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Decentralized EU Policy Coordination in Crisis? The Case of Germany

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Abstract

Europeanization research found no general convergence towards centralized EU policy coordination, despite decentralized systems' comparatively slow and ineffective position-taking. Does this finding hold against the threat, urgency, and uncertainty exerted by recent years' polycrisis? We posit that decentralized systems indeed persist, albeit in a three-step reactive sequence in which situational centralization during crises dialectically reinforces decentralization in the long run. First, the prime minister's office harnesses a crisis to acquire hierarchical control of position-taking. Second, to exploit the deep expertise of the bureaucracy and maximize its bargaining power on the EU-level, it co-opts a lead ministry. Third, due to the institutional underpinnings of the decentralized system, the lead ministry, rather than the prime minister's office, eventually retains the administrative capacities created in crisis. We illustrate this causal mechanism in a comparison of the German government's EU policy coordination during the Eurozone and Schengen crises.

Keywords: European Union; crisis; policy coordination; reactive sequence; decentralization; Germany

Introduction

EU crises have moved from polity to policy. Past crises like the failure of the constitutional treaty resulted from conflicts over the development of the EU polity. Today's 'polycrisis' (Juncker, 2016), however, engulfs integrated sectors, posing a 'serious threat to the basic structures' (Rosenthal *et al.*, 1989, p. 10) of EU policies. Due to their severe effects on member states' economies and societies, EU policy crises require decision-making 'under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances' (Rosenthal *et al.*, 1989, p. 10). To defend their interests on the EU-level and satisfy their electorate, governments are hard-pressed to coordinate swift and cohesive positions. Different domestic systems of EU policy coordination are differently prepared for this challenge. The literature on the Europeanization of core executives identifies two ideal types of coordination: centralized systems coordinate member states' positions through a central office; decentralized systems disperse authority among line ministries (Kassim *et al.*, 2000). Decentralized systems excel in exploiting ministerial expertise (Sepos, 2005), but suffer from lengthier and less effective position-taking (Mittag and Wessels, 2003). In theory then, the recent transformation of EU crises, and the rise of Eurosceptic attitudes in mass publics, should have exerted pressures for centralization

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(Jensen, 2014; Christensen et al., 2016; Kaniok and Galušková, 2018). In practice, however, this paper demonstrates how the intense functional, temporal, and political pressures of EU policy crises can even reinforce decentralized coordination in the long run.

To explain this, we hypothesize a three-step 'reactive sequence' (Mahoney, 2000, pp. 526–535). First, crisis-induced threat, urgency, and uncertainty allow the prime minister's office to circumvent the institutional factors supporting decentralized coordination and achieve situational centralization. In a second step, the prime minister's office involves a lead ministry, to tap its expertise and to mobilize additional administrative capacity. The configuration of this relationship between the prime minister's office and its lead ministry allows maximizing bargaining power on the EU-level. A member state preferring the status quo will set up the lead ministry as a domestic veto player to tie its own hands and thwart EU-level burden-sharing. A change actor will hierarchically subordinate the lead ministry to speak with a single voice in the quest for EU-level burden-sharing while harnessing the lead ministry's expertise. Thirdly, when the pressure of crisis subsides, the initially circumvented institutional factors, embodied by other line ministries, ensure a return to the decentralized status quo ante. Administrative capacities created to stem the crisis, however, remain in the lead ministry instead of the prime minister's office, which focuses on its coordination and mediation capacities rather than its technical expertise. In the end, situational centralization strengthens EU-related capacity and expertise of line ministries and hence the backbone of decentralized coordination systems.

We illustrate this reactive sequence on a within-case comparison of German EU policy coordination during the Eurozone and the Schengen crises. Germany is a typical case of a decentralized coordination system (Kassim, 2015). In the two crises, the country's EU-level preferences varied: during the Eurozone crisis, Germany was a status quo actor, opposing further burden-sharing (Schimmelfennig, 2015); in the Schengen crisis, it was a change actor, pursuing enhanced burden-sharing (Zaun, 2018). Comparison thus allows us to explore the reactive sequence and its potential in maximizing EU-level bargaining power: In the Eurozone crisis, the lead ministry acted as a domestic veto player, in the Schengen crisis the lead ministry was subordinated to the chancellery. The eventual consolidation of newly created administrative capacities in the lead ministry, rather than the chancellery, occurred in both cases.

Our study contributes to research on the Europeanization of core executives. It demonstrates how decentralized coordination systems are dialectically able to harness crisis-induced centralization pressures for long-term decentralization. Our study also speaks to the broader literature on EU integration. It suggests that decentralized coordination systems allow member state governments to strategically maximize their bargaining power in EU-level negotiations. Further analyses of the strategic usage of this reactive sequence in EU crisis management could enhance our understanding of the domestic sources of EU-level bargaining success.

I. Decentralized EU Policy Coordination in the Polycrisis

Member state governments have to set up EU policy coordination systems to present a 'coherent programme' on the European level and to ensure their proposals are compatible with their domestic actions (Kassim et al., 2000, p. 2). In other words, domestic coordination mechanisms aim to 'reduce redundancy, lacunae and contradictions within and

between' their EU policy positions (Bouckaert et al., 2010, p. 16). Coordinating EU policies domestically is a difficult task. The EU's dense, complex, and fluid procedures comprise multiple agenda-setters, consensual multi-level bargaining, and functional differentiation. Thus, coordination requires a high degree of expertise and flexibility (Kassim et al., 2000, p. 8).

