

First panel: Crises in the Union since it was established (1989–2008)

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The origins of the current crisis, sparked by the rejection of the Treaty of Lisbon by the people of Ireland in the referendum held in June 2008, can be traced back to the early 1990s. The historic opportunity to reunify the European continent and the determination to consolidate and deepen the European integration process gave rise to a series of challenges that the Member States are still trying to meet. New treaties, from Maastricht to Lisbon, were concluded with the aim of establishing the Union and then of giving it the tools to operate effectively in a wider framework, currently 27 Member States. The failure of the European Constitution and the rejection of the Treaty of Lisbon in Ireland echo the difficulties encountered during the ratification process for the Treaties of Maastricht and Nice. The enlargement of the Union has also raised questions regarding its borders and its ability to adopt a common foreign and security policy in order that it might be equipped for external crises (for example those in the Balkans, Iraq and Georgia). The operation of the Union has also revealed interinstitutional tensions, and doubts remain as to the appropriateness of the way in which it is financed. Finally, regular failures in the referendums held in the various European countries have emphasised the problem of democratic legitimacy in the EU, something which is seen in the growing distance between the European institutions and citizens.