Crisis Europe: Is a State of Emergency Transforming the European Union?

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Since the Eurozone crisis began in 2009, European politics has been in an age of crisis management with ‘rescue packages’ and emergency measures being introduced, purportedly to save the European Union. Writing in Political Studies Dr. Jonathan White asks what this state of emergency means for Europe and what it reflects about the very origins of the E.U. project.

Dr. White argues that far from being exceptional, the crisis may be the occasion, rather than the cause, of political and economic measures long in the planning. For example democratic oversight of budgets and financial institutions are being eroded in the cause of short-term survival, but with permanent effect.

Dr. White argues that crisis measures represent the use of politics in the emergency mode for transformational purposes, to introduce and constitutionalize a new status quo governed by the principle of technocratic expertise, not merely as a temporary means to bring a crisis situation under control.

“Throughout the Euro-crisis, E.U. governments have been invoking a state of emergency to push through fundamental shifts in policy,” said Dr. White. “It looks like a show of strength, but it’s actually a symptom of weak authority. It’s also politically dangerous, because it focuses public attention on the need to restore order when the real question is what kind of order to restore.”