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EU Policymaking in Times of Crisis – Analysing EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia under the Lens of Crisisification

Abstract

Against the backdrop of what former European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker termed the EU’s “polycrisis”, an abundance of scholarly work has turned attention to EU crisis governance. This article centres the concept of crisisification introduced by Mark Rhinard (2019) in this debate. Combining insights from traditional literature on EU policymaking and Critical Security Studies, Rhinard argues that a crisis mode of governance today complements traditional modes of policymaking in the EU. This article seeks to buttress his conceptual elaborations by offering more in-depth empirical insights into crisisification in practice in the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy. Turning to the case of the European Union Naval Force - Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED) Operation Sophia, it suggests that the concept can provide an improved understanding of the policymaking process leading to the operation’s launch as part of the EU’s response to the so-called ‘migration crisis’ in 2015. Concretely, the analysis sheds light on how a logic of urgency informed the policymaking process, detecting three procedural shortcuts EU actors have taken to abbreviate policy formulation and decision-making. Importantly, these findings demonstrate that even policies inherently designed as crisis management tools have been impacted by crisisification.

Keywords: EU Crisis Governance, Migration Crisis, Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia

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Introduction

A sense of crisis has become omnipresent in the European Union (EU) over the recent years. Events or developments perceived as crises have increasingly occurred both internal and external to the EU, constituting what Jean-Claude Juncker called the EU's "polycrisis" (European Commission, 2016). Consequently, the notion of crisis has also attracted growing attention in academia. Scholars have tried to capture what implications this shared sense of crisis has had for EU policymaking either discussing existing theoretical approaches to European integration (see, e.g. Ferrara and Kriesi, 2022, Genschel and Jachtenfuchs, 2018) or introducing new concepts such as emergency politics (White, 2015).

In the same vein, Mark Rhinard (2019) put forward the concept of crisisification. The concept combines perspectives from both traditional literature on EU policymaking and Critical Security Studies (CSS). In doing so, it responds to Manners and Whitman's (2016) call for a more "polyphonic engagement" in EU studies (Rhinard (2019, p. 617). Its core claim is that crisis has established itself as a new mode of governance next to traditional modes in EU policymaking (*ibid.*, pp. 616f.). Crisisification becomes manifest at the level of everyday policymaking and entails, *inter alia*, abbreviated decision-making procedures and new actor constellations (*ibid.*, pp. 617f.). While Rhinard (2019) bases his argument on his own empirical analysis of EU procedures, instruments and technical systems for identifying and managing crises, this paper seeks to buttress his findings by providing additional insights from one specific EU policy area, the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). In doing so, it recognises the imperative of "reconsider[ing] how we view and study EU decision-making" (Rhinard, 2019, p. 625) emerging from Rhinard's elaborations. The CSDP promises to be an interesting policy area to examine under the lens of crisisification. Different from other EU policy areas, the CSDP is inherently designed as a crisis management tool (Mattelaer, 2010, p. 2). From a conceptual viewpoint, analysing policymaking in the CSDP, thus, may reveal how crisisification relates to instruments of crisis management in security and defence. Against this background, the paper asks: How has crisisification shaped policymaking in the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy?

In answering this research question, the paper turns to the case of the European Union Naval Force - Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED) Operation Sophia (hereinafter "Operation Sophia") launched under the CSDP in 2015. Operation Sophia posed one of the EU's policy responses to the so-called "migration crisis" after more than 700 migrants had died in a shipwreck off the shore of the Italian island of Lampedusa on 19 April 2015. To investigate how crisisification shaped policymaking in the case of Operation Sophia, this paper engages in a qualitative analysis of EU policy, procedural and strategic documents as well as press releases complemented by insights from secondary literature. The analysis centres the logic of urgency as an important dynamic of crisisification examining how it informed the processes of policy formulation and decision-making. Moreover, it sheds light on how the logic of urgency might have shifted participation patterns usually found in policymaking processes in the CSDP. In fact, the analysis' findings also confirm that crisis management tools differentiate between

ordinary procedures and procedures for urgent responses. The analysis identifies three shortcuts manifested in EU procedural provisions that were taken during policy formulation of and decision-making on Operation Sophia. In terms of participation, it reveals that there were high-level political, rather than bureaucratic actors, promoting this course of action. This assessment seems to question the centrality of the latter suggested by Rhinard (2019) and encourages a theoretical discussion on how the concept of crisisification relates to dynamics of EU crisis governance as understood by other approaches.

The paper proceeds as follows. Initially, it provides an overview of the existing literature on EU crisis governance before it continues outlining the concept of crisisification in more detail. In the following, it presents the analytical framework based on which the empirical analysis is conducted. The empirical analysis starts off with an examination of how the logic of urgency is rhetorically reflected in EU institutions' discourse on the situation in the Central Mediterranean. Building on this examination, the analysis assesses how this perceived urgency translated into abbreviated policy formulation and decision-making procedures. These assessments are then the starting point for subsequent considerations on how taking procedural short-cuts shifted participation patterns compared to ordinary CSDP procedures. The final discussion wraps up the analysis' findings and assesses its theoretical and empirical implications.

EU Policymaking in Times of Crisis

A growing body of literature within the field of EU studies is turning attention to EU policymaking in times of crisis. This is not to say that crises are a new phenomenon in EU policymaking. Quite the contrary, crises have shaped European integration from the very beginning (Boin and Rhinard, 2022, p. 1). Nonetheless, echoing in the notion of the EU's "polycrisis" (European Commission, 2016), the quality and quantity of crises seem to have changed. Crises have arisen not only in several policy areas but "shocks seem to be arriving more frequently" (Rhinard, 2019, p. 620) and threats seem to be "more complicated of late" (*ibid.*). In particular, the economic crisis, the migration crisis, the external relation crisis, the Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic have been central to recent discussions of EU crisis governance (see, e.g., Falkner, 2016; Genschel and Jachtenfuchs, 2021; Ferrara and Kriesi, 2022).

