POLITICAL ELITES AND A POLITY IN THE MAKING: THE CASE OF EU[1]

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Elite Theory: Important Progresses and Some Open Questions

Over the past years, elite theory, especially through its explorations of the relationship between elite configurations and regime vicissitudes, has made a significant comeback in the world of political science. There is no doubt that the work of John Higley and his associates[2], which has shown that regime types and regime stability may be meaningfully connected to the unity and disunity of elites, and to elite unity being based either on consensus or on ideological conformity, has made a major contribution to this resurgence of interest. These studies have also greatly expanded our knowledge about the ways through which elites are transformed from being disunited to being consensually unified.

It would, of course, be possible and interesting to raise some questions concerning various points covered in the collaborative studies just mentioned, but in this article I would rather pose some new questions that seem relevant for the development of a full fledged elite theory of politics and which are stimulated by the very importance of the theoretical and empirical steps referred to earlier. To be honest, these questions cannot really be considered new as they had already been introduced in some form by classical elite theorists, such as Mosca and Pareto.

The questions I would like to examine essentially concern the power and genesis of elites. Most analyses take the existence of elites (particularly political elites) and their ability to conduct business and to affect events at the level of the existing polity (commonly assumed to be a national state) more or less for granted. These assumptions, however, cannot be accepted without discussion. It is true that in most cases we observe well established elites equipped with significant resources and appearing to be in control of the situation; yet this is not always the case. History is full of examples of weak elites that were not able to control events and who only after significant difficulties were substituted by more powerful and effective ones.

This raises two questions: Why, and under what conditions, do effective political elites lose their grip and become vulnerable? How are new elites formed and what does it take for them to gain ascendancy? To these questions we can add one more: What about the possibility of an interregnum, a situation where no elite is really in control and uncertainty prevails? These questions are particularly relevant during times of regime crisis, especially regime change. Regimes crises are closely linked to crises of the elites that were previously in power, and the transition to a new regime is often accompanied by a period of uncertainty on the part of the new ascendant elites. It should also be noted that regime change not only involves a change in the configuration of the elites (from divided to united, from ideologically united to consensually united, etc.), it typically also entails a partial or total substitution of the elites.

There is another situation of particular interest: where the polity itself is undergoing significant change. This is the situation I will analyse later. But before doing that, we must first look at the relationship between elites and polity. To avoid misunderstanding, the term polity will be used here to designate a political community, a political space sufficiently well identified and distinguishable from other political spaces, and at least relatively independent from them — what Weber would call politischer Verband. Today the typical polity is a "nation-state" or a "state-nation" if we want to adopt Linz's specifica-

tion[3]. Political elites are typically linked to a specific polity. Other elites not considered here — religious, economic, and cultural — are much less "polity dependent," belonging to different spheres of influence: some may even be operating globally. Generally speaking, political elites are more "local" as they tend to be more closely connected with territorially-bounded sovereignty. This does not isolate them completely from broader influences that may become critical at times, but typically their perspective is "national" rather than "supra-national". The size of this national horizon depends on circumstances. It can be as large as Brazil or the US, or as small as Luxembourg or Singapore. The "national" character of elites means that the processes of formation, change and transformation that usually concern them take place within the existing polity, and are influenced by the problems and challenges that pertain to it. The life of political elites is also strictly connected to the institutions of the polity, and these institutions play a significant role in the processes of recruitment, circulation and legitimation of the elites themselves. This link is especially strong in liberal-democratic polities where all the crucial moments of elite life are strongly regulated and institutionalized. In this way, the problem of elite unity or division is for political elites a polity-related problem.

This being said, we cannot forget that polities are not natural givens; nor are they eternal. They have been constructed, they can change, or even dissolve. What will happen to political elites when polities change? If at some point the polity horizon changes (to a larger or to a smaller polity) will elites also change? More specifically what is their role in these transformations and how are elites affected by them? Without becoming embroiled in a long discussion, we can give some examples that indicate the importance of this relationship. The breakdown of the Soviet Union and the separation from it of a number of independent states (a change from one embracing polity to a number of separate polities) seem to be associated with a crisis of the Soviet ruling elite and its inability to keep the USSR together, and to the emergence of new (regional) elites in the new successor polities. The case of Yugoslavia and its successor polities is not too dissimilar. Other interesting cases of combined regime and polity changes can also be seen in the former satellite states of Central Europe, particularly when we consider that the continuation of their political regimes was tightly anchored in their de facto incorporation in the larger political community of the Soviet bloc. In these states, the demise of this overarching political entity also enabled the recovery of a fuller sovereignty, which was accompanied by regime changes and elite transformations. Belgium also, with its process of federalization, suggests close links between the definition of the political community, institutional structure and elite configuration (with the regionalization of party elites). The case of the German Democratic Republic and its eventual merger with the Federal Republic of Germany demonstrates another and more complex variation in these connected factors: some degree of regained autonomy of the state due to the crisis of the Soviet hegemony led to regime and elite crisis, which was followed by the incorporation of the Eastern provinces into a larger political community, which in turn meant the integration of the regional elites into the institutional structures and the larger elite con-figuration of the Bundesrepublik.

Admittedly, these phenomena are not as frequent as other political events, such as electoral victories and defeats, cabinet changes, etc. Yet they happen and, since their consequences are momentous, they cannot be omitted from our theoretical and empirical discussions. To say that political science has totally neglected such phenomena, however, is perhaps too much, and the beginnings of a discussion can be found, for example, in literature pertaining to the building of modern nation states[4] and in the analyses of state building in colonial domains[5].

Nevertheless, systematic research on the causal connections between polity change and elite transformations is still lacking.

As it is not possible to attempt a full-fledged discussion of the "polity-elites" relationship here, I will first enumerate a series of simplified propositions and then, using a very special case of polity transformation — that is, the one connected with the process of European integration — I will discuss some of the related elite problems in greater detail.

1. The creation of a new polity is a major political transformation that entails the allocation of significant resources with which to overcome the inertia of the status quo. A dedicated and focused elite of "polity builders" seems, therefore, to be a crucial prerequisite for the success of the process. The aristocratic and bureaucratic elites of the monarchy were in most European cases the crucial actor in the construction of national states[6] (Rokkan 1970; Tilly 1975). The communist elite around Lenin and later Stalin shaped the Soviet Union and the Soviet Empire after the collapse of the Russian Empire on the wake of WW I and of the revolutions of 1917.

