Bachelor's thesis

NTNU
Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Faculty of Humanities
Department of Historical and Classical Studies

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Impact of European Union's crises on Member States

A comparative case study on PIIGS countries

Bachelor's thesis in European Studies
Supervisor: Tobias Etzold
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Abstract

The European Union has been constantly facing new challenges and problems along its history, and it is hard to think about the union without also thinking about crises. The member states are differently affected, however, there is a group of nations that have noticeably been more troublesome than the rest, the PIIGS (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Spain) countries. It is well known that these nations have represented a more serious economic difficulty for the union and the economically stable member states, such problems have not only led to disagreements and challenges among the members states, but they have also led to very different outcomes and consequences for the different PIIGS countries. This thesis analysed different types of EU crises, their impact at a domestic level and the internal factors of each country that enlarged the crisis-situation in two of the five PIIGS countries, these being Spain and Greece. A comparative analyse is presented, this is based on the assumption that the three different crises (economic recession in 2008, migrant wave in 2015 and covid-pandemic in 2020), had significantly different impact on each country, even though they both belong to the PIIGS countries and, to some extent, share the same type of struggles. This thesis bases itself on the liberal intergovernmentalists theory, and presents the different national problems and challenges, as well as provide an explanation through the theory of why some member states suffered in a specific crisis more than other countries. The discussion provides an overview of benefits and support that both countries have obtained from the union as well as an explanation of why the outcomes of the bargaining in these countries were different.

Sammendrag

Den europeiske union har stått overfor nye utfordringer og problemer gjennom sin historie, og det er vanskelig å tenke på unionen uten også å tenke på kriser. Medlemslandene har blitt pårørt på forskjellige måter, men det er en gruppe nasjoner som helt klart har vært mer plagsomme enn resten, PIIGS (Portugal, Irland, Italia, Hellas og Spania) landene. Det er velkjent at disse nasjonene har representert en mer alvorlig økonomisk vanskelighet for unionen og de økonomisk stabile medlemslandene, slike problemer har ikke bare ført til uenigheter og utfordringer mellom medlemslandene, men de har også ført til svært forskjellige utfall og konsekvenser for de ulike PIIGS-landene. Denne bacheloroppgaven analyserte ulike typer EU-kriser, deres innvirkning på nasjonalt nivå og de interne faktorene i hvert land som utvidet krisesituasjonen, i to av de fem PIIGS-landene, disse er Spania og Hellas. Det presenteres en komparativ analyse, som baserer seg på antagelsen at de tre ulike krisene (finanskrisen i 2008, migrantbølgen i 2015 og covid-pandemien i 2020) hadde forskjellig innvirkning på hvert land. Selv om de begge tilhører PIIGS-landene og til en viss grad deler lignende problemer. Oppgaven baserer seg på liberal intergovernmentalists teorien, og presenterer de ulike nasjonale problemene og utfordringene, samt gir en forklaring gjennom teorien om hvorfor noen medlemsland led i en bestemt krise mer enn andre land. Diskusjonen ga en oversikt over fordeler og støtte som begge land har fått fra EU, samt en forklaring på hvorfor utfallet av forhandlingene i disse landene var forskjellige.

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List of abbreviations

ECB	European Central Bank
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EEA	European Economic Area
EIB	European Investment Bank
EMU	European Monetary Union
EU	European Union
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LI	Liberal Intergovernmentalism
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
PIIGS	Portugal, Ireland, Italia, Greece, Spain

1. Introduction

Between 2007 and 2009 a global economic crisis emerged, leaving several countries with a long-term recession. For the European Union (EU) this was probably its most challenging crisis since the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1952. Such crisis caused an enormous economic harm, leading to the eurozone crisis, this exposed the weakness of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and the "one size fits all" policy. However, the EU also faced a migration crisis in 2015 and a health crisis in 2020, hence, consequences and problems accumulated from crisis to crisis.

All these increasing concerns led to the raising question of credibility, reliability and efficiency of the EU and eurozone, in some countries more than others. For some member states these crises caused more difficulties and tougher challenges, nevertheless, there were all crises originate at an EU level. For the PIIGS (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Spain) countries, the crises instigated a time of hardship. So much so that some of these countries still struggle economically, structurally and competitively to this day. The already existing poor monetary development, external debts, economical inefficiency, insolvency and inflation have been growing factors that have led to the creation of a strong dependency on the Union.

For this thesis I chose two case studies based on the most similar approach, Spain and Greece. Both countries show a great resemblance with each other, with their economical struggles and the eurozone. However, I intentionally chose these, in order to compare their internal problems, and the way the common crises impact them and their already existing issues.

In this thesis, I will analyse the impact that the different EU crises had on Spain and Greece, as well as analyse what were some internal factors that enlarged the crisis and thus, created more difficulties during these times. The thesis will be divided in five chapters. First an introduction of the applied theoretical framework, second, a presentation and discussion over three different EU crises, third, an analysis of internal factors and its connection with the EU crises, fourth, a discussion and comparison of the main differences on the impact and consequences that these crises had at a domestic level, and last, a brief summary of the previously discussed. The chosen time frame for this thesis is divided into three, the first one is 2008, when the global crisis started, secondly, the migration crisis in 2015, and thirdly the covid-19 pandemic in 2020.

