THE UNION CIVIL PROTECTION MECHANISM IN THE PRISM OF SOLIDARITY THEORY

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The presented analysis leads to a conceptual discussion of solidarity and empirical findings concerning solidarity behaviour in disasters. Selected academic articles are analysed and contrasted with the EU's structural solutions and functional experiences in the field of disaster solidarity. In the liminal period of a disaster, emerging actors spontaneously, collectively and altruistically provide assistance to victims. They act based on shared values and norms and ignore pre-disaster normative social differences and behaviours. Ethical dimensions and emotions are also crucial for solidarity behaviour. This solidarity is then reinforced by local, national and in some more serious cases even international actors. One of these is the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM), which provides regional and global assistance. The solidarity of the UCPM is mechanical, organic and based on a case-specific mix of generosity, morality, rationality, reciprocity, identification, connectedness and interdependence. The UCPM has functional goals and political motives.

Key words: solidarity; disaster; Union Civil Protection Mechanism; actions.

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the debate on solidarity has gained momentum. Authors dealing with the concept of solidarity mainly find the basis for discussion in Durkheim's concepts of mechanical and organic solidarity. The discussion concerning the reasons, motives, content, scope and forms of solidarity is quite controversial, causing several disagreements. Nevertheless, we agree with Forst (2021, 13), who argues that "solidarity appears in many forms and with many justifications and reasons. One must not limit this plurality but must describe it properly".

Solidarity is especially important in the context of the individualisation and globalisation of today's society. While individualisation suggests that people

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could be more rational and more selfish in their everyday lives, globalisation, in contrast, makes the world more interconnected and interdependent and brings with it greater opportunities for human cooperation and solidarity compared to the past. For example, the European Union (EU) has developed a civil protection cooperation programme that gives assistance not only to its members and partners, but also to other countries severely affected by various crises[2].

The objectives of the analysis are to summarize conceptual discussions on solidarity, introduce specific forms of solidarity exercised during a disaster or other crisis, and evaluate the role played by the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) in this context. We begin with a theoretical elaboration of the concept of solidarity and continue with a presentation of recent research on solidarity in disasters. The UCPM's solidarity programme, its basic activities and actual actions are analysed next. In the discussion, the UCPM is assessed and evaluated in the light of solidarity theory and empirical evidence. The analysis is rounded off with concluding remarks in the form of answers to research questions.

The analysis was guided by three research questions: 1) What are the biggest conceptual differences and perhaps controversies among scholars while explaining solidarity? 2) What are the main findings of recent research on solidarity in disasters? 3) To what extent are the characteristics of UCPM and its disaster help in line with the conceptual foundations of solidarity?

To accomplish the analytical objectives and answer the research questions, selected academic articles and research reports on solidarity in recent disasters were analysed. We also analysed the data available on the EU's websites and compiled a list of 536 UCPM actions in the last decade (2014–2023). We processed the data to determine the number of actions per year, the number of actions per disaster/crisis type, the geographical scope of the actions, and the type of assistance offered to the affected countries. Two cases were analysed and briefly described in this article to point out the UCPM's advantages and deficiencies. We compare empirical findings about the EU's structural solutions and activities in the area of disaster relief with the central theoretical propositions on solidarity. Finally, a synthesis of the main findings is presented.

2 THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL INSIGHTS

2.1 Conceptualisation of solidarity

Most authors who recently considered the topic of solidarity (e.g. Borger 2020; Wilde 2007; Komter 2004; Stjernø 2004; Brunkhorst 2005; Forst 2021; Sangiovanni and Viehoff 2023) went back to the concept developed by Emile Durkheim (1964), who distinguished between mechanical and organic solidarity. Mechanical solidarity refers to the social integration of members of a society who share a common identity, values, beliefs, morals, faith and way of life. They are similar and form a collective conscience that works within the individual members and encourages them to work together. The concept applies to small units like the family, tribe, church, neighbourhood and local community. Organic solidarity, in comparison, is a social integration that arises from the need of

[2] As the EU officially adopted the UCPM's all-hazards approach in 2013, it makes sense to adequately use the terms "disaster" and "crisis" in the text.

individuals for mutual fulfilment. It refers to more developed and complex societies with more differentiated identities and beliefs, a more abstract morality enshrined in law, and a greater division of labour. Alongside Durkheim, some authors (e.g. Borger 2020; Komter 2004) also mention Aristotle's concept of friendship[3], Rousseau's concept of the social contract, Weber's communal and associative social relations and Parson's concept of solidarity as a normative obligation in this context. Yet, it is necessary to stress that Durkheim's and Weber's concepts of solidarity mentioned above were understood as "ideal types". The distinction between them was made purely for analytical reasons, whereas in reality mechanical and organic solidarity or communal and associative relations exist simultaneously in one and the same society (Komter 2004).

