

TransSOL Research Summary 1: Facts and Analysis on Solidarity in Europe

The legal, political and socio-economic context of transnational solidarity (WP1)

Summary

Solidarity is a common constitutional principle across the eight countries surveyed as part of the TransSOL project. This means that in all countries, solidarity is a legitimate source of law and policy, and it should guide the choices of public authorities and policy-makers at all levels of government. Moreover, courts, and especially constitutional courts, supreme courts and the European Court of Justice, are legitimised to use solidarity as a paradigm of constitutionality in litigation, and are called on to decide the reasonableness of departures from measures applying solidarity.

However, in the three areas looked at in the TransSOL project, solidarity measures have been weakened since the crisis. Arguments of the market imperative have been used to weaken unemployment protections, securitisation has been used to limit solidarity in migration, and there has been a reduction in welfare to reduce solidarity for those with disabilities. This has occurred even where rights were strongly entrenched in law, such as in the case of solidarity for persons with disabilities.

Attempts by the EU to develop policies that meet the challenges of these crises have tended to fall short of public expectations, with national governments reluctant to sign up. This reluctance may not only stem from national interest, but is also due to challenges in the very nature of the EU, which has prevented it from undertaking more effective measures to enhance solidarity. In both respects, the effect of the crisis has and is changing this balance, with opportunities for

the EU to take a larger role in promoting cooperation and solidarity between Member States.

European Policy Recommendations

EU Institutions, particularly the Commission and Parliament, should identify opportunities to harmonise European solidarity policies in areas the EU has competence and should work with Member States to minimise challenges for citizens in areas where it does not.

Disability rights

The Institutions and Member States should proactively identify ways to increase solidarity for persons with disabilities at the EU level in line with 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This could include promoting full implementation of the “Employment Equality Directive”, including thorough guidelines on “disability” and “reasonable accommodation” and pushing for the adoption of the 2008 draft Equal Treatment Directive.

Unemployment

The Institutions and Member States should ensure that unemployment protections are increased in line with human rights obligations and the European Social Charter. This could include harmonising national unemployment schemes with a view to improving the rights and services in Member States with fewer protections.

Migration and asylum

Institutions should take steps to ensure that rules and policies on asylum and reception conditions are harmonised across the EU. They should also support solidarity between Member States on asylum seekers through Article 80 TFEU.

Civil society

Civil society organisations (CSOs) have been reluctant users of the courts, relative to other actions, in seeking to protect solidarity measures. CSOs should make more use of constitutional and other legal principles that could enable them to protect solidarity mechanisms through the legal system.

Research Findings

Solidarity, either explicitly or implicitly, is a constitutional paradigm in all TransSOL countries (Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Switzerland and the United Kingdom) and at the EU level. In legal and political terms, this has relevant implications: In all countries, solidarity is a legitimate source of law and policy and should guide the choices of public authorities and policy-makers at all levels of government. Additionally, courts, especially constitutional courts, supreme courts and the European Court of Justice, are legitimised to use solidarity as a paradigm of constitutionality in litigation, and are called on to decide the reasonableness of any eventual departure from the application of solidarity. At the constitutional level, solidarity may be embedded in three different dimensions:

- the vertical, which connects the citizen with the State and allows for the interconnection between the rights and duties defining the political community. This includes both times when the individual can count on the support of the state, for example in social benefits,

and when the individual is obliged to contribute to the community;

- the horizontal, open to peer-to-peer relations among citizens that mutually recognise the other person's human dignity. This includes the ability to support and be a part of voluntary organisations or tax incentives for donating to charity; and

- the territorial, in decentralised states, which allows sub-national entities to overcome a narrow understanding of political community in order to collaborate in pursuit of the common good of the whole national community.

Mutatis mutandis, solidarity assumes vertical and horizontal dimensions also in EU primary legislation (embodied in the treaties), which, however, face a problematic implementation in the legal and policy framework, especially in the policy domains of unemployment and migration/asylum.

Despite this legal protection and despite the differences experienced in the eight countries during and since the crisis, all countries surveyed have seen a retrenchment in solidarity. The market imperative has been used to justify reductions in solidarity for the unemployed, security for migration and welfare reform for persons with disabilities.

Solidarity in the fields of unemployment, migration and disability does not necessarily relate to explicit constitutional principles in the eight countries looked at, but rather conforms to implicit or explicit principles of solidarity. In all three of these areas, levels of protection have been impacted since the crisis in all eight countries. This has occurred whether or not the country has been affected by the crisis.