The purpose of the thesis is to find out the biggest differences in the way that the crises impacted Greece and Spain and to what extent were the internal problems a factor of enlargement of the crisis at a national level, and like this contribute with the investigation in areas such as crisis management in PIIGS countries. My thesis is motivated by the following research question: How and to what extent did the EU crises enlarged the internal problems in Greece and Spain?

I will apply two methods in the thesis, on one hand, the qualitative research method, which is more suitable for a case study with two specific units to analyse, *"qualitative work is expressed in natural language, employs small samples, work draws on cases chosen in an opportunistic or purposive fashion, is often focused on particular individuals, events, and contexts, lending itself to an idiographic style of analysis"*

(Gerring, 2017), this type of research does not usually propose a hypothesis, but instead seeks to use the logic of induction to answer the research question that motivates the thesis. On the other hand, the comparative method, these chosen units were selected based on the most similar approach, however, the main goal is to see how the domestic problems of these countries, shaped how drastic the impact and consequences of the EU crises would be. Comparison is routinely used in the evaluation of hypotheses and can contribute to the inductive discovery of new hypotheses. It consists of the analysis of a small number of cases (Collier, 1992).

The thesis follows an inductive approach, which *"reflects frequently reported patterns used in qualitative data analysis and is used in order to establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data"* (Thomas, 2003). The inductive approach was chosen with the purpose of formulating a thesis based on the observed data and patterns in the selected cases.

As for sources, For the formulation and analyses of this thesis I utilised both primary and secondary sources.

As a primary source, the most referred to are government official documents and annual reports from each country. However, as it will be shown, the manipulation of the information presented in these official documents has occurred before. However, these documents should be considered trustworthy, unless proven otherwise. A downside to this type of documents, however, is that they do not provide any interpretation of the presented data and information. As in for the European Union documents, these are very reliable sources that are mainly based on the commission general informs.

For my secondary sources, I utilised academic books, as well as journal articles. These are also heavily reliable and quite analytical, however they do not present a wide information on specific cases but rather situations in general, like the eurozone crisis. They are very neutral sources that provided an overview of the different crisis, as well as providing a solid explanation of the chosen theoretical framework. These sources show a limitation in regards time frame and the lack of presented perspectives.

The use of newspaper was also present, this in order to expose the position of some of the Spanish population, however this did not in any way attempt to replace primary and secondary sources. Although this type of source is very helpful in order to obtain a national perspective is also heavily influenced by the opinion of the journalist as well as the type of newspaper it is (tabloid, conservative). Hence consideration of bias is of great importance when handling them as a source.

2. Theoretical framework

The chosen research question involves the relation between states and a transnational organ; therefore, the selected theoretical framework is liberal intergovernmentalism (LI). This theory will be employed with the purpose of explaining why the relation between Greece and Spain with the EU works in certain way, why they are to some extent similar yet what makes the outcomes different in each country. This will be fulfilled by connecting the suggestions and arguments of the theory with the presented facts, but also by pointing out the weak points that this theory possess that fail to provide a solid explanation to some specific cases.

2.1. Liberal intergovernmentalism

The LI theory was first presented by Andrew Moravcsik, this theory emphasizes the importance of national government in the integration process, nevertheless, this theory suggests that the states are the main actors, and the EU is seen as a secondary element where nations gather only to negotiate. LI suggest that integration is possible due to domestic interests, the roles of which are of great importance for the theory. "*National governments have a strong idea of what their preferences are and pursue them in bargaining with other member states*" (Hatton, 2011). While this is true, there are some cases where no matter how strong the preferences of a nation are, these cannot be achieved due to the asymmetrical interdependence presented in the bargaining process, where some member states have a more favourable position than others and thus, making it hard for some countries to stand for their national interests. Unlike what neo-realism suggests, "*liberal intergovernmentalists consider supranational institutions to be of limited importance in the integration process*" (Hatton, 2011), this is one of the weakest points that the LI offers when it comes to the connection with the research question. Moravcsik argued that "*far from being a superstate, the EU was a strictly limited system of governance, with selected and mostly low-salience technical tasks, accountable to elected national governments*" (Kleine & Pollack, 2018). This theory limits itself to see the EU just as a tool between nations in order to bargain based on national interests rather than an organ that also equally legislates all member states.

LI has been criticized for "*providing mere 'snapshot' views of individual intergovernmental bargaining episodes and for failing to account for the endogeneity of the integration process*" (Schimmelfennig, 177-195). Moravcsik argued that integration was mainly about pursuing economic preferences and not much about geopolitical interests and according to him, member states were the ones in control over the integration process instead of the supranational bodies "*States are now considered to be unitary actors and supranational institutions are deemed to have a very limited impact in outcome*" (Cini, 2016, p. 77).

3. EU crises

This section will present different crises experienced by the EU, these were chosen based on their magnitude and impact over most of the members, as well as the different affected fields (financial, migration, and health). It is worth to mention that *"most EU rules are implemented, administered and enforced primarily by national officials"* (Moravcsik & Schimmelfennig, 2019, p. 70), thus, there exist an enormous difference between the way countries execute the imposed regulations, and the outcomes these have.

