Lampedusa and Marketized Surveillance in the Mediterranean: A Political Drama in Two Acts

Following the latest deaths near Lampedusa on 3rd October and then again off the coast of Sicily on 11th October, what are we to make of the current and likely future European responses?

There has been, quite rightly, much talk of the tragedy experienced by the migrants, families and survivors. Yet, in the fortnight since the 3 October, the political cycle has offered little comfort in its unedifying spectacle of member states blaming one another for what is above all a European problem. This has led to media talk of policy deadlock and intractability. However, closer inspection reveals that the perceived political problem of the Lampedusa crisis is not tragic deaths at sea, but rather the irregular migration from the African continent to the shores of particular EU member states. In the face of other member states' intransigence on responsibility-sharing, we can see that policymakers' logical response is not deadlock, but a further rationalization of the only European 'solution' on the table: increased surveillance and militarization of the Mediterranean.

Act One: Mobile People, Immobile Politics

This story is revealed in the two part drama underway since 3rd October. Act one involves lots of political theatre and a wide cast. National political protagonists shout at one another through their national media. Distressed local services and politicians complain of impossible practical burdens. International agencies and NGOs frustratedly wring their hands and say 'we told you so'. National intelligentsia and publics push for government action and reform. European politicians say more needs to be done, and no-one believes them – least of all the migrants and others protesting in Lampedusa itself. At the heart of this emotive political drama appears to be the impossibility of burden sharing and the ineffective role of the Commission when faced with intransigence from the Union's most powerful member states (notably Germany).

The Commissioner for Home Affairs, Cecilia Malström, responded to the deaths near Lampedusa by referring to the importance of burden-sharing, and the need for a European response to irregular migration. There was no mention of her policy success of only June this year – the agreement of the "Common European Asylum System"(CEAS) – whose revised directives on extended procedural rights for some asylum seekers seem curiously irrelevant to the cases of the Somali, Eritrean and Syrians seeking refuge on 3rd October. The CEAS is only due to be transposed into national law in 2015. Nonetheless, the events of Lampedusa expose the significant gaps in the EU's effective development of a CEAS that might actually be useful to its border member states, and which might materially assist in developing humane asylum and migration policy and practice across the Union.

These issues were central to the drama played out in the media in the first week of the crisis. Malta took the opportunity to reiterate its arguments that current levels of migration in the Mediterranean are a European problem and require greater burden-sharing. In this it has been supported by Italy, following rapprochement between the two countries in July 2013. Malta's position on burden-sharing means that it had not been participating in Frontex activities, as it objected to the terms of engagement (FRA, 2012, p. 117). So, despite the technical availability of emergency mechanisms for coordinated EU action through Frontex, the discussion at a scheduled Justice and Home Affairs European Council meeting on 8-9 October seemed to typify European responses. The German Interior

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Minister rejected – in strong terms – any possibility of burden-sharing in relation to irregular migration in the Mediterranean. The Council's provisional meeting notes do not convey the scale or depth of irritation and resentment among MS regarding this issue, referring to an "exchange of views" on what might be done "to avoid such tragedies". Most important, however, was the agreement that "as proposed by Italy", the Commission will establish "a task-force….to identify *the tools which the EU has at its disposal* and which could be used in a more effective way" (p.11, emphasis added). In other words, the central outcome was to *prevent* further discussion of how this European problem – of refugees and irregular migrants who want to live and work in Northern Europe – can be made (even in part) a responsibility of Northern European member states. Both Malta and Italy have responded in strong terms. From 11th October they established joint patrols and rescue missions, and they will be proposing new reforms for discussion at the European Council meeting on 24-5th October 2013. Malta maintained the emotive but frustrated tension, with Prime Minister Muscat declaring on 12th October that Malta feels it has been "abandoned" by Europe, and describing the Mediterranean as a "cemetery".

Act Two: Crisis, What Crisis?

Nonetheless, I suggested that this is a two-part drama. In order to grasp the likely trajectory of EU policymaking as the issue fades from the news, we must here change the scene, perspective and tempo, although some of the cast remain the same. The setting is now in the informal seminar rooms of Brussels, rather than formal meetings and statements from national capitals. The narrative is structured on a slow build of tension over a decade, not compressed into a frenzied fortnight. The Commission in this act has a different character: decisive and righteous, rather than vulnerable and pleading. National executive agencies and administrations appear as policy players, and the corporate interests of Northern Europe (France, UK, Germany, Sweden, and Poland) enter the stage.

The deaths of early October come in a long line of such cases. Over many years, we can observe the development of policies which are less politically charged and publically contentious, but more institutionally embedded and operationally functional than those discussed on 8-9th October. These policies 'hide in plain sight' amidst the frothy and bad-tempered exchanges of October 2013, and reveal different underpinning dynamics. In Malmström's press release of 3th October, her first policy reference was to the importance of the planned development of EUROSUR, in train since 2008.

