

Guest Editorial

Designing EU Crisis Management Capacities: Filling the Glass

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We live in a fast-changing world, which presents us with a wide variety of threats. At the same time, our world has never been safer: many deadly threats, common not so long ago, have virtually disappeared. Notwithstanding, we are acutely aware that small disturbances and glitches can have unforeseen and devastating consequences. Modern threats display a growing and significant transboundary potential (Boin, 2009; Lagadec, 2009).

In recent years, it has become increasingly clear that traditional ways of managing crises no longer suffice in this diffuse threat environment. A centralized, nation-based apparatus filled with planners and risk managers is no match for threats that escalate across geographic, cultural, legal and policy boundaries. Recent examples – think of the financial crisis, the Icelandic ash cloud and the many cyber incursions – have demonstrated the impotency of national governments in the face of these modern threats (Attinà, 2012).

Transboundary threats demand transboundary crisis management capacities (Ansell, Boin, & Keller, 2010). These are shared capacities aimed to coordinate efforts of national agencies to detect, understand and respond to known and unknown risks that may become manifest in rather unforeseen ways. This is no easy task: it is not clear how such capacities should be designed and there

tends to be political resistance against pooling critical resources in the traditionally national domain of crisis management.

It may come as a surprise to learn that the European Union (EU) has in place a surprising set of capacities that provide the building blocks for transboundary crisis management capacity (Boin, Ekengren, & Rhinard, 2013). The EU has built capacities to coordinate member state responses to natural disasters both at home and abroad. It can send civil-military teams to hot spots across the globe. In addition, the EU has begun to build transboundary crisis management capacities. Taken together, we can see an impressive array of policies, crisis rooms, experts and agencies working in the crisis management arena.

Critics argue that the EU has very little, and what it has amounts to little more than window dressing. But that is missing an important point: the EU continues to improve upon these capacities and gradually seeks to create synergies between the often disparate domains of crisis management. In a time when expansion of EU authority – in virtually every policy domain – is routinely criticized in member states, such expansion is rather remarkable. So while critics may rightfully point out that the glass is not even half full, observers will point out that the faucet is dripping.

These developments call for academic scrutiny. Fortunately, groups of specialized academics follow every move the EU makes in the various domains that together make up the EU's crisis management capacities. But the academic community is also divided: academics study different aspects of crisis management and are not always aware of other related aspects. This special issue aims to bring these perspectives together.

We do so by bringing together a set of articles that were first presented and discussed at a conference organized by the University of Catania, June 2013. This first annual workshop of the ReShape Programme, organized with the support of the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme, aimed to initiate discussion about the EU's response capabilities and policies with regard to emergencies, natural disasters, humanitarian crises and systemic risks, within and outside Europe. Together, these articles provide an overview of recent developments in the various EU crisis management domains. They also give an idea of the various academic perspectives that are brought to bear on the fascinating domain of supranational forms of crisis management.

The special issue begins with an overview of EU's transboundary crisis management capacities (Boin, Ekengren, & Rhinard, 2014). Claudia Morsut (2014) then discusses recent developments with regard to the EU's civil protection mechanism. Giulia Tercovich (2014) analyzes recent efforts in the EU's External Action Service to build a crisis management apparatus. The articles by Jan Orbie, Peter Van Elsuwege and Fabienne Bossuyt (2014) and Morten Broberg (2014) take a detailed look at the modernization efforts of the EU's oldest instrument in this arena: the provision

of humanitarian aid. Mara Benadusi (2014) concludes this special issue with an analysis of the EU efforts to educate its citizens about risks and resilience.

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