The general notion of solidarity refers to a practical attitude of an individual towards other people, and "involves a form of 'standing by' each other (from the Latin solidus[4]) based on a particular normative bond with others constituted by a common cause or shared identity" (Forst 2021, 3). Solidarity expresses the willingness to act with or for others to reaffirm the collective bond. It is also an endeavour to promote the common cause or shared identity of a given social group when necessary. Sangiovanni and Viehoff (2023, 3) state that there are two preconditions for solidarity: an individual identifying as a member of a social group together with a willingness, on that basis, to put aside narrow self-interests to help another.

Solidarity is also a mechanism of social cohesion (Borger 2020). This mechanism has three core characteristics: solidarity mediates between the community and the individual, solidarity creates unity, and solidarity requires the individual to act in support of and in accordance with the group. Borger (ibid.) distinguishes three types of solidarity: social, welfare state and oppositional[5].

The concept of solidarity refers primarily to the individual level and the collective or community level. Solidarity on the individual level is defined as "a feeling of togetherness or identification with another person or group, and the willingness to take the consequences of that". It is hence a disposition of a person in terms of their "propensity to sacrifice something on behalf of the group which suffers from an adverse condition" (Komter 2004). Solidarity on the collective/communal level emphasises "the ties that bind people together in the society; the term solidarity is referring to the degree or type of social integration resulting from these ties and is often used as a synonym of the social order or social cohesion existing in the society" (ibid.). This sociological perspective is strongly influenced by Durkheim's concept of organic solidarity.

Similarly, solidarity can be understood as "the feeling of reciprocal sympathy and responsibility amongst members of a group which promotes mutual support" (Wilde 2007, 1). Solidarity on the individual level can contain subjective and emotional elements and is associated with love and friendship. However, solidarity on the societal level involves collective action that helps to shape

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[3] Aristotle distinguishes three types of friendship: a friendship of utility, a friendship of pleasure and a perfect friendship. The latter is closest to the concept of solidarity and is "made up of men who are good and alike in virtue; for each alike wishes well to each other… they are good in themselves" (quoted by Prather, 2024).

[4] The Latin verb *solidare* means to make solid, to join parts into a strong whole (Forst 2021, 3).

[5] Oppositional solidarity is political in nature: it is a movement for social change that can take place on many levels of social existence. It opposes injustice, oppression, tyranny and social weaknesses (Scholz 2008, 54).

institutions and policies within states and beyond, especially in the era of globalisation.

Modern social systems consequently introduce various forms of institutionalised solidarity (social welfare, social insurance, healthcare, disaster relief programmes etc.). In this sense, Sciarra (2018, 2) defines solidarity as "ways in which collective interests emerge and are represented by organized groups at a national and transnational level". Taylor and Hunt-Hendrix (2024) argue that "solidarity is both a principle and a practice, one that must be cultivated and institutionalised so that care for the common good becomes the central aim of politics and social life". Stjernø (2004, 2) defines solidarity as "the preparedness to share resources with others by personal contribution to those in struggle or in need through taxation and redistribution organized by the state". A certain form of solidarity reciprocity is assumed, as it is "generally accepted that those in need will receive more benefits than those who are not in need" (Forst 2021, 9).

Still, a strong belief exists among analysts that solidarity presupposes intrinsic motives and voluntary action. Solidarity must be located outside the legal framework of duties and obligations. In this spirit, Calhoun (2002) criticises the purely institutional or political perspective of solidarity that ignores a variety of other forms of solidarity that are achieved outside of state and political organisations, while overestimating the mobilising potential of big institutional ideas. Honneth (1996, 128–129), too, emphasises the social dimension of solidarity: it is "an interactive relationship in which subjects mutually sympathize with their various ways of life because, among themselves, they esteem each other symmetrically". Social solidarity exists when "every member of society is in a position to esteem himself or herself".