Member states coordinate their EU positions via centralized or decentralized systems (Kassim, 2003; Laffan, 2007). Centralized systems like the UK's or France's rely on a single office responsible for coordination (Bulmer and Burch, 2001; Menon, 2000). Decentralized systems like Germany's and Belgium's designate a central body to coordinate between multiple ministries (Derlien, 2000; Kerremans, 2000) but refrain from endowing it with hierarchical authority (Jensen, 2014). The literature on Europeanization found that institutional factors such as domestic legal, political, and procedural structures shape the development of centralized or decentralized EU policy coordination systems (Kassim, 2003). Federal states governed by multi-party coalitions, for instance, are likely to develop decentralized coordination systems.

These institutional factors provide actors with opportunities to stabilize the system in the continuous political struggle over EU policy coordination (Dimitrova and Toshkov, 2007). Decentralized systems create a close link between EU-level policy-formulation and the ministries that hold deep expertise on an issue (Kassim et al., 2000). Although they do not impinge on member states' ability to achieve their policy objectives (Sepos, 2005), decentralized systems are slower and less efficient than centralized systems due to their highly formalized procedures (Mittag and Wessels, 2003). Efficient reactions, however, are essential for deciding and communicating on salient issues. Due to the increased salience of EU policies post-Maastricht, Europeanization scholars already puzzled over the lack of homogenization in EU policy coordination (Mittag and Wessels, 2003). More recent research, however, demonstrated the continuous relevance of the distinction between centralized and decentralized coordination (Jensen, 2014; Kassim, 2015). Despite its lower efficiency, some newer member states such as Romania or Slovakia deliberately adopted the decentralized, ministry-focused model (Gärtner et al., 2011). On the other hand, the more Eurosceptic a member state's electorate and the higher the salience of EU policies, the likelier a centralization of coordination around the prime minister's office (Jensen, 2017; Kaniok and Galušková, 2018).

Due to the increasing salience of EU issues and rising Euroscepticism among national electorates (Hooghe and Marks, 2009), recent years' polycrisis should have created pressures and opportunities for centralization. Member state governments face the general dilemma that policies cannot be coordinated effectively on the domestic and the EU-level at the same time (Egeberg and Trondal, 2016). In crises, they must therefore identify their interests and preferences swiftly, act upon them, and communicate them to satisfy an alert electorate (Christensen et al., 2016). Swift policy formulation and decisive action, however, are the Achilles heel of decentralized systems (see Mittag and Wessels, 2003). The urgency, threat, and uncertainty of EU policy crises thus require decentralized systems to speed up their policy formulation, and to communicate the government's EU-level positions to the electorate.

Crises are thus moments of institutional choice that potentially allow a prime minister's office to increase its influence. However, none of the six original member states with decentralized coordination systems (Kassim, 2003) switched to a centralized

approach in the crisis-stricken period between 2003 and 2015. Instead, depending on the classification, six to eight members even created or switched to a decentralized system (Jensen, 2014; Kassim, 2015). To explain this, our paper shows how decentralized coordination systems provide the flexibility necessary for situational centralization during crises. The following section lays out a three-step reactive sequence of this mechanism that dialectically reinforces decentralization in the long run.

II. A Reactive Sequence of Situational Centralization during EU-Induced Crises

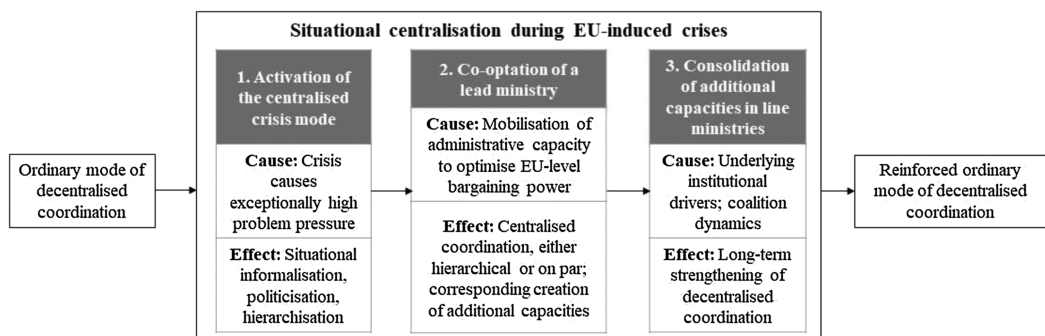
Change in decentralized EU policy coordination systems is very unlikely because the institutional factors that led to the development of the decentralized system allow actors profiting from the status quo to defend it. These factors can take a legal form such as constitutional provisions, be political such as multi-party coalition dynamics, or of a procedural nature such as vertical structures in federal states. In the decentralized system, actors (a) interact formally in interministerial coordination processes (b) dominated by bureaucratic instead of political appointees (c) without interministerial hierarchic structures. The prime minister’s office acts as merely one participant in interministerial coordination (Kassim et al., 2000).

We expect that EU-induced crises upset this established power balance and create opportunities for ‘institutional choice’ (Dimitrova and Toshkov, 2007, pp. 963–964; Johansson and Raunio, 2010, pp. 651–652). Crises trigger a three-step reactive sequence (Mahoney, 2000), from situational centralization to long-term decentralization (cf. Figure 1). We expect this mechanism to occur when decentralized EU policy coordination systems, characterised by interministerial committee structures, non-hierarchical coordination, and multi-party coalition governments, respond to the threat, urgency, and uncertainty of EU-induced crises. The remainder of this section unpacks this causal mechanism. It explains how decentralized systems both avoid permanent centralization and maximize their bargaining power on the EU-level through situational centralization.