3.1. Financial crisis

The financial crisis in 2008 occurred after the collapse of the housing bubble, the problem of subprime mortgages in USA and the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers. It quickly spread, affecting not only USA's economy, but also other nations, like the members of the EU. This led to a euro crisis, where the most affected countries were, undoubtedly, those who did not meet the Maastricht treaty requirements for the membership to the eurozone.

Countries like the PIIGS had a previous excessive public spending, public debt and deficit, which made their economies more vulnerable to the euro crisis (which caused an increasing public debt and deficit in the eurozone). The PIIGS also showed to have a certain type of crisis, one of cyclic nature, the banking crises in Spain and Ireland and the sovereign debt crises in Greece and Portugal. Lacking their own monetary policy and restricted in their ability to impose large losses on holders of sovereign debt or subordinated bank liabilities, they ended up in financial assistance programs that involved the authorities of the eurozone in the management of central aspects of national policies (Santos & Jesús, 2019).

"The eurozone crisis clearly demonstrates that policy cannot operate without long-term respect for economic laws" (Loužek & Smrčka, 2020, p. 284). The "one size fit all" policy presented by the European Central Bank (ECB), was to some extent the one to blame for the euro crisis. The deficits of current accounts were progressively adding up inside the monetary union, and it resulted in the profiling of debtor and creditor countries. Because of this, the governments of eurozone countries were facing another risk: *"the debt of toxic eurozone countries held the potential to harm or even cater the disintegration of their domestic banking systems"* (Loužek & Smrčka, 2020, p. 274). A situation that made the euro crisis even harder to manage, any possible solution would be controversial in nature. The situation of the PIIGS was a matter that concerned the whole union, if a member had an unstable economy, the others would be affected. The asymmetrical interdependence and national interests that the LI suggest made it hard for the economically stable countries to find the best way to defuse the euro crisis.

"The euro crisis highlighted the inadequacies of existing national banking supervision and resolution" (Moravcsik & Schimmelfennig, 2019, p. 74). This was the case of the PIIGS, which created a huge concern since the countries could not be trusted in the implementation process of certain rules, this also led to a negative impact on the

investments and markets, since a lot of countries did not want to be linked with countries, such as Greece, because of the image of lack of commitment and reliance that these countries had.

Nonetheless, there was a well-defined common goal all along when the euro crisis got critical and problems escalated, the purpose was always to save the euro and to keep all the members as part of the eurozone, so as to maintain the credibility of the union and to maintain markets and prices as stable as possible. Even if this meant to give financial support to countries that desperately needed it. *"LI predicts that mixed-motive situation in which all counties had a strong joint preference for avoiding an extremely costly short-term outcome of a euro collapse"* (Moravcsik & Schimmelfennig, 2019, p. 72).

By the end of 2009, there were three countries with the biggest fiscal deficits of all eurozone members, Greece with -12.7%; Ireland with -12.5%, and Spain with -11.25%. And from now on, the sustainability of the European currency will depend on the political will of the countries that contribute the most to the GDP in the euro zone. This group is headed by Germany, followed by France, Italy, Holland and Spain; Together they contribute more than 30% of GDP (European Commission, 2009).

3.2. Migration crisis

In 2015 the migration crisis reached its peak when the EU faced the biggest migration wave they ever experienced, the number of asylum seekers that year reached over a million, which caused many difficulties when it came to equal registration and allocation of refugees around the EU. This crisis represented two problems within the union, *"the first one was to determine the asylum status of the migrants who arrived to European territory, and second was to control and limit the number of migrants who reached Europe"* (Moravcsik & Schimmelfennig, 2019, p. 74).

This crisis highlighted two main issues, first it emphasised the weakness of the Schengen Area agreement due to its violation by some member states, and second, the crisis of the Dublin regulation, where some countries were heavily affected while others were not. The countries that are part of the Schengen area are obligated to accept the Dublin regime and what it implies. The Schengen agreement is currently part of EU law, and its aims are the abolishment of internal border checks between 22 EU member states and 4 non-EU countries for the facilitation of free movement of people and goods. It affects more than 400 million citizens, allowing them to cross borders by any type of transportation without documentation (Antenore, 2016), when the crisis reached unbelievable numbers, some countries imposed controls over their borders in order to reduce the number of illegal refugees, the taken measures rapidly became more intense when a lot of migrants attempted to avoid registration in some countries in order to reach their wished country. This questioned the efficiency of the Schengen agreement and how beneficial it was for the members. For its part the Dublin Regulation, states that the country where an asylum seeker arrives will be responsible for registering him/her, the goal of the Dublin III Regulation seeks to ensure quick access to the asylum procedures and the examination of an application on the merits by a single, clearly determined EU country (European Commission, n.p.). However, the unequal distribution of refuges caused conflict between member states and their domestic interests. *"As established in the LI, national preferences in migration policy stem primarily from domestic social and political pressures to manage a particular form of issue-specific interdependence"* (Moravcsik & Schimmelfennig, 2019, p. 75).

