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# WILL EUROPE BE FORGED IN CRISES?

## THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 AND UKRAINE CRISES ON EU ACTORNESS

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**REGROUP**

REBUILDING GOVERNANCE AND  
RESILIENCE OUT OF THE PANDEMIC



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Culminating more than a decade of crisis in Europe, the Covid-19 pandemic has opened an important window of opportunity for institutional and policy change, not only at the “reactive” level of emergency responses, but also to tackle more broadly the many socio-political challenges caused or exacerbated by Covid-19. Building on this premise, the Horizon Europe project REGROUP (*Rebuilding governance and resilience out of the pandemic*) aims to: 1) provide the European Union with a body of actionable advice on how to rebuild post-pandemic governance and public policies in an effective and democratic way; anchored to 2) a map of the socio-political dynamics and consequences of Covid-19; and 3) an empirically-informed normative evaluation of the pandemic.



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## Abstract

In this paper, we study the effect of crises on EU actorness, defined as the EU's capacity to defend its interests and values at the global level. Our research focuses on two major crises, the Covid-19 crisis and the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. Drawing on a process-tracing approach, we analyse four of the Union's policy initiatives that were proposed, negotiated and implemented to respond to these crises: joint vaccine procurement, common gas purchases, and the COVAX and FARM initiatives. The paper assesses the outcomes of these four initiatives and discusses the extent to which these initiatives led to the development of EU actorness and the achievement of common objectives. The analysis identifies the degree of internal cohesion, and how it is influenced by specific crises, as a key factor in fostering or hampering EU actorness in different policy fields. It also shows that the formal distribution of competences between the EU and the member states in specific policy areas matters little in crisis times, as the EU can resort to emergency competences in such situations. The findings of this paper contribute to the literature on EU actorness and equally provide some insights on policy legacies and learning.

**Keywords:** EU actorness; Covid-19 crisis; global energy crisis; global food crisis; public procurement; development aid

# Introduction

In recent years Europe has been hit by a series of severe and interlinked crises, taking place against the background of significant geopolitical and geoeconomic change. In addition, the EU has faced broader challenges, as the multilateral rules-based order, championed by the EU for decades, has come under significant pressure. The EU's green economy growth model has equally encountered more stiff competition from China and the USA (see Jansen et al. 2023). This new global order is more strongly influenced by power politics than by multilateral cooperation, which raises important questions about EU actorness (Costa & Barbé 2023). In such a world, unilateral and uncoordinated action by EU member states will be unlikely to succeed to defend their interests and values at the global stage, which makes it key for the EU to develop such capacities.

Given Europe's tendency to be 'forged in crisis', this paper investigates whether this also holds true for the EU as an international actor. To this end, we analyse how recent crises - in a context of geopolitical/-economic change - have affected EU actorness. By studying the EU as an international actor, this paper complements works studying the impact of crises on the system of international relations (Greco et al. 2023) and international organisations (Ayuso 2023) in the framework of the ongoing REGROUP research project.

To analyse the effects of crises on EU actorness, we focus on two recent major and multidimensional crises, the Covid-19 crisis and the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. Both can be considered as 'critical junctures' (Krasner 1984), which open 'windows of opportunity' for change in political, economic and social orders, but without determining its outcome (Capoccia & Kelemen 2007). To assess the (non-)development of EU actorness, we study four policy initiatives that the EU initiated as responses to these two crises. Using a process-tracing approach, we investigate, in the context of the Covid-19 crisis, joint vaccine procurement and the COVAX (Covid-19 Vaccines Global Access) initiative, as well as joint gas procurement and the FARM (International Food and Resilience Mission) initiative in the wake of the Ukraine war. The empirical analysis of the paper finds that the degree of internal cohesion, and how it is influenced by specific crises, is a key factor explaining the (non-)development of EU actorness in the different policy domains under analysis. It equally shows that in crisis situations, the formal distribution of competences between the EU and its member states in specific policy areas cannot well explain the extent of actorness.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. The second section provides an overview of the literature on EU actorness and conceptualises the impact of crises on EU actorness, also drawing on insights from the literature on EU integration. The third section discusses the research design and the case selection in more detail. The following sections cover the empirical analysis, delving into the four selected policy initiatives. The concluding section summarizes the main findings of the paper and provides some insights on EU policy legacies and learning in the context of crises.

# Conceptualising the impact of crises on EU actorness

There is a broad literature conceptualising EU actorness and analysing the factors that enable or constrain it (Sjöstedt 1977, Jupille & Caporaso 1998, Klose 2018). Traditionally, EU actorness is defined as the Union's "capacity to behave actively and deliberately in relation to other actors in the international system" (Sjöstedt 1977). In this paper, we largely draw on this broad approach, defining EU actorness as the EU's capacity to defend its interests and values at the global level.

While research on EU actorness accommodates various approaches to conceptualise and measure actorness, and explain its effectiveness, scholars generally acknowledge that the EU's capacity to act at the international level depends on both internal and external conditions (see Kratochvil et al. 2011, Bretherton & Vogler 2013, da Conceição-Heldt & Meunier 2014, Klose 2018, Guske & Jacob 2019). First, internal conditions include aspects related to the institutional settings of the Union (such as the formal competences and resources the EU has to act in a given policy domain), as well as the degree of internal cohesion. EU actorness should thus be more developed in policy areas where the EU has a higher extent of "legal authority and decision-making authority" (Klose 2018:1146), more available resources, and where the EU institutions and member states share the same policy preferences (Jupille & Caporaso 1998, da Conceição-Heldt & Meunier 2014). Second, external conditions refer to the opportunity structure in global governance and international relations and changes in the external environment that enable or constrain EU action (Bretherton & Vogler 2008, 2013).

While the literature has identified various internal and external conditions influencing EU actorness, there is still a deficient understanding of how these factors interact to foster its development or reinforcement. To address this gap, Klose (2018) proposes a more dynamic approach to EU actorness, arguing that its emergence results from an interplay between available EU resources (which determine the Union's 'action capabilities' in a given domain), changes in role expectations (that is, shifts in domestic and external expectations about the role the EU should play in particular policy areas) and creative action. As crises are, according to Klose (2018) moments of uncertainty which challenge established routines, they could have a major impact on the development of EU actorness.

Drawing on Bretherton & Vogler's (2008) concept of 'opportunity', we conceptualise crises as changes in the external environment of events and ideas that can enable, favour or push the EU to take a greater role at the international level. Based on Klose (2018), we consider that this change in 'opportunities' may result in the development

or reinforcement of EU actorness but that the final outcome will depend on the interplay between available EU resources, changes in role expectations and creative action.