Academic engagements with EU policymaking in times of crises have approached this trend from different angles. Many scholars have chosen not to abandon the claims of well-established European integration theories to study EU crisis responses (on the migration crisis, see, e.g., Niemann and Speyer, 2018; Zaun, 2018). Others combine insights from different integration theories to develop new approaches (see, e.g., Jones, Kelemen and Meunier, 2016; Ferrara and Kriesi, 2022). Importantly, the concept of "failing forward", introduced by Jones, Kelemen and Meunier (2016), points to crisis as an inherent feature of European integration. This notion is also explored by Genschel and Jachtenfuchs (2017), who stress that the EU's shift from market integration to the

integration of core state powers lies at the heart of understanding recent crises. Reviewing this literature, it becomes clear that, while EU policymaking is aimed at governing seemingly mounting crisis pressures, European integration plays a considerable role in first producing these crises.

Overall, these approaches tend to share a concern for the implications of crises for European integration and vice versa. According to Kreuder-Sonnen (2016, pp. 1353f.), this tendency to focus on structural outcomes potentially limits examinations of EU policymaking in times of crisis. It might neglect what he terms the “crises-related mode of politics” (ibid., p. 1351) informing these decisions. This shortcoming is the starting point for newly introduced concepts of EU crisis governance (see, Rhinard, 2019; White, 2015, 2019; Kreuder-Sonnen, 2018a). These commonly argue that the accumulation of cross-sectoral crisis tools, routines, and resources “has changed the essential character of the EU” (Boin and Rhinard, 2022, p. 14).

Nevertheless, these authors’ elaborations also centre different aspects of EU policymaking in times of crisis. Whereas the approach of emergency politics shows how exceptional measures need to be rationalised by appeals to urgency and necessity (White, 2015), crisisification grasps dynamics manifest at the level of everyday politics and administration (Rhinard, 2019, p. 620). The concept thus sheds light on an aspect of EU crisis governance often “taking place under the radar” (ibid.). However, empirical studies of crisisification have so far been exclusively focused on taking stock of the procedures, instruments and technical systems the EU has developed for identifying and managing crises (see Rhinard, 2019; Rhinard and Backman, 2018). Meanwhile, empirical investigations of crisisification in practice are still missing. This paper seeks to fill this gap by providing insights into the crisisification of policymaking in the CSDP. Rather than only identifying mechanisms of crisisification, it examines how crisisification shaped the policy formulation of and decision-making on Operation Sophia.

The Concept of Crisisification

Rhinard’s (2019) concept of crisisification claims that a crisis mode of governance has established itself in EU policymaking next to traditional modes of governance (ibid., pp. 616f.). The concept builds on distinct notions of policymaking and crisis. Rhinard (2019, p. 617) understands policymaking as constituted by different decision activities such as, referring to Peters (1987), the stages of agenda-setting, policy initiation, decision-making and implementation. Moreover, in line with Rosenthal et al. (1989), he regards crisis as an intersubjectively established threat to core values or essential societal structures accompanied by a sense of urgency and a condition of uncertainty (ibid., p. 617). Thereby, Rhinard (2019) adopts a constructivist perspective on crisis shared by many scholars discussing crisis management in general (Boin et al., 2016) and in the context of the EU specifically (see, e.g., Saurugger, 2016; Kreuder-Sonnen, 2018b). This

paper promotes a similar understanding, particularly highlighting the perception of urgency as a crucial feature of crisis.

Departing from these assumptions, crisisification becomes manifest in several ways. Crisis-oriented methods of policymaking are characterised by the early identification of the next urgent event as a possible crisis, specific actor constellations and technologies, abbreviated decision-making procedures and, finally, new narratives on the EU's 'raison d'être' (Rhinard, 2019, p. 616). As pointed out earlier, crisisification primarily affects the level of everyday politics and administrative procedures (*ibid.*, pp. 617f.). Here, Rhinard's (2019) argument crucially distinguishes itself from conceptualisations of EU crisis governance centring the political level (see White, 2015; Sahin-Mencutek et al., 2022).

Findings from Rhinard's (2019) own empirical research further illustrate how crisisification takes shape. The EU has developed tools and necessary infrastructure for the early identification of crises such as horizon-scanning systems, early warning systems and crisis rooms in different policy sectors (Rhinard, 2019, pp. 618f.). Moreover, special procedures have been introduced to abbreviate decision-making at the administrative level in crisis situations (*ibid.*, pp. 619f.). An even more comprehensive discussion of the manifestations of crisisification can be found in Backman and Rhinard (2018).

Rhinard (2019) does not explicitly address the question of when crisisification started. However, he discusses external events reaching back to the early 2000s as drivers of crisisification (*ibid.*, pp. 620f.). Hence, it can be assumed that crisisification started about two decades ago but has become more widespread over the years. As Rhinard (2019) states, "it is difficult to ignore the growth of this substantial area of EU cooperation" (*ibid.*, p. 620). Like traditional approaches, he also identifies neofunctionalist dynamics of political and cultivated spillover, policy entrepreneurship as well as the executive ambition of the European Commission and EU agencies as additional driving forces (*ibid.*, pp. 620ff.). In this regard, the concept's claims are reminiscent of other EU crisis governance approaches relying on traditional integration theories, e.g., "failing forward" (see Jones, Kelemen and Meunier, 2016). Diverging from these approaches, Rhinard (2019) then adds perspectives from CSS to his elaborations. He argues that the "obsession with making people safe" (*ibid.*, p. 622) has come to circulate in EU politics, *inter alia*, expressed in a concern for the safety of EU policy instruments and projects such as the Schengen area (*ibid.*). Similarly, the increasing availability of technology used to guarantee that safety has advanced crisisification, according to Rhinard (2019, p. 622f.).