2. The configuration of the elites that contributes to the creation of the new polity has a high probability of affecting the shape of this political community and of its institutions. A unitary elite will probably be conducive to the formation of a unitary and centralized polity. Plural elites will instead create a more decentralized polity. This effect is evidenced by the contrasting examples of modern France and the United States.

3. The elites responsible for the founding of the polity will most probably also govern the new political community, but once the new polity has been established, some degree of adaptation to the new conditions will presumably take place. A broadening of the original elite circle (through cooptation or other means) will probably follow in order to expand the support for the newly created polity. The institutions of the new community will play a crucial role in the reproduction of political elites, in their legitimation, and in providing them with instruments of political action.

4. With the passing of time, and under the impact of internal or external challenges, developments of the new polity may force a more fundamental transformation of the ruling elites. The founding elites may not be capable of dealing with the new situation and may have to give way to newcomers.

5. Finally, we must also consider that a new polity may fail and bring along also the failure of its political elites.

The case of the European Union and some recent developments in the process of European integration offer an opportunity for conducting an exploration of some of these points. Originally defined as the Common Market, or the European Economic Community, the Europe Union (EU) has in fact had features of a truly political community from the beginning. These traits have significantly increased with the passing of time and there is little doubt that the EU today must be considered a polity: its well-articulated system of institutions and wide array of policy responsibilities, together with a Europe-wide citizenship that has been officially recognized for some time now[7] make the EU much more similar to existing polities (especially those with a federal character) than to an international organization. It seems worthwhile, therefore, to explore the connections between elites and European integration.

The Process of European Integration: A Europe of Elites or a Polity without a Political Elite?

The role of elites has been often underscored by studies of the European integration process. In a recent book, Haller defined the EU as an "elite process"[8]. Other authors have described the process of European integration as based upon the "permissive consensus" of mass opinion which has enabled elites to steer the process without having to pay too much attention to the views of the population[9].

These views, which have gained a wide acceptance, support the proposition that

elites have been in command of the process of creating a new European polity. But who are these elites? The answer is rather straightforward: the national political elites of the states that decided to launch the process of integration, followed by those of states that joined later. This is not to deny the role of business elites, or of intellectuals and technocrats, in the elaboration of ideas and instruments related to the process, but ultimately decisions have been taken and agreements kept by national governments and their political leaders[10]. In other words, national elites, legitimized through national institutional mechanisms, have had a predominant responsibility in the creation and development of the new polity and of its operating capacity. There are also very good reasons to believe that these national elites supported the process of creating a new European polity, because they saw benefits for the solution of problems that could not be solved effectively and satisfactorily at home[11].

This however is not the whole picture. The central institutions of the European Union — the Commission and other bodies, such as the Court of Justice and the European Parliament, — have also contributed to the process. By preparing the ground, offering the solutions, implementing and expanding the scope of European integration, they have "filled the gaps" between the major decisions made by the governments of the member states, thereby helping to consolidate the EU's institutional framework[12]. Can we say then that national elites have been assisted in the construction of a new polity by a genuinely European elite? And has the institutional system of the EU produced a European elite distinguishable from national elites? The answer is mixed: on the one hand, the institutional framework of the EU (through the Council of Ministers and the European Council) has carefully preserved the role of national elites; on the other hand, it has created institutions that are somewhat detached from the national principle and based more on the Union principle. However, their ability to produce a well-integrated political elite with stable roots at the Union level has so far been limited, and it is quite evident that the Brussels-based politicians of the Commission and the European Parliament have lacked the stability, continuity, cohesiveness and organizational structure that normally characterizes national elites. A crucial factor in explaining these weaknesses is that, for these institutions, the recruiting mechanisms have remained predominantly under the control of national politics. Members of the Commission are still handpicked by each national government (with the only limitation being that they must not be unacceptable to the other member state governments or to the European parliament). In a similar way, members of the European parliament are the product of national recruitment, national campaigns and national elections[13]. Even if they are organized by European parties in the EP[14], their accountability linkages are still predominantly national.

We can say that in the case of the EU we have a situation where the strongest elites remain highly decentralized (at the national level), while at the centre there is only an embryonic and not well developed elite. The European polity is kept afloat by the prevailing willingness of "local", i.e. national elites to cooperate (with the help and assistance provided by a, still weak, central elite). For this reason, it seems more correct to talk of a "European compound elite system" rather than of a European elite. This system is composed of national elites that individually play the national game, but which can also unite to play the European game; to them must be added also the embryo of a genuinely European elite. This system is highly polycentric but, as we shall see, is also "consensually unified": it converges around a positive evaluation of the integration process.

Starting from this general picture, we can explore the prospects for change and estimate the direction such change might take. I propose to do this by con-ducting three exploratory analyses. First by examining the institutional changes that have taken place in the EU with the Lisbon treaty, then by an-

alyzing national elites' attitudes towards the EU using the data from a recent research project [15] and finally, by discussing how the recent global financial crisis is affecting the European polity.

The Lisbon Treaty and the European System of Governance

Over its history, the European Union has developed a system of governance that is both complex and peculiar with respects to its institutional shape and policy responsibilities, and that is still evolving. The Treaty of Lisbon, which brought the difficult constitution-making process of the Union to a close, following the rejection of the so-called Constitutional treaty by some EU member states, marks the most important and recent step in this evolution. Through an assessment of the changes introduced by this Treaty, I will try to highlight the elements of continuity and innovation that are most relevant for our discussion.

The innovations introduced by the Lisbon Treaty to the institutional system of governance of the European Union have added to the peculiarities of the European Form of Government (EFoG). These innovations — the new "permanent" President of the Council, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and new rules about the functioning of the law-making process in the Council and the role of the European Parliament in the same process — are interesting not only in themselves, but also for what they say about the nature of the European enterprise and its developmental dynamics. Even without discussing the new shape of the EFoG and the importance of its recent changes in detail, it is possible to highlight the broad features of this new trans-formation and to understand how they might affect the shape of European elites system.