The different geographic locations made the positions to negotiate of each member state hard. There exist four locations: **Front-line** like Greece, migration flow is relatively high; however, migrants do not attempt to stay. These states face the most disadvantageous position under certain circumstances because if the destination states unilaterally refuse to accept more migrants, front-line states have already lost de facto control over boarders, **destination states** like Germany, **transit states** such Slovenia and **bystander states** like France (Moravcsik & Schimmelfennig, 2019). Front-line states find themselves in an unfavourable position during the bargaining with other countries. These states have fewer feasible unilateral policy alternatives if other member states decide to close their boarders, the alternative is to reject migrants who reached their territory, but this would violate international law and would aggravate the short-term humanitarian crisis.

Since 2015, European policies have had an established goal: to reduce migration across the Mediterranean. Which has been indeed effective, and the LI theory explains it, the existence of a common problem that wants to be resolved by all members makes cooperation easier and thus is more likely to reach a fruitful agreement or solution. In the following years, the union managed to reduce the number of refugees that entered. EU leaders are facing a European refugee crisis and must address it as a common European challenge, consistent with their collective and individual member state responsibilities to refugees (Guild, Costello, Garlick, & Moreno-Lax, 2015).

3.3. COVID-19 crisis

At the beginning of 2020, an unknown disease that first appeared in China, would rapidly spread around the world and cause unthinkable consequences. The pandemic affected the world´s economy so drastically that it made the normal flow stop, and this put in danger the stability of the economy and some of the treaties of the EU and its member states. First affecting countries such France, Italy and Spain, and rapidly escalating to the point where the four liberties that characterises the union had to be paused, which provoked an enormous decrease in trading, as well as in the tourism field. This last point is of great importance for Spain and Greece that are both heavily dependent on tourism.

By March, all EU Member States had reported COVID-19 cases, something that raised significant concerns among countries. In May, the European Commission presented a proposal to review the Multiannual Financial Framework with the aim of undertaking greater investments in the 2020 financial year to face the crisis derived from COVID-19. The recovery plan was urgent, although some countries were in greater need than others. Bigger states such as Italy and Spain needed more support, not only because the impact of the consequences that these countries presented but also because are member states with a great impact on the EU, its organs and decisions, thus it was critical for them to receive financial support before it led to a graver scenario.

The covid-19 crisis re-opened the gap between northern and southern countries and with this, the emergence of disagreement between creditors and debtors. Unfortunately, Countries with a big public dept were disproportionally affected by the virus. This created dispute of national and economic interests between two parties, on one side countries such as Germany and the Netherlands and on the other countries such as France and Spain. Both sides, as predicted in the LI theory, were presenting their well-established domestic interests at an international level and were willing to get the most beneficial outcome in the bargaining process. The majority of the PIIGS countries agreed on the fact that a global pandemic demanded a coordinated response at European level, the aim of these countries was to be able to use all the common fiscal tools in order to prevent the collapse of their national economies.

Member States adopted measures such as the closure of borders and significant limitations on the mobility of people to mitigate the spread of the virus. Such situation helped to control (to some extent) the crisis and to reduce the number of cases. However, it aggravated the economic situation of the PIIGS, since their incomes were affected, as well as local and international business.

The dependency on the market and four freedoms were some of the biggest challenges for the member states. This crisis proved, once more, the differences that exist between member states, while some countries could afford medical equipment, provide a better health system and offer more economical protection to workers and the businesses, others were struggling. Nevertheless, the European Economic Area (EEA) and markets functionality were affected by the emergence of this crisis, not only had borders between countries been closed, but additionally some countries had prohibited the export of medical equipment to other Member States.

So far, financial assistance was provided to 19 Member States, including the PIIGS, this has been provided according to their needs and the impact that the covid-19 had on them. *"EU funds totalling €37 billion will be allocated to the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative to support healthcare systems, and labour markets where Poland, Spain, Italy, Romania, and Hungary are the largest beneficiaries of EU support"* (Goniewicz, et al., 2020). According to the European Investment Bank (EIB) a "remarkable" policy response by the EU and Member States prevented the coronavirus pandemic from provoking an economic collapse (European Investment Bank, 2022).

4. Internal factors

In this section, the previously presented crises will relate to the already existing difficulties and issues that each of the member states were facing through the years when each of the crises broke out. This will be presented in order to illustrate the way that the crises enlarged the national problems and raised more difficulties and challenges for Greece and Spain.

4.1. The case of Spain

Spain is a west-southern country that is a member of the EU since 1986 and member of the EMU since 1999. In 2008 its population was about 45.95 million, 46.44 million in 2015 and 47.35 million in 2020. Its territory extension is of 505,990 km² and had a GDP of 1.63 trillion USD in 2008 reaching its peak, 1.2 trillion USD in 2015 and 1.28 trillion USD in 2020 (OECD National Accounts, n.p.), its unemployment rate increased from 11.25% in 2008, to 22.06% in 2015 and it decreases in 2010 to 15.67%, however the unemployment rate reached its peak in 2013 with 26.09% (O'Neill, Spain: Unemployment rate from 1999 to 2020, 2022) additionally Spain has currently a national debt in relation to GDP of 120%.