Finally, Rhinard (2019, pp. 623-629) outlines the implications of his findings for the practice of and research on EU policymaking, particularly for agenda-setting, decision-making and legitimacy. As this paper's study chooses to focus on the dimension of decision-making, only his remarks on this aspect of policymaking are presented in the following. Rhinard (2019) divides decision-making into two separate aspects, decision modes and participation. He points out that examinations of EU decision modes need to address the question of pace. Instead of bargaining or deliberation, the crisis decision

mode is governed by a logic of urgency (*ibid.*, p. 626). In terms of participation, Rhinard (2019, p. 627) shows that crisisification tends to entail a stronger involvement of both the Commission and the Council of the EU (hereinafter “Council”) as these institutions oversee the growing number of crisis management systems and procedures (*ibid.*). Moreover, it has led to the formation of networks between EU institutions and national officials outside the formal EU framework (*ibid.*). Reviewing existing studies on EU crisis decision-making, Rhinard (2019) assesses these shifted participation patterns as “exclusionary” (*ibid.*, p. 627) and “restrictive” (*ibid.*).

Rhinard (2019) then adds perspectives from CSS to his elaborations on crisisification’s implications for both decision-making and participation. While readers are asked to turn to his article for a comprehensive discussion of these perspectives, some of his insights are highlighted here. Pointing to the CSS debate on modern security (Aradau and van Munster, 2007), Rhinard (2019, p. 626) argues that crisisification dynamics at the level of decision-making resemble decisionist structures. Decisionism is only rarely discussed in EU studies, but Rhinard (2019, p. 626) refers to Kreuder-Sonnen’s (2018a) elaborations on the EU’s “authoritarian turn” for an exception. In terms of participation, he claims, building on the work of several CSS scholars (see Amooore and De Goede, 2008; Aradau and Van Munster, 2007), that the rationale of crisis can be considered a tool which is used by different actors as a “mode of governmentality” (Rhinard, 2019, p. 628). Specifically, referring to Bigo and Tsoukala (2008), Rhinard (2019, p. 628) points out that crisisification tends to privilege bureaucratic actors with expertise and skill sets in crisis management. Overall, he thus stresses that crisisification raises several normative concerns while demonstrating that the crisis mode of governance is increasingly becoming the new normality of policymaking at the administrative level. Building on Rhinard’s (2019) remarks on the study of EU policymaking, the following section develops an analytical framework to examine crisisification in practice.

Analytical Framework

Overarchingly, this paper seeks to add evidence to the empirical insights of Rhinard’s (2019) cross-sectoral research. Specifically, it elucidates how crisisification has shaped policy formulation and decision-making in the CSDP by engaging in a case study of Operation Sophia. Operation Sophia promises to be particularly fruitful case for analysis. It was launched at the height of the migration crisis in summer 2015. As stated above, the migration crisis poses one element of the EU’s “polycrisis”. Notably, crises around migration tend to affect core achievements of European integration (White, 2019, p. 80). Hence, the migration crisis provides a context that might have favoured the use of tools that emerged from crisisification. While the EU’s response to the migration crisis, in general, was characterised by the difficulty of finding political agreement (see, e.g., Ferrara and Kriesi 2022, pp. 1361-1364), Operation Sophia stands out as one of the few measures on which EU member states were able to reach consensus (Riddervold, 2018, p. 171). The decision-making process even “unfolded at an unprecedented pace” compared to previous EU military operations (Boşilcă, Stenberg

and Riddervold, 2021, p. 224). These insights suggest that crisisification dynamics indeed might have contributed to the decision of establishing Operation Sophia.

Whereas many scholars have highlighted politicisation as a core feature of the migration crisis (see, e.g., Geddes, 2021; Maricut-Akbik, 2021), the concept of crisisification sheds light on additional aspects of crisis governance that have escaped public attention. With regard to another element of the EU's response to the migration crisis, the EU-Turkey deal of 2016, Smeets and Beach (2020) claim that existing analyses "have focused too much on the most *visible*, but not necessarily the most *revealing*, aspects of EU crisis management" (ibid., p. 130, emphasis in the original). Echoing this claim, this paper believes in the added value of analysing Operation Sophia under the lens of crisisification and reinterpreting empirical insights provided by existing analyses from a new theoretical perspective.

The analytical endeavour of this paper is directed towards providing a better understanding, but not explanation, of Operation Sophia. The analysis follows the purpose of an exploratory case study since, to the knowledge of the author, there exists no study on crisisification in the CSDP so far. On the contrary, the concept of crisisification is referred to in studies on the EU's response to the Covid-19 pandemic (Ares Castro-Conde, 2022) and EU counterterrorism policy (Kaunert and Léonard, 2021) but has not been applied as a comprehensive analytical framework yet. Against this background, this paper first needs to develop an analytical framework outlining how to investigate crisisification in practice.

