

The Politics of Instrumentation: developments in EU external migration policy to sub-Saharan Africa*

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Abstract:

This paper looks at developments that have taken place in the EU's external migration policy since 2015 as a result of the Valletta Summit and the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa that emerged from Valletta. It looks at the renewed and concerted efforts of the EU and its Member States to extend their policy reach further south to sub-Saharan Africa – efforts that have regained momentum on the back of the 'migration crisis' of 2015. In drawing on various themes in sociological and migration literature, and on semi-structured interviews conducted with staff at EU institutions in Brussels in September 2017, this article sets out to demonstrate that EU institutional actors framed their increased engagement with third countries from a crisis management perspective, where the notion of crisis serves as a policy window to scale up migration interventions in third countries and reorient development interventions to achieve EU migration policy goals. At the same time, the paper aims to establish if any major qualitative shift in EU external migration policies to key third African countries can be observed since 2015, while detailing the EU rationale – politically and contextually driven – for selecting certain countries for enhanced partnership. It concludes that the EU's external migration governance is subject to two conflicting forces: satisfying EU Member State demands for greater flexibility in achieving restrictive policy goals, and offering third countries tangible benefits in migration cooperation.

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Introduction

The existing literature has established the growth of the external dimension of the EU's migration agenda. I refer to the 'externalisation' of migration policy as a process by which EU institutions and EU Member States have implemented policies and frameworks which promote the governing of EU borders outside of its actual borders and jurisdiction (Aubarell, Zapata-Barrero, and Aragall 2009; Betts 2011; Boswell 2003; Lavenex and Uçarer 2004; Samers 2004). They have, as such, 'increasingly sought to exert extra-territorial authority in order to shape the movement of people within or from other regions of the world' (Betts, 2011: 32). This paper contributes to existing research by examining developments that have occurred since 2015 following the EU Summit at Valletta, at which African heads of state were present, and which saw the introduction of a new financial instrument: the EU's Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. Since 2015, EU policies formally identify West Africa as a region of interest, resulting in efforts to expand and scale up cooperation with West African governments on migration topics.

The research presented here draws on semi-structured interviews conducted in late 2017 and early 2018 with EU officials, primarily in Brussels, but also in EU Delegations in Senegal and Ghana. This research forms part of a larger doctoral research project on the EU's cooperation with West African governments in migration. I draw on public policy approaches and the crisis management literature to offer a conceptualisation of how the 2015 crisis created a political opportunity. Boin, 'T Hart, and McConnell (2009) employ the term 'crisis exploitation' to describe how crises disrupt societal routine and create a political space for 'actors inside and outside government to redefine issues, propose policy innovations and organizational reforms' (p.82). Rhinard (2019) attributes recent shifts in EU policy making dynamics as driven by 'crisisification', concluding that the changes introduced can be observed not so much by high-level agreements as by everyday activities and seemingly mundane administrative procedures, and where he stresses the symbolic importance of Brussels-level initiatives the formulation of responses. The critical security literature, using a constructivist perspective, also serves as a reminder that a preoccupation with security and crisis feeds into everyday

practices, where a new issue or threat is initially framed as requiring exceptional measures – but where emergency and security-oriented operating procedures subsequently become the norm rather than the exception (Bigo 2002; Huysmans 2006).

This article proceeds as follows. By drawing on ideas from public policy literature I explore the ‘crisisification’ of EU policymaking on migration since 2015, arguing that a series of shifts occurred that were made possible by the appearance of an agenda-setting opportunity, or a policy ‘window’ (Kingdon 1995). Political actors at the EU level have succeeded in framing the importance of increased engagement with third countries, and West African countries in particular, against the backdrop of a migration crisis. Fundamentally, this agenda has sought to reorient development interventions towards producing migration-focused outcomes, whereby development goals are increasingly viewed through a migration prism. Through the introduction of a new financial instrument, the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (hereafter EUTF) of which West African states are among the key beneficiaries, the EU has implemented a series of changes in operating procedures in line with a crisis management approach. This first section explores and documents the changes within the EU’s external migration regime since 2015, the role of West Africa within this regime, and shifts that can be observed in the EU’s strategy regarding conditionality. The second part of this paper examines the implications for the EU’s external governance strategy in light of the emerging literature on third countries’ migration diplomacy strategies. This paper puts forward that the EU’s policy approach since 2015 can be conceived both as a policy of appeasement towards the security-oriented demands of EU Member States, and as a strategic bargaining tool with African states.