The concept of solidarity is linked to terms like generosity, reciprocity, rationality, dependence, identity and morality. Is giving completely generous or does it require reciprocity? Is it interest-free or do people expect something in return? Are generosity and self-interest linked in gift-giving, and does the exchange thus entail a mixture of altruism and selfishness? Building on the research of Malinowski, Mauss, Levi-Strauss, Gouldner and Sahlins, Komter (2004) concluded that reciprocity in exchange relationships is the moral cement of culture and society and thus a cornerstone of social order and solidarity. In this context, O'Neill and Miller (cited by Sangiovanni and Viehoff 2023, 2) distinguish two types of solidarity: solidarity among and solidarity with. *Solidarity among* presupposes the attitudes and dispositions of group members are roughly symmetrical, while *solidarity with* refers to a relationship between (groups of) individuals who do not belong to the same unit. Reciprocity is not expected here, even though people who extend solidarity to those in need might generally expect others to help them should in the future they find themselves in a similar situation. Kolers (2016) claims that solidarity must always be one-sided and asymmetrical. Forst (2021, 4) argues in comparison that a certain reciprocity exists in solidarity, albeit it sometimes is asymmetrical.

Solidarity is additionally discussed within the framework of rational choice theory (Hechter 2015). The belief is that, when given a choice, people will always choose the alternative likely to bring them the greatest benefit. The individual is always goal-oriented and a a rational egoist, but the institutions, with their regulatory function, retain control over their behaviour. Another important variable is the individual's dependence on the group. Individuals weigh up their commitment to the group, the alternative of leaving the group, and the costs of

choosing an alternative. Komter (2004) contends that the greater the dependence of the members, the stronger the bond and obligation to the group. Solidarity is achieved when people are committed to the group's goals. "Compliance requires formal controls, the means of the group to counteract free riding" (ibid.).

Some authors do not see the connection between rationality, dependence and solidarity as critical and instead highlight the importance of norms, values and emotions as the foundations of solidarity. Mayhew (1971), for example, believes that people's solidary behaviour is organised in social groups such as the family, ethnic group, religious group, a group of colleagues and even the nation, which create a system of solidarity. People are attracted to the group, care for its unity, are loyal to, identify with and feel connected to it. These are all forms of solidarity within the group. Etzioni (1998) also rejects neoclassical paradigms that put forward rationalistic, utilitarian and individualistic features of human nature. He offers an understanding according to which people are committed to the community and share a common identity and common values. This means people often make decisions that are not rational, but affective and normative. People not only strive to maximise their pleasure or benefit, yet also act on the basis of shared values and norms. Similarly, Forst (2021, 5) believes that an individual values the cause or identity of a social group for certain normative reasons. Specific values are embodied in the community with which the person identifies. The reasons for solidarity are hence a combination of independent evaluative considerations and an attachment to a given collective to which a person belongs.

Morality is also key in this context because solidarity is based on our humanity in various forms: From morally obligatory help in times of need to acts of solidarity that do not require reciprocity at all. Morality enables us to recognise other people as vulnerable beings whom we must assist when needed given that we all share "a human form of life" (Habermas 1989). It is also important that we care for other people even though we do not share a particular form of life or a common identity with them. Rorty (1989) argues that our moral obligations to others stem from our shared identity and not so much from our shared humanity. Sangiovanni and Viehoff (2023, 7) claim that moral solidarity requires citizens to identify with one another in shared responsibility for the welfare of the social group. Notions of solidarity vary since the meanings of common bond, common identity and common cause are different. This makes the practical context important (Forst 2021, 7), and it can be an ethical, legal, political and/or moral context.

2.2 Empirical evidence

Recent research on disaster solidarity has yielded several interesting findings. First, and most importantly, solidarity comes in different forms (see Sangiovanni and Viehoff 2023; Drury et al. 2016; Schrauf and Rodriguez 2023; Albris 2023; Koopman 2021; Remes 2015; Sasse-Zeltner 2021; Hutchison 2014 and Zille 2020). In the initial phase of a disaster, considerable help is offered to victims by emerging actors who have not been badly affected. People's behaviour is guided by a strong ethical dimension in which disaster survivors spontaneously, collectively and altruistically help those in need. In helping others, they ignore normative social distinctions and behaviours from before the disaster. People do not seek to maximise their benefits, but act based on shared values and norms. Nonetheless, it seems that generosity and self-interest are intertwined in the exchange of help and promote the development of social order and solidarity. It

is also important to stress that solidary behaviour during a disaster is related to social identification, the observation of the solidary behaviour of others, and expected support. This means there is substantial solidarity among the affected individuals or groups, but also a lot of solidary behaviour emanating from the outside world: nationally, regionally and in some more serious disasters even globally. In disasters and other crises, the context is specific, and people often assist those affected, even if they have nothing in common with them, except for the mere fact that we are all *homo sapiens* who uphold humanity. As Sasse-Zeltner (2021) noted, the COVID-19 crisis, for example, triggered an outbreak of institutional solidarity on the national and international levels and simultaneously also revealed new forms of solidarity in local communities.