Operationalisation

In light of the implications of crisisification for EU policymaking discussed by Rhinard (2019), researching crisisification in practice presents scholars with a complex task. Crisisification affects many distinct aspects of the policymaking process that need to be examined differently. The analysis departs from the assumption that crisisification is an outcome already achieved. This is not to deny that crisisification is an ongoing process, but implies that a crisis mode of governance already existed complementary to traditional modes of policymaking at the time when Operation Sophia was discussed and established as a policy instrument. The analysis concentrates on the dimension of decision-making which appears as a significant aspect of policymaking in the case of Operation Sophia considering the speed in which agreement was found. Furthermore, it sheds light on the process of policy formulation, a stage of policymaking not elaborated upon by Rhinard (2019). Findings of the analysis suggest that the same logic of urgency characterising decision-making in the crisis mode of governance also informs policy formulation. Therefore, policy formulation has been included as a distinct phase in the analysis as well. Based on the analysis' findings, the final discussion makes some theoretical considerations on how crisisification dynamics at the level of policy formulation might become manifest beyond the case of Operation Sophia.

As stated, if informed by crisisification, policy formation and decision-making both follow the logic of urgency (Rhinard, 2019, p. 626). This logic of urgency is constituted by two different aspects. Firstly, it refers to the widely shared perception of urgency among political actors, a core feature of constructivist notions of crisis (see above); and secondly, it gets inscribed into abbreviated decision-making procedures (see Rhinard, 2019, p. 616). How a crisis-induced logic of urgency informs decision-making is further illustrated in crisis management literature (see *ibid.*, p. 626). Boin et al. (2005) highlight four characteristics of crisis management, two of which are used to initially analyse the shared perception of crisis. Firstly, they show that the logic of urgency translates into quick choices not allowing for deliberation on the respective decision (*ibid.*, pp. 43f.). Moreover, policymaking in crisis situations is about making highly consequential choices that “affect core values and interests of communities” (*ibid.*, p. 43). Discourses of urgency and necessity are also an important element of the rationalisation of emergency politics highlighted by White (2015, p. 303). Different to his approach, however, this paper does not consider discursive rationalisation as a necessary legitimisation strategy vis-à-vis the European public but rather as an indicator of the intersubjectively shared perception of crisis among EU actors. By first establishing the shared perception of urgency among policymakers, the analysis also responds to scholarly assessments that the degree of urgency characterising a crisis is always dependent on processes of sensemaking among relevant actors (see Seabrooke and Tsingou, 2019; Boin, Ekengren and Rhinard, 2021).

Finally, decision-making informed by a logic of urgency also entails shifts in participation patterns. In terms of crisisification’s implications for participation, Rhinard (2019, pp. 626-628) points to several EU institutions and particularly administrative actors with crisis management expertise that tend to be empowered in decision-making processes informed by crisisification. Still, when turning to specific policy areas, as this paper does, it can be assumed that crisisification shows sector specific participation patterns not exhaustively defined by Rhinard (2019).

Methods

Turning to the methodological approach, Rhinard’s (2019) elaborations do not offer any suggestions as to what methods might be suitable to examine crisisification. His own research mainly builds on interviews (Rhinard, 2019) and open-source scanning (Backman and Rhinard, 2018). Thereby, his empirical assessments focus on the identification of EU crisis management capacities as manifestations of crisisification rather than on how crisisification shapes policymaking in practice. Against this background, this paper develops its own methodological approach which, however, is exposed to limitations. Importantly, it combines discourse analysis with the analysis of secondary literature also including a few comparative elements.

The analysis draws on a wide range of publicly available textual data: press releases, policy, strategic and procedural documents as well as secondary literature. In terms of data collection, the author first screened existing literature on the development of

Operation Sophia, notably, Johansen (2017), Nováky (2018), Riddervold (2018), Biava (2020), Boşilcă, Stenberg, and Riddervold (2021) and, on the planning of CSDP operations, Mattelaer (2010). To analyse the urgency discourse, documents considered relevant included press releases of all EU institutions covering the time span between 19 April 2015, the date of the shipwreck in the Mediterranean, and 18 May 2015, when the Council decision on establishing Operation Sophia was made. These press releases were derived from EU institutions' press corners and document registers. Following a first scanning of this data set, further relevant documents referred to were added. The analysis of the policy formulation and decision-making process strongly relied on procedural and legal documents. Identified in the screening of secondary literature, these documents were accessed at the EUR-Lex database. Beyond the regularly available documents, Novaky's (2018) study refers to a leaked Council document provided by Statewatch which was included as well. Again, further documents were added following another search process that built on references to other relevant events and statements in the first set of sources. Despite these additions, the empirical evidence drawn upon resembles that of existing studies on Operation Sophia. It still offers new insights into policymaking on Operation Sophia when interpreted from the perspective of crisisification.

The data analysis then proceeds as follows. As crisisification becomes manifest at the administrative level, the analysis focuses on this level of policymaking. However, to examine how the situation in April 2015 was made sense of and to identify the relevant administrative procedures, the analysis starts at the political level. Concretely, a discourse analysis of statements by key EU institutions is conducted with view to the sense of urgency they invoke. In a second step, the analysis examines how this perception of urgency translated into abbreviated policy formulation and decision-making procedures. It traces statements and agreements made at the political level back to the administrative level if possible. Here, existing literature provided very valuable insights to detect procedural shortcuts taken by EU actors.

Building on the identification of these procedural shortcuts, the analysis turns to the question of how crisisification shaped actors' participation in policymaking on Operation Sophia. Based on the available data, it is not possible to make strong claims on which actors acted as decisive players in the policymaking process. In particular, the data material is not sufficient to identify single actors involved at the administrative level. Given that the empowered actors are not exhaustively defined in the concept of crisisification and dependent on the policy area, the analysis exploratorily inquires which actors were able to increase their participation in the policy formulation of and decision-making on Operation Sophia compared to usual CSDP policymaking procedures. Meanwhile, it abstains from making absolute claims on which actors have played a key role in advancing the decision-making process beyond insights from existing literature on Operation Sophia which turned out to be very insightful in this regard.