[A ‘crisisification’ of the EU’s migration agenda](#)

The year 2015 is a significant point of development in the EU’s external migration policy. The number of migrant arrivals and asylum applicants in the EU peaked in 2015 with over 1.25 million first-time asylum applicants, more than twice the number of first-time applicants in 2014 (Eurostat, 2017). In the same year, the EU established the European Agenda on Migration (EAM) citing the need for ‘swift and determined action’ in response to migrant deaths in the Mediterranean (European Commission 2015). This came on the heels of the European Council meeting of 23 April 2015 in which the statement of the meeting announces

that ‘the European Union will mobilise all efforts at its disposal (...) to tackle the root causes of the human emergency that we face’ (Council 2015). Further key actions outlined include strengthening presence at sea, fighting trafficking and preventing irregular migration flows (*ibid*). A case for crisis-driven action is thus made in EU discourse since 2015. In this context, the scaling up of EU engagement with West African countries on migration topics becomes formalised through the European Agenda on Migration (2015), the Partnership Framework (2016) and the Valletta Summit that took place in late 2015, where the Trust Fund was launched against the backdrop of the migration crisis. While the aim of this section is not to assess whether the 2015 crisis was authentic or constructed¹ nor to assess the empirical basis for the claim that such a crisis occurred – such an endeavour goes beyond the scope of this paper – it examines the role of crisis in providing the necessary opportunity and political momentum to scale up the EU’s engagement with third countries on migration, and to justify the use of a wider range of measures in EU efforts to increase the rate of migrant returns.

The notion of crisis-driven action is not a novel one to migration cooperation. The post-2015 flurry in activity in EU-African migration cooperation follows an established formula where the impetus for increased engagement on migration topics follows an external shock. Migration governance scholarship has long noted a tendency for migration cooperation initiatives to be sporadic, ad-hoc, and ‘driven by spectacular events rather than by long-term perspectives’ (Castles 2000, p.280; Newland 2010). The Khartoum Process in the Horn of Africa and the Rabat Process in West Africa were both created respectively in response to sudden events. The Rabat Process formed in response to the shootings and deaths of 15 migrants in the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in 2005 during attempts to cross the Moroccan-Spanish border. Following a series of migrant boat tragedies that occurred in the Mediterranean in 2014, European and African partner countries met in Khartoum in October 2014 to prepare a declaration on what was to become the Khartoum Process (Stern 2015). In both these cases, shock events acted as catalysts in expanding European-African cooperation in the area of migration.

¹ See e.g. De Genova and Tazzioli 2016; Crawley 2016 for an account of how the 2015 crisis is a notion discursively reproduced.

A public policy lens is useful here as it highlights the importance of agenda-setting within the policy process. A central question to an agenda-setting perspective is: *How do problems and solutions come to be matched together in public policy formulation?* (Rochefort and Donnelly 2013). Kingdon's multiple streams model looks at the existence of three 'streams' of problems, politics and policies that exist largely independently of each other, and develop according to their own dynamics and rules. Agenda setting opportunities come and go – timing is therefore important – and crises act as policy windows that enable the reframing of policy as political actors seize on problems as they pass by and apply their proposed (or 'pet') solution (Anglund 1999; Kingdon 1995; Teisman and van Buuren 2013). Political opportunities are created by external shocks such as a crisis, whereby the three independent streams flow into each other at a critical junction. At such a junction, reframing or policy change can become possible. The sections below detail how such a process of crisisification can be observed in the structural changes represented by the introduction of the EUTF; in the EU's applied rationale to foreground West Africa as a key target region for expanding migration partnership; and in the reorientation of development aid to achieve migration policy goals. The crisis has also served as a platform for EU Member States to explore the various tools at their disposal to secure a higher rate of return.