To identify and compare which are the EU's 'available resources' before a crisis in different policy domains, we draw on two internal factors and one external factor that shape the Union's 'action capabilities' in a given domain: the level of formal competences and (financial) resources, the extent of internal cohesion and the relevance of the Union as international actor in the specific international policy arena prior to the crisis.

We complement these insights from the 'actorness' literature with some findings from the literature on EU integration, which has extensively studied the impact of crises on integration processes (see Hooghe & Marks 2019, Moravcsik 2018, Saurugger 2016, Schimmelfennig 2018). Acknowledging the explanatory limits of individual theoretical approaches, the most recent debate contributions have focused on understanding what kind of EU policy-making dynamics and outcomes are generated by different crises (see Anghel & Jones 2023, Crespy & Schramm 2021, Ferrara & Kriesi 2022, Schramm 2023). Relevant for the analysis of EU actorness, Ferrara & Kriesi (2022) have shown the influence of the spatial distribution of crisis pressures on EU integration. They find that coordinated EU action in response to crises is more likely to happen when crises have symmetric rather than asymmetric effects. This suggests that the nature of a crisis may alter the level of internal EU cohesion in a given policy domain. This in turn can also shift the expectations as regards to the capacity to develop joint action and ultimately the role the EU should play in a particular international policy area.

While there are various studies analysing EU actorness in many different policy areas such as climate policy (Groen & Niemann 2013, Teebken & Jacob 2023), digital policy (Marcut 2020), foreign policy (Thomas 2012), development aid policy (Bretherton & Vogler 2008), global investment (Broude & Haftel 2022) or energy policy (Batzella 2022) only very few of them analyse the impact of crises on EU actorness (the exception being Siddi & Prandin 2023). Our paper thus intends to address this gap in the literature.

In the subsequent empirical analysis we will discuss not only EU actorness but also its effectiveness. While closely related, they should not be perceived as synonyms. EU actorness describes a capacity (which is not necessarily used), while its effectiveness requires to put this capacity into action and to achieve its objectives at the international level. In our view, the existence of EU actorness is necessary but not sufficient for effective EU action. As it can be challenging to identify the existence of a mere capacity in comparison to concrete actions towards the achievement of common objectives, the empirical analysis often draws on studying such actions to assess the existence of EU actorness.

# Research design and methodology

The assumption underlying this paper is that major global crises change the external environment of ideas and events in a way that can enable, favour or push the EU to take on a greater role at the international level. However, the extent to which this happens will depend on the interplay between the Union’s ‘action capabilities’ to act in a given domain, shifts in role expectations and creative action.

To analyse the impact of crises on EU actorness, we focus on the short-term and medium-term implications of four EU policy initiatives that were set up to respond to the Covid-19 crisis and the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. The four policy initiatives are: 1) the joint vaccine procurement mechanism set up in response to the pandemic, (2) the joint gas procurement mechanism set up in response to the global energy crisis in the context of the Ukraine war, (3) the COVAX initiative, an EU-led global initiative aimed at channelling financial support and vaccines to poor countries, and (4) the FARM initiative, an EU-led global initiative aimed at addressing the global food crisis caused by the war in Ukraine.

**Table 1: Selected case studies (policy initiatives)**

Type of impact addressed by the policy initiative	Crisis	
	Covid-19 pandemic	2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine
Intra-EU	Joint vaccine procurement mechanism (2020-2021)	Joint gas purchase mechanism (2022-2023)
Extra-EU	COVAX initiative (2020-2021)	FARM initiative (2022-2023)

The four policy initiatives differ in two key aspects (Table 1). First, two of them (joint vaccine procurement, COVAX) are responses to the Covid-19 crisis whereas the other two (joint gas procurement, FARM) address the consequences of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. As these two crises unfolded immediately one after the other and partially overlapped in time, the analysis will allow us to examine whether there are policy legacy or path dependence effects in crisis responses at the EU level. Second, two policy initiatives (the two joint procurement mechanisms) address the internal consequences of these crises for the Union- even if retaining an important international component<sup>1</sup> -, while the COVAX and FARM initiatives tackle the crisis’ external effects and particularly their impact on less developed countries. This difference in the type of impact addressed may help us better understand different causal mechanisms through which crises can reinforce EU actorness.

1. At the outset of the Covid-19 pandemic it was very uncertain whether and where a successful vaccine could be produced. Potentially, the EU would have needed to import all vaccines from abroad. Regarding the Ukraine crisis, the EU was and remains highly independent on gas imports from third countries.



We conduct the four case studies adopting a process-tracing approach. Our analysis draws on different documentary sources, including academic studies, EU and national official documents and other materials such as non-papers and newspaper articles. Using these materials, we track how these initiatives were proposed, discussed, adopted and implemented as well as their eventual success or failure (similar to the approach chosen by Schramm 2023). This allows us to evaluate the influence of factors mentioned above remaining open to identify additional and potentially case-specific factors explaining the outcomes of each case.

In the following sections, we start by assessing the Union’s ‘action capabilities’ at the outset of the crises in the policy domains covered by our analysis. This is followed by a presentation of the four case studies. The paper then discusses the findings from the four cases, provides an assessment of the outcomes in terms of EU actorness and draws conclusions on how recent crises have affected the EU’s capacity to act at the global stage.

## Action capabilities relevant for EU actorness before the crises

The three policy domains object of the analysis - health, energy and development cooperation (covering both the COVAX and FARM initiatives) - exhibited different action capabilities relevant for EU actorness before the respective crises (summarised in Table 2).

**Table 2: Action capabilities relevant for EU actorness before the crises in the policy fields under analysis**

	Health	Energy	Development cooperation
<i>Formal competences and resources</i>	Low	Low	High
<i>Internal cohesion</i>	High	Low	Low
<i>Global governance</i>	EU a minor actor	EU a minor actor	EU as a dominant actor

## Health

The EU possesses very limited health policy competences. With health being one of the EU “supporting competences” listed in Art. 6 TFEU, it can only intervene in the area of health to support, coordinate or complement the action of its member states (Art. 168 TFEU). Relevant in the pandemic context, Art. 168(5) TFEU allows the EU to adopt measures to help “combating serious cross-border threats to health”. In 2013, this legal basis was used to adopt Decision 1082/2013 which allows the EU institutions and its member states to “engage in a joint procurement procedure (...) with a view to the advance purchase of medical countermeasures for serious cross-border threats to health”. This 2013 Decision was a result of the uncoordinated and poorly managed response to the 2009 swine flu pandemic (Brooks et al. 2021). It led to the set-up of a Joint Procurement Agreement (JPA) in 2014, which was successively signed by all 27 EU member states, the EEA member states and several EU accession candidates.