These constraints imposed by the data material also point to more general limitations of this paper's analysis and, partly, any study of crisisification. As an empirical

phenomenon, crisisification often shapes policymaking “under the radar” (Rhinard, 2019, p. 620). Publicly available data can only provide information on such kind of processes to a limited extent (see also Smeets and Beach, 2020, p. 134). Consequently, this paper’s analysis needs to turn to other authors’ insights from interviews with EU policymakers. Interviews appear as a promising method to study crisisification. A similar approach is also chosen in other case studies on dynamics in the EU’s “machine room” (see Smeets and Beach, 2020).

Beyond methodological shortcomings, challenges also arise from the analytical framework. Due to the analysis’ focus on policy formulation and decision-making, it might not identify all relevant ways in which crisisification shaped policymaking on Operation Sophia. Particularly, it remains open whether the effect of crisisification at different stages of policymaking is interdependent. This question is not addressed by Rhinard (2019) either. Furthermore, one might argue that possible identified instances of crisisification are not part of the dynamics conceptualised by Rhinard (2019) since the CSDP was established and has since then evolved as a crisis management tool. However, the analysis also shows that these tools provide for procedures distinguishing between ‘normal’ and crisis situations. This finding strongly reinforces Rhinard’s (2019) overall assessment of crisisification. Nevertheless, crisisification’s added value could be questioned as Operation Sophia was developed in an environment characterised by the high salience of the 19 April mass drownings following which the Mediterranean “became the centre of the world’s attention” (Nováky, 2018, p. 197) rather than by everyday politics. Importantly, the process of CSDP military operation planning also interfered with political dynamics in the realm of migration policy. Against this background, the final discussion also considers how other concepts of EU crisis governance might relate to crisisification and, possibly, better grasp some dynamics underlying the policymaking process on Operation Sophia. Firstly, however, the analysis’ findings are presented in the subsequent sections.

Empirical Analysis: The case of EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia

EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia was deployed between 2015 and 2020. The decision-making process leading to the operation was initiated following a major shipwreck near the shores of Lampedusa in the Central Mediterranean on 19 April 2015, in which more than 700 migrants died. Two maritime operations had been deployed in territorial waters of EU member states in the Central Mediterranean before, the Italian Search and Rescue Mission Mare Nostrum in 2013 and the Frontex Operation Triton in 2014. However, only the incident of April 2015 provided a critical juncture for the policymaking process on an EU-wide naval response to the increasing number of migrants crossing the Central Mediterranean and extending to the high seas (Boşilcă, Stenberg and Riddervold, 2022, p. 223). The following analysis turns the attention to the policy formulation and decision-making process leading to the establishment of the Operation, departing from the notion that “the nature of decision-making [and policy

formulation] in the EU may be taking a new shape based on the way urgency has become a key aspect of decision situations” (Rhinard, 2019, p. 626).

The perception of urgency among EU policymakers

Initially, this section examines the perception of urgency among EU policymakers. Two aspects of policymaking in times of crisis highlighted by crisis management literature dominate their rhetoric and confirm the widespread perception of urgency: the call for quick decisions, and the emphasis on the highly consequential nature of the decisions to be made.

In the days following the mass drowning of April 19, EU institutions unequivocally called for making quick decisions at the EU level. The Commission stressed the need for “immediate actions” (European Commission, 2015a) on the same day. On the following day, then High-Representative/Vice-President (HR/VP) Federica Mogherini claimed at a joint meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council and the Council for Justice and Home Affairs: “We need to act fast and act together” (Council of the EU, 2015b). This was echoed by the heads of state and government which held a special European Council meeting on 23 April 2015. The European Council announced that the EU “will mobilise all efforts at its disposal to prevent further loss of life at sea and to tackle the root causes of the human emergency we face” (European Council, 2015b). Consequently, it tasked the HR/VP to “immediately begin preparations for a possible CSDP operation” (ibid.). In May 2015, just before the Council decision on the mandate of Operation Sophia, the Commission published the European Agenda on Migration which set out both “immediate” (European Commission, 2015c, p. 3) action and more long-term oriented measures for EU migration policies. The former mentioned the planned establishment of a CSDP operation as a “powerful demonstration of the EU’s determination to act” (ibid.). These statements reflect the time pressure and thus the need for quick decisions highlighted as an important feature of decision-making in times of crisis (see Boin et al., 2005, pp. 43f.).

Similarly, statements by the EU institutions indicate that the choices to be made were conceived as highly consequential. The European Council posited that “[o]ur immediate priority is to prevent more people from dying at sea.” (European Council, 2015b). This was reiterated by other actors. Based on the acknowledgement that “[t]he reality is stark” (European Commission, 2015a), the Commission emphasised that “actions must [...] be bold” (ibid.). The actions proposed by the Council on the following day were presented as “direct, substantial measures we will take to make an immediate difference” (Council of the EU, 2015b.). European Council President Donald Tusk clarified the price of wrong choices or inaction. He stressed the prevention of further loss of life as “the overriding priority” (European Council, 2015a) while long-term measures were postponed to the “near future” (ibid.). The perceived necessity to act, apparent in these statements, reinforces the sense of urgency detected above. As the European Agenda on Migration summarised, the CSDP operation, amongst other immediate measures to be taken, “responds to the need for swift and determined action

in response to the human tragedy in the whole of the Mediterranean” (European Commission, 2015c, p. 3).