The first element to be underlined is the incremental dynamism of existing institutions; this is particularly evident for the European Parliament, which continues experiencing an incremental strengthening of its powers. The second element suggests a tendency to deal with the functional problems of the existing structures through the addition of new institutions. The new "longer" Presidency of the Council goes in this direction. Instead of the old system of a presidency rotating every six months among the members of the Council, a new figure is brought in from outside the Council. The new President not being anchored as the other members of the Council in the national processes that affect their duration in office is an important component of the Council, but also a "different animal". The "additional" character of the new institutional figure is further underlined by the fact that the traditional rotating presidency has not been abolished but instead has been demoted to a lower status. The addition of new institutions also produces a proliferation of institutions. In this case the consequences are quite striking: if the President of the Commission is also entered into the equation, then the number of "presidents" of the European Union now adds up to three!

The new High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy suggests another type of change that could be defined as the streamlining of existing institutions: an already established institution — the High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) — has been fused with the European Commissioner for external relations. This simplification is however counterbalanced by an institutional complication: the position of Secretary General of the European Council, which had previously been combined with that of the High Representative for CFSP, has once again been separated. More importantly, the High Representative now sits somewhere between the Council and the Commission, making the post-holder a hybrid institutional figure.

These features of the post-Lisbon transformations tell us a lot about the process of European integration. More specifically, they suggest the coexistence of a plurality of driving forces that can be summarized as:

1. A self-generating growth factor. The development of the European polity, both in

terms of its territorial enlargement and of the broadening of its competences, requires the progressive adaptation and strengthening of its institutions to make them more able to respond to decision making needs and at the same time more (democratically) legitimate.

2. An institutional inertia factor. The existing institutions of the EU have by now developed a significant degree of entrenchment and a reciprocal equilibrium that produces a fairly strong resistance to major changes. This favours growth through the addition of institutions, rather than through substitutions and a more radical reshaping of the status quo.

3. The fragmentation of actors and of demands. In the absence of a dominant actor/coalition able to produce a strong and lasting aggregation of demands and to offer leadership with adequate legitimacy, the processes of change have to face the centrifugal force of a very broad range of actors with different preferences (big/small members; Euro-reformist/Euro-conservatives, national/European institutions, etc.).

4. The constraints of consensus. The whole history of the construction of the European Union, and the prevailing rules that continue to require a very broad consensus for all constitutional changes, produce a large number of veto players that fight for their specific preferences.

5. The compoundness factor. The persisting role of national states and their "sovereignty" requires EU institutional arrangements and policy competences to take the existence of national governments into account. This means a way that is cooperative and interstitial rather than antagonistic and more radically innovative has to be developed.

6. The legitimacy factor. The strongest sources of democratic legitimation are still perceived to be national, while the European democratic loop is still seen as weak or indirect, as in the European Parliament and the European Commission, respectively. This necessarily drives changes in the direction of the consensual model that seems more respectful of the national democratic mechanisms.

National and Union Principles in the European Form of Government

In all national systems, political life is both "national" and "local" and this is even more so in the EU, where politics is articulated on a "local" level (which in this case is the "national" level of the member states) and on a "national" level, which here is the Union level. To avoid confusion we will call the first level "national" and the second "Union". Because of the strong identity and autonomy associated with the national level vis-à-vis the Union level, it has become commonplace to define this arrangement as a multilevel polity[16] or a compound democracy[17], associated with which is the concept of compound citizenship[18]. The "compound" label which I adopt here highlights the fact that the politics of the European Union combines two different principles and mechanisms of political legitimation, very much like federal systems, in that one is based on the component units with their well-established political foundations, the other on the Union as a meta-polity with its own specific and increasingly rooted identity. The most obvious difference with established federal systems is that the central level of the EU has not yet acquired a greater standing and legitimacy than that of the individual Member States.

The peculiarity of a "compound" system is that the two dimensions of the polity (the "national" and the "Union") coexist and neither can easily prevail over the other. This also means that the political weighing of preferences and positions with the purpose of representing them and of producing decisions differs depending on which of the two principles applies. A majority (however specified — relative, absolute, qualified...) according to the "national" level is not the same as a majority according to the "Union" level: the former is a majority of national majorities, the latter is a majority of the citizens. In our specific case the first type of majority is well represented by ma-

jorities in the Council, the second by majorities in the European parliament. It is true, however, that in the case of the EU things are not so simple. For example, in the Council, voting rules have become more complicated. Wherever the unanimity rule or the normal majority applies, each state (MS) has the same weight and the "national" principle applies in its pure form, but where qualified majority voting (QMV) applies, the national principle is attenuated. With the Nice Treaty of 2003 a combination of the two principles (equality of MS and equality of EU citizens) was introduced. In fact, the QMV requires three conditions to apply: the number of countries (national principle), the number of country votes[19], and the percentage (62%) of the EU population represented by the voting countries (which brings into play fully the "Union" principle). With the Lisbon Treaty, this rule will be changed from 2017 onwards to the simpler double majority[20], which more clearly embodies the two principles. Even then, however, there will be a further complication: the blocking group must comprise at least four countries to make it impossible for the three most populous countries to prevent a decision from being adopted. Conversely, the European Parliament is fundamentally based on the "Union" principle: all MEPs have the same weight when it comes to voting. Nevertheless, even here there are some partial corrections: the seats are attributed to "national constituencies" and their allocation is based on a population measure that is corrected to the advantage of the smaller countries.

The institutional shape of the European Union and its decisional rules thus provide clear empirical evidence of control forces in the European integration process. The incremental and "complicated" changes taking place in EU institutions and in their governing rules also reflect variations in the balance be-tween the "national" and the "Union" forces at work within the European polity. The innovations introduced by the last reshaping of the institutional system also reflect some of the paradoxes of the EU. On the one hand they express the increasingly felt need to strengthen its operating capacity and its legitimacy as a unified polity and policy-making system. On the other hand there is the imperative not to unsettle the system and disturb the balance of power between national and Union levels. Here we must remember that national elites have maintained the power of veto in the European decision-making machine, particularly when it comes to "constitutional" transformations. Indeed, these powers have been even strengthened in recent times by the number of countries where the "permissive consensus" of public opinion has declined and national referenda have forced national elites to step back from their previously more integrationist positions.

To sum up: the institutional changes of the past years signal the transformative dynamism of the EU, but at the same time the incremental nature of this trend which is strongly constrained by the compound elite system on which the Union is based. Conversely, the institutional system has not acquired features that would provide firm support for the growth of truly European elite. To complement these findings we can now take a closer look at national elites and their views about the European polity.