Unemployment

The 2008 global economic crisis had very different effects in terms of unemployment

across TransSOL countries. While some countries were severely hit by the economic and financial crisis, especially Southern European countries, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland and, partially, Poland faced a more modest impact. The picture of policy and legislative responses in the field of unemployment, however, shows differentiated patterns that do not necessarily adhere to the relative impact of the crisis.

In Italy and Greece, where the impact of the crisis led to high levels of unemployment, reforms were both severe and structural, including huge changes to the labour market laws. In both countries, protections against dismissals were reduced and more flexible labour markets were promoted, in Italy with a corresponding increase in unemployment coverage to address increased periods of unemployment between more precarious jobs.

In France and the UK, where the effects of the crises were less, reforms were structural, but more moderate than in Italy and Greece. In France, this took the form of reduced costs on employers for overtime and the ability to dismiss workers more easily for economic reasons. In the UK, this took the form of stricter sanctions on job seekers not taking up employment or not accepting volunteer placements while receiving job-seeking social support. In Poland, where the crisis had limited impact, structural reforms were undertaken but these were relatively minor and part of an increasing liberalisation of the labour market.

Denmark, Germany and Switzerland, on the other hand, only implemented minor, temporary measures. Germany, for example, responded by increasing economic stimulus measures, continuing its implementation of a tightening of rights under the low-paid “Hartz IV” employment scheme, despite little crisis impact. Meanwhile, Switzerland and Denmark

continued the reforms already underway in their labour markets.

Migration

The economic crisis was followed by a ‘refugee’ crisis that especially affected Mediterranean countries, including Italy and Greece. Immigration and asylum laws were generally amended in all TransSOL countries and more restrictive measures were adopted, except in Poland and Greece. This occurred regardless of the country’s actual involvement in the migration crisis, signalling a politicisation of this issue and the increasing importance given to populist claims.

Denmark and Switzerland, for example, both tightened their immigration regimes during the crisis period, despite neither facing large-scale economic difficulties or a large influx of people. Poland on the other hand, while not experiencing large numbers of migrants, relaxed its immigration laws, largely to conform to EU standards.

Countries more effected by the movement of refugees – Italy, Greece and Germany – had differing policy responses. Germany tightened its asylum rules and solidarity measures for asylum seekers sharply after the arrival of large numbers of asylum seekers, while reforms in Italy largely focussed on undocumented migration and criminality. At the same time Greece liberalised aspects of its immigration laws that had previously been restrictive.

Disability

In Germany, France, Italy, Denmark and Greece, there were no significant reforms coming out of the financial crisis regarding disability. In the UK, Switzerland and Poland reforms changed the mechanisms but not the principles. This has consequences for disability, a field where intersectionality and multiple types of discrimination is very rele-

vant. Disadvantages in the intersection between disability and, for example, unemployment, gender, race, class, etc. are likely to become more severe, and this is related to why austerity measures tend to have a stronger impact on people with disabilities. The introduction of the system of means testing for services and benefits in several countries and the reforms of the welfare system generally have meant a further increase in the vulnerability of people with disabilities. This occurred especially during the first years of the crisis, even in countries not strongly economically affected such as Denmark, Switzerland and Poland.

A European solution?

While efforts to bolster solidarity at a European level are also at risk, a number of key challenges could be addressed that would not only shore up the horizontal and vertical dimensions of European solidarity, but could also strengthen solidarity in general in Europe.

The horizontal dimension of solidarity at the European level has been dramatically threatened, first by the economic crisis and subsequently by the increase of migration flows and the incapacity of European leaders to agree on a burden-sharing-based asylum policy, which would have provided evidence of inter-state solidarity. More recently, the Brexit vote has wounded horizontal European solidarity. In general, on the horizontal level, the crisis has exacerbated the public perception about the uneven capacity that Member States have for seizing the benefits of the European integration process: Some countries appear more capable of seizing the opportunities offered by the single market whereas others seem to struggle to achieve that.

When asylum and migration issues are at stake, the European Commission has taken a timid approach, by proposing mechanisms designed to operate primarily in emergency

situations, and has proved to be unable to structurally apply solidarity to European asylum legislation. In the spring of 2017, the Commission opened infringement procedures against the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland for non-compliance with their obligations under the 2015 Council Decisions on relocation following the massive influxes of asylum seekers fleeing from the Syrian conflict.