Step 1: Activation of the Centralized Crisis Mode

EU-induced crises create exceptionally high problem pressures. First, they create *temporal* pressures for the swift formulation of positions. Second, the threat a crisis poses

Figure 1: Reactive sequence of situational centralization during EU-induced crises



to the existence of an EU policy increases the costs of (in)action and creates *functional* pressures. Finally, uncertainty about working solutions and the preferences of a highly polarized and politicized public create *political* pressures. Stemming these pressures requires a circumvention of formal structures and the establishment of a clear-cut decision-making centre (Christensen et al., 2016) in a *crisis mode* of coordination. The latter (a) circumvents interministerial coordination through informal channels, (b) relies on political civil servants or even the involvement of (prime) ministers and (c) is backed up by interministerial hierarchization. The otherwise merely mediating prime minister's office activates this mode through a temporary abrogation of the legal, political, and procedural factors underpinning the decentralized coordination system.

Step 2: *Co-optation of a Lead Ministry*

To optimize EU-level bargaining power during complex crises, prime ministers' offices need both a clear-cut decision making centre and additional expertise that enables their lean bureaucratic apparatus to fulfil a leadership role (Parrado, 2012). To this end, they co-opt the readily available administrative capacity of a lead ministry competent on the affected policy dossiers. A member state's bargaining goals affect the relationship between the prime minister's office and its lead ministry. The crucial difference is whether prime minister's offices are under high pressures to change the existing EU-level framework or prefer maintaining the status quo. For example, in the Eurozone crisis, all member states faced high potential costs and polarized public opinion, but unequally distributed economic consequences. This led to vast differences in the perceived urgency of fiscal burden-sharing. Issue-specific bargaining power under asymmetric interdependence generally flows from low preference intensity (Moravcsik, 1998, p. 60). Even small states benefitting from the status quo can thus extract concessions from larger states that desire rule changes (Rittberger and Schimmelfennig, 2006, p. 80; Lundgren et al., 2019). Any member state government seeking EU-level policy changes to overcome a given crisis will therefore position the prime ministerial office hierarchically above the lead ministry. By putting the head of government in sole charge, this guarantees a coherent, timely, and undisputed position in the European Council. Speaking with a single voice is necessary considering the structural disadvantages in bargaining power of change actors vis-à-vis status quo proponents (Moravcsik, 1998). Member state governments defending the status quo will instead enlist the responsible lead ministry as a domestic veto player constraining the prime minister's bargaining space. Tying one's hands in this manner increases a country's bargaining power on the EU-level (Putnam, 1988). We hence assume that seeking to maximise issue-specific bargaining power via the inclusion of a lead ministry should be a sensible strategy for all member states with decentralized coordination systems.

Step 3: *Consolidation of Additional Capacities in Line Ministries*

Situational centralization does not modify the underlying institutional factors underpinning the decentralized ordinary coordination regime. Quite the contrary, it unleashes a 'reactive sequence' that even strengthens a member state's decentralized coordination system in the long run. According to Mahoney (2000, pp. 526–527), 'reactive sequences

are marked by backlash processes that transform and perhaps reverse earlier events. In a reactive sequence, early events trigger subsequent developments not by reproducing a given pattern, but by setting in motion a tightly linked chain of reactions and counterreactions'. In contrast to self-reinforcing types of path dependence, reactive sequences provide 'more room for policy evolution within the path' (Daugbjerg, 2009, p. 407). We expect that once the perceived problem pressure subsides, actors that lost competences through the crisis mode – such as line ministries but also lead ministries subordinated in a hierarchical relationship with the prime minister's office – will push for a return to the status quo ante. Prime minister's offices' central task is to coordinate with and mediate between ministries. It is hence rational for them to return to the decentralized status quo ante to avoid taking sides in future coordination conflicts. At the same time, lead ministries exploit the aforementioned legal, political and procedural factors to maintain the acquired competences as this strengthens their position vis-à-vis other ministries. Paradoxically then, situational centralization reinforces the position of line ministries and thereby the horizontal and decentralized nature of the interministerial coordination system in the long run.

III. Comparing the Reactive Sequence during Two EU-Induced Crises

This study illustrates the occurrence of the posited causal mechanism on the case of Germany, comparing patterns of interministerial coordination during the Eurozone and Schengen crisis between 2010 and 2018. It explains why situational centralization in crises strengthened decentralization in the long run. Germany is a 'typical' (Gerring, 2007, pp. 93–97) case of a decentralized EU policy coordination system underpinned by strong institutional factors that render centralization highly unlikely (Kassim, 2015).¹ The core of our findings could hence also apply to other member states with decentralized coordination systems.

The Eurozone and the Schengen crises each posed a functional threat to their policy field, induced high political uncertainty among member states, and exerted temporal pressures requiring urgent action. Germany's decentralized system faced intense pressures for centralization to ensure swift and coherent position-taking. The preferences of the German government varied in the two crises. Despite functional risks for the banking sector and federal budget during the Eurozone crisis, the German government faced weaker time pressure than countries more directly affected by the crisis and strong political pressure to resist costs of increased burden-sharing for fear of moral hazard (Schimmelfennig, 2015). Germany's preference was to maintain the common currency by avoiding further escalation, promote the strengthening of existing fiscal rules and accept as little burden-sharing as late as possible. During the Schengen crisis, in turn, the German government was confronted with high domestic functional, temporal, and political pressures. This induced a preference for EU-level burden-sharing. Consequently, the German government advocated a reform of the Common European Asylum System, for instance in suggesting distribution and relocation programs which it had repeatedly resisted in previous instances (Zaun, 2018).