The views of National Elites about the European Polity and its Institutions

Thanks to the two surveys conducted within the IntUne research project in 2007 and in 2009 (in 17 and 16 EU countries, respectively) and based on representative samples of the members of national parliaments, we can find out what national political elites think about the process of supranational integration. It is not difficult to explain the relevance of the attitudes of this "national" component of the European elite towards deeper European integration. As we have just seen, the compound/multilevel nature of the European Union provides a very strong role for national governments as the representatives of the national units within the supranational institutions. In addition, as national

governments in all member states derive their democratic legitimacy from elected parliaments, the members of these institutions are de facto also part of the supra-national circuit of representation.

As the attitudes of national political elites toward the European Union have already been analysed more systematically using the concept of a European citizenship as an interpretative framework[21], I will concentrate my attention on their attitudes concerning the "governance system" of the EU and on determining which institutions they prefer for the European polity.

When analysing the views of national elites we are faced immediately with a conceptual and methodological choice: do we analyse them as a series of N national samples or as a single pooled European sample? In fact, our data enable us to do both, and both approaches are relevant in the analysis of EU politics. The reason to study national parliamentarians as a set of distinctive national elite groups is obvious: they are produced through separate democratic circuits, to which they are accountable, as are the national governments that participate in the EU Council(s). At the same time, we could view them as part of the compound elite system of the European polity in which they participate as individuals. We must also not forget that most parties represented in the national parliaments have become associated with the European parties. From this perspective, it makes sense, therefore, to analyse national parliamentarians as also belonging to a common EU elite. However the "Union" dimension is still weak, since the mechanisms forging bonds among elites across the borders are not yet comparable to the strength of national bonds. For this reason, I use both approaches with a further methodological caveat: as already stated, the IntUne data do not cover all the member states of the EU[22] meaning that the picture is incomplete. Nevertheless, all the major countries, and more or less all the "regions" and country groups of Europe (North/South; East/West; old/new Members) are included.

As a background to this analysis, it is helpful to review some basic attitudes towards the EU and its further developments. As shown elsewhere[23] (Cotta and Russo forthcoming), a large majority (86 per cent in 2007 and 90 per cent in 2009) of national politicians display a positive attachment to the EU; percent-ages that are not too dissimilar from those expressing attachment to their own country (95 per cent in 2007 and 96 per cent in 2009). Things change, however, when only strong attachment is considered: not unexpectedly the scores for the EU are substantially lower than "for one's country" (37 per cent against 76.5 per cent in 2007; 41.8 per cent against 82.3 per cent in 2009). National elites predominantly accept a European polity but are still more strongly anchored in their national one. With regard to support for further unification, the whole group of national politicians reveals a significant majority supporting further unification (in both surveys, on a scale of 0 to 10, from "unification has gone too far" to "unification should be strengthened", 57.7 per cent had a score from 7 to 10). Overall the differences between 2007 and 2009 are rather small and, as yet, the financial crisis does not seem to have affected these basic positions.

When this relationship is analysed, we find that, although a positive attach-ment to Europe is correlated with a positive attitude towards further integration, the coefficient of correlation is less than impressive (Spearman's rho = 0.228, significant at the 0.01 level for the 2007 data). In fact, orientations on the two dimensions are distributed in a way that is not completely expected. Those expressing a stronger attachment for the EU should also be in favour of strengthening the process of integration. However, about a quarter of those strongly attached to Europe display only medium or weak support for further unification; and among those who are not attached to Europe, only one-third are consistent in opposing unification (Table 1). These results indicate that a significant amount of support for further unification of Europe comes from politicians who

do not share strong feelings of attachment, and who in some cases also have negative feelings. Here, we probably have to take the impact of a more utilitarian calculus, which can even overcome feelings of indifference for Europe, into account.

If national elites could be fully interpreted as one pooled elite group, our data would suggest that a clear majority of a crucial component of the compound European elite system supports a progress in unification. For a significant part of this majority, this support is backed by strong feelings of attachment to the new polity; for others, however, support probably stems from more utilitarian calculations that do not include significant affective elements.

What happens if we break down this imagined elite group into its national components? Quite obviously the picture becomes more complex. With regards to attachment to the EU, only in one country (UK) is the percentage of those negatively attached to the EU prevalent (56 per cent); in all the other countries there is a majority expressing either a strong or a mild attachment. If we consider the stronger level of support, however, only three countries (Denmark, France and Poland) pass the 50 per cent threshold, and just six others (Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Portugal and Spain) exceed the 40 per cent threshold. The remaining countries are all below the 30 per cent level. Concerning sup-port for further unification, results are as follows: of the 17 countries, all — with the exception of two (Great Britain and Estonia) — have a majority expressing a desire for further integration. Only three countries (Czech Republic, Estonia and the United Kingdom) have a fairly large share (more than 25 per cent) expressing negative views. Thus national elites, even when considered as separate national groups, provide rather solid support for the process of integration, but we must also take into account the contrary opinion of two countries (among which is one of the biggest countries of the Union).

From this general picture, we may turn to the analysis of more specific positions concerning the institutional shape of the Union. With regard to the main institutions of the EU, the aggregate data collected in 2007 show that a very large majority (77 per cent, of which 43.1 per cent express strong support) supports the maintenance of the role of member states as central actors of the EU; that a bare majority (50.8 per cent) wants to attribute the role of a true government of the EU to the Commission, although only a small part of this majority expresses a strongly favourable position; and that a very large majority (72.5 per cent) supports the strengthening of the powers of the European Parliament.

The attitudes toward the three main elements that compose the European Form of

Table 1. Attachment to Europe and Support for Unification (per cent)

	Strong attachment	Mild attachment	Negative attachment
Strong support for unification (7-10)	Patriotic Europeanism 27.0	Utilitarian Europeanism 26.4	Inconsistent anti-Europeanism 4.7
Medium support for unification (4-6)	Satisfied Europeanism 7.1	Prudent Europeanism 18.5	Calculating anti-Europeanism 4.6
Negative support for unification (0-3)	Inconsistent Europeanism 2.2	Minimalist Europeanism 5.1	Consistent anti-Europeanism 4.5

Source: IntUne survey 2007. Percentages for 2009 are not shown as differences are almost irrelevant. Negative attachment includes answers " not very attached" and "not at all attached"

Government (EFoG) may seem contradictory and puzzling: why do politicians who defend the role of member states against the European Commission support greater powers for the most supranational among European institutions, the European Parliament? The answer at first seems difficult, but a more careful consideration of these institutions and of their relationship can possibly contribute to explaining this puzzle. In the context of the EFoG, the European Parliament is probably seen as an instrument for strengthening the representative function and as a check against the dominance of the executive — as national parliaments were seen in the developmental stages of national forms of government.

