The road to Sophia: Explaining the EU’s naval operation in the Mediterranean

Niklas Nováky

Abstract
This article analyses the process through which Operation Sophia came into being. The EU’s ongoing anti-smuggling naval operation in the Mediterranean, Sophia was launched during the height of the 2015 migration crisis. The article argues that Sophia is essentially an Italian strategy to deal with the security and humanitarian aspects of the Mediterranean migration problem. It was in 2013 that Italy first proposed an EU naval operation to tackle human smuggling and trafficking in the Mediterranean. However, the idea collapsed because other EU member states saw illegal migration in the Mediterranean as mainly a national problem facing Italy. In the spring of 2015 the European Commission revisited the proposal as part of its 10-point plan to deal with the migration problem. This time it succeeded because Italy’s partners could no longer oppose it without appearing callous towards the plight of the migrants.

Keywords
CSDP, Sophia, EUNAVFOR, Mediterranean, Migration, Human trafficking

Introduction
In April 2015 the Mediterranean became the centre of the world’s attention when over 800 migrants drowned after the overcrowded fishing boat they were using to travel from Libya to Europe capsized. Although thousands of migrants had perished there in the preceding decades, the unprecedented scale of the incident forced the EU into action to minimise further loss of life close to its shores. As an immediate step, it launched an operation in the framework of its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Initially...
called ‘EUNAVFOR Med’, the operation was later renamed ‘Sophia’ after a baby born to one of the rescued migrants on board a German frigate (Operation Sophia 2015). Its purpose is to disrupt the business model of the human smugglers and traffickers, who endanger the lives of migrants by shipping them across the sea (Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins 2016, 317).

This article analyses the process through which Operation Sophia came into being. It argues that the operation can be seen as an Italian strategy to deal with the security and humanitarian aspects of the migration crisis. Italy had already begun to push for an EU naval operation in 2013 because it wanted the Union to share the burden of dealing with the migration problem and sought a hedge against the threats this problem posed. Despite Rome’s efforts to convince its partners, its initial proposal failed because the operation’s expected benefits seemed to be disproportionately in Italy’s favour. However, the migration problem became much more acute in spring 2015 as the death toll in the Mediterranean rose to new heights. It is likely that many of the deaths could have been prevented if the EU had agreed to Italy’s plan in 2013 or had replaced Rome’s Mare Nostrum operation with an equally strong operation in 2014. Since it did neither, the Union could no longer oppose the operation without appearing callous towards the migrants’ plight when the idea was raised for a second time.

This article uses the qualitative method of ‘process tracing’ and is based on 16 semi-structured interviews with 20 officials who were involved in the development of Operation Sophia (George and Bennett 2005, 206). The interviews were conducted in Brussels in 2015–16. They were held under the Chatham House Rule, which means that neither the identity nor the affiliation of the interviewees can be revealed. The interviewees include three Political and Security Committee ambassadors, 10 Politico-Military Group delegates, four EU Military Committee officials, one official from the Permanent Representatives Committee II, one Commission official and one official from the European External Action Service. Where possible the article uses newspaper articles and official documents to verify the interview data (George and Bennett 2005, 206). The article is divided into two sections. The first discusses the CSDP’s ability to deal with illegal migration in the run-up to the 2015 crisis, while the second provides a detailed analysis of the 2013 and 2015 attempts to organise an EU anti-smuggling naval operation.

CSDP and illegal migration

Over the past years, the EU has developed a readiness to address the causes of illegal migration, particularly in the maritime domain, through its CSDP. The literature published before the 2015 migration crisis and the launch of Operation Sophia tended to overlook the possibility that migration concerns could drive the creation of EU military operations. Howorth, for example, does not address this at all in his textbook on the Union’s security and defence policy (Howorth 2014). However, there are exceptions. Olsen (2009, 246), for example, writes that EU decision-makers see the Union’s crisis management activities in Africa as a useful way to take care of certain specific European
interests, such as preventing migration. Similarly, Ginsberg and Penksa (2012, 67) contend that Africa has become ‘the primary location for CSDP engagement’ because it is a source of migration and other negative externalities that affect the Union. Pohl (2014, 169–70) argues that the shared security goals that the member states have pursued through the CSDP have been linked to these countries’ domestic concerns, such as migration. However, these scholars provide only anecdotal evidence for a link between CSDP action and migration.