¹Kassim (2015) categorises Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Romania and Slovakia as further member states with decentralized EU policy coordination systems.

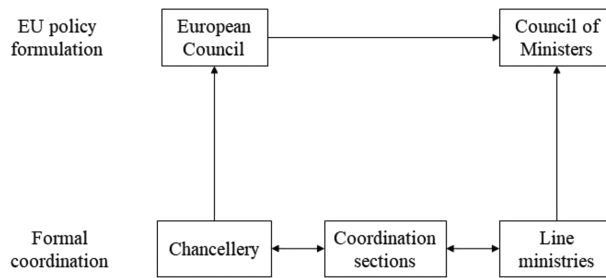
This within-case comparison of coordination in two crises has two aims. First, it illustrates the hypothesized reactive sequence as a causal mechanism that can subsequently be tested on other cases (Bennett and Checkel, 2015). Second, we conduct a ‘structured, focused comparison’ (George and Bennett, 2005, pp. 67–72) to show that despite differences in substantial preferences the outcome of the reactive sequence is similar. To this end, our analysis will be ‘structured’ along and ‘focused’ on the three component parts of the hypothesized reactive sequence. In step 1, to detect an *activation of the centralized crisis mode*, we need to observe a bypassing of formal coordination structures, an involvement of politicians and high-ranking administrators in policy-formulation, and a hierarchical process in which the prime minister’s office takes final decisions. In step 2, to detect the *co-optation of a lead ministry*, we need to observe the enlisting of a ministry’s administrative resources for the centralized formulation of EU policy positions. The logic of interaction between the prime minister’s office and its lead ministry, either hierarchical or on par, should vary in accordance with the EU-level bargaining goals. In step 3 then, to detect the *consolidation of additional capacities in line ministries*, we need to observe a counteraction to situational centralization among disadvantaged actors and the retention of additional administrative resources in the former lead ministry rather than the chancellery.

To analyse the crisis management of the German federal government and its aftermath, we rely on documents, press releases, and – with the necessary scepticism – on newspaper articles. For the long-term development of administrative capacity on EU affairs, we analyse federal ministries’ organizational charts (accessible via the open government platform www.fragdenstaat.de) since 2006, the first year of Angela Merkel’s chancellorship. To obtain a more complete picture as well as evaluations of participants, we include insights from nine semi-structured expert interviews. These interviews were conducted between May and October 2018 and lasted 60 to 90 minutes each. We granted our interviewees anonymity. The interviews were structured along three broad areas: (a) a *facts* section sought to understand ministries’ formal and informal roles during both crises; (b) an *impressions* section zoomed in on change in the coordination process over time; finally, (c) we asked the interviewees for *reflections* on the dynamics and power relations between different ministries and the chancellery. The interviews cover a variety of ministerial perspectives from the Foreign Office (AA), Ministry of Economy (BMWi), Ministry of Finance (BMF), Ministry of Interior (BMI), and the Chancellery (BKAm). To triangulate these findings, we conducted two interviews with European Commission officials who cooperated closely with the German federal government during the Schengen crisis and provided an informed outsider’s view on the government’s internal workings. Before we analyse how the reactive sequence played out in Germany during the two crises, we briefly outline Germany’s formal coordination structure in ordinary times.

IV. Germany’s Decentralized EU Policy Coordination in Ordinary Times

The ordinary mode of EU policy coordination among federal ministries is (a.) formalized, (b.) bureaucratic and (c.) horizontal (Beichelt, 2015; Bulmer and Paterson, 2018, Figure 2).

Figure 2: Germany's EU Policy Coordination in Ordinary Times



a. Interministerial coordination is formally organized by three specialized coordination sections that prepare the positions for COREPER I (responsibility of the BMWi), COREPER II (AA), and the Euro Group (BMF). The coordination sections identify controversial items, prepare the agenda for interministerial coordination meetings, and act as ‘honest brokers’ (interview 4) in conflicts. 70 to 90 per cent of all EU-related dossiers are cleared this way before reaching the minister level (Rudzio, 2015). The Permanent Representation functions as a nodal point of formal coordination between Berlin-based ministries and the Council in Brussels (Bulmer and Paterson, 2018, p. 92).

b. Coordination involves all levels of the federal bureaucracy. Specialized sections within ministries are the workhorses of the decentralized system. They formulate governmental positions and devise proactive proposals to lobby the Commission and other governments (interviews 1, 3 and 4).

c. The ordinary mode of coordination is dominated by the constitutionally enshrined principle of cabinet ministers’ autonomous responsibility for the formulation of their departmental policies (*Ressortprinzip*, Article 65 Basic Law). The BKAmT participates as an equal among peers. Long-serving EU coordinators of the BMWi and the AA insist the BKAmT ‘never’ (interviews 3 and 4) overrules other ministries and expects coordinators to exercise their ‘coherence competence’ (interview 4). Coordination never resided within the chancellery. Quite the contrary, attempts by Gerhard Schröder (Ladrech, 2010) and Angela Merkel (Sturm, 2016) to seize control of coordination for the General Affairs Council and the European Council foundered at the resistance of an AA controlled by the smaller coalition partner. As expected, the dynamics of multi-party coalition government hamper attempts at permanent centralization

