the EU by 52% to 48% on the referendum held on 23 June 2016[178] it was an unexpected outcome of a political game[179] that regardless of many speculations is impossible to turn back[180]. On 29 March 2017, in accordance with the Article 50 of the EU, the United Kingdom notified European Council of their intention to

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[178] BBC News > Politics > EU Referendum results,

[179] Glencross, A. (2016) Why the UK Voted for Brexit: David Cameron's Great Miscalculation. Palgrave Studies in European Union Politics, p 2.

[180] Cowburn, A. (2018) Brexit: Increasing majority back second referendum if UK faces leaving EU without a deal, finds poll. Independent.co.uk, 16 January 2018, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/brexit-latest-updates-second-eu-referendum-uk-leave-no-deal-talks-poll-jeremy-corbyn-theresa-may-a8161301.html ; Watts, J. (2018) Brexit: Nigel Farage says 'maybe' there should be a second referendum on EU membership. Independent.co.uk, 11 January 2018, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/brexit-nigel-farage-second-referendum-eu-membership-wright-stuff-video-ukip-maybe-leader-a8153106.html

leave the EU and on 29 April the negotiation guidelines were adopted. The EC is coordinating the work on all the issues involved in the process.[181]

Brexit is said to be affecting mainly the territorial borders of the European integration, it is a domestically induced crisis [182], with smaller scope than the Eurozone and migration crisis, not so multi-dimensional, but it has a deep impact on reputation and legitimacy of the EU, showing clearly the difference between the will of political elites and the general public. It is a structural crisis that affects the pillars of the European integration, questions the will and ability for much needed solidarity and might result in being the first step in disintegration of the EU.[183] When we look at the crisis clusters, for the EU it falls under the **victim cluster**, where the responsibility attribution is low and the reputational threat is considered low. This combined with the fact that negotiating the terms of UK leaving and possibly concluding the new international agreements with it, belong under the exclusive competence of the EU, gives the EC quite free position in its crisis communication.

The time span of the speeches analysed in this chapter is 2016-2018. The speakers are the President of the Commission, Valdis Dombrovskis, commissioner in charge of in charge of financial stability, financial services and Capital Markets Union and the EU high negotiator Michel Barnier, European Chief Negotiator for the United Kingdom Exiting the EU.

Figure 12: Speeches by Juncker, Dombrovskis and Barnier

Year	Press conference	Speech in Parliament	Other
2016	1	2	5
2017	4+2D+7B	7+4B	5+4D+16B
2018	4B	3+1B	3D+3B

*D marks the speeches of Commissioner Dombrovskis, B the speeches of Chief Negotiator Barnier

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[181] European Commission > Brexit negotiations, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/brexit-negotiations_en
[182] Schimmelfennig, F. (2017) Theorising Crisis in European Integration. The European Union in Crisis. Palgrave.
[183] Dinan, D et al (2017) Conclusions: Crisis Without End? The European Union in Crisis. Palgrave.

In 2016, before the vote was taken, Juncker is approaching the issue with humour – at first he is talking about the *contagious* referenda (also referring to the Hungarian one on quotas), making jokes that the UK referendum can not *possibly go badly* as it takes place on the National Holiday of Luxembourg. Then he turns to pure irony: "The Commission is even more unpopular in the UK than in other countries, and it is quite an achievement to be unpopular in the UK."[184] On the other hand he already states that there will be no renegotiation with the British: "Not just because the Prime Minister voted against me as Commission President, but also because this time he was extremely glad we were able to help him sort out his problem, a problem of his own making."[185] We can observe the use of **diminish** or **reducing offensiveness** crisis communication **strategies** here, **minimization** and **excuse** as he is making the crisis look less severe and also showing that EC has no power over nor responsibility for it. Also there is a quite strong **blame shifting strategy** in use that becomes especially clear as he concludes his speech with following: "Those who do not believe in Europe, doubt it, or are exasperated by it should visit the graves of our wars."[186]

Shortly after the referendum the ironic position of the President does not disappear, referring to the resignation of the Brexit architects, he says: "I would have thought that they had a plan. Instead of developing a plan, they are leaving the boat."[187] On several occasions he is reiterating that the free access to the internal market includes playing by all the rules, **provocation strategy** is used – we are only reacting.