To understand how the CSDP became an additional instrument for the EU to use to tackle the causes of illegal migration, one must look at certain strategic documents published before the launch of Operation Sophia in 2015. The 2003 document A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy (ESS) identified five key threats to the EU’s security, the last of which was organised crime. It explained that organised crime often has an impact that goes well beyond the regions directly involved because cross-border trafficking in, among others, women and illegal migrants, ‘accounts for a large part of the activities of criminal gangs’ (Council of the EU 2003, 4). The 2008 Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy elevated the status of organised crime—including trafficking in human beings—by placing it in the same category as terrorism and listing it as the second key threat to the EU’s security. With regard to illegal migration, the report saw it mainly as a negative spillover effect of state failure (Council of the EU 2008, 1). However, neither document specified how the EU would actually deal with threats linked to illegal migration.

The far-reaching consequences of illegal migration are also highlighted in the EU’s internal security documents. The 2010 Internal Security Strategy identified organised crime as the second key threat to the Union’s internal security and described human trafficking as one of the main crime-related threats facing the EU (Council of the EU 2010, 7). Furthermore, the 2005 Communication A Strategy on the External Dimension of the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice emphasised that the growing sophistication of organised crime, including human trafficking, ‘can only be countered through improved law enforcement and judicial cooperation, both within the EU and externally, and through support for capacity-building in third countries’ (European Commission 2005, 4). The mention of the possibility of addressing organised crime through capacity building in third countries suggested an increased willingness on the EU’s part to address the causes of illegal migration beyond its borders. Although not mentioned explicitly, it is clear that such capacity-building efforts also included civilian CSDP missions. The EU’s Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) in Libya, for example, was established in 2013 to support Libyan authorities in strengthening their border services and to advise them on the development of a new border management strategy (Council of the EU 2013b, 15).

Since illegal migration to the EU has an important maritime dimension, the Union has also developed the naval readiness to address it. The 2014 Maritime Security Strategy listed cross-border and organised crime as a key threat to the EU’s maritime security (Council of the EU 2014, 7). It explained that the Union responds to maritime threats through a variety of instruments, including the CSDP (Council of the EU 2014, 9). The
specific ways in which the CSDP can deal with maritime threats are outlined in the 2012 *Maritime Security Operations Concept*, which essentially sketches out what can be described as the EU’s Maritime Petersberg Tasks (Council of the EU 2012). It explains that the member states’ maritime forces engaged in CSDP operations should be able to carry out five core and three additional tasks, several of which are suitable for dealing with illegal migration and the problems that give rise to it (Council of the EU 2012, 12). For example, the EU could use naval forces to keep the migration routes under surveillance. This would deter smugglers and traffickers, and any vessels used for trafficking that EU forces encountered could be impounded.

The development of an EU anti-smuggling naval operation

First attempt

Due to increased chaos in Libya, the number of migrants crossing the Mediterranean surged in late 2013. This resulted in several major incidents because the migrants made the crossing in rickety, crowded vessels that could capsize, sink or catch fire. The worst accident of 2013 took place on 3 October, when a boat sank off the Italian island of Lampedusa, resulting in the deaths of 366 migrants. A day later, 36 migrants lost their lives off Malta. To prevent further loss of life, Italy launched Operation Mare Nostrum. It was a naval search and rescue operation that was meant to scare off people smugglers and, as then Defence Minister Mario Mauro explained, ‘help those in trouble at sea’ (Thuburn 2013). However, the operation also served Italy’s security interests by hedging against the threats posed by the increased instability in Libya. Due to its geographical proximity to the country, Italy was concerned about the threat of Islamic radicalism (*ANSAmed* 2013a). Then Foreign Minister Emma Bonino explained that the country suspected ‘that jihadists or Al-Qa’idah members may be lurking among the poor wretches bound for Europe’ (*BBC Monitoring Europe* 2013b). As a result, Italy reinforced its coastal services, placed its security services on high alert and made preparations to reinforce controls on navigation and migration in the Mediterranean. Mare Nostrum contributed to this effort by deterring human smugglers and reducing migration flows, in this way making Italy better protected against the negative consequences of Libyan instability.

However, Italy wanted its partners to share the burden of dealing with the migration problem. In late 2013 Italy’s Permanent Representation to the EU proposed to Rome that the Union should launch an anti-trafficking naval operation that would replace Mare Nostrum (interview, February 2016). Rome was so impressed with the proposal that in October Foreign Minister Bonino and Defence Minister Mauro sent a joint letter on the matter to then High Representative Catherine Ashton. They requested that ‘all possible options be explored for a joint security and defense operation conducted by the EU against human trafficking in the Mediterranean to discourage criminal organisations’ (*ANSAmed* 2013b). According to the ministers, it would concentrate on the struggle against human trafficking and could be ‘highly effective and operative’ due to the experience gained from EUNAVFOR *Atalanta*, the EU’s anti-piracy naval operation off the
Nováky

They also emphasised that the operation should be ‘complementary’ to the Union’s existing activities in the Sahel and Libya, such as EUBAM Libya (BBC Monitoring Europe 2013a). Furthermore, the ministers argued that the operation would extend the CSDP’s ‘humanitarian dimension’ by ‘increasing civilian–military integration and cooperation with the instruments’. According to them, possible options for the operation could be discussed at the 18–19 November meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) (ANSAmed 2013b).