This formalized, bureaucratic and horizontal mode allows the federal government to exploit the expertise of its bureaucratic apparatus. Analysts, however, emphasize its complex and cumbersome nature. While Derlien (2000, p. 75) argues the ‘reactive style’ might be ‘well suited’ for the EU-level consensus culture, Sturm (2016, p. 65) finds ‘[w]hat seems like a sophisticated process in theory, is much less efficient in practice’. ‘Frequently’ (Beichelt, 2015, p. 279, interview 3), the coordination process causes delays in or an absence of position-taking. German governments’ repeated failures to achieve a coordinated position and their consequent abstentions in COREPER or the Council have even inspired a pejorative term in use among other member states – the so-called ‘German vote’ (Beichelt, 2015, p. 279).

V. Germany's EU Policy Coordination in the Eurozone and Schengen Crises

Both the Eurozone and the Schengen crisis upset this equilibrium of decentralized EU policy coordination. Reacting to high problem pressures, the chancellery employed a more centralized *crisis mode* of coordination together with a line ministry, either on par or hierarchically (see Figure 3). This allowed for an optimization of Germany's bargaining power on the EU-level. After both crises, the involved line ministries, rather than the chancellery, profited from additional resources. We will now turn to the individual steps of this reactive sequence.

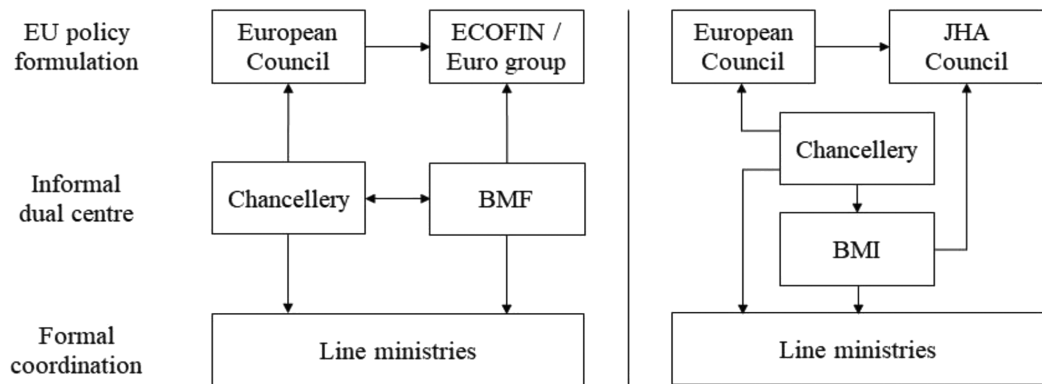
Step 1: *Activation of the Centralized Crisis Mode*

Both the Eurozone and the Schengen crisis exerted a degree of threat, urgency, and uncertainty that convinced the chancellor to take matters in her own hands (interviews 2, 8). Functional pressures (*threat*) were high in both cases. While the Eurozone crisis prompted unforeseeable consequences of an uncontrolled break-up of the monetary union, the Schengen crisis required coordination among EU members to regain control of the influx of people into the area without internal borders. Temporal pressures (*urgency*) also ran high. The European Council (usually meeting every 3 months) convened at a steeply increased rate. On average, heads of state and government met every 1.5 months during the Eurozone (March 2010 to March 2012) and every 1.2 months at the height of the Schengen crisis (September 2015 to March 2016). Political pressures (*uncertainty*) stemmed from the electorate as the crises weighed heavily on the governing parties' electoral fortunes in imminent and important *Länder* elections in both 2012 and 2016 (Schneider and Slantchev, 2018; Zaun, 2018).

In such exceptional instances, '[t]he chancellery controls when the crisis mode begins.'² (interview 5). Two factors allow the chancellery to assume control through situational centralization of the government's position-taking. The first lever is the chancellor's attendance in European Council meeting, which have played an increasingly important role in EU affairs. However, the foreign office rather than the chancellery remains formally responsible for preparing the German government's positions. European Council attendance is thus a necessary but insufficient prerequisite for creating a hierarchical crisis mode. In fact, the formal coordination process continues unabated during crises, but is bypassed through informal, political, and hierarchical position-taking by the chancellery together with the lead ministry. The AA is well aware that the chancellor enjoys – and takes – the liberty to stray from prepared positions on controversial dossiers (interview 4). The second, legal leverage is the chancellery's obligation to countersign instructions to the permanent representative in Brussels. A formality in ordinary times, during crises this provides the chancellery with an entry point to assume hierarchical control of position-taking also in the Council of Ministers (interviews 5, 6).

From the early stages of the Eurozone crisis onwards, beginning with the March 2010 decision to grant coordinated bilateral loans to Greece, the Eurozone formation of the European Council acted as the focal point of EU-level crisis management.

²One interviewed official (interview 5) explicitly used the term 'crisis mode' in reference to the federal government's reaction to EU-level crises. Other interviewees (1, 2, 4 and 6) described the crisis mode in largely congruent terms without explicitly referring to it as such.

