Preface

This book is the result of my long-standing interest in the political economy of Europe which has gradually evolved over the past decade. The publication of this book comes at a critical juncture for the European Union (EU). In the wake of the events of the global financial crisis, which started to emerge in 2007 and peaked in 2008–2009, the EU found itself embroiled in a sovereign debt crisis of previously unseen proportions. Since then the EU has been in crisis mode and looked predominantly inwards with the aim of extinguishing the wildfire of recession, budgetary crises and spiralling unemployment that has taken hold in many countries across the continent. Meanwhile questions about the future direction of the EU and the possibility of the breakup of the eurozone are being raised. The citizens of the EU are puzzled by events and urgently demand answers from political elites on where the journey of the European train will lead them. The rest of the world watches the EU with an equal degree of amazement and concern. The crucial question will be if Europeans have the strength and vision to pull the project of European integration back from the brink.

The purpose of the book is to make some sense of the changes that national Varieties of Capitalism (VoC) have experienced in recent years and to provide a glimpse of the emerging post-crisis set-up of the EU with all its risks and insecurities. I sincerely hope that political leaders in Europe will have the wisdom to lead the EU out of the crisis and towards a new period of stability, unity and prosperity for all its citizens.

My research has taken me to many countries across the continent in recent years and I never cease to be amazed by the rich diversity of our cultures in Europe.

I would like to thank my colleagues in the UACES Collaborative Research Network *The Single Market in the Global Economy*, for their inspiration and support with my research. I would like to thank Lothar Funk in the Department of Business Studies at the University of Applied Sciences in Düsseldorf, Maciej Duszczek at the Institute of Social Policy at the University of Warsaw, Bela Galgoczi at the European Trade Union Institute in Brussels and Anna Visvizi at the Warsaw School of Economics for the fruitful collaboration over the years. I am also particularly grateful to my friends and colleagues in the Slovak Republic for having given

me valuable insights into the perception of the crisis in the Central and Eastern European region. My special thanks goes to Andrej Matisak at *Pravda* daily newspaper, Luboš Blaha who represents SMER in the Slovak national parliament and the colleagues in the *Central European Policy Institute* at the Slovak Atlantic Commission in Bratislava for hosting me as a Visiting Fellow and for offering me important insights into the current debates in the region.

Christian Schweiger
Durham University
September 2013