In 2008, Spain was performing better than Germany in terms of deficit and national debt (OECD National Accounts, n.p.), the crisis in Spain was still not a big concern. However, its productivity could not keep the pace with the northern competitions and hence issues became exacerbated. The economy had become more expensive, it had lost competitiveness and consequently it was buying more goods and services from abroad. Then the rough adjustments began, like damaging employment (Maqueda, Alonso, & Clemente, 2021). The slowdown that the Spanish economy was experiencing gave the chance for a sharp adjustment, with falls in activity, ending the year in a deep recession.

Another issue that Spain experienced during this time, was the real-estate bubble. *"The Spanish property bubble burst, together with the housing bubble in Ireland and Latvia"* (Dinan, 2014, p. 331), the high demand for housing and the ease of banks granting credit led to inflation rates that were observable in the housing prices. In 2009, the collapse of this sector created a surge in unemployment, which, together with their labour rigidity (high wages and difficulty in firing employees in the formal sector) exacerbated the problem. This started to challenge Spain's competitiveness, it affected its productivity and deficits, and public debt emerged.

"By late 2010, the bigger worry was that the sovereign debt crisis would spread to two large eurozone members, Spain and Italy" (Hodson, 2017, p. 226). The country re-entered a recession period as the housing prices were falling and default rates were rapidly escalating, the Spanish bank system was severely struggling.

In 2015, Spain´s main concern was to keep stabilising the economy and to reduce the numbers of unemployment as they were doing in 2014, rather than the migration wave that was impacting several countries in the EU. Spain only received 5,947 applications for political asylum in 2014, out of the 625,000 applications received in the EU (Comision

Española de Ayuda al Refugiado, 2015). However, in January 2015, the number of irregular migrants and refugees arriving by sea increased by around 60% compared to the same month in 2014. Spain only gave asylum to 14,887 in 2015 when the migration crisis in Europe reached its peak and over a million refugees entered EU (Ministerio del Interior, 2018).

Spain managed to obtain a bystander position in the migration crisis even though its position on the EU borders. This is explained by Article 36 of the Dublin regulation, that establishes that member states may establish between themselves, on a bilateral basis, administrative agreements relating to the practical provisions for the application of this Regulation, in order to facilitate its application and increase its effectiveness (Unión Europea, 2013). This unilateral agreement placed Spain in a very favourable position for both the migration flow and the bargaining of this crisis, just as the LI suggests. This same year, European governments briefly examined a proposal for a permanent quota system for allocation of refugees. *"It gained some support from Italy and, to some extent Germany, but was rejected not only by bystander-states in the East but also by Spain and France who had imposed effective unilateral controls on entry that permitted them to act as if they were bystander"* (Moravcsik & Schimmelfennig, 2019, p. 78).

The current government has fiercely opposed the European allocation of 9.1% of EU refugees to Spain, arguing that the country's high unemployment rates (above 20%) make this goal unrealistic (Berry, García-Blanco, & Moore, 2015). Spain could not afford to saturate their systems when the current population is already struggling, this would escalate further a couple of years later when the global pandemic started and caused damage to the country's economy and the work sector. However, before the crisis impacted the union, Spain experienced a strong growth since 2015 with a real GDP variation rate of over 3% in 2015, 2016 and 2017 and 2.6% in 2018, the strongest of the large Eurozone economies (Nieves, 2019).

Spain has registered 11.8 million cases since the start of the pandemic, and around 104 k deaths since the covid-19 crisis started in 2020. As one of the most affected Member States in this crisis, Spain experienced an enormous recession in one of the most important fields for its economy: tourism. For this sector, the crisis has been unprecedented in its effects, as Spain only received 18.96 million travellers that year. This is 77% less than the year before. As a result, tourism income declined severely, with 19,739 million euros being injected into the economy in the year 2020, 78.52% less than the 91,912 million the previous year (Gutierrez, 2021).

Spain was one the most visited countries in 2019. A year before the covid breakout, Spain had an income of 80 billion thanks to tourism, however, after the crisis started, Spain barley reached 20 billion € (Organización Mundial del Turismo, 2022). It was clear, Spain was badly affected by this circumstance, after the vicious closing down of the tourism and service industries. According to the declarations of Fernando Valdés (secretary of state for tourism) The data confirms the historical impact of the pandemic on international tourist flows, which worldwide have fallen by 74% compared to 2019. In Spain, this impact has been felt in all tourism metrics. The Government and the rest of the administrations continue to work to maintain the productive fabric, employment and competitiveness, trusting that 2021 will be the year of recovery (Gutierrez, 2021).

The covid-19 crisis also meant the "violation" of the freedoms for this country, which weaken the economy and the markets. Restrictions and prohibitions characterized the rules imposed by the Spanish government within the country, lower incomes and slower economy beside stopping the circulation of services, good and people put this country in an unfavourable position, notably the service field. The Spanish economy suffered a drop of 11% in 2020. This is the biggest drop in activity in times of peace due to the restrictions imposed by the authorities to try to contain the spread of the coronavirus (Maqueda, Alonso, & Clemente, 2021) and some have even argued that the 2020 crisis has provoked the biggest economical drop in 85 years.