In 2017 also other speakers appear from the side of the EC. Commissioner Dombrovskis is stressing that *the integration is an existential question* for the financial markets despite *one leaving country*. He says that in Brexit question EU *will act as one to preserve its interest*

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[184] Juncker, J.-C. (2016) 14th Norbert Schmelzer lecture – Lecture by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, 'The European Union – a source of stability in a time of crisis', http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-16-583_en.htm

[185] Ibid.

[186] Ibid.

[187] Juncker, J.-C. (2016) Speech by President Jean-Claude Juncker at the EP Plenary session on the conclusions of the European Council meeting of 28 June 2016 and the Informal meeting of the 27 Heads of State or Government of 29 June 2016, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-16-2413_en.htm

and the goal for the future is to have a *fruitful cooperation* with UK *on fair terms*. He states that the *resilient economic base* is needed to *successfully cope with Brexit and its potential impact*. The commissioner is communicating using the **corrective action strategy**.

A third voice has been given mandate to speak in this crisis – Chief Negotiator Barnier. He is not a member of the Commission, he is chosen to perform his duties as a impartial outsider, but we must not forget that he was Commissioner for Internal Market and Services in second Barroso Commission[188], so he is very well aware of the communicative tasks expected. In speeches in front of the Parliament he is expressing the need for *unity* from the EU side, unity, which *does not fall from the sky*, but is earned by *transparency*, *public debate* and *trust*. Barnier is fighting the populist allegations made during a plenary session in October: "[…] never, ever will you find the slightest bit of revenge or punishment in my attitude – never!"[189] and he also is firmly reasoning against using the word *ransom*, while describing the financial conditions of exit. He is using **provocation strategy** here as if saying: If you would not have wanted to leave, you would not have to pay, what is due. As for the negotiations, he stresses in his speeches the *positive atmosphere*, the need to *build trust*, the need for *clarity*. By the end of September Barnier is saying that *constructive spirit has been expressed* and *new dynamic has been created* in the negotiations, but stresses that there still is not a *sufficient progress*. And he is constantly, in every speech repeating that *the time is passing very quickly*, implying that the UK side has not been and still is not constructive and cooperative enough. He is using **reminder**, **blame shifting, ingratiation and corrective action strategies**.

In State of the Union speech 2017 President Juncker says: "This will be both a sad and tragic moment. We will always regret it. But we have to respect the will of the British people. We will advance, we must advance because Brexit is not everything. Because

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[188] European Commission > The Commissioners (2010-2014) > Members, http://ec.europa.eu/archives/commission_2010-2014/members/index_en.htm

[189] Barnier, M. (2017) Closing statement by Michel Barnier at the Plenary Session of the European Parliament on the state of play of the negotiations with the United Kingdom, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-17-3681_en.htm

Brexit is not the future of Europe."[190] He is making his position clear – even though Brexit is an important issue, it is not in the top of the list. Juncker is still using **diminish or reduce offensiveness strategies**. In December 2017, after the Joint Report of negotiators was agreed and the first phase of negotiations concluded, President Juncker admits that *sufficient progress has now been made*, which is later clarified by Barnier not to be taken for a *full progress*.

The beginning of 2018 meets us with the same strategy lines. **Provocation and blame shifting** by Barnier (*this was the UK's sovereign decision; we regret the decision but we respect it and now we have to implement it*), as he is firmly saying no transition period can be sure before the ratification of withdrawal agreement and no special treatment will apply. Dombrovskis is stressing the need to *strengthen pre-conditions for the true single market*, meaning through **corrective action** (including strengthening the monetary union) the impact to the economy will be withstood. And President Juncker says there is no winning side in Brexit and that EU is not throwing UK out. He also says: "We need to focus on our European future – not on the past, and not on Brexit."[191] He is still using the **diminish strategies**.

On the basis of the analysis above, we can note, that the most commonly used strategies in this crisis are **diminish or reducing offensiveness** family strategies, also **blame shifting** and **corrective action**. In the following subchapter their social consequences are being viewed.

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[190] Juncker, J.-C. (2017) State of the Union Address 2017, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-17-3165_en.htm
[191] Juncker, J.-C. (2018) Speech by President Juncker at the Plenary Session of the European Parliament on the guidelines on the framework of future EU-UK relations, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-18-1881_en.htm

6.2 Reception and the Evaluation of the Consequences for Reputation and Legitimacy

Given the exclusive competence in the matter and the weak attribution of responsibility in this crisis, the position of the EC was strong, reputationally at least. The crisis communication itself, though, was complicated by several external factors.