Figure 3: Crisis mode of EU coordination in the Euro (*left*) and the Schengen crises (*right*)

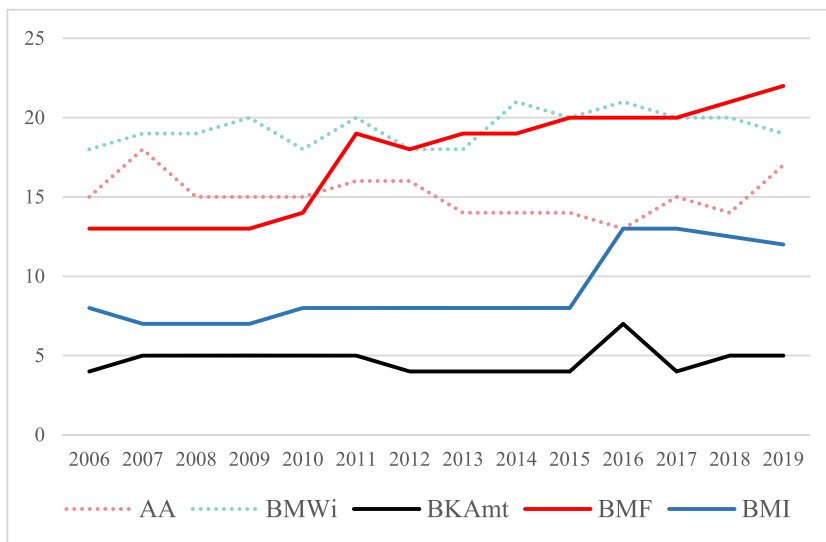
The chancellery harnessed this favourable opportunity structure to acquire hierarchical control of governmental position-taking (Beichelt, 2015). Although headed by the small coalition partner, other ministries with stakes in the EU's institutional development (AA) and in economic affairs (BMWi) were caught off-guard by the unfolding EU-level dynamic and toed the line (Behnke, 2016).

In summer 2015, the chancellery realized that the Schengen crisis, though felt domestically (interview 2), could be addressed effectively solely through a 'European solution' (interviews 4, 5). In October 2015, the minister of the interior de Maizière criticized a lack of coordination in Germany and demanded chancellor Merkel and chancellery minister Altmaier 'to switch to the crisis mode' (Bannas et al., 2016). This, the BMI hoped, would allow for the mobilization of additional political, administrative, and financial resources (interview 6). Reacting to the minister's demand, the BKAMt decided to establish a task force (*Stabsstelle*) internally and to transfer the responsibility for 'overall political coordination' (Bundesregierung, 2015) to the chancellery minister, enlisting the BMI in its crisis management. The step was subsequently formalized by a cabinet decree adopting a 'coordination concept for coping with the Schengen situation' (Bundesregierung, 2015). With the departmental principle *de facto* suspended, the BMI henceforth operated under the hierarchy of the chancellery in its management of the Schengen crisis (interviews 2, 6, 7, 8).

Step 2: *Co-optation of a Lead Ministry*

During both crises, the chancellery co-opted a lead ministry, creating what has been termed a 'dual centre' (Fleischer and Parrado, 2010, p. 366). In this dual centre, additional EU coordination capacities are created. Figure 4 shows the development of sections and working groups with primary responsibilities in EU affairs in selected German ministries. The chancellery's division 5 on Europe comprises four sections and roughly 20 staff, primarily to 'mirror' the activities of line ministries (Beichelt, 2015). These figures have remained stable over the past 15 years. Due to its low in-house endowment, the chancellery needs to mobilize additional administrative capacities during crises. Thereby, it relies rather on the readily available expertise of the lead ministry in the dual centre than

Figure 4: Sections and working groups with primary responsibilities in EU affairs, data: own calculations based on organizational charts from fragdenstaat.de. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]



enlisting less readily available external experts. In the Eurozone crisis, divisions 4 (economy, roughly 60 staff) and 5 of the chancellery combined their resources. Nonetheless, the complexity of the crisis necessitated an exploitation of the BMF's sectoral expertise in divisions VII (financial markets) and E (urope). Consequently, the BMF increased its administrative capacities substantially throughout the crisis, moving from 14 to 19 sections and working groups between 2010 and 2013. In the Schengen crisis, the established chancellery task force comprised about 15 specialists, many of whom had been high-ranking BMI officials (interview 2). Its head, for instance, had led the BMI section on 'aliens law'. Simultaneously, the administrative resources of the BMI were enhanced. Between 2015 and 2016, the number of EU sections and working groups grew from eight to 13. As a consequence of the Schengen crisis, the BMI became one of Berlin's foremost actors in EU affairs. In terms of administrative resources, it is now on par with the traditionally well-endowed ministry of agriculture, and closely trailing the 'big three' AA, BMWi, and BMF.

Situational centralization allows the chancellery to disregard the formal procedure, to formulate positions independently, and to quickly pass them on to the EU-level (interview 5). In the crisis mode, it establishes informal coordination with a lead ministry on top of the formal, horizontal coordination process (see Figure 3) instead of wholly replacing it. Ordinary coordination organized by the AA and the BMWi continues (interview 6). Central EU-level reform proposals are still discussed in the monthly meetings of state secretaries and heads of divisions (Beichelt, 2015). However, 'political life goes on in other fields [than the ones in crisis], too' (interview 4), reinforcing the dual centre's situational autonomy. When, during the Eurozone crisis, the European Financial Stability Facility was proposed by France and Italy in an emergency meeting of the ECOFIN Council in May 2010, chancellery and BMF jointly negotiated the details over