Operational changes under 'crisisification'

The introduction of the EUTF brought with it a number of structural changes that differ the EUTF, as an instrument, from other development financing instruments. Predominantly these changes are administrative and organisational shifts, but a key outcome of this reshuffling is that project interventions in third countries increasingly feature the restricting of migration and mobility as a core aim, and that processes have been streamlined to allow for urgent action.

The EUTF is financed through a reallocation of funds from other EU financial instruments already in existence – including, most notably, 1 billion euros² allocated from the EU's main development funding instrument, the European Development Fund (EDF) – and voluntary

² https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/sites/euetfa/files/eu_contribution.pdf

pledges from EU Member States. Yet the EUTF represents a structural shift from traditional development financing, applying a greater emphasis on quicker procedures and results. The EUTF was thus created to provide the EU and EU MS with ‘a swift and flexible instrument to deliver immediate and concrete results in sensitive and rapidly changing fragile situations’ (European Commission, 2015: 4). Project interventions are intended to be implemented quickly and to deliver fast results. The European Commission’s Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) has taken on the management of the Trust Fund, there where migration had not previously formed an important part of DEVCO’s portfolio of activities.³ This has resulted in the rapid expansion and increased staffing since 2015 of certain units within the directorate, such as the Migration and Employment Unit (B3), and the geographic units representing the regions that the Trust Fund targets. The Trust Fund represents, above all, a quantitative shift, with one interviewee at DEVCO commenting that the main observable change since 2015 was that there was ‘much, much more money on the table’.⁴ Another interviewee at DEVCO noted the politicisation of migration had had an impact on funding, whereby units within the Commission increasingly made efforts to incorporate a ‘migration angle’ into their activities to attract funds.⁵ The crisis has contributed to an ongoing politicisation of migration as an issue, with implications for funding and ensuring that project interventions are increasingly viewed through a migration prism.

Certain qualitative key differences between the Trust Fund and the EU’s traditional development funding instruments, such as the European Development Fund (EDF), are significant in the sense that the EUTF orient interventions according to a migration agenda. Projects implemented under the Trust Fund have an attached conditionality of migration as a main theme; under the EDF, no thematic conditionality of migration is attached to projects and where migration features it does so only tangentially to other development intervention themes. Instead, under the Valletta Action Plan, the EU asserted its intention to address the ‘root causes’ of irregular migration through targeted development interventions, to be implemented under the EUTF. As a result, interventions target rural areas in beneficiary countries considered to be major migrant departure zones, and some interventions have,

³ Interview, DG DEVCO (Geographical Unit on West Africa). Brussels, 7 December 2017.

⁴ Interview, DG DEVCO. Brussels, 26 September 2017.

⁵ Interview, DG DEVCO, Unit B3. Brussels, 26 September 2017.

accordingly, aimed to accurately map migrant departure zones in West African countries. The EUTF rationale has been to promote job creation and boost employment opportunities in such rural areas, creating an alternative to migration and incentivising young would-be migrants to remain. An interviewee at the Commission's DG HOME described the rationale as follows: 'We try to tackle those parts of the country where especially young citizens want to migrate (...). The projects aim to create jobs, especially in agricultural parts of the country [sic], not in the cities where they try to migrate to.'⁶ In Senegal – one of the key recipients of EUTF funding – this is reflected in the fact that many of the EUTF's projects aimed at creating employment are implemented in rural areas which are also often initial migrant departure zones, but not in Dakar which is a major hub for migrants in the country and wider region.⁷ EUTF project data for Senegal shows that of the four projects currently implemented in the country that aim at promoting economic opportunities and employment, only one includes Dakar as an eligible region.⁸ The other three are earmarked for developing rural economies where the geographical selection is unambiguously centred on regions' status as migrant departure zones.⁹ An interviewee at the EU Delegation in Dakar, working thematically on employment and job creation, noted there had been a significant push to deploy EUTF projects in regions not necessarily covered by traditional (aid) programmes, and particularly remote areas, perceiving that there was a gap that the EUTF could thereby fill.¹⁰