The British media (as well as the society) was divided already before the Brexit vote, but this impartial versus eurosceptic attitude in UK's media coverage is nothing new. Before, during and after the Brexit the most reliable and neutral message was distributed by BBC, but even they were accused of failing to achieve actual balanced impartiality before the vote and politicising everything.[192] Trying to give word to every side (government, Irish, Scottish, EU) while answering the widespread provocative articles in tabloid media (e.g. Daily Mail, The Sun)[193] is not an easy task and therefore the EU crisis communication did not have reliable nor neutral enough means to spread in UK. It was (justifiably) presented in national context e.g. the pre-Brexit speech by the President (Juncker´s suggestion for eurosceptics to visit the graves of our wars) was even in the mainstream news reproduced with the angry response by the "out" campaigners,[194] whilst in the other media the strong colours were not held back at all[195]. Later, as the Briton´s frustration towards their own government grows, we can see this approach fade even in tabloids and more balanced picture is presented[196].

After the initial predominantly negative reaction to the Brexit referendum result[197], the media and general public in Member States developed a mostly neutral standpoint. The

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[192] Seaton, J. (2016) Brexit and the Media. The Political Quarterly, Vol. 87, No. 3, July–September 2016

[193] Ibid.

[194] Holehouse, M. (2016) Eurosceptics should visit war graves, says Jean-Claude Juncker. The Telegraph, 6.3.2016, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/eu/12184099/Eurosceptics-should-visit-war-graves-says-Jean-Claude-Juncker.html

[195] Stevens, J.(2016) EU chief provokes fury by telling Brexit backers to visit war graves and then think about again about quitting the EU, MailOnline, 4.3.2016, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3477073/EU-chief-provokes-fury-telling-Brexit-backers-visit-war-graves-think-quitting-EU.html

[196] Di Santolo, A. S. (2018) 'I'm surprised you're surprised!' EU spokesman's FIERCE reply to Davis over no-deal Brexit, Express, 9.1.2018, https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/902264/Brexit-news-update-latest-David-Davis-EU-Commission-no-deal-scenario

[197] MacDonald, S. (2016) The impact of Brexit on the UK's reputation, influence and soft power. Cultural

news media in EU was covering Brexit extensively, but without strong emotions. Most of the news were the matter of fact statements on the progress of the negotiations or analytical articles speculating on the future scenarios of EU-UK relations. If something, the British government and the Prime Minister are pictured in a slightly ironic key[198] and sometimes stories are published about the EU citizens´ mistreatment in UK[199].

On more fundamental level, if we recognise the permanence of the Brexit decision and its historic relevance in the history of the European integration – there are some major issues connected to Brexit, though, for example will Brexit become contagious? The reply might include the comparison of the crisis management and the crisis communication of both the UK and the EU: "The answer to the latter question may depend heavily on how well the UK is perceived by citizens in other member states to manage any post-referendum crises compared with how well the EU manages its other crises."[200]

Brexit is still very much an ongoing crisis, the negotiations are only half way through and the transition period has been agreed in principle. Nevertheless, we can see that the most prominent feature of EC´s crisis communication in this crisis is – consistency. They use the same strategies and they hold the same position all through the crisis.

It seems to be a rewarding approach. Even if the image of the EU is not the most positive in the UK during the crisis (but the EU average is only around 5-10% better during the period in question), it shows improvement and the positive attitudes are by the end of 2017 slightly prevailing:

trends 2016, Vol 25, No 4, 280-286.

[198] Delesalle-Stolper, S. (2017) Discours au congrès tory: Theresa May victime d'une quinte de tout, Libération, 4.10.2017, http://www.liberation.fr/planete/2017/10/04/discours-au-congres-tory-theresa-may-victime-d-une-quinte-de-tout_1600888 ; Volkery, K. (2017) May hustet, die Konservativen leiden, Handelsblatt, 4.10.2017, http://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/international/grossbritannien-may-hustet-die-konservativen-leiden/20412438.html ; Tóth-Szenesi, A. (2017) Két dolog zavarta meg szegény Theresa May kongresszusi beszédét, de nagyon, Index, 5.10.2017, https://index.hu/mindekozben/poszt/2017/10/05/meg_ne_menjen_ket_dolog_zavarta_meg_szegeny_theresa_may_kongresszusi_beszedet_de_nagyon/

[199] Schindler, J. (2017) Britain Grows Increasingly Hostile to EU Citizens. Spiegel Online, 7.12.2017, http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/as-brexit-nears-harrassment-of-eu-citizens-in-uk-rises-a-1181845.html

[200] Webber, D. (2017) Can EU Survive? The European Union in Crisis. Palgrave. p 356.