What does this mean in the context of the EU? Concerning representation, a polity such as the EU must be based on a combination of the two principles (Union and national) that are complementary rather than strictly antagonistic, which is typical of a compound system. In the EU, however, the "Union principle" was a latecomer in the field of representation (the European parliament was for a long period marginal in the institutional system), but is progressively gaining ground, as witnessed by the changes following the ratification of the Lisbon treaty and the broad support for this progress among national elites. It is possible perhaps to add another element to the picture. Contrary to the question about the governing powers of the European Commission, which could be perceived as more directly antagonistic with regard to the "national principle" (and more specifically to the role of the member states), and thus challenging explicitly the other important component of the EFoG, the expansion of the powers of the European Parliament could be seen as enhancing the role of this institution as a watchdog and check vis-à-vis the Commission and as an instrument for producing a better balance between the parliamentary and the executive branches of the EFoG. The latter point should obviously be close to the heart of any parliamentarian, national or European. These results are a good match with the institutional developments that we have discussed in the first part of this paper. The defence of the "national principle" (the role of the member states) remains paramount, but it is balanced (or complemented) by strong support for a strengthening of the parliamentary expression of the "Union principle". However support for expanding the role of the Commission (i.e. for the governmental expression of the same principle) is not as broad, and is matched by a considerable opposition. Those who "strongly disagree" reach the 20 per cent threshold.

When we analyse the results on a country by country basis, however, the picture changes. While only France has a majority ready to challenge the role of member states in governing the EU, the majority in six countries (Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Lithuania, Poland and United Kingdom) defends their central role. Other countries show more diverse patterns, and in four — France, Germany, Italy and Spain — less than 30 per cent strongly defend the traditionally strong role of member states. With regard to the role of the Commission, in 10 out of the 17 countries there is majority support (strongly or mildly) for the idea that the Commission should become the true government of the Community; of the other seven, only two (Denmark and Great Britain) strongly oppose the idea, while the others (among which is Germany) are less adamantly against. As for the role of the European Parliament, a majority sup-porting an increase in its powers can be found in all the countries, with the exception of the Czech Republic, Estonia and Slovakia. But the strongest expression of support reaches an absolute majority only in Austria, Belgium, Germany and Greece, to which Italy, Portugal and Spain can be added if the threshold is lowered to 40 per cent.

These results show that the distribution of national preferences concerning the role of crucial EU institutions is rather diversified across the countries examined. But what happens when we combine views about the role of member states with those about

the Commission? As has been shown elsewhere[24], it is possible to delineate three models in this regard: First, there is the federalist model, which sees the Commission as the true government of Europe and rejects the role of member states as central actors. Second, we have the intergovernmental model that proposes the opposite to the federalist model; and third, there is the compound model that combines support for the Commission and for the role of member states. Overall the second model finds most favour among national political elites (41 per cent), but is followed closely by support for the third model (35 per cent), leaving the first to be approved of by a rather smaller minority (16 per cent). When we analyse the results on a country by country basis, significant variations emerge (Table 2). The intergovernmental model is supported by an absolute majority in five countries, and obtains a relative majority in another three; in seven countries, the compound model is the most preferred model, while the federal model wins in only France and Italy, but receives larger support than the intergovernmental model in five countries.

If these views were translated into coherent positions at the bargaining table when designing the institutions of the Eu-

Table 2. Distribution of Preferred Models of Government across Countries (per cent)

Country	Intergovernmentalist	Compound	Federalist
Great Britain	90.0	2.0	2.0
Denmark	74.6	13.6	3.4
Czech Republic	65.0	23.7	8.7
Slovenia	60.0	28.7	6.2
Germany	54.0	21.6	13.5
Portugal	48.7	27.5	15.0
Austria	48.0	23.0	16.0
Lithuania	45.0	**46.2**	2.5
Poland	41.2	**45.0**	5.0
Estonia	37.5	36.1	8.3
France	29.5	11.5	35.9
Greece	26.7	**51.0**	10.0
Hungary	25.3	**40.5**	26.6
Belgium	25.3	**39.0**	33.0
Bulgaria	25.0	**58.3**	9.7
Italy	20.2	32.1	33.3
Spain	18.5	**47.8**	28.3

Source: IntUne survey 2007. The countries are ordered by decreasing support for the intergovernmentalist model. The countries in bold are those for which the intergovernmentalist solution is the strongest and also wins over the other two positions combined. The countries in italics are those showing a greater support for the federalist solution than for the intergovernmentalist. In all the other countries federal and compound model combined win at least a relative majority. The percentages in bold indicate where the compound model is the preferred one. The percentages do not add to 100 per cent because of a group which votes negatively on both points (role of the Commission and role of the Member States).

ropean Union, finding a positive solution would require a rather complex institutional model. As we have shown in the first part of this paper, this is very much what happened in negotiations leading to the Lisbon Treaty.

The 2009 wave of interviews enables us to explore further aspects of the institutional preferences of national political elites. One of the new questions asked in this wave of data collection was about support for a President of the European Union: the overall support for such an institutional figure (which would strengthen the Union principle) was large (almost 60 per cent; see Table 3). But when we examine countries individually, only nine out of sixteen show a favourable majority, and the polarisation between supporters and opponents is quite evident. This is a clear case where a large overall majority translates into a much thinner majority when seen at the national level.

When asked how this President (with a no-defined role) should be elected or nominated, only a minority preferred nomination by the European Council (the most intergovernmental solution), while an almost absolute majority supported election by the European parliament (thus combining the parliamentary model and the Union principle). A fairly significant group also supported the idea of direct election by European citizens (presidential model and Union principle).

On a country basis, the parliamentary solution finds an absolute majority in six countries, whereas the presidential (direct election) scheme is supported at this level by only one. Appointment by the European Council does not reach a majority in any country, and is the preferred solution only in Great Britain.