Thus, EU policymakers broadly shared a perception of urgency which suggests that a logic of urgency shaped policy formulation and decision-making. Most blatantly, this is expressed in Mogherini’s statement: “We need to show that same collective European sense of urgency we have consistently shown in reacting in times of crisis” (Council of the EU, 2015b). In the following, the analysis examines how the perception of urgency among the EU institutions was translated into abbreviated policy formulation procedures.

The logic of urgency behind policy formulation of Operation Sophia

The EU institutions’ joint call for immediate action was addressed at a joint meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council and the Council for Justice and Home Affairs the day after the shipwreck in the Central Mediterranean had raised the EU’s attention. At this meeting, EU Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, Dimitris Avramopolous, proposed a “Ten point action plan” to tackle the crisis, which, inter alia, suggested the deployment of a military operation against smugglers. The research carried out by Nováky (2018, p. 203) reveals that the plan had been developed by a few officials within the Commission’s Directorate-General (DG) for Migration and Home affairs the day before. The European Council unanimously endorsed the plan at its special meeting on 23 April 2015 and tasked Mogherini with the preparation of the CSDP mission. The options for member states to oppose the plan were limited due to “the seriousness of the migration crisis and the fact that the death toll would likely have been lower if the EU had replaced Mare Nostrum with an equally strong operation” (Nováky, 2018, p. 203). Similarly, Johansen (2017) argues that the speed of the decision-making process concealed concerns of some member states about the operation (ibid., pp. 519f.). The policy formulation process, consequently, took less than a week. This was enabled by the option for abbreviated policy formulation procedures at the administrative level laid down in the EU’s Crisis Management Procedures (CMP).

The CMP, first developed in 2003 and then revised in 2013, delineates “the process through which the EU engages in a crisis with its CSDP instruments as part of its overall comprehensive approach” (Council of the EU, 2013). Interestingly, comparing both documents, the procedural shortcuts discussed in the following were first added in the later CMP (see Council of the EU, 2003, Council of the EU, 2013). Indeed, Rhinard (2019, p. 626) himself refers to the CMP of 2013 as one instance of the increasing trend of crisisification. According to the CMP, the first phase of the EU’s engagement in a crisis is the “[i]dentification of a crisis and development of an overall EU approach” (Council of the EU, 2013). To this end, the European External Action Service (EEAS), more specifically the EEAS Geographical Desk, develops a Political Framework for Crisis Approach (PFCA) that outlines the strategic direction and suggests a range of options for policy responses (ibid., p. 13). Concretely, the PFCA defines “what the crisis is, why the EU should act [...] and what instruments could be available, and best suited, for that

action” (ibid.). The EEAS’ Crisis Management and Planning Directorate (CMPD) is responsible for the CSDP elements in the PFCA.

However, a leaked draft of the Crisis Management Concept (CMC) underlying Operation Sophia reveals that no PFCA was developed on the issue of migration via the Central Mediterranean to which Operation Sophia was supposed to respond (Council of the EU, 2015c). Planning the CSDP operation without a PFCA was made possible by the “Option for Urgent Response” (Council of the EU, 2013) included in the CMP. It allows, based on a decision of the Political and Security Committee (PSC), to skip the first phase of the CMP and to move directly to the second phase, the development of a CMC and the decision on the establishment of a CSDP operation (ibid.). This mechanism corresponds well to the abbreviated policy formulation and decision-making procedures envisaged by the concept of crisisification.

Due to the lack of a PFCA on migration, the CMC drafted for Operation Sophia built on insights from the PFCA for Libya (Council of the EU, 2015c). Johansen (2017, p. 517), who analyses the EU’s strategic capacity in the case of Operation Sophia suggests that the “Ten point action plan” was put forward as an alternative to the PFCA. Meanwhile, Boșilcă, Stenberg and Riddervold (2021) argue that the mechanism of copying accounts for the EU’s choice of a military operation. According to them, the process of policy formulation “in record time” (ibid., p. 231) was possible due to the EU’s experience from Mare Nostrum and from the anti-piracy CSDP Operation Atalanta (ibid.). The mechanism of copying, unlike the concept of crisisification, builds on the process of learning rather than on newly developed tools or procedures for abbreviated policy formulation processes. Nevertheless, it can be considered as a mechanism operating separately from crisisification. Policy formulation of Operation Sophia was thus clearly shaped by crisisification. The next section now examines whether such dynamics can also be identified in the phase of decision-making.

The logic of urgency behind decision-making on Operation Sophia

Operation Sophia was established by a Council decision based on the proposed CMC at the next Foreign Affairs Council meeting on 18 May 2015. Following the force generation for its first implementation phase within not much more than a week (Nováky, 2018, p. 206), the operation was finally launched on 22 June 2015 by a second Council decision. The overall policymaking process only took a little over three months, thus, as “no other EU military operation had ever been launched this quickly” (Johansen, 2017, p. 519), it “unfolded at an unprecedented pace” (Bolsica, Stenberg and Riddervold, 2021, p. 224).

Administrative procedures allowing for the abbreviation of the decision-making process can be detected in both the second and the third phase of the CMP. The second phase, “Development of the CMC and Establishment of the Mission/Operation” (Council of the EU, 2013), inter alia, involves the conduction of Military Strategic Options (MSO) by the European Union Military Staff (EUMS). However, according to the CMP, this step may be skipped, and the further planning process relies only on the operational

documents developed in the third phase (see below) (ibid., p. 19). The findings by Johansen (2017, p. 519) confirm that no MSO were conducted for Operation Sophia. Hence, this proceeding poses a second example of how crisisification shaped the policymaking process.