In the sphere of employment and disability, which are intertwined, the economic crisis has critically worsened the living conditions of people, raising concern and mistrust towards the European process of integration, ultimately strengthening populism and nationalism. EU intervention has also played a crucial role in creating a social-model based understanding of disability other than a medical one alone, and solidarity *vis-à-vis* disabled people has been implemented by the adoption of a progressive, human rights-based policy framework, endowed with a proper long-term, cross-policy, strategy in addition to monitoring instruments for its implementation.

The vertical dimension of European solidarity has also had to face challenges. A key challenge is represented by the inconsistencies created between the commonalities underpinning the single market and the monetary union and the still nationally based social provisions that usually serve the purpose of accompanying the development of a market economy, from both the social security and the welfare provision side. The European system can therefore still be said to be made up of 'separate' social systems that the EU sometimes forces or attempts to put in communication with efficient – though not sufficient – policy coordination methods.

In the field of immigration and asylum, the unequal distribution of burdens has severely prejudiced the system of reception of those states subjected to higher levels of pressure,

showing the incapacity of the EU and its Member States to respect the principle of solidarity as well as the essential fundamental rights of refugees and asylum seekers.

On the employment side, on 16 November 2016, in its Annual Growth Survey 2017 Communication, the Commission outlined the main features of its jobs and growth agenda, realising that the European Union's economy is experiencing a moderate recovery. The

Commission affirmed that the economic performance and social conditions, as well as reform implementation, remain uneven across the EU. Many economies still face the far-reaching challenges of high, long-term youth unemployment, with an unprecedented inflow of refugees and asylum seekers, representing a significant, new phenomenon in some Member States.

Annex: Country Legal Snapshots

Denmark

The principle of solidarity is rooted in the 1849 Danish Constitution (Grundloven) granting public assistance for those in need. Over the years, solidarity as a core principle of Danish society has facilitated the establishment of a strong welfare system based on universal access to state-funded services. Denmark, like other Nordic countries, has a universal social-democratic welfare state tradition, where welfare state and community are closely related. General trust in institutions, the Danish work ethic, volunteerism and high taxation contribute to the maintenance of the welfare state and its relative stability over time. Denmark has nevertheless moved away from this Scandinavian model in the important sense of having developed the flexicurity model, which is combined with a system of earning access rights to welfare benefits. This has laid the ground for an increasing emphasis on individual initiative, responsibility and merit. The flexicurity model has combined neoliberal and communitarian elements, and it has allowed the Danish government to insist on a more exclusive principle restricting services over time, for example for the unemployed and for migrants. Denmark can therefore be seen as undergoing a slow but steady transformation from a universal and inclusive model of high protection to a liberal model of subsidiarity, relying increasingly on market dynamics and providing only for the basic needs of its citizens.

France

Drawing on a mixed tradition of solidarity and subsidiarity, France today has both public and private forms of solidarity reflected in legislation. In private law, this solidarity exists both in issues such as family law, where members of a family are obliged to support each other, and in areas such as civil law, where, for example, debtors can enter into a relationship of solidarity with regards their creditor. In public law, solidarity is understood as a bond of mutual assistance that takes the general form of national solidarity. A special trait of French Republicanism is the strong association that exists between solidarity and the nation. In the French spirit, tolerance and respect are more important for peaceful coexistence than having “common values” or than the creation of a “common project”. Coexistence among individuals is the first concern of living together. This means that national solidarity is a guarantee of assistance between members of the same community. This deep linkage between solidarity and the nation can entail a solidarity tax, an exceptional tax intended to help the state to face a crisis situation, as with the 1945 “impôt de solidarité nationale” (national solidarity tax). It can also be used to finance a sector of the economy particularly affected by an economic downturn, as was the case with the “impôt sécheresse” (drought tax) of 1976, or even to shore up a social system in deficit or to help a specific category of the population, as with the “journée de solidarité” (solidarity day). The latter was instituted by the law of 30 June 2004 (Art. 2) and then renewed in the Loi Travail of 2016, designating an additional day’s work (seven hours) of solidarity by employees without additional compensation. The French Constitutional Council has referred many times to the notion of solidarity. In its jurisprudence, the term solidarity has a plurality of meanings, using the terms “mécanisme” (mechanism) of solidarity, “principe de solidarité” (principle of solidarity), “exigence de solidarité” (solidarity requirement) and “objectif de solidarité” (solidarity objective), sometimes relying on several of them in the same decision. Under a progressively liberalising regime and the growth of neo-liberalism, solidarity in France has maintained its resilience through its existence as concrete norms, both legal ones and political and social ones, that compel the state to act and also encourage society to be active citizens in support of solidarity.