During the meeting, Italy tried to make the case for the operation by arguing that ‘human trafficking is hateful and dangerous’ for the people directly involved, but also ‘a security problem’ for the EU (BBC Monitoring Europe 2013b). At the time, however, its partners responded unenthusiastically. The FAC stated that the Union was ‘committed to enhance its cooperation with and assistance to the Libyan government to improve Libya’s capacity to manage the security of all its borders and to combat human smuggling and trafficking, illicit smuggling of goods and weapons, and in the fight against terrorism’ (Council of the EU 2013a, 9). Furthermore, it noted that the EU ‘will respond to these challenges with all appropriate instruments’. With the exception of Malta, however, the other member states did not consider the CSDP an appropriate instrument for dealing with migration (interview, February 2016). They dismissed Italy’s proposal as ‘fanciful’ and ‘unhelpful’ and argued that it blurred the distinction between external and internal (interviews, July 2015).

After the FAC, Foreign Minister Bonino explained that the issue of the proposed CSDP operation had been postponed until December, when the Commission-led Task Force Mediterranean would report on how the EU could deal with the migration situation more effectively (BBC Monitoring Europe 2013b). However, when it did report, it addressed Italy’s proposal only indirectly by noting that ‘[t]he on-going reflections about the use of appropriate CSDP instruments in order to support the fight against criminal organisations in third countries will also have to be taken into account’ (European Commission 2013, 14). The Task Force’s report was discussed at the 5–6 December meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council, and the outcome of that discussion was presented to the European Council on 19–20 December. Although the European Council called for ‘actions to fight smuggling and human trafficking’ in the Mediterranean, Italy’s EU partners were simply not interested in its proposal (European Council 2013, 21). They believed it blurred the distinction between external and internal politics and suspected it was a smoke screen for Italy to fight the migrants rather than the traffickers (interviews with national officials, 2015–16). Most importantly, the situation in the Mediterranean was seen as a national issue for Italy to resolve, which is why its partners were unenthusiastic about having to deal with it with their own forces (interview with a national official, 22 February 2016). Thus, the idea of a CSDP operation was buried for the time being.

Second attempt

After its 2013 attempt to establish an EU anti-smuggling naval operation had failed, Italy continued to pressure the Union to get more involved in dealing with the
migration problem. The reason for this was that Mare Nostrum was both expensive and domestically unpopular. First, Italy could no longer afford to run the operation by itself. Although it was initially estimated that its monthly running costs would be €1.5 million, they ended up climbing to €9.5 million (The Economist 2014). Second, Mare Nostrum was domestically unpopular because it was seen as a ‘pull factor’ that incentivised migrants to cross the Mediterranean. Among others, the leader of the populist Northern League (Lega Nord) party Matteo Salvini called for the operation’s suspension because it was too expensive and contributed to the ‘invasion’ of Italian shores (ANSAmed 2014a). Due to these pressures, then Interior Minister Angelino Alfano explained that Mare Nostrum ‘can’t last forever’ and that ‘Europe must replace Italy’ in the effort (ANSAmed 2014b). However, none of the three biggest EU member states agreed. The UK wanted Mare Nostrum to end because it believed that the operation had acted as an unintended pull factor that encouraged migrants to cross the Mediterranean, thereby causing more deaths (Travis 2014). Similarly, Germany viewed the operation as having created a bridge to Europe for migrants and believed that the EU should focus more on controlling its borders than on search and rescue (Germany, Federal Ministry of the Interior 2014). France was also in favour of an operation that would focus more on surveillance and border control closer to Europe’s shores (Agence France-Presse 2014).