In line with the EU’s limited role on health in ‘normal times’, the EU has very little financial resources in the health policy area. There are practically no EU funds in support of health actions and the EU Commission’s General Direction in charge of health (DG SANTE) is very small in terms of staff. The EU’s minor role on health also explains the lack of major intra-EU conflicts on this issue. This situation, however, may change in times of crisis when member states may be reluctant to exercise solidarity, as it initially happened with the response to the 2009 swine flu pandemic.

As regards global governance, the global health system is structured around a UN-related organisation, the World Health Organisation (WHO). While it has significant normative power, in dealing with crisis its authority is limited by the voluntariness component of the contributions from its member states (Ayuso 2023:11). Besides, the EU has only an observer status at the WHO (Deters & Zardo 2023).

## Energy

Energy is listed as a “shared competence” in Art. 4 TFEU. Under this basis, the EU can adopt legally binding acts requiring the harmonisation of member states’ legislation insofar as it is necessary to maintain a well-functioning internal energy market “in a spirit of solidarity” and attain certain EU objectives, among which is to “ensure security of supply in the Union” (Art. 194 TFEU). However, the Treaty explicitly forbids EU harmonisation efforts that would “affect a Member State’s right to determine the conditions for exploiting its energy resources, its choice between different energy sources and the general structure of its energy supply” (Art. 194(2) TFEU). As the right to determine that mix includes the right to sign contracts with third country companies (Marhold 2023:12), this constrains the EU’s capacity to define a joint external energy policy. In

addition to that, prior to the energy price crisis there was no mechanism in place for joint gas purchases, as previous Commission initiatives in this direction in 2015 and 2021 did not meet sufficient member state support (see Boltz et al. 2022:2).

There are significant EU funds supporting energy investments but most of them are managed by national authorities under EU cohesion policy. While these funds are used according to strict EU climate-related conditionalities, they do not reinforce the EU-level capacity to act when it comes to build an internal energy market and strengthen the EU's external energy policy.

With respect to intra-EU cohesion, there are major differences in national energy mixes which are accompanied by strong differences in member state preferences in the field of energy (above all between countries supporting nuclear energy, led by France, and those opposing it, led by Germany). This clearly constrains the EU's capacity to develop actorhood in the field of energy, as exemplified by Union's inability to formulate a common position on the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline connecting the EU with Russia before the start of the war in Ukraine (Batzella 2022).

Global energy governance is highly fragmented and rather based on regional than multi-lateral arrangements. It is also a policy field in which private actors (large energy companies) play a major role. Since the 2004 enlargement round, the EU has become increasingly active on the external dimension of its energy policy, launching a wide range of frameworks aimed to export its energy *acquis* to neighbouring countries, e.g. via the Energy Community since 2005, and has integrated energy policy into other external policies such as the Eastern Partnership in 2009. However, the fact that member states and their national companies can develop energy projects outside the EU framework, and even in overt opposition to European objectives, severely constrains the Union's capacity to formulate and pursue a coherent EU external energy agenda (Batzella 2022).

## Development cooperation

Development cooperation is a shared competence under Art. 4 TFEU. The Treaty gives the EU the competence to carry out activities and conduct a common policy in this area but without member states being prevented from running their own development and aid policies (Art. 4(4) TFEU). Besides, EU development cooperation actions shall complement and reinforce actions taken at the national level and comply with commitments approved in the context of the United Nations and other competent international organisations (Art. 208 TFEU). Unlike in the case of energy or health, however, the Union has significant resources to conduct its own action. The Commission is the second largest donor of development aid in Europe after Germany.

With respect to intra-EU cohesion, member states have different development cooperation priorities in the world, shaped by different historic, economic, security or neighbouring factors. This diversity of interests hampers the Union's capacity to develop a single and coherent agenda on development aid (Muñoz Galvez 2012). Since the early 2000s there have been efforts to increase the coordination between the Union and member state development aid. However, prior to the Covid-19 crisis, joint programming consisted mostly of developing broad joint strategies rather than specific joint actions, with limited success (Lundsgaarde & Keijzer 2019).

Finally, the EU is a major actor in the global development aid landscape. Collectively, the EU and its member states are the biggest donor for international aid in the world, providing more than 50% of total public development aid. This places the Union in a favourable position to shape global discussions on development aid.

## Analysis of four EU policy initiatives in response to crises

### The joint vaccine procurement mechanism

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit Europe, it became rapidly clear that an effective vaccine would be of vital interest to save human lives and minimize the economic costs of the crisis. The global scramble for securing yet non-existent vaccines started as early as February 2023. An early example of the fight over vaccines was the US courting the German company CureVac, which was met with a counter offer of Commission President von der Leyen and the European Investment Bank (EIB) to the vaccine producer (Deutsch & Wheaton 2021). In the following months member states rapidly started to negotiate individually and jointly with vaccine producers. Based on a Franco-German initiative, the 'Inclusive Vaccine Alliance' was formed through the inclusion of Italy and the Netherlands, which jointly procured 300-400 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine candidate in June 2020 (ECA 2022:17).

The Commission was also very active from the outset of the pandemic. Already in April 2020, it used joint public procurement to purchase medical supplies and equipment on behalf of member states. However, as the existing joint public procurement procedure (e.g. under the JPA) was not appropriate for the purchase of vaccines under development as the product is not readily available on the market" (McEvoy 2022:270), the Commission worked on the development of a procurement model adapted to such a situation, based on so-called Advance Purchase Agreements (APAs). On 17 June 2020, the Commission presented the EU Vaccines Strategy. This was followed with the signature

of an agreement on APAs with the member states, which gave the Commission a mandate to negotiate and sign such APAs with potential Covid-19 vaccine manufacturers on behalf of the member states (Decision 2020/4192).

From August 2020 onwards, the Commission signed APAs with eight producers until November 2021, “providing access to up to 4.6 billion vaccine at an expected total cost of close to €71 billion” (ECA 2022:8). To - at least partly - finance the development costs of the different vaccine candidates, the EU provided a down payment envelope of up to €2.9bn. €2.15bn came from the EU budget, while the member states provided a €750m top-up (ibid.). If a vaccine candidate proved successful and was authorized by the European Medicines Agency (EMA), the respective down payment could be deducted from the purchase costs. If a vaccine failed, at least some of the invested money could be lost.

This “novel risk-sharing approach” (ECA 2022:8) helped to foster rapid vaccine development based on different technologies and to maximize the chances for member states to have sufficient access to a viable vaccine, especially important for member states with smaller budgetary capacities. In addition, the member states accepted some of the liability that are normally bore by vaccine producers in the case of damages caused by a product (ECA 2022:10), to incite producers to develop their potential vaccines as rapidly as possible.