a mere weekend (interviews 1, 2). During the Schengen crisis, the BKAmT and the BMI cooperated equally informally. The BMI's division E (urope) hammered out many details of the German proposals to introduce an EU-wide relocation scheme and to establish an EU border and coast guard. However, it worked on directives of the chancellery's task force (interviews 2, 6, 7). The latter's responsibility entailed all aspects EU and international, including the chancellor's European Council positions (Sirleschtov, 2015). Furthermore, the head of the chancellery task force negotiated the central aspects of the EU agreement directly with the Turkish government (Maurice, 2016). The Commission also observed the division of labour between the BKAmT and the BMI, and the clear hierarchy between both. During the crisis, DG HOME shifted its focus towards the chancellery for political aspects while maintaining its ties to the BMI for technical aspects (interviews 7 and 9). Lines of communication were upheld directly between the Commission and Berlin, largely without mediation by the Brussels-based Permanent Representation. From the Commission's perspective, it was evident that the chancellery took all decisions of importance. For instance, the BKAmT and the BMI held opposing views on 'closing' the 'Balkan route', with the former's position prevailing (interviews 7 and 8).

Depending on Germany's position on EU-level reform, the crisis mode enables the chancellor to maximize the German government's bargaining power through manipulating domestic coordination (interview 2). In the Eurozone crisis, the German government held an interest in maintaining the status quo of strong fiscal rules and weak fiscal burden-sharing (Schimmelfennig, 2015). The chancellor would have been in the position to side-line the minister of finance. When, during the early stages of the Eurozone crisis, Wolfgang Schäuble, the minister of finance, repeatedly offered his resignation due to illness during a period of high political stakes, the chancellor declined his request (Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung, 2011). Acting on par with the BMF in a 'good cop, bad cop routine' (Chassany et al., 2015) aided the chancellery in pursuing its 'pedagogical approach' (interview 2) vis-à-vis Greece, and signalling to the European Council that its hands were tied by a strong domestic veto player (and to the domestic audience that taxpayers interests' were staunchly defended). In the Schengen crisis, on the other hand, the German government found itself in the position of a change actor, receiving high political pressures from the electorate, and demanding burden-sharing from other member states. When the minister of the interior, in late September 2015, publicly criticized the chancellor for allowing refugees to transit from Hungary to Germany (Zeit Online, 2015), it was rational for the chancellery to evade a powerful domestic veto player. Disempowering the BMI allowed the German government to speak with a single voice on the EU-level and to maximize its bargaining power in pushing for reform.

Step 3: *Consolidation of Additional Capacities in Line Ministrie*

In both cases, situational centralization resulted in a reinforcement of the former ministries' administrative capacities post-crisis. When the temporal, functional and political pressures abate, the crisis mode ends. The end of acute crisis is reflected in decreasing engagement of the European Council. During the Eurozone crisis, this was after the March 2012 signature of the Fiscal Compact. In March 2016, the agreement

between the EU and Turkey heralded the end of the critical phase of the Schengen crisis (interview 6).

When the crisis mode ends, the chancellery and the lead ministry reintegrate into the formal, horizontal coordination process (interview 4) and the chancellery reduces additionally acquired resources. Throughout the Merkel chancellorship, the number of EU affairs units in the chancellery has remained remarkably stable (see Figure 4). In the Eurozone crisis, the chancellery managed to lift the additional workload largely through the aforementioned internal cooperation (interview 2). During the Schengen crisis, the number of EU units and working groups witnessed an intermittent increase from four to seven between 2015 and 2016, only to return to four again in 2017. The chancellery's inclination to reduce acquired capacities post-crisis traces back to the constitutional and political dynamics of multi-party coalition government. The latter are suspended in times of crisis yet continue to have an effect in the longer run. In both the Eurozone and the Schengen crises, the concentration of executive power in the dual centre was to the detriment of ministries led by the 'small' coalition partner, particularly AA and BMWi. When, after the 2017 federal elections, the incoming foreign minister sought 'self-assertion' (Weiland, 2018) and claimed a more influential role for his ministry in the formulation of EU policy (interview 4), he had both the rationale of coalition stability and the departmental principle on his side.

Line ministries involved in the dual centre face fewer pressures to reduce the additionally acquired administrative resources. The build-up of decentralized resources in specialized ministries corresponds to the system's general departmental logic of preparedness. In both observed crises, it was the responsible ministries, rather than the chancellery, which eventually profited from situational centralization in the crisis mode. Throughout the Eurozone crisis, the BMF substantially increased its administrative capacities to deal with future crises in the Euro system. After 2012, the ministry maintained this high level of administrative endowment, eventually even eclipsing the number of EU units held by the BMWi. The BMF's institutional build-up consolidated its interministerial coordination position on all things Euro, much to the discontent of the traditional coordination actors in the AA and BMWi (interview 4). In the aftermath of the Schengen crisis, the BMI expanded its activities in external migration policy (interview 8) and maintained most of the acquired resources. Despite an internal organizational reshuffling under the incoming minister in 2018, seeking to 'mainstream' (interview 6) EU affairs in the ministry, the number of specialized units is considerably higher than pre-2015.