At the level of implementation a key difference is that the fundamental role accorded to EU Member State agencies, who are called upon to propose interventions in the beneficiary countries. Given the large budget of the Trust Fund projects, it is generally only large agencies who have the management and organisational capacity to put in a project bid and to act as lead implementers. Finally, given that the Trust Fund was created to function as an 'emergency' tool, project management processes are simplified in comparison to traditional EU development instruments. There is no National Authorising Officer (NAO) as with the EDF – a national (Ministry of Finance) counterpart in the beneficiary country, who works in

⁶ Interview, DG HOME. Brussels, 22 September 2017.

⁷ I say 'initial' departure zones because many young persons migrate from rural zones to cities, e.g. Dakar, from which some then migrate onwards.

⁸ Project titled PAsPED: '*Programme de contraste à la migration illégale à travers l'appui au Secteur Privé et à la création d'emplois au Sénégal*', launched in May 2017.

⁹ See e.g. Action Fiche for project '*Développer l'emploi au Sénégal: renforcement de la compétitivité des entreprises et de l'employabilité dans les zones de départ*'. Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/sites/euetfa/files/t05-eutf-sah-sn-04.pdf>.

¹⁰ Interview, EU Delegation Dakar. Dakar, 7 November 2017.

partnership with the EU representatives and whose approval is needed for project management decisions. With the Trust Fund, the role of the NAO has been eliminated and no direct approval for such decisions needs to be sought; rather, national counterparts in partner countries are 'kept informed'.¹¹ It is these elements in particular that distinguish the Trust Fund from other EU development instruments.

How problems and policy solutions are framed, and in what context they have come together, is important for the following reasons. It impacts how the EU has defined its subsequent interactions and interventions in third countries according to a crisis management agenda. It has introduced a crisis and emergency logic in the form of new operating procedures in project interventions in third countries. The salience of the crisis (deemed primarily a crisis of irregular migration), and subsequently managing it, has also determined which African states are considered priority countries in the EU's external agenda.

Renewed efforts to engage West African states

Since 2015, the EU has vastly scaled up its efforts to engage African governments in migration discussions, primarily from the angle of crisis management. The European Agenda on Migration (EAM) paved the way for the Partnership Framework, proposed in 2016. The Partnership Framework aims to enhance cooperation between EU Member States, EU institutions and third countries in the area of migration. Of particular relevance are the 'compacts' introduced thereunder – these are outlined as being fluid processes led by EU Member States and combining different policy elements (such as trade, aid, development, security), with the intention of forging a tailor-made migration governance approach to each individual country.

With an investment of over 4.1 billion euros, the EUTF constitutes a major instrument in the externalisation of the EU migration agenda to, primarily, sub-Saharan Africa, given that of the three eligible regions of North Africa, Horn of Africa and the Sahel, the sub-Saharan regions receive the largest proportion of funding by a significant margin (see EUTF Annual Report 2017: European Commission, 2017a: 15). The Partnership Framework further details a

¹¹ Interviews, DG DEVCO. Brussels, 28 September 2017.

roadmap for extending EU involvement in the migration governance of 16 priority countries. Of these 16 countries, 13 are located in Africa.¹² The progress reports on the Partnership Framework further demonstrate that cooperation efforts are particularly intensive with respect to Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Mali and Ethiopia, i.e. the EU's migration 'compact' countries in Africa that are earmarked as priority countries for increased engagement and project funding. In February 2017, the geographic scope of the EUTF was extended to include a further three countries belonging to the West Africa region.¹³ Of the three regions eligible for funding, the Sahel and Lake Chad region covering West Africa has received the largest investment in projects through the Fund (EUTF Factsheet, 2018). These elements reflect the strategic importance of the West Africa region in the EU's recent external migration policy.