To successfully procure vaccines, the EU had to compete with other developed countries such as the US and the UK, which had launched respective initiatives already before June 2020. To do so, the APA agreement introduced a governance structure which included a steering board and a ‘joint negotiation team’ (ECA 2022:19-20). The steering board was made up of representatives of all 27 EU member states and the Commission and was charged with “overseeing negotiations and validating contracts before signature” (ibid.). The joint negotiation team was selected from among the circle of member states representatives and Commission experts. It comprised the four members of the Inclusive Vaccine Alliance, as well as Spain, Poland and Sweden. Country pairs and Commission officials were then negotiating with individual vaccine manufacturers (ibid.). To reinforce the Commission’s capacity to negotiate APAs with vaccine producers, Sandra Gallina (deputy director general of DG TRADE) was put in charge of the health division of DG SANTE (Deutsch & Wheaton 2021).

The APA agreement helped the EU to acquire various vaccines to cheaper prices than the US (Deutsch & Wheaton 2021) and maintaining more liability requirements for vaccine producers than in the US. However, deliveries from manufacturers stayed significantly behind the agreed schedules, especially in the first half of 2021 (ECA 2022:34, Deutsch & Wheaton 2021). In contrast, the US and the UK had considerably more jabs available in the early stages of vaccine distribution. According to the ECA (2022:25), the main reasons for this was that the negotiated APAs did not define sufficiently constraining

delivery schedules for vaccine producers and did not manage to adequately counteract priority provisions that third countries, such as the UK, included in their contracts with the same producers. In addition, the US invoked its Defense Production Act, which allowed the government to “conclude priority-rated contracts or place orders that take precedence over any other if a contractor is unable to make all the contracted deliveries on time” (ibid.:27). To defend its interests, the Commission took the vaccine producer AstraZeneca to court. Siding with the Commission, the court considered AstraZeneca to have intentionally breached the contract, requiring the company to deliver 50 million doses at a specified date and be liable to pay a €10 penalty per dose in case of non-delivery (European Commission 2021). The Commission also made use of its export authorisation scheme to block at least one shipment during 2021 (ECA 2022:35).

In the early phase of negotiations with vaccine producers, the Commission had also insufficiently looked at potential supply chain risks which could materialize and undermine vaccine production and delivery schedules. The US and the UK had anticipated and addressed such problems more actively than the EU, especially in 2020 (ECA 2022:37). The Commission learned from these experiences. It set up a Task Force for Industrial Scale-up of Covid-19 vaccines and included better guarantees to ensure full and timely vaccine deliveries in later contracts with vaccine producers (ibid.:25, 36).

To put this mechanism on a more stable footing, in 2022 the EU used the TFEU’s ‘solidarity clause’ (Art. 122(1) TFEU) to adopt a regulation (2022/2372) establishing a framework for the supply of crisis-relevant medical countermeasures in the event of a public health emergency. The Regulation also defines new institutions and processes that can be put into place in the case of an emergency, such as a Health Crisis Board (a strengthened version of the APA-related Steering Board) better specify the different options for joint public procurement at the EU level in the case of crisis. Beyond this regulation on emergency procedures, another Council Regulation (2022/2371) set-up a more robust system to deal with cross-border threats to health, including the Union’s existing JPA.

## The COVAX initiative

Since the very start of the Covid-19 pandemic, the EU Commission framed the crisis as a global crisis requiring international solidarity and cooperation. Already in February 2020, while closely following the evolution of the pandemic in Italy, the Commission announced the mobilisation of €232 million to help combat the epidemic on a global scale. The contours of the EU’s global response to the crisis were more clearly presented on 8 April by means of a Joint Communication by the European Commission and the European External Action Service (European Commission 2020).

The Communication reiterated the EU's position as the world's largest donor and its willingness to be at the forefront of the global effort to respond to the pandemic. To this end, it proposed the adoption of a new approach, labelled "Team Europe" approach. This would consist of the development of a single framework of action, combining resources from all EU institutions, EU member states, the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in order to provide "a critical mass that few others can match" (European Commission 2020:1). The Communication defined three joint "Team Europe" priorities: 1) support for the urgent, short-term emergency and humanitarian needs; 2) the strengthening of health systems; and 3) the mitigation of economic and social consequences.

Apart from presenting the Team Europe approach, the Communication recalled some general principles that were supposed to guide the EU's global response to the Covid-19 crisis. In particular, EU development actions had to be aligned with Europe's core values and strategic interests. In addition to that, they were to take place within the lines of a global coordination effort and support multilateral solutions to the crisis.

During the first months (from April to August 2020) the EU's Team Europe approach framed the EU response to emergency needs. Several initiatives were taken to pool existing financial resources from the EU and the member states. Initially, planning beyond this point proved difficult given the uncertainty as regards to the crisis and the Team Europe initiatives basically consisted of repurposing existing aid (Burni et al. 2021). In the following months, however, the EU began to prepare the thematic EU development cooperation priorities for EU budget programming period 2021-2027. In this process, the EU Commission's delegations in third countries were instructed to exchange with member states' embassies so as to identify possible joint projects and programmes targeting a common theme, which could be subsequently presented under the label of "Team Europe Initiatives". In addition to that, references to the "Team Europe approach" became increasingly common in Commission communications and Council conclusions (Keijzer et al 2021:12). In April 2021, a specific Council reaffirmed the central place of Team Europe as a constitutive part of the EU's long-term development policy agenda.

In parallel to this, increasing US isolationism that culminated in withdrawing from the WHO (Deters & Zardo 2023:1063) prompted the EU to take the lead in global Covid-19 cooperation. In April 2020, the Access to Covid-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-Accelerator) was launched by the WHO, the European Commission, France, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. This was a global initiative aimed at pooling public and private resources to support the research, development and equitable access of Covid treatments and vaccines around the world. A key element of the ACT-Accelerator was its vaccines pillar, called COVAX. It was structured in two pillars, one for rich countries and the other one for poorer countries. The first would pool resources from rich countries to

develop and purchase vaccines while the second would channel financial support and vaccines to poor countries (Danaiya Usher 2021). The ultimate goal was to guarantee that all participating countries could vaccinate at least 20% of their populations.

From the start, the Union became a leading contributor to COVAX. Yet, during the second half of 2020 and early 2021 the deployment of COVAX was very disappointing (Danaiya Usher 2021). The main problem stemmed from the lack of engagement of richer countries. Confronted with the risk of vaccine scarcity for their own populations, most of them decided to make bilateral agreements with vaccine manufacturers instead of contributing to COVAX (The Lancet 2021). Whereas the Commission wanted to maintain its lead on COVAX and volunteered to negotiate with vaccine producers on its behalf, member states feared that expanding the COVAX portfolio would increase competition and prioritised securing vaccines for the EU over backing the Commission's global leadership (Deters & Zardo 2023:1064).