In August it was announced that Frontex Plus, an expanded operation based on the EU border agency’s Hermes and Aeneas operations, would replace Mare Nostrum. In reality, there was no question of replacing Mare Nostrum because Frontex Plus—later renamed ‘Triton’—had ‘much more limited funds at its disposal’ and lacked ‘the competence to specifically aim at search and rescue’ (Rijpma and Vermeulen 2015, 467). Whereas Mare Nostrum had had a monthly budget of €9.5 million and a mandate that allowed it to conduct search and rescue operations throughout the Mediterranean, Triton’s monthly budget was only €2.9 million and its patrols were restricted to EU member states’ territorial waters. As a result, the UN and several non-governmental organisations warned that replacing Mare Nostrum with Triton would increase the death toll in the Mediterranean (Davies 2014; Amnesty International 2014, 8). Human Rights Watch, for example, claimed that ‘Frontex Plus turns out to be more of a Frontex Minus’ (Ward 2014). Despite these warnings, Italy continued to portray Triton as Mare Nostrum’s replacement because it wanted to bring the expensive and unpopular operation to an end. Interior Minister Alfano explained that it should be terminated after Triton’s launch because the operation ‘had a timeframe and Italy could not and should not take charge of the Mediterranean border on its own’ (ANSAmed 2014c). On another occasion, he explained that Italy would ‘not have two lines of defense’ for its borders in the form of Mare Nostrum and Triton (ANSAmed 2014d). Thus, Mare Nostrum ended on 31 October and Triton was launched on 1 November.

The EU’s attitude towards the migration problem changed dramatically in the spring of 2015. On 19 April a ship capsized off the Libyan coast and more than 800 people drowned. It was the worst maritime disaster in the Mediterranean since the Second World War. Two days later the Foreign Affairs and Home Affairs Councils held a joint session, the conclusions for which were essentially written by Italy (interview, July 2015). In
them, the Council ‘confirmed a strong commitment to act so as to prevent tragedies like
the recent events in the Mediterranean’ and noted that work would be taken forward
along three different strands: the fight against organised crime networks and human traf-
fickers, more effective efforts to save lives at sea, and a fairer sharing of responsibilities
regarding resettlement and relocation projects (Council of the EU 2015a, 3). With regard
to the first strand, the Council discussed several options ‘including stepping up work on
the routes of travel used by migrants and enhanced police cooperation on counter-meas-
ures against smugglers’ (Council of the EU 2015a, 3).

At the meeting Dimitris Avramopoulos—the European Commissioner for Migration,
Home Affairs and Citizenship—presented a 10-point plan on the immediate actions to be
taken in response to the migration crisis. The ministers gave the plan their ‘full backing’
(European Commission 2015). Avramopoulos and High Representative Mogherini, who
had succeeded Ashton in November 2014, explained that they would convey the plan to
the European Council, which was to hold an extraordinary meeting on the migration
crisis three days later (European Commission 2015). One of the points included in the
plan referred to a ‘systematic effort to capture and destroy vessels used by the smug-
glers.’ It continues with ‘The positive results obtained with the Atalanta operation should
inspire us to similar operations against smugglers in the Mediterranean’ (European
Commission 2015). The 10-point plan had been drafted in a matter of hours during the
weekend by a small group of people within the Commission’s Directorate-General for
Migration and Home Affairs (interview, December 2015). The naval operation point was
inspired by Italy’s 2013 proposal and the experience of EUNAVFOR Atalanta (interview,
December 2015). However, Italy did not propose it and Mogherini was not involved in
drafting the plan (interviews, 2015–16). Thus, for the first time in the CSDP’s history, the
Commission had proposed launching an EU military operation.

Although the naval operation point was intended as something to be considered, High
Representative Mogherini took it as something to be delivered and began to push hard
for it (interviews, July 2015). That she was operating in an emotional political environ-
ment which was conducive for the operation aided her efforts. When the 10-point plan
was presented, not all member states were enthusiastic about the proposed operation.
However, 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, they became caught up in it—it would have been difficult for anyone
to oppose it publicly (interviews, 2015–16). The then German Interior Minister Thomas
de Maizière, for example, supported the idea of destroying the smugglers’ ships, while
then French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius promised a determined fight against the
smugglers (Agence France-Presse 2015). Even the British Home Secretary at that time,
Theresa May, welcomed the operation as part of a ‘widescale approach’ to tackling the
migration crisis (Waterfield 2015).