Germany

Solidarity is not explicitly mentioned in the German Basic Law (constitution), but has been implied as being a constitutional principle by the Federal Constitutional Court and legal scholars. The German constitution does however explicitly codify the principle of the social welfare state (Art. 20 para. 1 and 28 para. GG), guaranteeing a minimum level of social welfare and a universal subsistence minimum, defined as entitling each citizen to the provision of a material minimum needed to cover their daily subsistence (Heun 2011: 200). This has repeatedly been confirmed by the Federal Constitutional Court, for instance, very prominently in its recent verdict on the minimal provision of social “Hartz IV” benefits (BVerfG, Judgement of the First Senate of 09 Feb., 2010 - 1 BvL 1/09 – “Hartz IV judgement”) and of asylum seeker benefits (BVerfG, Judgement of the First Senate of 18 July, 2012 - 1 BvL 10/10). Furthermore, the constitution includes the principle of federalism (Art. 20 para. 1, Art 30 and Art 79 para. 3 GG). This means that Germany is a federal state where powers are divided and shared between the central state and the 16 federal states. Interestingly, at the level of the constitutions of the federal states, the picture is more complex than at the national level. Similarly to the Basic Law, the constitutions of the former West German federal states do not explicitly mention solidarity. In comparison, solidarity is directly referred to or equivalently addressed as a basic principle of state action in the constitutional preambles of the new, East German federal states; sometimes as abstract expectation and sometimes as concrete obligation of the respective federal state (Piazolo 2004: 170- 172). Despite the lack of explicit references in the constitution and legislation, solidarity is well entrenched in Germany society. A major pillar of solidarity is the German welfare state. It provides people in need with a broad range of social services and facilities, but is based on previous contributions and occupational status. This means that while those within the social insurance schemes are well protected, those outside are only offered minimum levels of social support. The family, if not to the same extent as Mediterranean countries, still also plays a large role in the German social system, with certain benefits geared to support family life and certain means-tested benefits being based upon family income.

Greece

Solidarity is enshrined in the Greek Constitution. In particular, the principle of solidarity is included in Article 25, paragraph 4 which states that every adult citizen has the right to participate in the social, economic and political life of the country. The State and all its agents are directed to ensure that individual rights and liberties are exercised fully. The State may, for its part, call on all citizens "to fulfil the duty of social and national solidarity". More concretely, the principle of solidarity has traditionally been strongly associated with the Greek welfare state (guaranteed by the aforementioned Article 25 of the Constitution) and particularly the public pension system. Since 2010 however Greece has been experiencing an unprecedented economic, social and political crisis that has profoundly affected both the living conditions of the majority and the functioning of the entire institutional apparatus. The deep recession and the harsh austerity policies implemented during this period have influenced all aspects of social life, as large parts of the population have suffered a great loss of income, while young Greeks have faced crises of unemployment, poverty, insecurity, fear, anger and pessimism regarding the future. During the early crisis years, domestic courts generally demonstrated an ambivalent attitude towards the ways in which solidarity, as well as human dignity and decent living, are safeguarded through the pension reforms implemented as part of the state's fiscal adjustment efforts. Over the years that followed, however, the judicial stance altered, with the Court of Auditors (CA) finding that while the European Convention on Human Rights and the Greek Constitution did not safeguard a right to a pension of a particular amount and accepted that under severe economic conditions, the legislator could adopt restrictive measures to decrease public spending, due respect for the requirements of Articles 2 and 4(5) of the Greek Constitution should

be ensured, so as to preserve adequate living conditions, especially for vulnerable persons. Building on this, the Court of Auditors found that the "cumulative" effect of the various measures taken in terms of degrading living conditions and previous cuts in pensions and other benefits, meant that pension cuts were unconstitutional. The Greek case provides support for the claim that there is a link between austerity and the erosion of institutional solidarity underpinning many post-war arrangements that have created the Greek modern social welfare state and economy. The adverse effects of this linkage have been more painful for vulnerable groups undermining a set of values such as social justice and equity and the moral foundations of public policy-making. Moreover, solidarity as a normative foundation of the Greek welfare state has been challenged by the ambivalent judicial stance over reductions in pensions and social benefits amid austerity backlash. As a result of the state's failure to provide citizens in need with adequate social policies and services, there is evidence however testifying to the growing presence of the solidarity economy and the possibility of social changes that are conducive to more human-oriented growth models.