During 2021, China, Russia, and the US increased their unilateral donations outside COVAX in an emerging game of vaccine diplomacy (Suzuki et al. 2022). The Commission saw the EU lose its multilateral edge and unilateral member states vaccine donations constrained the Commission's impact further. To re-establish leadership and curb these uncoordinated national efforts, the Commission proposed a 'sharing mechanism' for vaccine donations. Based on a 'Team Europe' approach, the new mechanism charged the Commission with the task to collect all European donations and transfer this aid to recipient countries through the second pillar of COVAX (Deters & Zardo 2023:1065).

The new mechanism finally began to produce results. Whereas by mid-2021 Europe had donated just 7.9 million doses in contrast to 59.8 million doses donated by the US (Deutsch & Wheaton, 2021), by March 2023, Europe's donations through COVAX amounted to 700 million doses, still less than the 900 million delivered by the US by that time but much more than before (COVAX 2023). The new mechanism, however, did not fulfil the original aim of COVAX to allow all countries to vaccinate at least 20% of their populations. By March 2022, 75.72% of people in high-income countries had been vaccinated in contrast to 27% in low-income countries (Pichon 2022). This strong inequality prompted calls from emerging countries, particularly India and South Africa, to lift the intellectual property rights on Covid-19 vaccines in order to produce the vaccines themselves. Whereas the US administration expressed public support to this demand, the EU Commission, under the pressure of big pharmaceutical companies and some member states (particularly Germany), opposed the waiver (Furlong et al. 2022). This event exposed the inconsistencies of the solidarity narrative of the EU's global response to Covid and weakened the EU's credibility as "normative power" at the eyes of many emerging countries (Balfour et al. 2022).



## The Joint gas procurement mechanism

In February 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine, gas storage levels in the EU were already low as a result of lower than usual Russian gas deliveries in the months preceding the invasion. A further reduction of Russian gas supply following the invasion led to an explosion of gas prices. Fearing insufficient supply for the winter 2022-2023, there was a scramble among member states, their energy providers and enterprises to acquire sufficient amounts of gas. Prices also rose sharply because of potentially too little gas infrastructure to replace Russian pipeline gas with other pipeline gas or liquified natural gas (LNG).

In March 2022 the Commission presented REPowerEU, a plan aimed at accelerating the energy transition while reducing the Union's dependency on Russian gas and ensuring the security of gas supply in the short term. The plan included a proposal to pool gas demand. In particular, drawing from the experience with vaccines, the REPowerEU Communication (2022/108:2) proposed a mechanism by which the Commission would lead a negotiation team to hold talks with gas suppliers, with the support of a steering board composed of EU country representatives (Boltz et al. (2022:2). This was inspired by the governance of APAs and the subsequent contracts signed with vaccine producers during the pandemic.

In April 2022, the so-called EU Energy Platform was established. This platform would, however, only play a limited role in the following months (e.g. facilitating the adoption of Memoranda of Understanding with some major partnering gas producer countries) (European Commission 2023a). The main reason was the lack of sufficient member state support. Indeed, in parallel to the Commission efforts, various member states sought bilateral gas procurement deals, such as Germany with Qatar (Wintour 2022), or would build up national gas reserves using public money, such as Austria (derStandard 2022). Joint purchases were also made more difficult by pre-existing gas supply contracts with different gas undertakings and consumers, with diverging durations and terms (Boltz et al. 2022).

In light of this experience and taking into account some of the member states 'red lines', in May 2022 the Commission published a reworked REPowerEU plan (Communication 2022/230). The new proposal better specified the functions of the EU Energy Platform and considered the development of voluntary operational joint purchasing mechanisms based on Joint Ventures or business-owned entities. However, this proposal was not met with unequivocal backing by member states.

Finally, in December 2022, the EU used the TFEU's solidarity clause (Art. 122(1)) to set up a mechanism to coordinate gas purchases from third countries. The new mechanism, called AggregateEU, was a significantly scaled-down version of the initial Commission

proposal. In terms of governance, it established an ‘ad hoc Steering Board’ composed of representatives of each member states and a Commission representative to better coordinate demand aggregation. The regulation made it mandatory for member states’ gas undertakings and key consumers to participate in the process of demand aggregation, covering volumes of at least equal to 15% of the national gas storage targets set out by another EU regulation. The AggregateEU mechanism was designed to carry out regular tenders for demand aggregation subsequently allowing for their matching through offers from international gas suppliers but without any obligations for member states to participate in common gas purchases. The first round of tenders took place in April 2023, with additional rounds in June, September and November 2023 (European Commission 2023a).

On the basis of these tenders, the regulation allows gas buyers to “coordinate elements of the purchase contract or use joint purchase contracts in order to achieve better conditions with their suppliers”. However, the contracting of gas is not part of AggregateEU and takes exclusively place between companies. It is also not mandatory to conclude purchases based on matched demand and offer via AggregateEU. Neither the Commission nor the service provider are involved in these purchases. To facilitate the formation of joint purchasing consortia, the Regulation allows member states to provide liquidity support, such as guarantees (in line with State aid rules). The Commission also laid out two models for joint gas purchase, a ‘Central Buyer’ model and an ‘Agent on Behalf’ model (European Commission 2023b).

Even after the completion of the fourth round of tenders, which took place in November 2023, it is difficult to evaluate whether the mechanism has been successful (Elliott 2023). AggregateEU does not require companies taking part in the mechanism to provide any information to the Commission or to member states on whether the process actually led to the conclusion of purchase contracts and under which contract conditions (such as quantity, delivery schedule and price) eventual contracts took place. The feedback available so far suggests that the success has been mixed. The matching of gas demand and supply through AggregateEU has been higher than expected (Schnier 2023) and the first two rounds of tenders have led to a cumulative aggregated demand of 27.5 bcm and a matched demand of 22.9 bcm (Commission Report 2023/547). This is considerably above the targeted annual minimum demand aggregation amounting to 13.5 bcm. This data, however, does not allow to draw any conclusions about the actual purchases that have resulted from the matching through AggregateEU or on its impact for the Union as a whole.

According to feedback received by the Commission, “there are indication from some EU Member States and market players that the joint purchasing mechanism contributed to strengthening the security of supply, and that in a few instances it may have con-

tributed to keeping prices down and help reduce market volatility”, while also having contributed to market transparency (Commission Report 2023/547). The Commission, however, also mentioned more sceptical feedback from other member states and companies regarding its utility and adequacy (ibid.). Barnes (2023), for example, questions the added value that AggregateEU can provide, given its temporary nature, and “as the current market framework already enables effective demand aggregation”. At the end of 2023, the temporary AggregateEU mechanism was nevertheless prolonged for another year with the Commission aiming to further develop the platform, especially with regards to green hydrogen (Schnier 2023).