Solidarity and the overall success of disaster relief are enhanced when existing concepts of mutual aid are already established in society. Following an earthquake in Indonesia, the mobilisation of survivors, formation of leadership and effectiveness of the response were all supported by the traditional norms and rules of the "gotong royong" concept [6] (Koopman 2021). This also contributed to the quick recovery through friendship, transparency and trust between different religious groups and villages. A research report on two Canadian historical disaster cases underscored the role of self-help patterns, informal order and solidarity in coping with the consequences of disasters (Remes 2015). Both, the Indonesian and Canadian cases showed that the neglect of traditional concepts of solidarity or their modification, not in the sense of valorisation but of distortion, led to serious difficulties in coping with the disasters.

Emotions have played an important role in the provision of transnational solidary aid, revealing that emotions are linked to contemporary humanitarianism. Images of devastation, loss of life, injury and general human suffering have evoked solidarity and provided aid. In rare cases, solidarity has been reported to be offered through the mobilisation of stereotypes and colonial experiences of the Third World (Zille 2020), which suggest a "politics of pity" (Hutchison 2014).

Recent research has also shown that the normalisation of the post-disaster situation stimulates pre-disaster behaviour, meaning that solidarity diminishes while traditional patterns of interaction between people are gradually restored. Yet, there are individuals who commit themselves ethically in the event of a disaster and consequently engage in solidarity as a long-term behaviour (Schrauf and Rodriguez 2023). This means that in some cases solidarity can have a deeper and lasting moral impact on society as a whole. It should also be noted that no cases of purely rational or selfish behaviour have been identified in recent research. Nor can it be said that aid via solidarity mechanisms was chiefly motivated by the self-interest of the donor countries. The above overview is principally concerned with solidarity as an expression of mutual aid between people in an affected community. In a few cases, it also deals with (international) institutionalised solidarity. The latter is examined in detail in the next chapter.

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[6] This concept stands for traditional cooperation in communities and practical inter-personal help. The concept emphasises the importance of collaboration, solidarity and the spirit of helping other people.

3 THE UNION CIVIL PROTECTION MECHANISM AS A SOLIDARITY PROGRAMME

The processes of globalisation and regional integration make it possible to implement institutional solidarity in a regional and global context and not only in the context of the nation state, as happened in the past. This is an opportunity for new forms of solidarity that can be linked to the process of democratisation and the affirmation of humanism. The core international structures for solidary assistance in the event of a disaster or other crisis are the United Nations Offices for the Disaster Risk reduction (UNDRR) and for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), the NATO Department for Resilience and Civil Preparedness, and the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC) within it, together with the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM). The latter is a form of solidarity that reaches far beyond EU membership – it involves non-EU members of the UCPM, but also countries around the world that are assisted during various crises. It is international or even cosmopolitan solidarity provided by a supranational organisation. EU solidarity also extends to various other areas and forms, although focus in this article is on solidarity in the event of disasters or other crises[7].

3.1 Chronology of the UCPM's development

Even though the EU Civil Protection Mechanism was established in 2001, the beginnings of cooperation between EU Member States in providing disaster relief date back to 1977 when a fund to financially assist affected countries was set up. In April 1985, the ministers responsible for civil protection met informally in Rome and agreed to coordinate national civil protection capacities in the event of major natural disasters. Gradually, the European disaster relief programme was implemented, which included advanced forms of cooperation: the development of a common disaster management strategy, civil protection instructions, a permanent network of national civil protection officials, a database on disasters, joint training and simulation exercises, and a public information campaign (Malešič 1991). In 1997, the Council adopted a decision on a Community action programme in the field of civil protection to support and complement the Member States' activities on the national and sub-national levels via cooperation projects relating to preparedness, the dissemination of information, and public awareness of natural and technological disasters. Cooperation in the area of civil protection is intended to promote solidarity, protect the environment and improve effectiveness in the Member States by applying the subsidiarity principle[8] (Villani 2017, 126–128).

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[7] Villani (2021) provides an overview of the so-called EU civil protection law and an assessment of its details, evaluating the essential practical and theoretical role of solidarity in shaping the main legal instruments for civil protection within the European Union. Particular attention is paid to the existing instruments for the provision of financial and in-kind assistance in the event of a disaster, as well as analysing recent initiatives to provide assistance for dealing with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

[8] The subsidiarity principle means that the responsibility for disaster relief lies primarily with the states themselves, while the EU supports, complements and facilitates the coordination of their efforts. The EU endeavours to strike a balance between national responsibility and European solidarity.