Italy

The Italian legal system is grounded in and embedded in a few pivotal principles, among which social solidarity plays an important role (Art. 2). In the last two decades, Italy has undergone deep structural changes that have radically transformed its social, political, economic and legal system. The crisis has exacerbated certain weaknesses in both the socio-economic and legal systems and has created the momentum for the enactment of several reforms. In the wake of both mounting fiscal pressure and new needs created by the crisis, by an ageing population and, in the field of immigration, by sizeable flows of economic migrants and asylum seekers, important legal and policy changes have been implemented. These changes that have had a direct impact on the transformation of the welfare system. Looking at the Italian legal system and at its socio-cultural aspects, there is a curious discrepancy between on the one hand a very strong constitutional entrenchment of solidarity, a quite consistent and diverse legislation stemming from this principle, and rather copious cases grounded on solidarity and, on the other hand, a welfare system that remains characterised by several imbalances, combining a universalistic approach in education and health with a traditional "corporatist" approach in pensions and unemployment measures, and a family-based approach in social care. Recent transformations in social needs, in the economy and in policy-making show that "the Italian way" to solidarity provides solutions based on premises that no longer correspond to reality (one being the structure of the family). The crisis has submitted the Italian solidarity framework to one of the heaviest crash tests ever experienced. It has dramatically unhinged an already unbalanced welfare state and it has eroded some elements of its solidarity and altruistic socio-cultural and legal pillars. Against this background, decision-makers have been tempted to adopt crisis-driven measures not always consistent with the principle of solidarity. As a consequence, the courts, and especially the Constitutional Court, have emerged as a second, very relevant actor for the protection and respect of solidarity as a source of legislation. Indeed, the crisis-driven legislation and policies have generated high levels of contentiousness, and a large number of austerity measures have been challenged in the courts invoking the respect of solidarity, fundamental rights, and equality. In a jurisdiction where solidarity is explicitly mentioned in the Constitution, the Constitutional court refers to the principle as a proper 'constitutional paradigm', and indeed in the past ten years it has constantly referred to solidarity, often in connection with human dignity, equality, labour and subsidiarity, to define the unfringeable perimeter of a society where rights and duties should stem from the very same source: the value of sharing privileges and responsibilities.

Poland

The principle of solidarity appears explicitly only in the preamble of the Polish Constitution and is less often evoked by the Constitutional Court than other values. The meaning of “solidarity” in Poland is however strongly anchored in the specific socio-cultural background and the legacy of the Solidarity movement during communist times. It is also partly mentioned in Art. 20 as one of the elements characterising the social market economy: The social market economy is the basis of the economic system of Poland which is based on freedom of economic activity, private ownership, solidarity, dialogue and cooperation between social partners. “Solidarity” in Art. 20 of the Constitution is however understood in a narrow sense, in that it primarily addresses social partners, i.e. trade unions, employers’ organisations and the authorities of the State when the State is also the employer. Despite this, solidarity is a part of other key principles of the Polish system, such as social dialogue, the common good or social justice and the Polish Constitutional Court acts in line with the philosophy known as “social solidarity” and emphasises this principle in many cases, even though it is not derived from the Constitution directly. Polish constitutionalists state that solidarity is not fully recognised by courts, and it is an intrinsic constitutional norm in process of becoming canon. Social solidarity is also seen as the basis for the public welfare state, including the public system of social assistance and social insurance. The essence of this principle manifests itself mainly in breaking a link (the equivalency) between contributions paid and the amount of benefit received. Because of this and historical-social factors, solidarity is a principle which causes many paradoxes in Poland. On the one hand the “obligation of solidarity” written in the preamble of the Polish Constitution suggests that it is one of the principles that forms the basis of the state system. On the other however, Polish constitutionalists show that the principle of solidarity inscribed in the Polish Constitution is rather a “general idea”, impossible to define, unclear, with a nonbinding character. The Constitutional Court often refers to “solidarity”, especially “the social solidarity” principle, but rather as the part of other principles. Moreover, in times of crisis of the functioning of the Constitutional Court, it is unclear and difficult to foresee how it will adjudicate in the future, under political pressure. The second paradox is that Poland, the country of the “Solidarity” movement that helped to overthrow communism, has implemented post 1989 rather neoliberal political and economic solutions, based more on individualism than on social solidarity. Finally, although still a Catholic country where almost 90% of citizens declare themselves as Catholic, it is also one of the countries with the lowest levels of empathy and tolerance, both of which are vehemently necessary for solidarity to thrive.