The survey covered also other aspects that can affect the EFoG such as support for

Table 3. Support for Different Institutional Changes (per cent)

	Having a President of the EU	Extending majority voting in the European Council	Most important European decisions by a majority of all EU citizens via a popular referendum
Austria	42.2	57.8	50.0
Belgium	80.9	80.0	36.4
Bulgaria	63.6	54.9	78.7
Czech Republic	31.8	38.5	58.1
Denmark	42.1	74.4	22.7
France	68.2	87.1	34.3
Germany	69.7	70.7	29.5
Greece	78.0	73.2	58.5
Hungary	78.3	76.6	31.9
Italy	85.1	75.0	47.1
Lithuania	34.8	68.6	59.4
Poland	30.6	69.6	54.1
Portugal	73.0	74.6	59.7
Slovakia	37.7	57.1	47.8
Spain	92.4	88.6	55.0
United Kingdom	38.7	57.1	24.4
Total	59.9	69.8	46.7

Source: IntUne survey 2009. Countries in bold are those expressing a majority in favour of having a President of the EU. Favourable answers include "strongly in favour" and "somewhat in favour".

Table 4. The Designation of the EU President (per cent)

	In any case: If we have it, which way of designation is most appropriate?				
	an election by all EU citizens	by the European Parliament	by the European Council	other possibilities	Total
Austria	31.1	**55.6**	8.9	4,4	100 (45)
Belgium	47.8	40.3	7.5	4,5	100 (67)
Bulgaria	46.4	46.4	5.4	1,8	100 (56)
Czech Republic	23.8	**64.3**	9.5	2,4	100 (42)
Denmark	19.5	36.6	36.6	7,3	100 (41)
France	20.9	43.3	26.9	9,0	100 (67)
Germany	30.3	**64.5**	3.9	1,3	100 (76)
Great Britain	32.9	27.1	38.6	1,4	100 (70)
Greece	36.6	48.8	9.8	4,9	100 (41)
Hungary	14.1	**70.3**	9.4	6,3	100 (64)
Italy	36.8	**57.4**	5.9	-	100(68)
Lithuania	29.9	**61.2**	9.0	-	100 (67)
Poland	32.1	42.3	21.8	3,8	100 (78)
Portugal	**51.6**	31.3	17.2	-	100 (64)
Slovakia	33.8	48.5	16.2	1,5	100 (68)
Spain	37.2	46.2	14.1	2,6	100 (78)
Total	33,2	48.8	15.0	3.0	100 (992)

Source: IntUne survey 2009.

extending the role of majority vote in the European Council and for having important decisions concerning the EU taken by a majority of all European citizens via Europe wide referenda (see Table 3). Without going into a detailed analysis of these data we can highlight that a solid majority supports the extension of the majority vote in the European Coun-

Table 5. Models of Governance and Institutional Choices (per cent)

	Federalist model	Compound model	Inter-governmental model
Extension of Majority vote (strongly agree)	49.4	26.5	18.1
Support for having a President of the EU	92.9	70.2	36.8
President nominated by the European Council	5.5	14.2	20.9
Most important decisions to be taken by a majority of EU Citizens through a referendum (strongly agree)	8.7	16.0	20.0

Source: IntUne survey 2009. The figures indicate the percentage of supporters of each of the three models who also support the four institutional changes. The column percentages do not add to 100% because they are the result of different questions.

cil. Only in the Czech Republic does the negative position prevail, but in Austria, Bulgaria and the United Kingdom the opponents reach more than 40 per cent. With regard to the European referendum attitudes are more lukewarm. Only in eight countries there is a favourable majority and globally supporters do not reach the 50 percent threshold.

If we compare these choices and national elite's preference for the comprehensive institutional model, the relationships are significant (see Table 5). Particularly strong is the connection between the preferred model of governance and support for having a president of the EU (but not so much when the method of nomination is included) and also for the extension of the majority vote. Interestingly enough support for a European referendum on important decisions is more strongly supported by intergovernmentalists than by federalists! Is it because intergovernmentalists perceive (with some good reasons) voters as being more prudent on European developments than elites and thus conceive referenda as defensive instruments against further development of integration?

These results provide some further illustration of the complexity of the European elite system. The complexity has not only to do with the multiple (national and Union) levels and the compound character of this system, but also with the variety of views and preferences that are articulated at the national level. As we have seen from the IntUne survey data, behind the broad support for the supranational polity and the pursuit of the integration process, national politicians express rather different views when it comes to designing the institutional structure of the EU. Since via their governments, national elites have the power of veto over all major Union decisions, it is not surprising that complex institutional schemes such as those provided by the Lisbon Treaty are produced.

The Financial Crisis of 2008–2011 and Its Impact on the Union

In the previous sections, I have discussed how the institutional system of the EU has evolved and analysed the views of national elites concerning developments related to the EU system of governance. While results highlighted a significant degree of parallelism between opinions and real world change, what emerged fundamentally is that, given the absence of a dominant actor (or dominant coalition), and given the variety of elite preferences about the goals and instruments related to deeper EU integration, construction of the EU has progressed according to a compound model combining elements of different models. The resulting system of governance has a kind of circular effect, whereby the system continues to protect the role of national elites and provides only to a limited extent institutional opportunities for a more integrated European elite to develop. In this way, the construction of truly European elite progresses very slowly and at the margins, leaving the European elite system largely dominated by national elites that by definition have a mixture of converging and diverging interests and views.

The third step of our inquiry is to examine how such a system behaves during a crisis and to see whether such a challenge produces more significant changes in the European polity, particularly with regard to its elite and institutional configuration. Such a crisis was triggered at the end of 2007 by the subprime mortgages defaults in the USA. Although not arising in Europe, this has proven to be a particularly serious test for all developed countries and for the ability of their political elites to make quick and effective decisions in order to reduce the negative impact of the successive emergencies that followed: the financial and banking crisis, the recession and unemployment crisis, and later, the sovereign debts crisis. How has the European Union, especially its inner core group of countries, faced this crisis? How have a multilevel polity and its "compound elites system" combining national and supranational levels of decision reacted to this challenge? To what extent have national uncoordinated answers prevailed or been balanced by cooperative efforts or truly supranational interventions? Which component of the European elite sys-

tem has taken the lead in front of these problems? And what have been the consequences for the development of a European polity? To what extent has this crisis changed the internal equilibrium of the system?