In a statement issued after the emergency meeting on 23 April, the European Council
declared the situation in the Mediterranean to be a ‘tragedy’. It promised that the EU
would ‘mobilise all efforts at its disposal to prevent further loss of life at sea’ and to
tackle the root causes of the ‘human emergency’. Its immediate priority, however, was ‘to prevent more people from dying’, which is why it had decided to strengthen the EU’s presence at sea, to fight the traffickers, to prevent illegal migration flows and to reinforce internal solidarity and responsibility (European Council 2015). Several member states made concrete contributions to help in search and rescue efforts. Germany, for example, offered a frigate and 10 ships, while France committed itself to providing a plane for a fortnight in September and a patrol boat for November (Traynor 2015). The UK even offered the Royal Navy’s flagship, the *HMS Bulwark*, despite its earlier criticism of search and rescue efforts. The reason that the UK now offered this support was that, although Home Secretary May and then Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond had resisted increasing the UK’s involvement in search and rescue to save face due to their earlier opposition to *Mare Nostrum*, then Prime Minister David Cameron had become convinced that the British people saw the migration crisis as a humanitarian rather than an immigration issue (Travis 2015). With regard to the human traffickers, the European Council wanted to ‘disrupt trafficking networks, bring the perpetrators to justice and seize their assets’ and ‘undertake systematic efforts to identify, capture and destroy vessels before they are used by traffickers’ (European Council 2015). To this end, it invited High Representative Mogherini ‘to immediately begin preparations for a possible CSDP operation’ so that the matter could be discussed at the 18 May meeting of the FAC (European Council 2015; interview, July 2015).

The Crisis Management Concept (CMC), which describes how the CSDP can address particular problems, was developed quickly. It was based on the Political Framework for Crisis Approach, which had been revised on 10 April. This framework had identified a maritime surveillance operation as one of five options for possible CSDP action in Libya (interviews, July 2015). The CMC explained that the situation in the Mediterranean ‘has extremely serious implications for the EU and requires urgent action’ (Council of the EU 2015b, 3). It laid stress, in particular, on the ‘security and stability implications’ of this situation and emphasised ‘the need to prevent links between criminal networks and terrorist organisations’ (Council of the EU 2015b, 6). The CMC stated that the operation needed ‘an executive mandate and could be military and joint (e.g. naval and air) in nature’ (Council of the EU 2015b, 7). Thus, it developed a four-phase operation that would ‘disrupt the business model of the smugglers’ by ‘undertaking systematic efforts to identify, seize/capture and destroy vessels and assets’ before they could be used (Council of the EU 2015b, 1). Phase 1 would focus on intelligence gathering, Phase 2 on seizing the smugglers’ vessels and assets, Phase 3 on destroying their vessels within Libya’s territorial waters, and Phase 4 on withdrawing and concluding the operation (Council of the EU 2015b, 1). The reasons for organising the operation in phases were threefold: first, conducting it would be easier if it was divided into clearly defined phases; second, the EU needed to gather intelligence on the smugglers and their networks before it could start acting against them; and third, the Union did not yet have the necessary legal mandate that would allow it to conduct all Phase 2 and 3 activities from the very beginning (interviews, July 2015).

Early in the planning process, diplomats estimated that it might take ‘several months and even up to a year’ before the operation could be launched (Traynor 2015). However,
due to a ‘sense of political imperative’ to move quickly, the operation was fast tracked (interview, July 2015). The fast-track process had been introduced when CSDP planning procedures were revised in 2013. It simplifies the standard planning process by eliminating certain steps to give the EU the option to deploy operations ‘at very short notice’ and launch them ‘within a few days of the approval of the CMC’ (Council of the EU 2013c, 28). Due to the public outcry over the deaths in the Mediterranean, EU member states were under pressure to act. As a result, they wanted to launch the operation as soon as possible to show to their domestic constituents that they were doing something about the situation (interviews, July 2015). Furthermore, both Italy and High Representative Mogherini were pushing strongly for a quick launch of the operation. Mogherini argued that the summer peak season for the flow of migrants was about to start, which meant that more of them were likely to die if the operation were not launched soon (interviews, July 2015). Moreover, they understood that the 19 April incident had created a limited window of opportunity for setting up the EU anti-smuggling naval operation that Rome had wanted since 2013 (interviews, July 2015). Thus, to obtain the commitment of the other member states, Italy and Mogherini used the emotional political climate to their advantage.