4.2. The case of Greece

Greece is an east-southern European country, that became a member of the EU in 1981 and joined the EMU in 2001. Greece's population consisted of 11.08 million in 2008, 10.82 million in 2015, and 10.72 million in 2020. The territorial extension of this country is of 131,957 km². Its GDP reached its peak in 2008, with 355.87 billion USD, 196.69 billion USD in 2015 and 189.26 billion USD in 2020 (O'Neill, 2021). Its unemployment rate increased from 7.76% in 2008, to 24.9% in 2015 and decreased in 2020 with 16.85%, however, it reached its peak in 2013 with 27.47%. Greece's national debt in relation to GDP is currently of 205.6% and is the largest debt registered among all member states of the EU.

The Greek economic issues started before the crisis in 2008. The real problem of Greece's insolvency was caused by the unmanageable character of the Greek debt, which by that time was unknown. Since the early 2000s, small increases in national debt were present within the Greek economy, these small increases turned into rather substantial surges between 2008 and 2011, which resulted in a large amount of accumulated public debt (O'Neill, 2021), a public debt that Greece would not be able to solve unassisted.

The public finances presented a deficit of more than 10% of GDP in 2008 and 15% in 2009, which set off all the alarms in the markets (Mateos & Penadés, 2013). This created tension inside the EEA and the eurozone, the complexity of Greece's problem started a debate among member states on whether they should bailout Greece and its possible consequences. It was not until the EBC president, Mario Draghi stated in a global conference that "*he would do whatever it takes to preserve the euro*" (Alcaraz, Claessens, Cuadra, Marques-Ibanez, & Sapriza, 2019).

"In an audit of public finances, it was revealed that previous Greek governments, had, for years hidden massive debts from the rest of the EU" (Musabegović, Bradic-Martinovic, & Zdravkovic, 2010, p. 105). Years of uncontrolled spending, cheap loaning and failure to implement financial reforms left Greece severely exposed when the global economic recession struck. After his election, Prime Minister Papandreou, reveals that Greece's budget deficit will exceed 12 percent of GDP, nearly double the original estimates (Council on Foreign Relations, n.p.), this created way more concerns over Greece's solvency and the damages it would cause to the eurozone. There was a variety of possible approaches to this problem and because of that member states were continually in disagreement. *"Greece experienced a long-lasting economic recession that negatively impacted the standard of living of much of its population"* (Cavounidis, 2018). The LI highlights that the national interests of a country are always present in the

negotiations, and this was noticeable when the decision to bailout Greece was taken. The total bailout of crisis was the most suitable decision for the eurozone and its members. Three rescue plans were approved and presented to Greece, these were accepted and implemented, *"in exchange, Prime Minister Papandreou commits to austerity measures, including 30 billion euros in spending cuts and tax increases"* (CBC News, 2010).

Although the responsibility for monitoring the fiscal data is vested in the Commission, it does not directly compile government data for the Member States. The Commission depends greatly on the data compiled and reported by Member States, as well as on the administrative ability, good will and co-operation of the respective national authorities; moreover, it does not possess audit powers (European Comission, 2010). Such situation, heavily exposed Greece lack of efficiency and reliability, and the high degree of corruption existing in the administrative and to some extent, the political field of this country. This led stricter rules imposed by the union and the troika, that was in charge to supervise Greece.

The three loans, the austerity and the Troika did not solve all the national issues. However, *"the troika played a central, if not quite as dramatic, role in negotiating and overseeing loan deals from the EU and/or International Monetary Fund (IMF), to different countries"* (Hodson, 2017, p. 228). The austerity in this country caused protests and manifestations in the Greek population due to its unconformity.

In 2015 the tension between countries was rising due the migration wave. The number of refugees that reached Europe through Greece represented a possible collapse of the Greek system, such flows were politically unsustainable (Moravcsik & Schimmelfennig, 2019). This not only caused domestic difficulties, but it also created tension between Greece and countries such as Germany and Austria, that were pressuring and accusing Greece of failing to control its border and calling for its expulsion from Schengen.

"Greece faced a disadvantage towards this regulation. In the summer and autumn of 2015, over 200 000 migrants per month entered Europe through Greece" (Moravcsik & Schimmelfennig, 2019, p. 75), this caused unconformity among destination states and front-line states. The bargaining that the LI suggest overcame with an agreement of relocate the asylum seeker, but this never happened. At the beginning of January of the same year, 57,000 of the refugees that were supposed to be relocated remained in the country, living in dangerously overcrowded hotspots (Ministerio del Interior, 2009).

In 2020 the covid-19 crisis would cause serious damages, so far, Greece has reported 3.29 M cases and 28,933 deaths. *"This crisis made Greece fall into another recession due to the economic fallout of the virus. As schools closed, businesses shut down and economic activity came to a halt, unemployment and poverty rose substantially"* (Tzanis, 2021). Greece declared a state of emergency on 3 March 2020, just six days after the confirmation of the first COVID-19 case in its territory; Greece's economy was facing a slowdown.

Another problem faced during this time was the growing tension with other nations. It re-appeared on 28 February 2020, when the President of Turkey declared that he would open the borders to Greece for the refugees (Nieves, 2019). Greece could not sustainably have more refugees than in the previous years, it would have been significantly harder to do so under a pandemic. The already existing refugee camps were a factor in the spreading of the virus and a potential threat to the public, therefore in March the government announced a list of protective actions in order to limit contamination within and outside the camps (Nieves, 2019). The outbreak heavily exposed the inefficiency and the lack of optimal conditions of Greece's health system, having the second highest position of unmet needs for healthcare in the EU.

