Preface

This book is published at a seminal point in the history of the European Union. The EU has been in permanent crisis mode since the onset of the global financial crisis, which quickly spilt over into a banking and sovereign debt crisis in many European economies. As EU leaders struggled to find effective policy responses to the crisis and to resolve its deepening internal economic and social implications, they were confronted with new external challenges for which they were collectively ill prepared. The standoff with Russia over Ukraine, and the recently emerging migration crisis, illustrate more than ever that the EU in its current state is unable to collectively address major challenges. The tendency of member states to pursue their national interests and to defend their sovereignty has become even more pronounced under crisis conditions. The EU consequently presents itself as more disunited than ever before in its more than 60-year history and is now even facing the unprecedented prospect of losing one of its larger member states as a result of the outcome of the British referendum on EU membership. What started as the grand project of aspiring to create an ‘ever closer union’ between the people of Europe is at risk of getting lost in the daily grind of intergovernmental wrangling and half-baked technocratic policies. Ordinary citizens become increasingly alienated from the EU as they fail to associate it with substantial improvements in their living conditions.

I write this book as a passionate pro-European who is profoundly concerned about the current lack of visionary, passionate and effective leadership in the EU and aspires to make a constructive contribution towards saving the European project from terminal decline. The current generation of national leaders distinctively lacks the emotional affiliation with the task of maintaining and developing the institutionalised economic and political cooperation between the countries of Europe and therefore fails to instil enthusiasm for it among the general public. I hope that the analysis presented here will contribute to the understanding of what has gone wrong, what is at stake and how we can assure that the achievements of a process that has maintained peace and stability in Europe over more than six decades are not permanently lost.

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On a personal level, my deep gratitude and love go out to my wife Csilla who is my rock of support and advice when it is most needed. I dedicate this book to the late Helmut Schmidt, a great statesman and fascinating personality who has always been a personal inspiration for me. I hope that his leadership skills, wisdom and passion for the European project will continue to be an inspiration for future generations of European leaders.

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