Various challenges arose during the planning process. At the start of the process, the Council Legal Service gave the opinion that the operation could be launched without a UN mandate. However, the EU member states believed that this mandate, or at least an invitation from Libya, would be necessary. Later in the discussions, military planners told them that Phase 1 could be launched without a UN mandate or Libyan consent because sufficient legal grounds already existed, such as the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the 2000 Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air. There were also disagreements over the nature of the operation. The great powers contended that it should focus on dealing with the human smugglers and traffickers. However, a number of other member states, such as Sweden and Austria, held that the operation should also focus on search and rescue because they were sensitive to the humanitarian dimension of the migration crisis. In the end the Operational Plan had to be revised due to Sweden’s and Austria’s questions over the issue (interview, July 2015). In addition, it was initially unclear what would happen to the migrants the operation would rescue. Just four days before the 18 May meeting of the FAC, the member states were still discussing ports of disembarkation and the legal aspects of what to do with the migrants. As a result, it seemed unclear whether the operation could be established on schedule. However, High Representative Mogherini gave her assurances that it would be established on time, and it was decided that Frontex would take the migrants picked up by the operation and bring them to Italy or elsewhere (interviews, July 2015).

The CMC and the Council Decision establishing Operation Sophia were adopted, as planned, at the 18 May meeting of the FAC. Since Italy had offered to serve as the operation’s framework nation, Italian Rear Admiral Enrico Credendino was chosen as the Operation Commander, and the Joint Operations Headquarters in Rome were selected as the location of the Operation Headquarters. Since Sophia was to be conducted in phases, its force generation process was divided into three phases. This
meant that force generation was initially conducted only for Phase 1. The first force
generation conference was held on 5 June and focused on manning the Operation
Headquarters and the Force Headquarters. The first force generation conference for
assets was held on 11 June, the second on 18 June and the third on 19 June (interview,
July 2015). Thus, force generation for Sophia’s first phase was completed in little over
a week. It was made easier by Italy’s significant contribution, which included the aircraft carrier *Cavour* and two helicopters. Germany also made a significant contribution
by providing the frigate *Schleswig-Holstein* and the supply ship *Werra*. Berlin had
initially hesitated about making this contribution to Sophia because it had concerns
over certain aspects of the Operational Plan and because it faced legal questions at
home. However, in a last-minute announcement at the Political and Security Committee,
it declared its willingness to contribute to the effort. This gave Operation Commander
Credendino enough assets to conduct the first phase of the operation and allowed the
FAC to launch it on 22 June.

**Conclusion**

This article has analysed the process that led to the launch of Operation Sophia, the EU’s
anti-smuggling naval operation in the Mediterranean. Italy initially attempted to set up
such an operation following the Lampedusa shipwreck in October 2013. At the time,
however, the proposal failed to gain steam because other member states saw illegal
migration in the Mediterranean mainly as an Italian problem. Furthermore, the proposed
operation would have benefited Italy disproportionately because, by making it more dif-
ficult for human smugglers and traffickers to operate in the Mediterranean, it would have
provided direct benefits to the country in the form of fewer illegal sea arrivals and
reduced costs of patrolling the sea. For most of its partners, however, it would have pro-
duced only an indirect benefit in the form of improved maritime safety for the migrants.
Thus, since Italy would have been the main beneficiary of the operation, its partners were
unwilling to support it out of solidarity.

The second attempt to set up the operation took place when the Commission revisited
Italy’s 2013 proposal following the death of over 800 migrants in April 2015. This time
it received instant support and led to the launch of Operation Sophia two months later.
This attempt succeeded because the EU could no longer oppose the operation without
appearing callous towards the plight of the migrants. It is likely that many of the deaths
in the Mediterranean could have been prevented if the great powers had supported replac-
ing Mare Nostrum with an equally strong operation in 2014. When it was announced that
Mare Nostrum would end, the humanitarian community explicitly warned that the move
was likely to cause increased casualties because Triton had fewer resources and a more
limited mandate than its predecessor. Thus, when the Commission revisited the idea of
deploying an anti-smuggling naval operation after the 19 April disaster, EU member
states had no option but to accept it. If they had opposed it, Italy could have shamed them
publicly for their lack of compassion and solidarity, which would have damaged their
reputations among their domestic constituents.
Note

1. The October 2013 Justice and Home Affairs Council agreed to set up Task Force Mediterranean in response to the Lampedusa disaster. Its establishment was also welcomed later in the same month by the European Council.

References

Agence France-Presse. (2014). Rome et Paris en “parfait accord” sur la fin de Mare Nostrum. 28 August.

Agence France-Presse. (2015). L’UE planche sur 10 actions pour éviter les drames de migrants en Méditerranée. 20 April. https://fr.news.yahoo.com/immigration-leurope-doit-prendre-mesures-imm%C3%A9diates-selon-mogherini-085149017.html. Accessed 20 September 2018.

Amnesty International. (2014). Lives adrift: Refugees and migrants in peril in the central Mediterranean. EUR 05/006/2014, 30 September. https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/8000/eur050062014en.pdf. Accessed 20 September 2018.