## The FARM initiative

Russia’s attack on Ukraine in February 2022 had important repercussions on global food markets. Given the role of Russia and Ukraine as major world producers of wheat and fertilisers, the conflict led to a sudden drop in food exports and further increases in food prices, putting some highly food-import dependent countries in Africa and the Middle East in a dire situation. On 11 March 2022, an extraordinary meeting of G7 agriculture ministers already alerted on the risks of major distortions in global food markets (G7 information centre 2022). Drawing lessons from past crises, G7 ministers called on all countries to keep their food and agricultural markets open, guard against any unjustified restrictive measures on their exports and cooperate to safeguard global food security and nutrition.

In Europe, in the immediate aftermath of the invasion, the attention mostly focused on the implications for EU farmers given their strong dependence on Russian gas and fertilisers and on Ukrainian animal crops (particularly maize). There was also a general understanding among EU agriculture ministers that Europe should have to compensate the expected drop of Ukrainian production with an increase of its own production (Council of the EU 2022a) also sparking a debate on the need to relax certain environmental obligations imposed on farmers. Concerns on the risk for third countries would not figure prominently in EU documents until 24 March 2022, when the Commission presented a communication on “safeguarding food security and reinforcing the resilience of food systems” (European Commission 2022). Apart from acting some measures to increase EU food production, the document proposed to adopt a “Team Europe” approach to scale up humanitarian aid for food-deficit countries.

The same day the Commission presented its communication, the French government - in charge of the Council’s rotating presidency - announced the launch of a global initiative to tackle the risks of global food insecurity. Called FARM (International Food and Agriculture Resilience Mission) the initiative was structured in three pillars. The first

(trade pillar) consisted of an international commitment to ensure full transparency of food trade flows and stocks and avoid unjustified trade barriers. The second (solidarity pillar) consisted of coordinated action among world food producer countries to temporarily raise production thresholds to cover the gap left by Ukraine, coupled with a mechanism to channel the additional volumes to the most vulnerable countries. Finally, the third (production pillar) was devoted to provide development aid to help vulnerable countries build sustainable agricultural capacity in the medium- to long-term.

The FARM initiative was presented at the EU summit taking place on 24-25 March 2022 and received full support from all member states. During the following months, the French government tried to mobilise international support for the initiative. In early April, the three food-related UN agencies<sup>2</sup> backed FARM. The World Food Programme (WFP) committed to work together with France to set up the ‘solidarity mechanism’ (France Diplomatie 2022a, 2022b). However, in the following months, the initiative failed to gain traction. One problem was the lack of engagement by other third countries. While all G7 countries backed the initiative, France did not succeed to rally key G20 countries, particularly global grain producers such as India and China (Gérard 2022). Another problem was the inability of France and the EU to impose a global ban on export restrictions. Since the Russia’s invasion in February until June 2022, 23 countries imposed new export restrictions affecting over 16% of global agricultural trade (Glauber et al. 2022). The fact that this included major food exporters such as Argentina and India created major distortions in global food markets. Even within the EU, Hungary announced temporary export controls on wheat, rye, barley, oats, maize, soybeans and sunflowers on 4 March 2022 (Caprile & Pichon 2022).

The ineffectiveness of the FARM initiative and the general lack of global coordination to deal with the crisis aggravated the situation. In May 2022, price levels for wheat and maize reached the highest levels in more than 10 years. In this context, African countries started to criticise the lack of effective action from G7 countries to address the problem. Criticism was also fuelled by a Kremlin-led propaganda campaign that painted an impending global food crisis as the result of Western sanctions against Russia.

Against this background, Germany - which was leading the G7 group at that time - launched a new initiative with the support of the World Bank. Called “The Global Alliance for Food Security” (GAFS), it consisted of a common commitment by all developed countries to scale up humanitarian support in response to the unfolding global hunger crisis (World Bank 2022). The European Council endorsed this new initiative and EU foreign affairs ministers agreed to contribute to it by adopting a “Team Europe” approach (Council of the EU 2022b). However, the EU and its member states were confronted with capacity problems. During the first months after the invasion, the priority had been to

2. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the World Food Programme (WFP).

provide emergency support to Ukraine and this resulted in very little financial capacities remaining to cover additional needs (Di Ciommo et al. 2022). Besides, according to the press, tensions emerged between the French-led FARM and the German/World Bank GAFS initiatives, with France and Germany competing over “who should take the credit for the global response” (Wax 2022). At the global level, there was also a lack of coordination between these two EU-led initiatives and other initiatives such as the UN/US-led “roadmap for global food security” or the African Emergency Food Production Facility set up by the African development bank.

Since the second half of 2022, with the partial re-opening of the Black Sea ports, the situation on global food markets improved. In addition to that, global food markets progressively adapted to the situation. The loss of Ukrainian wheat exports was partly compensated by production increases in other countries, in particular Russia and Canada and, to a lesser extent, in the EU (Glauber & Laborde 2023). Despite that, the situation remained critical for some food-dependent countries. In September 2023, an EU report on food insecurity alerted that the prevalence of acute food insecurity in certain countries was largely unchanged compared with 2022 and at a historical maximum. In the same document, the Commission stated to have allocated around €1.1bn for humanitarian food and nutrition assistance in 2022, which was 90% more than in 2021 and declared to be “working to maintaining appropriate levels of food assistance” and “working to mobilise additional funds” in the future (European Commission 2023c:7).

## Evaluation of the four cases

Bringing together the findings of the four cases allows us to draw some broader lessons on how crises may affect EU actorness. We will first present the findings from the four cases separately and then draw general lessons on the impact of crises on EU actorness

### Discussing the findings from the four cases

The four cases differ regarding their outcomes in terms of EU actorness, with a strong development of EU actorness in the case of joint vaccine procurement, a more partial one in the COVAX case and largely a non-development of EU actorness in the cases of joint gas procurement and the FARM initiative.

Among the four analysed cases, joint vaccine procurement is clearly the case where EU actorness developed the most and in which EU actorness also subsequently proved most effective. The EU succeeded in securing the provision of vaccines partly produced outside Europe at favourable conditions across member states. The delivery of vaccines to Europe suffered from some protectionist actions from third countries but the Commis-

sion used law suits and export authorisations to assert itself in relation to third countries and foreign enterprises. Building on the success of this initiative, EU competences to deal with global health emergencies were reinforced. In particular, key lessons from the pandemic were integrated in a new emergency framework which can be activated in times of crisis. In addition, the existing joint public procurement possibilities in the health policy area were strengthened, increasing the EU's capacity to act coherently beyond pandemic situations.