Greece has reported the highest unemployment rate of all EU member states in the current year, followed by the earlier discussed country, Spain (O'Neill, 2022). From an economic perspective, Greece is still recovering from a period of intense and persistent recession. In the beginning of 2020, the country had succeeded in adjusting the main macroeconomic and fiscal imbalances, which were responsible for the economic crisis, however the covid-19 pandemic, set Greece back into a vulnerable situation.

5. Discussion

In this last section, a comparison between Spain and Greece will be presented and debated. We have already seen the crises and internal factors, now it will be discussed how the difference between circumstances affected the respective country, while the benefits provided by the EU and different outcomes are also pointed out. This section also goes back to the research question by analysing in what ways did the EU crises enlarged the internal problems in Greece and Spain?

5.1. Financial crisis

In the 2008 crisis the main difference between Greece and Spain their economy. On one hand, the good and stable economic performance and development that Spain showed and on the other hand, the concerning external debt of Greece. Yet they both *"lost the exchange rate as an instrument of economic policy, monetary policy autonomy, fiscal autonomy, and lost seigniorage revenue"* (Loužek & Smrčka, 2020, p. 263), after the implementation of the euro, the economical performance of these countries was not even close in similarity.

While *"the bursting of the Spanish real-estate bubble forced states with balanced budgets to go into debt and risk their creditworthiness"* Greek government *"faced a sovereign default that could drag down its national financial system"* (Moravcsik & Schimmelfennig, 2019, p. 71). At this point, there was still no point of comparison over the magnitude of their economic issues, Greece was already further away and urgently needed financial assistance from the other EU members.

A dilemma was presented for the other members: to bailout Greece or to go through Greece default. National interests began to emerge and while some argued that markets would lose trust others argued that would be easier to bailout Greece in order to avoid further consequences in larger countries like Italy and Spain. LI explains that the common goals are mainly shaped by the wish to avoid long-term consequences, and thus, the bailout of Greece was the most suitable decision. Spain, meanwhile, did not receive such a financial support; For the euro crisis, Spain represented one of its biggest problems because Spain was one of the largest eurozone members, Spain was too big to fail but also too big to bailout. Hence, Spain was not as dependent on the EU´s financial support as Greece was.

The treatment the countries received by other member states and the union itself was also different, while Spain´s situation was being handled in a calm and discrete way, *"Greece was forced to follow tough austerity measures such as cutting pensions and increasing taxes. During this period, Greece's economy declined, unemployment and poverty increased. In 2017, one-third of the Greek population lived below the poverty line and the unemployment rate was 22%"* (Mathis, Andruszkiewicz, Wilkinson, Danchev, & Moustakas, 2020). Greece came under massive pressure to reorganize its finances. *"Its public image was affected by extremely harsh declarations and actions. In contrast, the treatment of the other countries (Spain and Portugal) was basically discreet"* (Loužek & Smrčka, 2020, p. 288).

The EU approved six economic rescue plans, three for Greece, one for Portugal, another for Ireland and another for Cyprus (not included in the PIGS), in addition to the financial aid program for Spain (Mateos & Penadés, 2013). This left Greece in an EU-dependent situation and had no other option that follow the harsh measures imposed by the union. Meanwhile Spain requested and obtained from the EU a rescue of up to 100,000 million euros for the Spanish financial system and did not face with tough measures or a troika like Greece, however, Spain did face austerity.

In few words, the crisis of 2008 in these two countries can be summarized like this: *"lack of political trust stands in Greece out as having the greatest impact, while unemployment to Portugal and Spain"* (Halvorsen, 2016). However, they both benefitted from the IMF.

5.2. Migration crisis

In the crisis of 2015, *"their relative position as financial creditors or debtors in the euro crisis and their geographical position along immigrant routes in the migration crisis exposed the vulnerabilities of EU member states and deficiencies of existing arrangements"* (Moravcsik & Schimmelfennig, 2019, p. 71).

The differences among these countries and their geographic positions were noticeable, while there was a heavy migration flow in Greece and a large number of refugees entering the union through this country, Spain enjoyed the bystander position it managed to obtain through negotiations and unilateral agreements this however was a one-of-a-kind case.

Spain did also face a migration flow, but there was a key difference, most of the immigrants in Spain were other Europeans that did not have a refugee status and thus, the Spanish government, health system and economy did not have the responsibility to provide support to them. On the other hand, Greece´s situation is more delicate, since the refugees represented an economic responsibility for the country, a country that was already experiencing high rates of unemployment and a slow economic growth. The fact that thousands of refugees were dependent on Greece's government placed the country in a disadvantageous position that, beside creating national difficulties, gave place to tension and dispute with other member states too. This crisis created conflict between western and eastern countries and their governments, leading to heavy support for the conservative parties as an attempt to try to stop the high flows of asylum seekers in their nations.

Meanwhile, the alleged relocation plan proposed and accepted by the union and its member states was not successful at all. With less than thousand persons being reallocated, it did not make a difference for countries that were struggling to assist the refugees, such as Greece.