The underlying rationale that has led to the EU's selection of a number of West African states as preferred partners in an intensified EU-African migration dialogue can be traced to two dominant factors. First, the EU's selection of key third countries in this intensified dialogue has followed the European political imperative of addressing irregular migration at its apparent point of origin, whereby sub-Saharan African countries with proportionally higher levels of irregular migration to Europe have been primarily targeted. The centrality of irregular migrant numbers and how this plays a part in the selection of third countries for enhanced cooperation is widely affirmed by interviewees across the EU institutions as well as EU Member State officials.¹⁴ One interviewee at the European Commission commented in relation to the selection process for the five 'compact' countries that 'there are several reasons, but the main one is the number of irregular migrants to Europe', while an interviewee at DG HOME noted that it was 'one criteria – a very important one'.¹⁵ However, this first condition is simultaneously weighed against the likelihood of achieving meaningful cooperation with the third country government. The second factor in the EU's selection rationale is therefore an estimation of whether cooperation *can* be achieved and is dependent on the country's political stability (and the EU's perception thereof), as well as

¹² The 16 priority countries are: Ethiopia, Eritrea, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

¹³ Guinea, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire are now also eligible for EU assistance under the EUTF.

¹⁴ Affirmed by interviewees at DG HOME, DG DEVCO, EU Delegation (Ghana), EEAS, Ministry of Foreign Affairs official (Belgium).

¹⁵ Interview, European Commission, DG DEVCO. Brussels, 28 September 2017; Interview, European Commission, DG HOME. Brussels, 22 September 2017.

historical relations with a given partner country. This second factor resulted in the decision to select Senegal as a compact country where the country's reputation as a stable, peaceful and democratic nation made it a more ideal partner than, for example, the Gambia, whose levels of irregular migration proportionally exceed Senegal's – but where the perception that the Gambian administration was comparatively 'closed' signalled to the EU a poorer likelihood of achieving a meaningful partnership.¹⁶

The selection rationale of the EU as applied to the EUTF thereby closely follows a logic of addressing irregular migration. Yet the application of this selection rationale is not always clear, as evidenced by the fact that the West African states of Guinea, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire only belatedly became eligible for financing under the EUTF, and where Guinea was not initially identified as a priority country in the EU's Partnership Framework. An interviewee at the EU Delegation in Ghana stated that Ghana's accession to the EUTF stemmed from an increase in the number of irregular migrants to Europe from 2015 to 2016.¹⁷ The method of funding the EUTF through reallocation from other EU funds, with some funds being renamed and recycled several times, makes the funding process something of a 'washing machine' (Collett and Ahad 2017). While enabling the greater degree of flexibility that EU policymakers have sought, the channelling of funds towards a more explicit focus on migration interventions in third countries, coupled with the selection rationale that the EU employs in selecting countries for enhanced partnership (and, consequently, increased funding) lends itself to diverse interpretation by third countries. It can prompt speculation over eligibility criteria and lead to conclusions that a state's poor track record or lack of interest in cooperating to restrict migration flows nonetheless carries financial benefits (*ibid.*, p.10). Eligibility for substantial financing under the EUTF represents – perhaps inadvertently – a readiness to reward countries for their status as contributors to irregular migration, representing a departure from previous EU 'more for more' policy of conditionality, whereby countries are given more development aid in exchange for cooperating in other areas, such as returns and readmission.

¹⁶ Interview, Desk Officer at the European External Action Service (EEAS). Brussels, 19 September 2017.

¹⁷ Interview, EU Delegation in Accra. Accra, 25 January 2018.

Strategy continuation or a change of course?