The development of EU actorness in the area of joint vaccine procurement can be interpreted as the result of a positive interplay between EU action capabilities, changes in role expectations and creative action. While the Commission had some formal competences to react to cross-border health crises, the available instrument - already used in response to the 2009 swine flu pandemic - was not appropriate for the purchase of vaccines. This prompted the Commission to be creative, proposing a new type of procurement model based on so-called Advance Purchase Agreements. There was also a change in role expectations. In the past member states had been reluctant to give much power to the Commission to exercise intra-state solidarity in response to cross-border health threats. However, the symmetric nature of the Covid crisis and the nature of the product purchased (prone to high levels of risk and uncertainty) facilitated the member states' acceptance of a joint approach. The success of the joint procurement initiative, in turn, generated a change in the expectation for a bigger EU role in this domain on a more permanent basis.

The results of the COVAX case are more mixed. While the deployment of COVAX was disappointing, the Commission was able to react to the USA and China's 'vaccine diplomacy' proposing a 'sharing mechanism' for vaccine donations built on the second pillar of COVAX. This new mechanism had some positive results. It did not fulfil the COVAX's original aim to allow all countries vaccinate at least 20% of their populations but increased the amount of vaccines donated by Europe and secured overall coordination between EU and national donations. The experience with COVAX and, more generally, with the provision of development aid during the Covid-19 crisis led to the development of a new approach guiding future EU development aid policy, the 'Team Europe' approach, thus ultimately reinforcing EU actorness in the area of development aid. However, COVAX failed to address another problem hampering the effectiveness and impact of EU development aid actions, namely the lack of consistency between EU development aid and other EU external policies. Seen from this angle, the COVAX initiative failed to lead to more EU actorness. It exposed the inconsistencies between EU trade and EU development policies and weakened the EU's credibility as a "normative power" in the eyes of many emerging countries.

The mixed results of the COVAX case highlight a different type of interplay between EU action capabilities, changes in role expectations and creative action. The EU had strong competences and resources in the field of development cooperation and there was general support from member states to help third countries to get out of the crisis. There was also a shift of role expectations: US isolationism in response to the Covid-19 crisis created a strong domestic and external demand for the EU to take a leading role in global Covid-19 cooperation. There was also creativity in the response to the crisis, both in designing COVAX - a novel and original instrument - and in developing the 'Team Europe' approach. What explains the absence of more developed EU actorness in this case is that, over time, member state support for global vaccine cooperation declined. Confronted with risks of vaccine scarcity, member states prioritised internal objectives (securing access to vaccines for their populations) over external objectives (supporting vaccine deployment in third countries).

In the case of joint gas purchases, there was, overall, no significant development of EU actorness. Constituting only a basis for potential common purchases by gas undertakings and key consumers, AggregateEU fell considerably short of allowing the EU to be an important actor on international gas markets. Given the lack of reporting requirements for participating enterprises, it is even difficult to assess whether this mechanism actually helped to reduce purchase prices and improved security of supply. The future of AggregateEU is also uncertain, as it is a temporary mechanism which has to be extended every year. While the Commission has plans to make the platform more permanent, many market actors are sceptical and would prefer it to be phased out as soon as market prices have stabilised more.

The non-development of EU actorness in the framework of this initiative can be explained by a negative interplay between low EU's initial action capabilities in the field of energy and the lack of a shift in role expectations. As noted in section 4.2, the EU's action capabilities in the field of energy were already limited both as a result of low formal competences and lack of EU internal cohesion on energy issues. Contrary to what happened with Covid-19 and the vaccines, the crisis did not increase the level of EU internal cohesion but on the contrary, it exacerbated existing differences. Unlike the Covid-19 crisis, the energy price crisis following the Ukraine war had very asymmetric effects on individual member states given the differences in national energy mixes and the levels of dependence on Russian gas. In addition, differences in the nature of the product purchased (Covid-19 vaccines vs. gas) facilitated member state support to joint purchasing in the former case, while hampering it in the latter. In particular, the high degree of uncertainty over the availability of a functioning vaccine, and by who it would be produced, made it difficult for member states to clearly assess their potential advantages or disadvantages between joint vaccine procurement and national purchases. In contrast, distribution of gas consumption was well-known, making it easy for member

states to assess who would benefit or lose most from joint gas purchases. Besides, as gas is already a normed and widely-traded product on existing markets (contrary to the Covid-19 vaccines), it was difficult to create a working joint gas procurement model which would not cause problems with active gas delivery and storage contracts.

Also in the case of the FARM initiative, there was no significant development of EU actorness. While, the French-led initiative was endorsed by all member states it was totally ineffective in solving the global crisis. Over time, the general lack of coordination aggravated the crisis, convincing Germany to launch another global initiative to address this problem. Despite the EU efforts to develop a ‘Team Europe’ approach again, EU action in response to the food crisis was therefore marked by fragmentation, ineffectiveness and tensions between the two biggest member states (France and Germany).

The failure of the FARM initiative shows a different interplay between EU’s action capabilities, shift in role expectations and creative action. As for COVAX, action capabilities were strong prior to the crisis. The EU had important competences and resources in the field of development cooperation and there was general support from member states to help third countries to overcome the crisis. The FARM initiative was endorsed by all member states, which proves that there was an expectation to see the EU to take a leading global role in response to the crisis. However, the initiative failed. This can be explained by the fact that the initiative was too ambitious and probably created too high expectations on the EU’s capacity to lead the crisis response. In particular, the FARM initiative proposed to address the food crisis not only by coordinating EU and global development aid support to the countries in need but also by coordinating the action of all global food production and imposing a general ban on food export restrictions. Given the level of fragmentation and polarisation in global trade governance, the EU did neither have the capacity to rally all major global grain producers such as India and China nor was it able to impose a global ban on export restrictions.

## The impact of crises on EU actorness

Bringing together these results from the four analysed cases, we can draw some more general findings on how crises affect the (non-)development of EU actorness.

### Level of formal competences

A first general conclusion is that, in contrast to what is argued by much of the existing literature on EU actorness, the formal distribution of competences does not pose a major obstacle to develop joint EU action in response to crises. Being a response to an emergency, the EU was able to make use of some existing emergency clauses, such as the TFEU’s solidarity clause (Art. 122(1)) to set up new instruments, temporarily allow-



ing the Union to overcome its lack of competences in particular policy domains (Fernández Arribas 2024, Chamon et al. 2023). The EU's success in using these emergency clauses to jointly purchase Covid vaccines created the conditions to elaborate an emergency framework on a more permanent basis, thus enhancing EU actorness to respond to future pandemics. The Union used its emergency competences again in response to the energy price crisis. However, lacking the same degree of internal cohesion, it was less successful in creating an effective mechanism and it is still unclear whether the temporary AggregateEU mechanism will be transformed into a more permanent one.