Furthermore, the speed in decision-making was increased using a fast-track option available for the third phase of the CMP (Nováky, 2018, pp. 204f.). Next to the normal procedure, the third phase, “Operation Planning of the CSDP Mission or Operation and Decision to Launch” (Council of the EU, 2013), provides for a fast-track option which is supposed to be applied in situations in which “the need to deploy a mission/operation at very short notice may require rapid decision-making for a rapid response to a crisis, including rapid deployment” (ibid., p. 28). It fast-tracks decision-making insofar as it enables the launch of an operation shortly after the approval of the CMC (ibid.). Instead of two different, sequential operational planning documents, the Concept of Operations (CONOPS) and the Operation Plan (OPLAN), only the OPLAN is drafted following this track (ibid.). It can be prepared in parallel to the CMC (ibid.). In the case of Operation Sophia, the fast-track option reduced the time needed to little over a month between May 18 and June 22. Against this backdrop, it can be considered a third manifestation of how crisisification informed the policymaking process.

Overall, the perception of urgency among EU actors translated into a logic of urgency that guided policymaking on Operation Sophia. Concretely, it found its procedural expression in the use of one shortcut during the phase of policy formulation and two at the stage of decision-making. Arguably, the latter abbreviations affect the aspect of operational planning more than the decision-making moment itself. Still, as decision-making builds on operational planning, both procedural shortcuts can be regarded as instances of abbreviated decision-making. This finding underlines Rhinard’s (2019) assessment that the adoption of special procedures for crisis situations poses “perhaps the most intriguing trend” (ibid., p. 619) of crisisification. The concept of crisisification suggest that these shifts in policymaking dynamics also entail a divergence from usual participation patterns. Their concrete implications in the case of Operation Sophia are explored in the following.

Implications for participation in policy formulation and decision-making

As stated earlier, the subsequent considerations on shifts in participation can only be regarded as preliminary assumptions, based on the analysis’ findings. The stage of policy formulation emerges as particularly revealing in terms of participation. Considering the findings, it is the DG Migration and Home Affairs that can be considered a privileged actor here, given that it drafted the “Ten point action plan” on migration suggesting a CSDP Operation to respond to the crisis. In fact, Operation Sophia poses the first CSDP operation proposed by the Commission (Nováky, 2018, p. 203). While Rhinard (2019, p. 627) also mentions the Commission as an actor governing many of the crisis management tools, in the case of Operation Sophia, it is rather likely that the DG Migration and Home Affairs was privileged in the policy formulation

process, because compared to the EEAS drafting the PFCA, it is primarily concerned with the issue of migration. In fact, the involvement of the DG in Operation Sophia corresponds well to Hadj Abdou and Pettrachin's (2022) findings that Home Affairs actors remain central in EU migration governance despite a diversification of actors engaged in the policy area. At the same time, the shortcut taken at the stage of policy formulation implies that EEAS actors contributing to the PFCA were sidelined. These include, for example, the CMPD that usually "draw[s] together both civilian and military expertise from across the EEAS as required" (Council of the EU, 2013, p. 14). This assessment does not resonate well with Rhinard's (2019) emphasis on the increasing involvement of actors with crisis expertise and skill sets in policymaking processes.

Insights from secondary literature help to further elucidate different actors' roles in policy formulation. Johansen's (2017) analysis of the EU's strategic capacity in the case of Operation Sophia confirms that actors at the administrative level of the EEAS and in the working bodies of the Council, notably the European Union Military Committee (EUMC), played a diminished role in the policy formulation process. She assesses that "the link between the end and the mean was made at the political level" (*ibid.*, p. 517). According to her interview data, neither the EEAS nor the EUMC would have opted for a military operation if consulted (*ibid.*). This finding suggests that, although crisisification at the level of administrative procedures shaped policymaking on Operation Sophia, the logic of urgency resulted in a dominance of political actors. Conformingly, the HR/VP, in charge of preparing the CSDP operation, is highlighted as having massively contributed to the quick launch of the operation (Nováky, 2018; Biava, 2020). Nováky's (2018) and Biava's (2020) assessments further suggest that the dominance of political actors also applied to the agenda-setting stage not assessed in this paper. Meanwhile, the analysis' findings give rise to the assumption that shortcuts during the phase of operational planning do not privilege other actors, since the same administrative bodies are responsible for drafting and revising the MSO, the CONOPS and the OPLAN.

Overall, the considerations that can be made based on the analysis do not reinforce crisisification's conceptual claims on shifts in participation patterns. These insights are addressed in the following discussion which centres theoretical and empirical implications of the analysis' findings. Still, before turning to these questions, an outlook on the implementation phase is considered relevant. While Rhinard (2019) does not elaborate on how crisisification affects the implementation stage of policymaking, the bulk of literature dealing with the militarisation of the EU's external borders encourage adding some remarks on what actors might be privileged in the long-term. Authors here point to the increasing role of private military security companies in EU border control (Davitti, 2019) that have provided border protection also as part of Operation Sophia (Pacciardi and Berndtsson, 2022, p. 4016). Furthermore, by adding military operations to the policy instruments of EU migration governance, the impact of the military epistemic community as a transnational network of experts shaping EU security integration (see, e.g., Cross, 2011) is likely to extend to a new policy area.

Discussion

The analysis demonstrated how crisisification has shaped policymaking in the CSDP in situations of crisis. The CMP provides for several shortcuts which can be considered as manifestations of crisisification. Beyond the identification of these mechanisms, the analysis has illustrated how they worked in practice and resulted in the abbreviation of policy formulation and decision-making processes in the case of Operation Sophia during the migration crisis. Hence, the findings reinforce Rhinard's (2019) assessment of crisisification and reveal that it has become manifest even in policies already designed as crisis management tools.

