

Foreword:

Living in Times of Polycrisis

In recent years, the term ‘polycrisis’ has been increasingly used by scholars and policymakers to describe the contemporary state of interconnected crises, such as pandemics, climate change, and geopolitical shocks. Like many buzzwords or catchy concepts in social sciences, it has been disputed in terms of its analytical value and novelty. However, the academic discussion about the concept of ‘polycrisis’ and its use in advancing our understanding of current events, their effects, and causal mechanisms has produced insightful and policy-relevant studies.

This special issue aims to enrich this debate by providing a novel analysis of recent multiple crises, their interaction, and their effects on policies and institutions. It focuses on the ways how the governments and public sector organisations of Lithuania, a frontline EU and NATO country, responded to the recent polycrisis from 2021 to 2025.

The special issue starts with an introductory article where we present the ongoing debate about the concept of ‘polycrisis’ and its use in constructing an analytical framework for examining simultaneously occurring crises. These crises mostly originate from growing tensions between the increasingly aggressive authoritarian regimes in Russia, Belarus, and China, and Western democracies. We analyse the policy response to the interrelated crises and their management, their feedback loops, and spillover effects. We do this by examining how they influence the country’s operational responses and strategic decisions, mediated by variables such as dominant policy paradigms,

modes of crises coordination, and governance capacities. We also explore how these policy decisions feed into system-wide changes to crisis management in Lithuania.

The analytical framework is then consistently applied in the three articles, each focusing on a different policy domain and the interplay of crises and policy responses within it. Vainius Bartasevičius, Vytenis Fuks, and Vitalis Nakrošis analyse Lithuania's response to the irregular migration crisis of 2021–2024. They focus on policy responses to the instrumentalisation of irregular migration by Minsk and its interaction with the cost-of-living crisis, which largely stemmed from Russia's weaponisation of energy supplies, and the escalation of sanctions introduced by the EU. The article by Marius Kalanta analyses the management of the energy crisis in Lithuania, focusing on the operational responses adopted since 2022 and the subsequent strategic policy shifts in this domain. Ramūnas Vilpišauskas and Justinas Mickus analyse the use of sanctions and the evolution of Lithuania's sanctions policy and institutions from 2020 to 2025, a period marked by the escalation of Western sanctions in response to violations of international norms by Belarus and Russia.

The special issue concludes with the reflections of the former Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė, who was leading the coalition government of Lithuania during the period of 2020–2024, marked by the resurgence of the COVID-19 pandemic, deteriorating relations with Belarus and China, the start of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, and hybrid attacks against Western democracies. We believe that her insights and *ex-post* assessments of the interplay of different crises and their effects on advancing the government's priorities are invaluable for scholars, practitioners, and anyone interested in crisis management and strengthening resilience to multiple external shocks.

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