Figure 15: Image of the EU (UK)

In general, does the European Union conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image?						
Date	Fairly positive(...	Very positive (5...	Fairly negative(...	Very negative (...	DK - Don't know	Neutral (3.0)
05/2016	24.09 %	6.73 %	22.76 %	13.38 %	2.00 %	31.04 %
11/2016	25.24 %	8.41 %	22.26 %	9.61 %	4.24 %	30.23 %
05/2017	28.23 %	8.21 %	18.18 %	10.26 %	5.35 %	29.77 %
11/2017	26.76 %	8.47 %	22.34 %	10.57 %	3.45 %	28.41 %

Source: Eurobarometer Interactive

The support level to one of the key policies of the EU, one of the pillars of the Single Market, that Britons voted to leave, is a bit lower than the EU average (around 80% throughout the period in question), but still remarkably high and shows growing trend:

Figure 13: Free movement of people

What is your opinion on each of the following statements? Please tell me for each statement, whether you are for it or against it. The free movement of EU citizens who can live, work, study and do business anywhere in the EU			
Date	For	Against	DK - Don't know
05/2016	62.80 %	29.96 %	7.25 %
11/2016	67.68 %	24.65 %	7.67 %
05/2017	69.45 %	19.56 %	10.99 %
11/2017	75.41 %	19.04 %	5.55 %

Source: Eurobarometer Interactive

The UK citizens' view on UK´s brighter future outside the EU is pessimistic and 55-60% of people do not think UK could do better not being part of the EU:

Figure 14: Could UK better face the future outside the EU?

Please tell me for each statement, whether you tend to agree or tend to disagree? (OUR COUNTRY) could better face the future outside the EU			
Date	Total 'Agree'	Total 'Disagree'	DK - Don't know
05/2015	30.22 %	57.56 %	12.23 %
11/2015	33.39 %	55.28 %	11.32 %
05/2016	32.70 %	55.26 %	12.04 %
11/2016	32.68 %	57.53 %	9.79 %
05/2017	30.41 %	59.68 %	9.92 %

Source: Eurobarometer Interactive

This means that with in the context of Brexit, EU reputation has not suffered during the Brexit crisis, the EU image as an indicator in UK being in correlation with the EU average and in general higher than ever since 2000, when the question was first included in the Eurobarometer survey. Legitimacy of the EU itself and one of its key policies – free movement of people – that is also one of the major issues preventing the successful conclusion of Brexit negotiations seems to be unquestioned even in the eyes of UK citizens. Against the background of the previously established EC crisis communication strategy, this means that EC was successful in maintaining/repairing reputation and the legitimacy has not suffered.

Conclusion

In terms of crisis communication, the EC was found to rely on **compensation** and **ingratiation strategies** in the beginning of Greek government-debt crisis, later it continues to use other strategies from **rebuild** and **bolstering strategy families**, which are combined with the **attack the accuser strategy** at times and **diminish** or **reducing offensiveness strategy family**. The multitude of strategies used can be explained by the alteration of the crisis cluster from **victim** to **accidental**, the latter having stronger responsibility attributed to the EC and also the long time span of the crisis that includes both fast and slow burning phases. In terms of social consequences there can be seen a serious damage to the reputation, which means that the strategies chosen did not work well for maintaining/repairing the reputation. Legitimacy in the other hand suffered less, it can be contributed to the prior very strong reputational capital (see Figure 1). The main problem might in this case be that the corrective action was taken, EC had the means to do so (mostly exclusive competence policy field, only the bail-out measures had to be agreed upon), but it was not communicated clearly enough through the **corrective action strategy**. The strategies used could have worked for repairing the image, but they were used inadequately, e.g. instead of answering the allegations of Member States and media by using the rebuild strategies, **attack the accuser strategy** was chosen, which according to SCCT might have been effective, when the accusations would have been invented, based on rumours. By the incident of Greek referendum **attack the accuser** and **ingratiation** strategies were used, these might have worked better, if the balance would have been right – more towards the **ingratiation**.