Greece has shown a growing problem that, of course, is not present in Spain. The refugees' camps and their marginalization, *"overcrowded refugee camps in Greece and Italy have also turned attention to considerably older issues from history, such as the* *problem of the integration of the Turkish minority in Germany"* (Loužek & Smrčka, 2020, p. 310).

It can also be argued that another of the main differences in the migration crisis for these two countries is the status in which most of them enter the country. As well as the quality of life they can provide for the immigrants (no matter their origin). The Greek health system has been previously exposed by its lack of optimal conditions, which created a worse quality life for both locals and refugees.

However, nowadays, there are dozens of crossings a day between Greece and Turkey, Morocco and Spain, as well as Tunisia and Italy (Guild, Costello, Garlick, & Moreno-Lax, 2015). Which demonstrates that although the union has reduced the number refugees, has not successfully control its flow and even less, its distribution. Without the EUs and other member states support, the system of these countries would be on the edge of collapse.

5.3. COVID-19 crisis

The pandemic of 2020 is of natural origin, it affected both Greek and Spanish population, not only trough deaths and infections, but also trough exacerbation of the economic situation. The crisis weakened the Greek health system even further, and abruptly demolished Spanish tourism.

The crisis deeply affected Spain´s economy through its high dependency on tourism. The loss of income from one year to the other was unpredictable, and thus, the consequences were unsustainable. To some extent, Greece also experienced a decline in profit from this sector *"the Greek economy, as an economy highly dependent on services with a high share of tourism and retail trade in its GDP, was hit harder than other EU countries by the shocks to external and domestic demand."* (Bank of Greece, 2021).

The emergence of coronavirus infections led to decrease in economic activity in the last quarter of 2020 (De Vet, et al., 2021) in this regard, the impact that the crisis had on both countries was arguably equal, as both faced a lockdown that led to a heavy economic decrease.

The unemployment rate was affected in both countries; unemployment increased sharply in 2020, both in the EU and the euro area, reaching 7.8% and 8.7% respectively in the period July-September 2020 (De Vet, et al., 2021). A particular concerning situation for Spain and Greece that were already facing high numbers of unemployment from before. The crisis would mean that other sector of the population will lose their jobs and thus, the unemployment would increase.

Additionally, the crisis heavily affected the food and drink industry, due to "*changing consumer behaviour and emerging trends, such as rising demand for more local products, and hence keeping shorter supply chains"* (De Vet, et al., 2021). Which results in greater local consumption, however, this in turn means less exportation for some countries. With the greatest impact being on restaurants and hotels, particularly in Spain.

One of Greece´s biggest challenges during the pandemic, was the lack of staff in the health field and the concerning health services they offered with nonoptimal conditions. *"The healthcare sector has been negatively impacted as demand was curbed, in order to keep capacities free for COVID-19 patients as well as due to the fear of infection and hence the postponing of 'non-essential' treatments and surgeries by patients"* (De Vet, et al., 2021). Spain meanwhile observed an increase in mental health problems among all age groups.

So far, the union has support them by providing financial assistance. The EU has agreed to implement a recovery plan that aims to not only reconstruct the economy but strengthen it. And the EIB has responded to the crisis by presenting a plan of up to 40bn euros in order to facilitate vaccines, medical equipment and urgent treatments (European Investment Bank & European Investment Fund, n.p.).

6. Conclusion

So far, we have gone through the different elements that will help with providing an answer to the research question. The different causes and consequences of the crises, as well as some of the national problems that were being faced by Greece and Spain and the way these problems connected with the crises in such a way that enlarged the issues in each country have been presented and provided for. We have seen the difference in each country but also the similarities between them.

Greece showed a greater range of internal problems, as well as a higher difficulty in solving them on its own, which led the country to a higher dependency on the union and its financial support since the financial crisis in 2008. For its part, Spain did not show a high degree of dependence, however, the financial crisis of 2008 represented a long-term recession that remains an issue, this was noticeably the crisis that impacted Spain the most.

The migration crisis represented one of the biggest problems for Greece, its already bad economy made it hard for the country to support the thousands of asylum seekers, and unfortunately, there was no fruitful agreement reached for this country. Spain, however, was not affected by this crisis, with focus remaining on the recovery from the 2008 crisis.

The 2020 pandemic meanwhile, deeply affected both nations, however, the impact was more noticeable in differing sectors. Even though there was a common problem with the food and drink industry, the main concern stood in the service branch that was heavily affected, especially in Spain. Greece, on the other hand, experienced more pressure with this crisis than with any other, this is attributed to two main reasons: first, the tension created by the Turkish boarders and second, the almost collapse of its health system.

To conclude and answer the research question, three things can be argued, the first one is that the main way that the crises enlarged the domestic problems was economically rather than social or political. While some of the crisis created disagreements between countries it was never a point of contention, because, as established in the LI theory, integration is possible due national interest but also because other states have similar goals. Second, the degree of impact of each crisis varies, Greece struggled in the 2015, while Spain had its greatest difficulty in 2008, and by 2020 the crisis had an arguably similar impact. Lastly, although the EU crisis caused greater tension within and between countries, it is undeniable that without the financial assistance provided by the EU, these countries would not be able to keep the euro and hold together their economies. Without the provided assistance, Greece and Spain would struggle to be functional and independent countries.

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