The EU's two-pronged approach in external migration governance combines both restrictive measures with measures that fall under the migration-development nexus in its policies and interventions in third countries (Boswell, 2003; Chou, 2009). This dual focus on security and development is reflected in the four pillars of the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM) – the framework formally guiding the EU's external migration regime since 2005. Restrictive measures include classic migration control systems such as border control, measures to combat smuggling and trafficking, and the gradual capacity-building for migration management in transit countries. The huge increase in migrant remittances in the 1990s sparked new optimism, particularly among international organisations, in the development potential of migration (de Haas 2012; Lavenex and Kunz 2008). Since then, optimism regarding the potential to exploit remittances and other migration outcomes for development purposes has formed what Kapur (2004) dubbed the 'new mantra'.

Yet migration scholars have been critical of past efforts to engage with the development potential of migration policies, arguing that it is only lip service that is paid to the development agenda of the European external migration agenda, and questioning both the motives and indeed the benefits of development aid in the context of migration (Castles 2009; De Haas 2008). They have argued that the development component is primarily aimed at reducing migration flows to the European continent (Boswell, 2003: 619). Another key challenge surrounding the politics of migration cooperation is that development aid is increasingly made contingent on cooperation in migration control (Samers, 2004). This may lead to increased competition between third countries for development funds, and the likelihood of less funds going to centralised efforts (Betts and Milner 2006). It may be creating a situation where development aid is going not necessarily to where it is most needed, but to countries that have proven to be the most cooperative with the EU and its Member States in terms of implementing its migration control agenda.

The dual approach of the EU's external migration agenda has not fundamentally changed. It would therefore appear that policy developments have done little to effectively counter the critiques made in migration scholarship. The thematic novelty in the narrative of addressing 'root causes' of irregular migration in West Africa is in itself interrogated by officials within

the EU institutions: an interviewee at the European Commission's DG DEVCO noted that while the Valletta Summit and subsequent action plan had vastly increased the amount of funds available for development programming with third countries, the notion of partnerships with third countries is hardly a novel one.¹⁸ Another interviewee at the Commission observed that addressing the 'root causes' of irregular migration was something that the last 60 years of EU development cooperation had already been doing.¹⁹ The novelty, as detailed earlier, lies in the introduction of a migration 'prism' through which development interventions have been refocused, and in the crisisification of the EU's external migration governance with third countries.

As noted by Slominski and Trauner (2018), the crisis has also underlined EU Member States' strategies in returns, whereby EU MS have signalled a keener interest in leveraging the EU's operational and financial resources to achieve a more effective return rate (p.106). This strategy change transpires in key EU policy documents published since 2015. The EU's 'more for more' approach with third countries has typically used conditionality as a means of encouraging cooperation on returns and readmission, whereby development aid and financing, and visa facilitation, has hinged on third countries' willingness to readmit their nationals found in an irregular situation²⁰ (Adepoju, van Noorloos, and Zoomers 2010; Carrera et al. 2016; den Hertog 2016). This forms the basis of, for example, the EU's earlier Mobility Partnership instrument introduced under the GAMM, whereby participating third countries are to benefit from visa facilitation agreements in return for cooperating on returns and readmission. However, EU Member States' dissatisfaction with the actual rate of returns has led these to push the EU to adopt a more punitive approach by using visa measures in retaliation for 'persistent non-cooperation' (European Commission, 2017b: p.22). While there is no indication of the intention to apply negative conditionality through visa measures in the 2015 European Agenda on Migration (EAM), subsequent progress reports on the EAM, published in 2017 and 2019, signal that this has shifted in recent years. The European Commission notes in 2017 that consultations with EU Member States have highlighted a need to 'assess critically whether the current visa policy still matches the present and future challenges' (European Commission, 2017b, p.16). Specifically, it envisages 'addressing more

¹⁸ Interview, DG DEVCO. Brussels, 26 September 2017.

¹⁹ Interview, DG DEVCO. Brussels, 26 September 2017.