In the migration crisis the most often deployed strategies by EC were **corrective action**, **blame shifting, attack the accuser, excuse** and **ingratiation** strategies. **Excuse** and **blame shifting** strategies were being used logically, during times, when **corrective action,** which in this case was communicated much better than during the Greek crisis, was slowed down, it was used in parallel with **ingratiation** to encourage the Member States agree on further steps. The shared competence limited in part the choice of strategies, but in the other hand

demanded continuous communication, that was lacking during the Greek crisis. In the migration crisis the social consequences from the aspects of reputation and legitimacy are better – reputation indicators initially dropped, but were improved by the time the crisis calmed down. Legitimacy did not suffer too much even in these Member States that on the elite level were most hostile towards the common migration policy. On the basis of the CDA we can not make the direct link between image repair, reputation restoration and the crisis communication, but at least it can be seen to contribute to the process.

The Brexit crisis saw EC using the **diminish or reducing offensiveness** family **strategies**, also **blame shifting** and **corrective action.** There are much less strategies used than in other two crises studied. As EC´s position in this crisis is clean cut, it is a **victim** cluster crisis and the matters belong under exclusive competence of the EU, it is easier to be consistent in the strategy choices and the use of strategies. Also, the **provocation strategy** is used as a novelty feature, which is more elegant and convincing than simple **blame shifting**. This also indicates that the crisis communication strategies are used more confidently and consciously than in previous crises. As the social consequences neither the reputation nor legitimacy suffered during the time of Brexit crisis until to the date it was viewed.

This study started with the aim to know what kind of crisis communication strategies EC uses and that we could find out. We also wanted to see if there are the social consequences of the use of these strategies that could be connected to reputation and legitimacy of the EU. While this study focussed on assessing the consequences of EC crisis communication strategy by looking at media response and public opinion, it acknowledges that a) other factors than EC crisis communication could have played a role, b) it could not take into account all different audiences in detail, but instead focussed on the most relevant for each crisis/case. Nevertheless, and in the spirit of the discursive framework this study has adopted, interested in conditions of possibility, not causal connections, the findings still suggest that crisis communication contributes to shaping the context within which the observed consequence regarding reputation/legitimacy can occur.

All these findings have to be understood within the parameters - and limitations - of the present study. The position of the EC as a communicator is complicated. EC speaks to the vast and diverse audience through the crisis communication, there are many different stakeholders, whose stages of involvement in the crisis vary on a big scale. The multiple audiences and their diverse positions is nothing new, it has also been noted by the crisis communication experts: "[…] the audiences are not monolithic; for example some may think that a crisis is internally caused, whereas others may think it is externally caused."[201] The same applies also to how severe is the crisis in the eyes of the stakeholders and which direct points of involvement it has with their lives e.g. the migration crisis is obviously differently perceived by Greek and Hungarians than by Finnish and Swedish citizens. That is why at times the most affected audience is chosen to illustrate the social consequences.

The position of the EC is further complicated by being a supranational actor that depending on the policy field has its hands tied or is free to act, it is determined by the competencies it has regarding the policy – exclusive or shared. This is one of the features that decides, which crisis management measures and which crisis communication strategies are used. The expectations in the other hand and are always bigger than the means to deliver the longed results.

Whilst the capability-expectations gap[202] appeared in public consciousness in connection with the international role of the EU (i.e. EU's inability to act up to the expectations of the international community during conflicts in Balkans and North Africa in the end of the century/beginning of the new one), the political legitimacy crisis that has followed different crises in past ten years is more of internal nature, partly given from the above mentioned fact that anticipations and reality are not completely corresponding: "Were it a federation, which it is not, then clearly it would be performing badly. But if the EU is understood as

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[201] Benoit, L. W. (2015). Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: Image Repair Theory and Research. State University of New York Press, p 49-51.
[202] Hill, C (1993) The Capability-Expectations Gap, or Conceptualizing Europe´s Inernational Role. Journal of Common Market Studies, Volume 31, No 3, September 1993.

confederation, then its link between its institutions and its citizens are unusually strong".[203]

That there is a mixture of strategies used in all the cases, it is nothing unusual: "[…] in some cases there is no single crisis type, and no single appropriate defensive strategy can be identified in a particular situation."[204] Still, it can be said that EC can not use the "strong" crisis communication strategies like full **apology** or full **denial** – it all depends on the responsibility attributed to it, at least in three crises viewed in this thesis it is either two big or two small. EC is never entirely without blame and never fully guilty, no matter the audience and some populist claims. Also, EC has to adapt its crisis communication strategies to keep up with the evolution of the crisis and the different phases of it. What matters is that the right combination of strategies is chosen, appropriate to the given circumstances. As we can see on the basis of the findings, at times EC has managed to do that.