ANSAmed. (2013a). Italy on security alert after Libyan premier kidnapping. 11 October. http://www.ansamed.info/ansamed/en/news/sections/politics/2013/10/11/Italy-security-alert-Libyan-premier-kidnapping_9443604.html. Accessed 20 September 2018.

ANSAmed. (2013b). Immigration: Italy wants EU support for anti-trafficking. 30 October. http://www.ansamed.info/ansamed/en/news/sections/politics/2013/10/30/Immigration-Italy-wants-EU-support-anti-trafficking_9545970.html. Accessed 20 September 2018.

ANSAmed. (2014a). Italy: more migrants rescued, League demands mission’s end. 21 April. http://www.ansamed.info/ansamed/en/news/sections/politics/2014/04/21/italy-more-migrants-rescued-league-demands-missions-end_6bbd33a-9a16–4f22-b9e6–32c4a0aad05.html. Accessed 20 September 2018.

ANSAmed. (2014b). Immigration: ‘Mare Nostrum must become EU operation’. 26 June. http://www.ansamed.info/ansamed/en/news/sections/politics/2014/06/26/immigration-mare-nostrum-must-become-eu-operation_cf3f7547–8abe-4b07-a742–1e97118b3851.html. Accessed 20 September 2018.

ANSAmed. (2014c). Lampedusa shipwreck: Alfano calls for Mare Nostrum’s end. 3 October. http://www.ansamed.info/ansamed/en/news/sections/politics/2014/10/03/lampedusa-shipwreck-alfano-calls-for-mare-nostrum-ends_6c68e6b01–4aef-4c5b-bdef-6943d6efc17f2.html. Accessed 20 September 2018.

ANSAmed. (2014d). Alfano says Triton replacing Mare Nostrum rescue plan. 9 October. http://www.ansamed.info/ansamed/en/news/nations/europe/2014/10/09/alfano-says-triton-replacing-mare-nostrum-rescue-plan_a9936036–14e2–4d4d-a245–92336bcffe35.html. Accessed 20 September 2018.

BBC Monitoring Europe. (2013a). Italy asks EU to launch mission against migrant smugglers. 5 November.

BBC Monitoring Europe. (2013b). Italian ministers says jihadists likely to be among migrants from Lybia. 19 November.

Council of the EU. (2003). A secure Europe in a better world: European security strategy. 12 December. https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/european-security-strategy-secure-europe-better-world. Accessed 20 September 2018.

Council of the EU. (2008). Report on the implementation of the European Security Strategy: Providing security in a changing world. S407/08, 11 December. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/reports/104630.pdf. Accessed 20 September 2018.
Council of the EU. (2010). *Internal security strategy for the European Union: Towards a European security model*. March. http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/30753/qc3010313enc.pdf. Accessed 20 September 2018.

Council of the EU. (2012). *EU Maritime Security Operations (MSO) concept*. 8592/12, 17 April. http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8592–2012-INIT/en/pdf. Accessed 20 September 2018.

Council of the EU. (2013a). 3273\textsuperscript{rd} Council meeting: Foreign Affairs. Press release, 16364/13. http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/foraff/139633.pdf. Accessed 20 September 2018.

Council of the EU. (2013b). Decision 2013/233/CFSP on the European Union Integrated Border Management Assistance Mission in Libya. OJ L138 (22 May), 15. http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013D0233&rid=6. Accessed 27 September 2018.

Council of the EU. (2013c). Suggestions for crisis management procedures for CSDP crisis management operations. 7660/2/13, 18 June. http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7660–2013-REV-2/en/pdf. Accessed 20 September 2018.

Council of the EU. (2014). *European Union Maritime Security Strategy*. 11205/14, 24 June. http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11205–2014-INIT/en/pdf. Accessed 20 September 2018.

Council of the EU. (2015a). 3385\textsuperscript{th} Council meeting. 20 April. http://www.parliament.bg/pub/ECD/185679ST08146.EN15.PDF. Accessed 11 October 2018.

Council of the EU. (2015b). Draft Crisis Management Concept. 30 April. http://www.statewatch.org/news/2015/may/eu-med-military-op.pdf. Accessed 20 September 2018.

Davies, L. (2014). UN warning over Mediterranean crossing patrol force from EU. *The Guardian*, 29 August. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/29/un-eu-mediterranean-frontex-mare-nostrum-italy. Accessed 20 September 2018.