In both crises, the posited reactive sequence occurred, albeit in a systematically differing fashion (see Table 1). The decentralized German EU policy coordination system reacted flexibly to both the Eurozone and the Schengen crisis, in a causal mechanism spanning from situational centralization to long-term decentralization. To allow for swift position-taking, the chancellery activated a crisis mode of coordination, characterized by informality, politicization and hierarchy. In both crises, the chancellery constructed a dual centre to co-opt the expertise of a lead ministry, and in accordance with its integration preferences. Whether acting hierarchically as an advocate of change or on par as a proponent of the status quo, the German government successfully maximized its power in EU-level bargaining. The outcome of the crises was again similar: The lead ministry involved in the respective crisis retained newly-acquired capacities, augmenting its role in a coordination system characterized by reinforced decentralization.

Table 1: Comparison of German EU policy coordination in the Eurozone and Schengen crises

<i>Crisis Reactive Sequence</i>	<i>Eurozone crisis (2010–12)</i>	<i>Schengen crisis (2015–16)</i>
Crisis mode	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disregarding formal procedure (<i>informal</i>) • Side-lining administrative actors (<i>political</i>) • Centralized decision-making (<i>hierarchical</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disregarding formal procedure (<i>informal</i>) • Side-lining administrative actors (<i>political</i>) • Centralized decision-making (<i>hierarchical</i>)
Co-optation of a lead ministry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Necessary reliance on the expertise of a line ministry <i>Dual centre on par</i> • Germany as <i>status quo actor</i> • Chancellery and BMF cooperate to maximize bargaining power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Necessary reliance on the expertise of a line ministry <i>Hierarchical dual centre</i> • Germany as <i>change actor</i> • Chancellery enlists BMI to maximize bargaining power
Consolidation in line ministries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Discontinuation</i> of internal restructuring in the chancellery • <i>Retention</i> of additional capacities in the BMF, <i>consolidation</i> of coordination role on EMU 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reduction</i> of acquired capacities in the chancellery • <i>Retention</i> of additional capacities in the BMI, enhanced <i>focus</i> on external migration policy

Conclusion

Our study demonstrates why recent years' polycrisis has not prompted permanent centralization among and can even reinforce decentralized systems of EU policy coordination. It contributes to research on the Europeanization of core executives that puzzled over the persistence of decentralized systems (Mittag and Wessels, 2003) and pointed to their ability to mobilize deep expertise and to support flexible bargaining (Kassim, 2003). Our comparison of German EU policy coordination during the Eurozone and Schengen crises shows a reactive sequence (Mahoney, 2000) through which decentralized systems benefit from these strengths while avoiding permanent centralization. Functional threat, temporal urgency, and political uncertainty allow the chancellery to initiate situational centralization, and the co-optation of a lead ministry enables swift and coherent position-taking. Post-crisis, however, pre-existing institutional factors such as constitutional provisions, coalition dynamics, or federal arrangements push for a return to the status quo ante. Regardless of whether the chancellery and its lead ministry acted on par or hierarchically during the crisis, newly-created capacities remain in the former lead ministry. Paradoxically then, situational centralization during a crisis ultimately reinforces the country's decentralized coordination system.

Our study provides novel insights into the internal determinants of member state bargaining power in EU-induced crises. In the Schengen crisis, Germany preferred to change the EU policy framework to alleviate domestic pressures. The chancellery hierarchically subordinated the lead ministry. This allowed Germany to speak with a single voice in negotiations in all relevant EU bodies, a necessary (yet evidently insufficient) condition for change actors' success in two-level bargaining. In the Eurozone crisis,

Germany wanted to maintain as much of the existing fiscal policy framework as possible. As a status quo actor, the chancellery harnessed the ministry of finance's powerful domestic position as a constraint in EU-level negotiations. These differences in situational centralization imply that member state governments with decentralized coordination systems can manipulate domestic administrative arrangements in order to maximise their bargaining power on the EU-level.

Our findings warrant further testing of the illustrated causal mechanism and its impact on EU-level bargaining power. We expect it to occur when exceptional centralization pressures induced by EU policy crises confront decentralized EU policy coordination systems. In such cases, the dialectical movement of situational centralization and long-term decentralization should unfold similarly as in Germany. In Greece, for instance, the ministry of finance played a decisive role in policy coordination and implementation during the Eurozone crisis. As in the German case, however, no formal changes to the coordination system occurred (Spanou, 2017), rendering a post-crisis return to the status quo ante likely. Interestingly, the polycrisis seems to exert pressures even on centralized systems. During the Eurozone crisis, the Irish government created an Economic Management Council that involved the finance ministry in a coordination process that is otherwise dominated by the prime minister's office (Laffan, 2017). Once the crisis was over, however, the Council was dissolved, and coordination returned to the status quo ante. We therefore deem it possible that similar sequences of reconciling EU-level bargaining power with deep sectoral expertise occur in both centralized and decentralized coordination systems. Further cross-national analyses could hence reveal how different configurations of the reactive sequence affect member state's strength in two-level bargaining. In an era of polycrisis, understanding these domestic sources of EU-level bargaining power is important to grasp the driving forces of the European polity.

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List of interviews

- Interview 1: current official of the BMF, Berlin, 8 May 2018
- Interview 2: former official of the chancellery, Berlin, 9 May 2018
- Interview 3: current official of the BMWi, Berlin, 18 May 2018
- Interview 4: current official of the AA, Berlin, 30 May 2018
- Interview 5: former official of the chancellery and the BMI, Berlin, 7 June 2018
- Interview 6: former official of the BMI, Berlin, 12 June 2018
- Interview 7: former official of DG HOME, on the phone, 27 July 2018
- Interview 8: current official of the BMI, Berlin 24 September 2018
- Interview 9: current official of DG HOME, on the phone, 5 October 2018