One more aspect has to be pointed out, the **consistency in the strategies used** might have an influence on their effectiveness. EC crisis communication was most successful during Brexit, having positive influence on both the reputation and legitimacy. The practical outcome of this crisis is still unknown, but as it is not excluded that it could be an opportunity for further integration: "All of the crises are open-ended: they may result in disintegration but also lead to a reassertion of the status quo or to more integration."[205]

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[203] McCormick, John (2017) Understanding the European Union. A concise introduction. Palgrave.
[204] Benoit, L. W. (2015). Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: Image Repair Theory and Research. State University of New York Press, p 49-51.
[205] Schimmelfennig, F. (2017) Theorising Crisis in European Integration. The European Union in Crisis. Palgrave.

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BBC News (2011) Barroso outlines plan to resolve eurozone debt crisis, 12.10.2011

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EUROOPA LIIDU KOMMUNIKATSIOON KRIISI AJAL: EUROOPA KOMISJONI KRIISIKOMMUNIKATSIOON NING SELLE TAGAJÄRJED REPUTATSIOONILE JA LEGITIIMSUSELE

Tiina Pai

Resümee

Viimasel kümnendil on Euroopa Liitu tabanud mitmed kriisid, võib täheldada püsivat kriisiseisundit, millega toimetulemisel EL alati kõige edukam ei ole olnud. Peale otsese, nähtava ja igapäevaselt tajutava mõju, ohustavad kriisid ka Euroopa Liidu ja tema institutsioonide reputatsiooni ja legitiimsust. Kriis ongi käesolevas magistritöös mõistetud ohuna organisatsiooni reputatsioonile ja/või legitiimsusele.

Reputatsioon ja legitiimsus on küll seonduvad kuid kindlasti mitte sisuliselt täiesti samad mõisted. Legitiimsus on seotud organisatsiooni vastavusega kindlaksmääratud või implitsiitsetele standarditele või eeskirjadele. Reputatsiooni võib käsitleda organisatsiooni positiivse eristumisena huvirühmade silmis teiste samataoliste seast. Nende omavaheline suhe on keeruline, kuid reputatsioonikapitali vähenemine mõjutab aja jooksul kindlasti ka legitiimsust.

Reputatsiooni saab kriisiolukorras parandada kriisikommunikatsiooni abil. William Benoit maine parandamise teooria ja sellele toetuv Timothy Coombsi väljatöötatud situatsiooniline kriisikommunikatsiooniteooria, milles määratletakse eri strateegiad, mida kriisis organisatsioon kasutab/võiks kasutada, on leidnud kasutust paljude organisatsioonide, ametiisikute ja poliitikute kriisikommunikatsiooni analüüsimisel. Euroopa Liit on samuti defineeritav organisatsioonina ja Euroopa Komisjoni kommunikatsioonistrateegia tavaolukorras on väga sarnane mis tahes korporatiivsele kommunikatsioonile. Seepärast saabki nimetatud kahe kriisikommunikatsiooniteooria kombineerimisel nende abil uurida ka Euroopa Komisjoni kriisikommunikatsiooni ja leida vastuse uurimisküsimusele, milleks on: milliseid kriisikommunikatsioonistrateegiaid Euroopa Komisjon kasutab ja millised on nende sotsiaalsed tagajärjed reputatsiooni ja legitiimsuse vaatepunktist.

Et Euroopa Komisjoni kriisikommunikatsiooni kohta puuduvad avalikult kättesaadavad dokumendid ja materjalid, on seda võimalik uurida komisjoni presidendi ja kriisist puudutatud poliitikavaldkonna eest vastutava voliniku kõnede analüüsi abil. President ja volinikud on ainsad, kellel on volitused kriisiolukorras sõna võtta, kes ei allu väga rangelt piiratud tavakommunikatsiooni suhtes kehtivatele reeglitele, samuti on kõned vahetuim kommunikatsiooniakt, neis sisalduv teave on väärtuslik uurimismaterjal. Kuigi kõnedel on olemas esmane publik, on need alati suunatud kõigile Euroopa Liidu kodanikele, vastates nii kogu komisjoni kommunikatsiooni peamisele eesmärgile – selgitada kodanikele, et Euroopa Liit toimib nendega arvestades ja nende nimel.