Switzerland

The Swiss ethos for solidarity strongly refers to social cohesion inside the various territorial levels of the nation-state. Swiss federalism accommodates diversity and autonomy as the mechanism that accounts for the political and social equilibrium between the shared-rule at the federal level and the self-rule at the cantonal level. Solidarity and federalism are subject to the cultural and territorial complexity of the state, which ascribes a core set of values and duties that hold together cantons and citizens’ peaceful coexistence and well-being. The preamble of the 1999 Swiss Constitution recognises the principle of solidarity as one of the fundamental values that governs Swiss society. Furthermore, it defines the Swiss state’s spirit as one in solidarity and openness towards the world, embedded in pivotal values such as diversity, sustainability, democracy and mutual consideration. While the principle of solidarity is only included in the Constitution as a declaration of intentions that guides the legal order, other laws explicitly include solidarity provisions. The 2004 Federal Financial Reform, for example, includes the principle of subsidiarity through allowing the federal government to equalise financial resources and burdens, to enhance internal cohesion and to reduce inequalities between cantons or prejudice towards people that benefit from collective services. It also recognises the state and cantonal duty to ensure every person has access to social security

(Art. 41). The Swiss welfare state is, in scope and structure of social schemes, similar to the continental insurance-based model of social security contributions, while also combining residual liberal traits. These schemes are mostly regulated at the federal level but their implementation takes place at cantonal level, which varies importantly from canton to canton. The impact of federalism, direct democracy and diversity results in a complex social-liberal welfare state model at different stages where complementary measures to personal responsibility and private initiative are ensured by the cantons and the Confederation. This legal solidarity is coupled with individual and collective responsibility. For example, following the constitutional revision of 2010, improper claim of solidarity-based benefits (social insurances or aid) gives ground for loss of resident status and deportation of foreign residents (Cst. Art. 121§3 and 5), and Swiss insurance schemes have of late strengthened their anti-fraud and abuse provisions, allowing private investigator-led surveillance.

United Kingdom

Solidarity has been a key ingredient in the existence of the United Kingdom (UK) as a single political authority since its inception. As a pluri-national state bringing together four different nations: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the UK has had to find a balance between what would otherwise be competing solidarities located at different geopolitical levels. Infra-national solidarity (e.g. solidarity among Scottish or Welsh people) must be combined with cross-national forms of solidarities (e.g. Scottish towards Welsh), as well as with a supra-national one (e.g. Scottish towards British). A complex system is therefore necessary to sustain these forms of solidarities at different geo-political levels and has been developed through specific institutions and policies. While the UK does not have a written constitution, from a social-political point of view, this complex web of solidarities has been maintained via the development of the welfare state, namely the establishment of a public health care system, along with public pensions and insurance programmes that have been in place from the early decades of the 20th century. In the UK, like elsewhere, the welfare state as a set of redistributive policies has been a key tool in the promotion of national and supranational identity building, and therefore as a way to create solidarity among citizens. However, such solidarity-creation mechanisms are being seriously challenged by political and political-economic issues. These challenges seem to be a catalyst for the robust revival of national solidarities at the detriment of supranational (British) ones. Some of the mechanisms that have underpinned cross-national solidarity for so many years are now heavily challenged and consequently the basic framework of solidarity that has held together the UK is now at risk. Political-institutional arrangements such as power sharing among different nations and territorial-political actors have been closely scrutinised in their capacity to represent the range of interests and voices to the point that one of the constituent components of the UK, Scotland, has sought independence from the UK through a referendum. Another key-political institution that has guaranteed solidarity, such as the welfare state, has been curtailed by austerity policies following the financial and economic crisis. Finally, supranational solidarity in the form enshrined by the UK membership of the European Union has collapsed following the country's decision, through a referendum held in June 2016, to vote to leave.