Some preliminary answer can be reached by examining the main decisions that have been adopted in this period. In any case it is easy to see that the European polity, its identity, and its internal equilibrium have been under serious stress during this period. More than at other occasions, the relationship between national and Union levels has been critically discussed and assessed. Not unexpectedly, the reactions of the European system to the various aspects of the crisis have been slower, weaker, more "polycentric" and less systematic than those of a national state (for instance, the U.S.). At the same time, it must be acknowledged that these reactions have progressively generated considerable changes in the institutional system of the EU, and potentially also in its elite system.

When, in the first stages of the global crisis, the banking systems were hit and economies world-wide went into recession, national governments everywhere reacted with a variety of instruments to help support their own countries and to avoid a worsening of the situation. This was also the case for EU member states. Their first actions, which generally consisted of support for their banks and other economic institutions, were fundamentally guided by national self-interest and were uncoordinated at the European level. National elites, faced with the risk of bank defaults and high rises in unemployment resorted to their traditional repertoire of instruments of economic intervention (plus some new, less traditional tools, which were quickly devised) without waiting for a common European response. Due to the high coordination costs and the lack of experimented European tools such a response would have been rather difficult to put swiftly in place. If national actions pretended to show that within the European shell, national elites still had the capacity to act, they were definitely not the end of the story: uncoordinated actions were soon seen as having a negative impact upon the rules and principles of the common European market. This, and the failure of purely national measures to solve the problems fully, stimulated demand for coordinated and common action, which institutions of the EU (especially the Commission) were keen to encourage. These actions, however, were slower to arrive and were primarily of a defensive and reactive nature: their purpose was mainly to avoid too much damage to the continued construction of Europe. Among these actions, one can highlight the creation of new procedures and institutions at the Union level with the purpose of harnessing national actions and making them more compatible with a common interest. Putting in place more active instruments of intervention took much longer, and initially only ad hoc measures related to a specific situation were introduced that were only followed later by more comprehensive and general instruments. The different phases of the crisis touching in turn the banking system, the growth rates of the economy, national budgetary policies, and the sustainability of the sovereign debt, have triggered a variety of responses.

The bank crisis occurred because there is no common European surveillance system (the ECB does not have such powers), but the seriousness of some of the cases and the subsequent consequences soon stimulated debate about the need for financial supervision within the EU to go beyond the purely national level of control. One result was the creation of new supervisory authorities for banking (the European Banking Authority), insurance (the European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority) and securities sectors (the European Securities and Markets Authority)[25]. These authorities, which became operational in 2011, will not substitute but rather complement existing national ones, and contribute to their coordination. It must also be noted that solving the bank crisis created a major burden for some states with impor-

tant consequences for their budgetary discipline (and thus for the other dimensions of the crisis).

Also concerning the stimulation of the economy to drive it out of the recession the intervention of the EU was almost absent compared to that of national states. Given the limited budgetary resources of the Union, any serious intervention would have required a major change in what is probably the most delicate and crystallized equilibrium of the European polity, the allocation of re-sources between national and supranational levels. Indeed, a debate about the possibility of issuing "Eurobonds"[26] to pay for common investments as an instrument for stimulating growth began but no decision was taken. In fact, the only "European actor" that acted concretely on this aspect of the crisis and obviously only within the limits of the Eurozone was the European Central Bank, which introduced some measures for expanding the liquidity of the market, but still with some restraint, given its fears of growing inflation, which induced it to make a somewhat contradictory move and raise interest rates twice in 2011.

As can be seen, the Union was not a very significant mover, at best making some effort towards coordination. Its lack of operational capacity stimulated some limited institutional changes and discussions about future changes. More relevant things did happen, however, in other fields where the crisis had a more direct affect on areas where European integration has gone further (but is also limited to only some of the member states, those who are part of the Eurozone). This has been the case in particular for national budgetary policies and their discipline.

It is relevant to devote some attention to this topic as it offers a clear example of a typical "European", incremental process of institution building. The principle that members of the Euro group should maintain budgetary discipline in order to protect the Euro from excessive state deficits and high state debts had been established along with the adoption of the common currency. But the "Stability and Growth Pact" of 1997 that embodied this rule was too weak to prevail over national decisions, so that, in 2005, it was not too difficult for France and Germany to bend the rules and violate the three per cent deficit threshold fixed by the Pact. This, and the much bigger deficits produced by the countercyclical measures introduced by member states, have forced the Union to upgrade its instruments of control. In September 2010, the decision was adopted to put the so called "European semester" — a procedure by which national budgets have to be examined and verified for adherence to the economic policy guidelines of the community before they can be finalised by national authorities — into operation from 2011 onwards. The European powers of control were thus augmented, although remaining predominantly of a regulatory and reactive type. Nevertheless this measure introduced a potentially important change: a fundamental instrument of national policy-making was now subject to some sort of common European process and the (partial) control of European authorities.

With the spreading of the crisis to the field of sovereign debt, it became clear that reactive and regulatory means were insufficient to avoid the possibility of national defaults and to protect the common currency from their negative consequences. This opened a dramatic soul searching exercise, involving national elites and the embryonic European elite, on the principles to be followed and the instruments to be adopted. The questions were at the same time practical and normative: what should be done in order to avoid the default of one or more countries; was it right to save "profligate countries;" and to what extent did solidarity within the Eurozone and among its member countries have to be pushed? These were also questions about the interests (national or European) at stake, and about the responsibilities of the political elites. As in the case of the rules of budgetary discipline, the search for solutions has been incremental, but this time the pace has been more rapid, essen-

tially because of the accelerating pressures coming from the financial markets and the default risks extending rapidly from Ireland, to Greece and Portugal, and then possibly to Italy and Spain, and maybe even France!