²⁰ And, in some cases, nationals of third countries.

systematically and effectively non-cooperation by key third countries of origin, mobilising all the incentives and leverages available, both at EU and at Member State level' (*ibid.*, p.22). This is to be complemented by the exploration of 'informal arrangements', pursued in tangent to formal agreements, on return and readmission (*ibid.*). In light of these aims, the European Parliament and Council have agreed reforms which further facilitate the possibility of adopting restrictive visa measures against non-cooperative third countries (European Commission, 2019, p.11). Envisaged next steps include building 'operational partnerships' with third countries whereby operational tasks associated with processing and implementing returns will be facilitated through the creation of joint investigation teams, further capacity building and the exchange of liaison officers (*ibid.*). The use of visa leverage as a tool in overcoming resistance in returns and readmissions with third countries similarly appears in the progress reports on the Partnership Framework as of 2017, where its effectiveness is noted 'in the experience of certain Member States', and the US and Canada, vis-à-vis third countries (European Commission, 2017c, p.14). Prior to 2017, visa policy in relation to external relations with third countries only appears as positive incentivisation tool. These developments signal a broader shift of the EU's 'more for more' approach to a more punitive stance in its migration bargaining strategy with third countries, where the role of EU Member States in pushing for both informalisation and the adoption of a wider range of measures to implement returns is apparent.

The use of negative leverage as a tool in strategies to increase the rate of return is one that has been met with some resistance within EU institutions. An EEAS desk officer for the West African region noted that while the European Commission's DG HOME had prioritised curbing irregular migration and had promoted a harder approach by advocating the use of negative leverage, the EEAS preferred to balance policy priorities in decision-making and was more concerned with preserving relations with third countries.²¹ An interviewee at the European Commission, whose background was in the foreign service of an EU Member State, perceived the political cost in diplomatic relations with third countries to be very high while there was no real prospect that negative visa leverage would deliver on its aims of increasing returns.²² Within the European Commission, the question of visa policy as a negative leverage was a

²¹ Interview, EEAS. Brussels, 19 September 2017.

²² Interview, European Commission's DG JRC. Brussels, 28 September 2017.

source of disagreement between DG HOME and DG DEVCO on how to move forward. This meant that the inclusion of an Article 40 on conditionality in the new European Consensus on Development in 2017 had been largely pushed by DG HOME, and unsuccessfully contested by DG DEVCO.²³ As a result, the 2017 Consensus notes the intention of attaining the aims of the Partnership Framework by ‘applying the necessary leverage by using all relevant EU policies, instruments and tools, including development and trade’ (European Commission, 2017e, p.18). While issue-linkage is in itself not new to the EU’s migration bargaining strategy with third countries, whereby cooperation in migration issues is linked to incentives in other areas (Hampshire, 2006), the EU’s recent strategy has taken a more punitive turn.

Between appeasement and bargaining

The crisis management literature suggests a performative role that policy actors are required to enact following a crisis event, where the symbolism of ‘doing something’ becomes paramount (Rhinard, 2019, p.6; Kuipers and ‘T Hart 2014). Several interviewees within the EU institutions cited the influence of (select) EU Member States as one of the key catalysts for the formulation of policy following the crisis, and in the development of the policy instrument that emerged (the EUTF). One interviewee at DEVCO cited the pressure applied by EU Member States for the EU to respond to the crisis and mobilise funding as a critical factor.²⁴ An interviewee at the EEAS similarly perceived the catalysts for new policy formulation to have been the ‘emergency’ context of increased irregular migration to the EU’s borders, and the efforts of mainly southern EU Member States such as Italy and Greece in pushing for policy responses at the EU level.²⁵

In many instances, EU Member States pursue bilateral cooperation with West African states in tangent to pursuing partnership frameworks with third countries through the EU. The recent push for EU level action in enhancing cooperation with West African states can be conceptualised as an exploration of all the different avenues to achieve EU MS migration policy goals. At the same time, there is some indication of a greater recognition – at least by

²³ Interview, DG DEVCO. Brussels, 26 September 2017.

