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Clara Isabella Siegle

EMU Reform Mechanisms

A Multi-Level Analysis of the European Sovereign Debt Crisis in a Case Study of Ireland and Spain

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EU Studies | 1

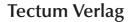
Edited by Prof. Dr. Christian Lequesne and Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Wessels

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With a Foreword by Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Wessels



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Foreword

Confronted with the serious consequences of a polycrisis, it is highly relevant to study the EU's mechanisms to deal with the Sovereign Debt Crisis as a case study to understand the reactions of the EU and its Member States to past and present challenges.

Clara Siegle's MA thesis, written at the College of Europe during the academic year 2022/2023 under supervision of Professor Westlake, a leading expert on EU policies, presents a stimulating analysis of the interplay between the national and the European level. As a considerable added value, we can profit from Siegle's approach to develop – with a critical review of the theoretical literature on the EU's multilevel system – a theoretical framework of an "upward spiral of mutually perpetuated reform". We can also benefit from her test of three hypotheses by using the empirical evidence of two different countries as highly significant case studies.

The conclusion offers a valid contribution to the academic research on the EU's crisis management and to the political debate on how the EU and its members should deal with major challenges.

Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Wessels

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Further acknowledgements are extended to Prof. Michele Chang, Prof. Gabriel Glöckler, and Prof. George Pagoulatos of the College of Europe whose classes on the European sovereign debt crisis, the European Economic and Monetary Union, and the Political Economy of European Integration provided me with profound background knowledge on the thesis topic.

I would also like to express my profound gratitude to Prof. Wolfgang Wessels for his continued support of my research activities and his key role in enabling the publication of this thesis. I am thankful to him and the team of the Tectum Verlag for their valuable help towards this publication.

Abstract

This paper explores the mechanisms behind the emergence of reform on the national and on the European level during the European sovereign debt crisis by asking itself how these adjustments were enabled when reform had faced substantial constraints on both levels in the years prior to the crisis. The paper establishes a theoretical framework of an *upward* spiral of mutually perpetuated reform by basing its approach on a multilevel analysis of reform-enhancing and -restraining factors in the national and the supranational realm. This approach regards the high level of interdependence between the member states and the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) as the reason behind the accelerated reform implementation in the crisis years, claiming that the exceptional situation of the eurocrisis created a unique window of opportunity for change on the national and on the supranational level. More precisely, adjustments were enabled by each level possessing weaknesses whose change however was constrained due to level-specific factors. Thus, only the pressure exercised by the respective other level enabled the implementation of reform once the urgency of the crisis necessitated adjustments as the only remedy against collective failure.

To exemplify its claims, this paper analyses two of the most affected countries of the European sovereign debt crisis, Ireland and Spain, and assesses the interaction of these member states with the supranational level in the establishment of reform. With the help of three hypotheses, a holistic analysis of the mechanisms behind the eurocrisis reforms is enabled, regarding the interconnected system both in its entirety and in its individual levels of member states and the EMU.

Abstract

The first hypothesis claims that the high degree of interdependence between the two levels existed in the implementation of reforms due to the integrated, yet incomplete nature of their relation, rendering each level dependent on the other to implement much-needed reform to counter the crisis effects. The second hypothesis concentrates on the member-state level, arguing that change in Ireland and Spain would not have been possible without the intervention of the European level as national reform was constrained by domestic factors. The member states' dependence on the EMU's financial assistance created the necessary impetus to establish reform due to the strict conditionality that the supranational aid encompassed. In a mirrored logic, the third hypothesis claims that previously impossible change to the supranational level of the EMU was only enabled in the crisis context when member state failure necessitated the intervention by a strong and credible EMU that was only attainable through the implementation of change to its lacking architecture.

Applying the real-world evidence of reforms achieved in Ireland, Spain, and the EMU to its claims, the paper concludes that the substantial reforms which each level implemented during the crisis can be explained with the highly interconnected nature of the member states and the European level because it created the necessary pressure that facilitated reform in an exceptional situation where the contextual urgency and risks at stake allowed for change that had previously been constrained.

Keywords

EMU Reform European integration European sovereign debt crisis Two-level interdependence Ireland Spain

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Figure 1: The spiral of mutually perpetuated reform

List of Abbreviations

CEBS	Committee of European Banking Supervisors
EBA	European Banking Authority

ECB European Central Bank
EDP Excessive Deficit Procedure

EFSF European Financial Stability Facility
EFSM European Financial Stability Mechanism

EIP Excessive Imbalance Procedure
EMU Economic and Monetary Union
ESM European Stability Mechanism
ESRB European Systemic Risk Board

EU European Union

GDP Gross Domestic Product

H Hypothesis

List of Abbreviations

IMF Internation	nal Monetary Fund
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MIP Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure

NAMA National Asset Management Agency (Ireland)

OHIO "Own House In Order"

OMT Outright Monetary Transactions

PEPP Pandemic Emergency Purchase Programme

SAREB Sociedad de Gestión de Activos Procedentes de la

Reestructuración Bancaria (Spanish "bad bank")

SGP Stability and Growth Pact

SMP Securities Markets Programme

SRF Single Resolution Fund

SRM Single Resolution Mechanism SSM Single Supervisory Mechanism

TFEU Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

USA United States of America