GLOBAL RISK ASSESSMENT DATASET AND THE EU'S ROLE

IN THE GOVERNANCE OF GLOBAL RISKS

GRADEU JEAN MONNET MODULE – 2022- 2025

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Research Note - 3

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Research Note 3 – Global Risks and the EU's Governance Capacity: Comparative Findings (2023–2024)

The third stage of the GRADEU Jean Monnet Module focused on comparing the findings of the Global Risk Assessment Dataset (GRAD) with the European Union's policy frameworks. By this stage, the dataset had revealed consistent long-term trends in global risk perception — most notably, the increasing prominence of climate, health, and technological risks alongside the relative decline of traditional security threats. These findings provided a robust empirical base for evaluating how effectively EU governance mechanisms have adapted to these global transformations. The analysis combined two dimensions: first, a longitudinal comparison of risk categories across major global reports published between 1990 and 2024; and second, a qualitative assessment of the EU's strategic responses within the same period. This dual approach allowed the project to map both discourse evolution and policy adaptation, offering a rare perspective on how knowledge about global risks is translated or sometimes lost in the policymaking process. Three major findings emerged from this phase.

First, the European Union demonstrates an impressive framing capacity in articulating complex, interdependent risks. Its major strategic documents — such as the European Green Deal (2019), EU Climate Law (2021), and the Strategic Foresight Reports (2020–2023) — reveal a sophisticated awareness of systemic vulnerabilities that extend beyond conventional policy silos. The EU's use of concepts like resilience, strategic autonomy, and sustainability positions it as a global thought leader in risk governance. However, this conceptual sophistication does not always translate into coherent institutional practice. Implementation remains uneven across sectors, highlighting the persistent gap between ambitious rhetoric and administrative coordination.

Second, institutional fragmentation continues to limit the EU's capacity for anticipatory governance. GRAD's comparative coding indicated that while global institutions such as UNDRR, OECD, and the World Economic Forum increasingly integrate environmental, social, and technological risks under unified frameworks, EU responses remain dispersed among various Directorates-General and policy areas. This results in overlapping mandates, inconsistent timelines, and fragmented monitoring systems. The analysis suggests that without stronger horizontal coordination mechanisms, the EU's potential to act as a truly integrated risk governance actor will remain constrained.

Third, the Union's approach remains largely reactive rather than anticipatory. Crises from the Eurozone turbulence and migration pressures to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine tend to trigger rapid institutional responses but

rarely lead to sustained foresight mechanisms. Although the Strategic Foresight Reports represent a step forward in embedding long-term thinking into EU policymaking, they are still advisory rather than directive in nature. As a result, the EU often excels in crisis management but struggles to institutionalize foresight-driven learning.

This phase of the GRADEU project highlighted the EU's dual character in global governance: ambitious in its vision yet constrained by structural complexity. It reinforced the idea that global leadership in risk governance requires not only strategic framing but also procedural coherence, the ability to align long-term vision with short-term political incentives. The findings underscored the importance of improving inter-institutional coordination, enhancing data integration across Directorates-General, and linking foresight with implementation. By bridging GRAD's empirical insights with broader academic debates on EU actorness, this stage provided a conceptual foundation for the forthcoming edited volume Rethinking European Security. It also offered a valuable teaching outcome for the Module: students were able to engage directly with empirical evidence and critically examine the European Union's role as a laboratory for risk governance innovation.

Further Readings:

Börzel, T. A., & Risse, T. (2019). Grand theories of integration and the challenges of the European Union today. Journal of European Public Policy, 26(8), 1172–1190.

European Commission. (2023). Strategic Foresight Report 2023: Sustainability and Well-being at the Heart of Europe's Open Strategic Autonomy. Brussels.

European Environment Agency. (2021). Europe's Changing Climate Hazards: An Overview of Risks. Copenhagen.

Howlett, M., & Ramesh, M. (2021). The two orders of governance failure: Design mismatches and policy capacity gaps in European regulation. Regulation & Governance, 15(3), 720–737.