The creation of a fund that would operate as a safety net for a European country facing solvency problems was at the centre of the discussion. Why should other more prudent countries prevent the default and share the responsibilities of the countries in difficulty? How large should the intervention fund be? Should such interventions be carried out on an ad hoc basis or through a permanent instrument? Who should be in charge of guiding the operations? This debate has generated an interesting and tense dialectic between the different components of the European elite system. National elites of the potentially contributing and the potentially receiving countries have participated actively, on one side echoing the resentment of public opinion against having to shoulder the costs of the failure of another country, and on the other side, showing reluctance to accept the conditions attached to the external help. In this case, perhaps more than in any other, what may be rightly called a component of the truly European elite — the leadership of the European Central Bank (ECB) — has participated with a strong voice in the discussion defending the principle that a member of the Euro should not be left to fail, lest the credibility of the common currency is seriously damaged. As a result of this debate, which extended more or less over a year and a half, the Union has progressed from ad hoc to general and from smaller to larger instruments of intervention. The twin principles of stronger solidarity within the Eurozone and stronger accountability of national decision-makers with regard to the EU have made important step forward. Although the process is far from finished, its provisional results signal not only a policy change, with the readiness to sustain countries in difficulty[27] and the creation of new institutions in 2010 — the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) and the European Financial Stability Mechanism (EFSM) — and instruments to manage the problem, but also the strengthening of the principle of European solidarity. All this may be interpreted as a significant step forward in the polity building process. It is interesting also to notice that the most important of these institutions, the EFSF, which was endowed with a large fund guaranteed by all Euro states to provide loans to Eurozone countries, already had to be reformed within the first year[28] to expand its resources and to enable it to use a wider spectrum of instruments (among which is also the possibility of buying national securities). Moreover it was decided to transform what was originally conceived as a temporary facility into a permanent instrument. At the same time the interventions of the ECB for sustaining the ability of indebted nations to borrow was significantly stepped up during summer 2011.

The crucial contribution of the ECB technocracy in producing a European response to this aspect of the crisis may be interpreted as indicating a step forward in the formation of a genuinely European elite. This, of course, should not make us to forget the importance of the role of national leaders (particularly those of the big countries like France and Germany) and of the intense summitry activity they have conducted in this period. But the existence of another voice, less affected by the constraints originating from national accountability mechanisms, was an important factor in asserting a more explicit conception of the European interest.

If we now take stock of this discussion, we can highlight two main developments. First, we have a stricter subordination of national decisions to European scrutiny with the purpose of preserving the Union norms. Second, we witness the creation of a more articulated system of central institutions endowed with greater resources and powers of intervention vis-à-vis member states. Under this heading we must also underline the

strengthening of an existing institution (the ECB). These developments have not subverted the basic structure of the European polity but have significantly altered the internal balance between its components and levels. The role of national elites has not been suppressed, but has been further constrained into more Union-based procedures in which they have to participate. Union level technocratic elites (belonging to the ECB, the Commission and other new authorities) have received further powers to regulate, scrutinise, criticise and, in part, substitute or direct the actions of national elites. This impact is obviously more significant for the weaker member states that have become more dependent on external help[29].

The crisis has revealed that national, democratically elected elites are losing control of crucial decisions at the expense of Brussels-centred technocratic or bureaucratic elites. It has also contributed to empowering European elites, so that the balance of responsibilities can be seen to have shifted towards the EU institutions and their elites. In this way, however, the European polity appears increasingly unbalanced from the democratic point of view: the empowerment of European elites has so far mainly affected its technocratic and bureaucratic components with a very indirect democratic legitimacy, and it is unclear to what extent the various national populations will be willing to accept the recipes for the solution of the crisis offered by these elites. This is all the more so if the success of the solutions is not very evident or is delayed, while sacrifices are immediate and apparent. The fragility of their political legitimation may be quickly exposed, and with it that of the European polity they increasingly try to keep afloat.

In a world where democracy is the supreme political value, such technocratic elites cannot be completely self-sufficient; they need other authorities to select them. The fact that this cannot yet be done by Europe-wide democratically selected elites produces a striking imbalance between weakened but democratically accountable national elites and strengthened but democratically not accountable European elites. The ability of these elites not only to develop the solutions but also to "sell" them to the public is thus problematic. Equally problematic is their ability to contribute to the development of a more cohesive supranational identity and solidarity, without which there can be no willingness for sacrifice. The risk is that national (democratic) elites will oscillate between compliance and complaint, but without fully taking the responsibility for difficult decisions. A serious political problem then lies ahead for a European polity.

Conclusion

The broad support for the European polity and the institutionalisation of its structure enables an incremental development of its institutions and the build up of new ones. This, however, happens only along the lines of a multilevel and compound model that tries to safeguard a delicate balance between national and Union levels. This effort tends to produce an increasingly complicated (and often burdensome) institutional system. It has also important and interesting effects for the development of the European elite system. Thanks to the increasing role assigned to the EU level in solving some problems that nation states are not able to deal with, the development of a truly European elite system is bound to speed up. But this happens essentially to the advantage of a technocratic and bureaucratic elite. National democratic elites seem more ready to accept the strengthening of an elite type that is very different (in terms of skills, legitimacy, etc.) from them. Strong central technocratic and bureaucratic elites have a crucial role to play in order to ensure the implementation of (national) commitments in a very decentralized Union. National political elites are much more reluctant to give way when it comes to the political legitimation of important policies. This leaves the problem of the legitimacy of the supranational polity and of its policies unsolved and probably aggravated.

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[16] Hooghe L., Marks G. Op. cit.

[17] Fabbrini S. Compound Democracy. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2007.

[18] Cotta M. A «Compound» Model of Citizenship? European Citizenship in the Eyes of National Elites. Paper presented at the IntUne General Assembly, November 27–30, 2008 in Lisbon, Portugal.

[19] The votes of each country are determined by its population weight so that the "Union" principle applies — but the count favours the smaller countries, thus attenuating the "Union" principle with some elements of the "nation" principle.

[20] That is 55% of Member States, currently 15 out of 27, representing at least 65% of the population

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[22] The countries covered in the 2007 survey were Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, United Kingdom (to these should be added a non member state, Serbia, which is not analyzed here). In the 2009 survey Estonia is missing.

[23] Cotta M., Russo F. Op. cit.

[24] Cotta M., Russo F. Op. cit.

[25] The decision was taken in September 2010 by the Council of Financial ministers (ECOFIN) in agreement with the European Parliament.

[26] Eurobonds, i.e. securities issued by a European authority, are not a new topic as they had been proposed already in the past, notably by Jacques Delors. The discussion about them has become with the crisis le ss academic and more intense.

[27] In practice, this meant bending the treaty rule that explicitly excluded a community bail out.

[28] According to a decision of the European Council of July 2011.

[29] A good example was the sudden decision of the Italian government in August 2011 to change its budgetary framework, which had been introduced just a month before, and to advance the balancing of the budget by one year to 2013. This extraordinary step was explicitly requested by a letter of the ECB to the Italian government as a precondition for the decision of the Central Bank to buy on a large scale on the secondary market Italian treasury bonds and thus contribute to pus hing down their interest rates.