²⁴ Interview, DG DEVCO. Brussels, 26 September 2017.

²⁵ Interview, EEAS. Brussels, 19 September 2017.

EU Member States – of the added value of the EU in the external dimension of migration. While one Commission interviewee felt that the EU was perceived more positively by partner countries in the last 10 years and was increasingly recognised as an interlocutor,²⁶ the main appeal of channelling efforts through the EU would seem to be the ability to mobilise funds on a much larger scale. This has been demonstrated by the mobilisation of significant funds, on short notice, under the EUTF. EU Member States have thus sought alternative strategies to attain migration policy goals and envisage making greater use of the EU's resources to attain this. On a related note, Slominski and Trauner (2018) argue that the stronger reliance on informal patterns of co-operation, introduced in the context of the migration crisis, meant not only to increase the number of effective returns, but also to 'shield supranational actors from political involvement and legal scrutiny' (pp.106-107).

On the other hand, a few accounts have explored the notion of 'migration diplomacy' and how states strategically use migration flows and migration management policies in their foreign relations – or use diplomacy to achieve migration policy goals (Adamson and Tsourapas 2018; Greenhill 2010; Thiollet 2011). This considers how state actors are affected by their position in migration systems according to whether they are migration-sending, migration-receiving, or transit states – the bargaining power of third countries lies precisely in their strategic position as migrant-sending nations, there where the EU is increasingly involved in efforts to reduce migration to its borders (see Adamson and Tsourapas, 2018; El Qadim 2014). In other words, how have West African political actors interpreted and acted on the increasing interest of the EU to engage them in migration dialogue, and to the shift towards negative conditionality? It has also been shown that policy outcomes following EU-African cooperation and dialogue cannot solely be measured or explained by theories of power asymmetry between the EU, EU Member States and African states (Reslow 2012; van Criekinge 2009). Theories of power asymmetry, while contributing to greater understanding of EU-African cooperation outcomes, have largely fail to account for the increasing interest of EU MS and the EU institutions in engaging West African states in migration cooperation initiatives and how, conversely, this acts as a source of empowerment to states that are the recipients of these efforts. Equally, there are significant constraints on the EU's bargaining power with third countries when EU membership conditionality is off the table (Lavenex and

²⁶ Interview, DG DEVCO. Brussels, 26 September 2017.

Schimmelfennig 2009). The other 'carrots' the EU can offer are comparatively weak, and the main concessions that many African governments seek in dialogue – namely, an increase in legal migration opportunities through visas – are not within the EU's power to offer, this being an area of jurisdiction of EU Member States. The EU's external migration governance approach is therefore subject to two different and conflicting forces, where reconciling the two proves a considerable challenge. On the one hand, recent developments reflect a policy of accommodating EU MS demands for flexibility in the pursuit of restrictive migration policy options; however, the EU's cooperation with migrant-sending West African states is subject to the 'migration diplomacy' bargaining strategies of these states.

Conclusion

This paper has examined policy developments since 2015 whereby the EU and EU Member States have sought to increase externalisation to sub-Saharan Africa and, in particular, to scale up interventions in West Africa in line with an increasingly politicised EU migration agenda. While the 2015 crisis served as an agenda-setting opportunity for EU Member States to push for new strategies in the EU's external migration governance approach, the main policy instrument that emerged has produced little in the way of thematic novelty. There is as such a continuation of the EU's two-pronged approach identified as early as 2005 with the GAMM, of using both development and security as a means of achieving its migration policy goals with third countries. Yet, the research presented here notes an increasing willingness of EU MS to use negative leverage with non-cooperative third countries in the forms of visa conditionality, and linking migration cooperation to development and trade policy, in order to achieve restrictive migration policy goals. While issue-linkage is not a new strategy to overcome asymmetries of migration policy interests between the EU and African states, the willingness to use negative leverage over positive incentives in cooperation constitutes a policy shift.

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