Della Porta, D., & Keating, M. (2008). How many approaches in the social sciences? An epistemological introduction. In D. Della Porta & M. Keating (eds.), *Approaches and methodologies in the social sciences: A pluralist perspective* (pp. 19–39). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

European Commission. (2005). *A strategy on the external dimension of the area of freedom, security and justice*. COM (2005), 491 final, 12 October. http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexp/rep/1/2005/EN/1–2005–491-EN-F1–1.Pdf. Accessed 20 September 2018.

European Commission. (2013). *On the work of the Task Force Mediterranean*. COM (2013), 869 final, 4 December. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-is-new/news/news/docs/20131204_communication_on_the_work_of_the_task_force_mediterranean_en.pdf. Accessed 27 September 2018.

European Commission. (2015). Joint Foreign and Home Affairs council: Ten point action plan on migration. Press release, IP/15/4813, 20 April. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release _IP-15–4813_en.htm. Accessed 20 September 2018.

European Council. (2013). Conclusions: 19/20 December 2013. EUCO 217/13, 20 December. http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-217–2013-INIT/en/pdf. Accessed 27 September 2018.

European Council. (2015). Special meeting of the European Council, 23 April 2015: Statement. Press release, 204/15, 23 April. http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press -releases/2015/04/23/special-euco-statement/. Accessed 20 September 2018.

George, A. L., & Bennett, A. (2005). *Case studies and theory development in the social sciences*. Cambridge: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs.
Germany, Federal Ministry of the Interior. (2014). Rede von Bundesminister Dr. Thomas de Maizière anlässlich der ersten Beratung des Bundeshaushaltse 2015. http://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/Reden/DE/2014/09/haushaltsrede-2015.html. Accessed 20 September 2018.

Ginsberg, R. H., & Penksa, S. E. (2012). The European Union in global security: The politics of impact. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Howorth, J. (2014). Security and defence policy in the European Union. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Jeandesboz, J., & Pallister-Wilkins, P. (2016). Crisis, routine, consolidation: The politics of the Mediterranean migration crisis. Mediterranean Politics, 21(2), 316–20.

Olsen, G. R. (2009). The EU and military conflict management in Africa: For the good of Africa or Europe? International Peacekeeping, 16(2), 245–60.

Operation Sophia. (2015). High Representative and Vice-President Federica Mogherini visits the Eunavfor Med headquarters in Rome. News, 24 September. https://www.operationsophia.eu/high-representative-and-vice-president-federica-mogherini-visits-the-eunavfor-med-headquarters-in-rome/. Accessed 20 September 2018.

Pohl, B. (2014). EU foreign policy and crisis management operations: Power, purpose and domestic politics. Abingdon: Routledge.

Rijnma, J., & Vermeulen, M. (2015). EUROSUR: Saving lives or building borders? European Security, 24(3), 454–72.

The Economist. (2014). Tidal wave. 5 July. https://www.economist.com/europe/2014/07/05/tidal-wave. Accessed 20 September 2018.

Thuburn, D. (2013). Italy deploys drones, warships after refugee tragedies. AFP News, 14 October. https://sg.news.yahoo.com/italy-plans-refugee-operation-latest-boat-lands-071946591.html. Accessed 20 September 2018.

Travis, A. (2014). UK axes support for Mediterranean migrant rescue operation. The Guardian, 27 October. https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/oct/27/uk-mediterranean-migrant-rescue-plan. Accessed 20 September 2018.

Travis, A. (2015). UK cabinet split over EU plans to expand sea search and rescue of migrants. The Guardian, 23 April 2015. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/22/uk-cabinet-split-over-eu-plans-to-expand-sea-search-and-rescue-of-migrants. Accessed 20 September 2018.

Traynor, I. (2015). Migrant deaths: EU leaders to triple funding of rescue operations. The Guardian, 24 April. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/23/migrant-deaths-eu-funding-rescue-ships-mediterranean. Accessed 20 September 2018.

Ward, B. (2014). The EU must take more responsibility for the migrants risking their lives to reach Italy. The Independent, 17 September. https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/09/17/eu-must-take-more-responsibility-migrants-risking-their-lives-reach-italy. Accessed 20 September 2018.

Waterfield, B. (2015). Stop the people traffickers of the Med, EU chiefs order. The Times, 21 April. https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/stop-the-people-traffickers-of-the-med-eu-chiefs-order-d3jxtbkxsw8. Accessed 20 September 2018.

Author biography

Niklas Nováky, Ph.D., is a Research Officer at the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies. He focuses on foreign, security and defence policy. He is also the Assistant Editor-in-Chief of the European View, the Martens Centre’s biannual policy journal. He is author of the book European Union Military Operations: A Collective Action Perspective (Routledge 2018).