Käesolevas magistritöös käsitletakse kolme Euroopa integratsiooni alustalasid kõigutavat kriisi – Kreeka võlakriis, rändekriis ja Brexit. Esimene neist seadis kahtluse alla Euroopa Liidu ühe sümboli, eurotsooni püsimajäämise, teine mõjutas tugevalt isikute vaba liikumist, mis on siseturu põhielemente ja kolmas on kahjustanud Euroopa Liidu aluspõhimõtteid, mille kohaselt koos ja ühiste väärtuste alusel toimides saavutatakse enam kui rahvuslikke huvisid esikohale seades.

Käesolevas magistritöös on analüüsitud 231 kõnet, mis on kõik saadud Euroopa Komisjoni andmebaasist RAPID. Uurimiseks on kasutatud Norman Fairclough teooriale tuginedes kriitilist diskursuseanalüüsi, kolmedimensioonilist mudelit. Kõned analüüsitakse, leiud kirjeldatakse ja asetatakse sotsiaalsesse konteksti, siis interpreteeritakse neid lähtuvalt kriisikommunikatsiooniteooriatest, määratakse kindlaks kriisiklastrid ja konkreetsed kasutatud strateegiad, seejärel jõutakse selgitavasse etappi, mille käigus avaliku arvamuse küsitluste ja meediaretseptsiooni abil hinnatakse strateegia kasutamise ühiskondlikke tagajärgi reputatsiooni ja legitiimsuse aspektist.

Analüüsi põhjal selgus, et kuigi Euroopa Komisjoni ja Euroopa Liidu reputatsiooni ja legitiimsust mõjutavad paljud tegurid, siis on kriisikommunikatsioonil, valitud strateegiatel siiski oma mõju. Kreeka kriisi puhul, milles kasutati erinevaid strateegiaid, kuid milles domineerisid taastavad ja pehmendavad strateegiad kombinatsioonis ründaja

süüdistamisega, said tugevasti kahjustada reputatsioon, kuid legitiimsus mitte niivõrd. Selles tulemuses võis mängida oma rolli strateegiate paljusus, mis oli omakorda tingitud nii kriisiklastri muutusest kui ka kriisi kestusest, strateegiate olukorrale mittevastav kasutamine ja parandusmeetmete võtmine, kuid neid käsitleva kriisikommunikatsiooni puudulikkus. Vähene mõju legitiimsusele on omistatav eelnevale väga tugevale reputatsioonikapitalile.

Rändekriisi puhul, milles olid põhilisteks strateegiateks parandusmeetmed, soosingu otsimine ja süü teiste kaela veeretamine, kahjustus reputatsioon, kuid legitiimsusega seotud näitajad püsisid positiivsed isegi neis liikmesriikides, kes komisjoni kriisihaldusmeetmeid kõige vaenulikumalt vastu võtsid. Vähene mõju legitiimsusele võis olla tingitud reputatsiooni kiirest paranemisest kriisi vältel, sest selle kriisi puhul oli kriisikommunikatsioon asjakohane ja järjepidev, oli ju tegu jagatud pädevusse kuuluva poliitikavaldkonnaga, kus Euroopa Komisjon pidevat liikmesriikide toetust vajas.

Brexiti puhul, milles kasutati vahelduvalt leevendavaid strateegiaid, süü teise kaela veeretamist ja parandusmeetmeid, on kriisikommunikatsiooni sotsiaalsed tagajärjed reputatsiooni ja legitiimsuse seisukohast vaadelduna kõige paremad – nii reputatsiooni kui ka legitiimsusega seotud näitajad on tugevad ja kõrged, meediakajastus valdavalt neutraalne või positiivne. Selle üheks põhjuseks võib pidada kriisikommunikatsiooni ühtsust ja strateegiate vähesust ja olukorrale vastavust. Euroopa Komisjoni positsioon selles kriisis on tugev, tal on ainupädevus ja ka kriisiklaster on selline, et talle omistatav vastutus kriisis on väike.

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