In contrast to the two 'joint procurement' case studies, the existence of strong EU formal competences in the field of development cooperation was not sufficient to guarantee the success of the two initiatives launched in this field (COVAX and FARM). Tensions between internal and external priorities (in the case of COVAX), excessive expectations on the EU's capacity to lead the global response (in the case of FARM) and a general inability to ensure coherence between different external policies (development cooperation and trade) resulted in a weak development on EU actorness especially in the case of the FARM initiative.

### **Internal cohesion**

Another general conclusion from the four cases, in line with the insights from the literature on EU actorness, is the key role of internal cohesion in supporting the emergence of EU actorness. A significant degree of internal cohesion is not only a factor favouring the emergence of EU actorness but appears to be a necessary condition for it. Our analysis also shows that the level of internal cohesion in a policy domain should not be taken as static condition but rather as a factor that may evolve over time, influenced by the impact of the crisis. In the case of joint vaccine procurement, the symmetric impact of the crisis can reinforced the Union's internal cohesion, favouring the setup of coordinated joint actions. If successful, these crisis-related joint actions can create an expectation for a greater EU role in a given domain and will pave the way towards the establishment of more permanent instruments. In the case of joint gas purchases, the impact of the crisis accentuated intra-EU differences, rendering the development of common actions in response to the crisis difficult. If new instruments are nevertheless created, they will likely be less effective (as exemplified by AggregateEU) and therefore not result in the enhancement of EU actorness in the medium or long term.

Another way in which the impact of the crisis may alter the level of intra-EU cohesion is when there is a tension between addressing the crisis' internal effects (impact for the member states) and its external effects (impact on third countries). The COVAX case shows that, in case of tension, member states tend to prioritise the response to the internal effects at the expenses of the EU support to third countries. This weakens the

level of intra-EU cohesion in support of more EU action on external policy areas such as development cooperation.

### Legacy effects

A final interesting finding of this paper, linking the different cases across crises, are the legacy effects that the crisis responses to the Covid-19 pandemic had on the development of crisis responses during the Ukraine war. In the case of the gas price crisis, the Commission attempted to replicate the joint vaccine procurement model. The vaccine procurement's perceived success and the availability of an existing joint procurement model for crises surely played a role in privileging this approach over developing a tailor-made solution for this very different policy area. The subsequent difficulties in implementing the same model for joint gas purchases show, however, the limits to such an approach. Similarly, as explained in the French internal note presenting the proposal (French government 2022), the FARM's solidarity pillar was inspired by the second pillar of COVAX. As with COVAX, the idea was to coordinate world production of an essential public good (food) and guarantee equitable access to this good to all countries. These attempts of re-applying previously developed crisis response models raise important questions regarding policy learning and its limits to successful implementation in different policy areas or crises.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we have studied the effect of crises on EU actorness, i.e. its capacity to act as a coherent entity and defend its own interests at the global level. To do so, we have presented in-depth analyses of four policy initiatives in the EU that were launched to respond to the Covid-19 crisis and to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. These include common vaccine procurement, common gas procurement, as well as the COVAX and FARM initiatives to address global vaccine and food supply concerns at the global level.

Especially in the case of common vaccine purchases, the EU developed a significant capacity to act and defend its interests at the global level. Our analysis has identified a high extent of member state cohesion, supported by the nature of the crisis and the good under question, as well as the ability to make use of the Union's emergency competences as key explanations for this - at least temporal - development of EU actorness. Also in the case of common gas purchases, the EU could resort to its emergency competences. The much more muted increase in EU actorness in this case has been mainly due to a lack of member state cohesion, which was further exacerbated by the asymmetric effects of the energy price crisis. External factors and the geopolitical environment

had only a minor effect on EU actorness in these two cases (apart from Russia's central responsibility for the gas crisis in Europe). Where the EU encountered difficulties due to protectionist and competitive behaviour in the vaccine procurement case, it seemed to successfully learn from these experiences and integrate the lessons in the emergency framework it put into place to deal with future crises.

Even if the EU had significant competences and resources in the area of development cooperation and aid before the two crises, both in the COVAX and FARM cases there was little development of EU actorness, which was significantly hampered by various factors. First, the Union's preference of a multilateral approach to global vaccine and food distribution ran into difficulties due a highly unfavourable geopolitical context, in which key institutions of global governance were not able to play a key role. The uncooperative approach of other influential global actors (USA, China, Russia) also made it difficult for the EU to assert its interests at the international level. Beyond this broader context, the EU also suffered from a considerable lack in member state cohesion. This included, on the one hand, tensions between internal and external interests, as exemplified by the trade-offs between a European and a global vaccination approach, and tensions between different external policies and their underlying interests, as highlighted by the refusal to waive the intellectual property rights of vaccines. Against these adverse conditions, the development of the Team Europe approach reinforced EU actorness at least to some extent in the context of the COVAX, while the EU's capacity to act did not really improve in the FARM case.

We believe that the findings of this paper can contribute to the literature on EU actorness in several regards. First, by focusing on the role of crises in the development of EU actorness we show the formal distribution of competences in specific policy areas are less pertinent in such a context, as certain emergency clauses can be activated to increase the EU's capacity to act. Second, drawing on insights from the literature on EU integration, we highlight how different crisis impacts can influence the extent of internal cohesion by either fostering (e.g. in the case of joint vaccine procurement) or hindering it (e.g. in the case of joint gas purchases). Third, our focus on specific policy initiatives provides, compared to most existing works, an innovative approach to study the development and reinforcement of EU actorness.

Our analysis also highlights the importance of legacy effects in crises response models in subsequent crises. While policy learning in individual policy areas seems to have been successful, such as in the case of joint vaccine procurement, there are risks in attempting to replicate crisis response models developed for a specific crisis and policy area to other crises and/or policy areas. Here the EU and the member states should improve their capacity to draw on existing initiatives and the lessons of their implementation for the development of new instruments without falling back to copy-pasting, such has happened initially in the case of common gas purchases.

As witnessed by the COVAX and FARM cases, the EU and its member states should definitely invest in the development of a more coherent set of external interests and aim to find innovative ways to overcome tensions between internal and external interests. While especially such tensions could be more easily resolved in the case of a more favourable geopolitical context, the EU should nevertheless work hard to improve the internal conditions for the development of the Union's capacity to act and defend its interests globally.



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