Nevertheless, the analysis suggests that the case of Operation Sophia does not pose a prime example of how crisisification of EU policymaking has shaped decision-making in the CSDP. Rather than proceeding in the realm of everyday politics, policy formulation was characterised by considerable involvement of key political actors such as the HR/VP and Commissioner Avramopoulos. This points to some tensions inherent to the concept of crisisification. In the policymaking process, manifestations of crisisification seem to have excluded rather than empowered administrative actors with crisis expertise. Accordingly, political goals rather than crisis management as a problem-solving rationale governed decision-making. As Johansen (2017) puts it, Operation Sophia "served as a tool for political decision-makers to demonstrate political unity and action to domestic audiences in the midst of the migration crisis" (ibid., p. 522). For the empirical study of the crisisification of CSDP policymaking, it would thus be interesting to investigate further military operations that were fast-tracked with view to their participation patterns. At a theoretical level, the findings imply that crisisification might offer opportunities to influence policymaking not only to bureaucratic but also to high-level political actors. Still, this paper's analysis would benefit from additional empirical data to substantiate such claims. Otherwise, the role of political actors whose actions and voices are more visible might be overestimated.

Nevertheless, this analysis suggests that crisisification might interfere with other forms of crisis governance discussed in the literature. Viewing the findings on Operation Sophia within the broader picture of EU policymaking in times of crisis, they resonate well with existing studies on EU crisis governance. For example, they support claims by scholars highlighting dynamics of crisis exploitation, i.e., that crises provide opportunities for policymakers to advance their interests (see Kreuder-Sonnen, 2018b; Boin, Hart and McConnell, 2009). Moreover, crisisification could be considered as working hand in hand with emergency politics. Adopting this perspective, taking procedural shortcuts could be regarded as an "action [] departing from conventional practice" (White, 2015, p. 300.). If this action is supported by high-level political rather than bureaucratic actors, they might need to rhetorically justify their way of acting "as [a] necessary response [] to exceptional and urgent threats" (ibid.). However, merging the two concepts might weaken the distinct claims of the concept of crisisification explicitly centring the administrative level of policymaking not exposed to public scrutiny.

Moreover, the findings also emphasise the added value of distinguishing between the stages of policy formulation and decision-making in the analysis of crisisification. They suggest that crisisification of policy formulation might look similar to crisisification of decision-making in providing for abbreviated procedures. Next to mechanisms such as copying (see Boşilcă, Stenberg and Riddervold, 2021), crisisification points to the development of more strongly institutionalised shortcuts at the procedural level to shape policy formulation in urgent situations. Nonetheless, it is subject to further empirical research to establish these features as more general characteristics of crisisification at the stage of policy formulation.

Empirically, the findings point to crisisification's profound consequences for the EU's response to the migration crisis. By allowing for skipping the PCFA, crisisification led to the exclusion of potentially relevant expertise of EEAS actors from the policy formulation process (see Council of the EU, 2013, p. 14). Indeed, Johansen (2017) demonstrates that the mandate of Operation Sophia exposed a "disconnect between ends, means and ways" (ibid., p. 521). According to her assessments, the Operation posed an inadequate response to pursue the stated goals of disrupting and dismantling smuggling networks (ibid.). Thus, from a strategic perspective, dynamics of crisisification contributed to an ill-suited EU response to the increasing number of people crossing the Mediterranean, not to mention to any moral obligations. Still, political actors played a decisive role in activating the mechanisms of crisisification. More in depth-accounts of political actors' motivations in promoting Operation Sophia can be found in scholarly engagements focused on the nexus between humanitarianism, militarisation and securitisation characterising Operation Sophia and, more generally, the EU's migration and border policies (see, e.g., Riddervold, 2018; Moreno-Lax, 2018; Garelli and Tazzioli, 2018).

Conclusion

Concludingly, crisisification of EU policymaking has shaped policymaking in the CSDP by providing the procedural framework for abbreviating policy formulation and decision-making processes as well as shifting participation patterns. Consequently, in the case of Operation Sophia, three procedural shortcuts were taken. The increased speed in policymaking resulted in a privileged role for political actors, especially dominating the stage of policy formulation. Hence, the analysis reveals that even tools inherently designed for crisis management provide for abbreviated procedures in case of urgency. Operation Sophia was launched so quickly because "a lot of the normal crisis management procedures were skipped" (Johansen, 2017, p. 519). Nevertheless, the emphasis on high-level political actors shaping the policymaking process (Johansen, 2017; but see also Nováky, 2018 and Biava, 2020) does not correspond well to the emphasis on everyday policymaking and administrative procedures as the domain of crisisification (Rhinard, 2019, p. 618). These dynamics might be better grasped by concepts such as emergency politics (White, 2015; White, 2019; Kreuder-Sonnen and

White, 2021) or the crisis mode of governance as conceptualised by Sahin-Mencutek et al. (2022).

This paper's findings have important theoretical implications. First, they highlight the added value of developing a more differentiated conceptualisation of crisisification at different stages of the policymaking process. Specifically, the findings suggest policy formulation and implementation as relevant dimensions for further investigation. Beyond that, the findings imply that theorising the interdependence between crisisification at different levels of the policymaking process poses a useful addition to the concept. Such considerations could also create conceptual links to other mechanisms of EU crisis governance, notably, emergency politics (White, 2015; White, 2019; Kreuder-Sonnen and White, 2021). Findings concerning the aspect of participation also encourage a closer look at how crisisification might facilitate crisis exploitation (see Kreuder-Sonnen, 2018b; Boin, 't Hart and McConnell, 2009). Finally, developing a consistent analytical and methodological framework of how to examine crisisification "in action" would turn crisisification into a more comprehensible concept for empirical research. Avenues for future research are hence numerous.

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