A co-ordinated communication network for border surveillance and information sharing, envisaged as the first phase of EUROSUR, will apply to the EU's Eastern land, and of course, Southern maritime, borders by 1st December 2013 (other member states join in 2014). EUROSUR would enable the EU, said the Commissioner, "to better track, identify and rescue small vessels at sea thanks to better coordination between national authorities, appropriate channels of communication and improved surveillance technology." It was, in fact, only the following week, on 10th October, that the European Parliament voted to approve the adoption of EUROSUR's first phase of information co-ordination. It did so, despite ongoing concerns regarding data protection under this new system (FRA, 2012, p. 62). This use of irregular migration concerns to justify surveillance and security measures, and to generate market development opportunities for civil, military and technology security companies, is evident elsewhere in long-term EU policymaking.

First, in migration and development policy. 'Partnership agreements' with the EU's neighbours and some countries of origin, have been promoted as a key platform of the EU's (2005) Global Approach to Migration and its 2011 revision, the 'Global Approach to Migration and Mobility'. Indeed, Malmström refers to a recently agreed, and long fought-for, partnership with Morocco in her statement of 11th October. These partnerships were originally explained as necessary mechanisms to facilitate the orderly, regularised circulation of migrants for temporary and low skill employment between the EU and relevant partners (for a cogent critique, see Statewatch, 2012). Yet, the financial and in-kind assistance provided under the partnerships is strongly oriented to security measures (Kunz et al, 2012). Such 'partnerships' thus engage the EU in policing neighbour state borders and *vice versa.* They have little effect in the numbers of people trying to cross the sea to Europe's Southern borders.

Second, in accordance with phase 2 of EUROSUR programme (p. 7-9), the EU's research programmes FP7, and forthcoming Horizon 2020, are used to fund the testing and operational application of existing products and

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technologies of major Northern European corporations. Especially striking, in light of the Lampedusa crisis, is the use of research monies for the purposes of embedding and normalizing the use of drones and robots in EU border surveillance. (For a non-exhaustive selection, see FP7 projects: 93528, 99196, 95504, 88640, 99691, also projects talos and sectronica.) Thus EU research funding is used to support private companies' product testing in the public domain – and at public expense. The improbable conflation of 'monitoring small boats in the Mediterranean' with 'humane management of irregular migration' gains new meaning through these practical developments. As a result, 'monitoring the Mediterranean' becomes conflated with 'maintaining security'. Perhaps this translation of policy meaningis not surprising when we see how closely the EU's research priorities for 'security' resemble those proposed by EOS, the main industry lobby group. Indeed, the fully integrated maritime surveillance system for the Mediterranean, proposed for phase 3 of EUROSUR (pp. 9ff), closely reflects industry positions, and would require increasing use of such technology. In doing so, it would also help, by the way, to act as a showcase for European technology and skill in this 'growing global market'.

The Commissioner's emphasis on the value of EUROSUR and mobility partnerships to manage irregular migration and help prevent loss of life seems disingenuous at best. Most irregular migration does not come across the Mediterranean, but through airports and visa overstayers. And drones and robots, of course, do not undertake rescue operations. Nor do they have protocols for respecting rights of those seeking asylum.They might, however, have their uses in the protection and development of assets for natural resource exploitation, such as oil and gas, in this highly sensitive region. (Discussion about such exploitation formed part of Italy and Malta's bi-lateral discussions in July.)

...So Policy as Usual?

In the light of this second act of our drama, the policy stalemate about burden-sharing should be re-interpreted. Rather than policy immobility, we can observe instead the smooth reproduction – even hastening – of 'policy-business as usual' in the Mediterranean.

The deaths at Lampedusa, and the political response dominating part one of our drama, seem to imply the absence of policy alternatives in the high drama of member states politics. Yet, there is already an alternative on the table, deeply ingrained in the EU's political and institutional make-up. Reflecting this dynamic is the Italian case. Thus, domestic political debate in Italy has raised the need to reform the main immigration 'Bossi-Fini' law, and its draconian 2008 amendments. This was a debate about migrant integration and humanity. Yet, by 12th October, the key policy measure on offer was from the Italian Defence Minister, promising a three-fold increase in Italy's military presence in the Mediterranean. Both Italian prime minister Letta and Malta's Muscat are busy wooing allies for substantive policy proposals on immigration and asylum. They hope these will be discussed at the EU Council meeting on 24-25th October, and taken up during the Greek-Italian Presidencies of the Union in 2014. However, Greece's socio-economic position remains very precarious, and both Greece and Italy have other far-reaching pre-occupations in relation to the EU. These make sustained leadership on the question of migrationduring 2014 improbable. In these circumstances, any impetus for migration policy reform can **only** be maintained if it is directly linked to wider questions of growing socio-economic and political inequality in the Union. In the absence of such an impetus, the Lampedusa crisis will primarily serve to rationalize the intensified surveillance of the maritime domain, and the ongoing creation of new market opportunities in an increasingly securitized Mediterranean.

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