In October 2001, the Council adopted a decision and launched the EU Civil Protection Mechanism [9] to facilitate enhanced cooperation between the Community and the Member States in the field of civil protection in the event of major emergencies. This was an important milestone in the development of cooperation in disaster response. The mechanism was an operational tool to mobilise assistance, improve preparedness and organise cooperation. The key element of the mechanism was the Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC), a hub for communication between Member States. Not only intended for the EU Member States, the mechanism could also be used to support third countries when affected by a major disaster. The Civil Protection Mechanism became an important tool for the EU to ensure immediate and coordinated disaster relief (Villani 2017, 128).

In 2002 we witnessed the establishment of the EU Solidarity Fund that is used to respond to major natural disasters and express European solidarity and support to disaster-stricken regions within Europe. It has become one of the main EU instruments for post-disaster recovery. In the 2009 Lisbon Treaty, a specific provision on disaster response was adopted in the form of a "solidarity principle": The commitment of the EU to provide assistance, relief and protection to victims of natural or man-made disasters around the world, and in the form of a "solidarity clause" to support and coordinate the civil protection systems of the Member States, which provides that the latter are obliged to show solidarity and assist another Member State if it is affected by a terrorist attack or a natural or man-made disaster (Lisbon Treaty 2009). The Treaty introduced a formal legal basis for civil protection as a competence of the Union, meaning that activities in case of the solidarity clause being activated are led by the Council, whereas activities in case of activation of the Civil Protection Mechanism are led by the Commission.

The last decade has been decisive for the development of EU civil protection. In December 2013, the existing framework was upgraded with the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM). This mechanism can be activated in the event of any major natural or man-made disaster affecting people, the environment or cultural heritage. Events can include terrorist attacks, technological, radiological or environmental disasters, marine pollution, and acute health emergencies. Such an all-hazards approach emphasises prevention, preparedness and effective response, while post-crisis reconstruction has not been the focus of the UCPM (Villani 2017, 132–134). As mentioned above, this is the domain of the EU Solidarity Fund.

At the same time, the Emergency Response and Coordination Centre (ERCC) was established on the basis of the existing Humanitarian Aid Crisis Room and the Monitoring and Information Centre to serve as the operational centre of the UCPM. The ERCC gathers information in real time, monitors the evolution of disasters, prepares plans for resources deployment, works with members to identify appropriate civil protection capacities and coordinates the EU's civil protection assistance. In 2021, the ERCC was upgraded with operational, analytical, monitoring, information and communication capabilities (Emergency Response Coordination Centre 2024).

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[9] Today, in addition to the EU Member States, Iceland, Norway, Serbia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Bosna and Herzegovina, Moldova, Ukraine, and Turkey participate in the Mechanism.

Another important milestone was the creation of the European Emergency Response Capacity (EERC) in October 2014 (Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism 2013). The EERC is a voluntary pool of pre-committed resources from the countries involved in the civil protection mechanism. The EERC includes modules (water treatment, surgical units, medical evacuation procedures, aerial and ground forest firefighting, flood mitigation, urban search and rescue), technical and practical assistance teams and experts in various fields. These modules enable Member States to respond to disasters immediately after being contacted by the Emergency Response Coordination Centre. A weak point of the previous system was that it facilitated the use of ad hoc resources provided by countries. There is no doubt that the mobilisation of resources is much easier and faster if they are made available to the mechanism in advance by the participating countries.

In December 2018, the UCPM was amended, bringing three main changes:
1) greater obligations for Member States in the area of prevention. They should extend reports on risk assessment and risk management plans, and report on prevention measures and preparedness;
2) changes concerning the Commission's responsibilities in the areas of preparedness and response. The dual system of capabilities was introduced: The EU Voluntary Pool was transformed into the European Civil Protection Pool (Decision (EU) 2019/420) and reserve capacities-rescEU (Decision (EU) 2019/420) were created, as managed by the Commission in conjunction with the host country's reserve capacities; and
3) a significant increase in funding allocated to civil protection occurred. A rise of EUR 280 million in 2018–2020 and a favourable budget for 2021–2027 were agreed upon (Dobnik Jeraj and Martinič 2019, 260).

It is important to note that the EU recently developed a 'balance mechanism': Countries that frequently request assistance for the same type of disaster are invited by the Commission to submit additional information on prevention and preparedness measures. If necessary, the Commission can propose to send teams of experts to the country to draw up a proposal with recommendations. The same provision applies to countries requesting disaster assistance for 3 years in a row (ibid.).

In December 2021, the Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network was launched as an instrument of the UCPM (Regulation (EU) 2021/836). It was set up to strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of civil protection training and exercises, promote innovation and dialogue, and enhance cooperation between Member States' national civil protection authorities. The Knowledge Network is a hub that connects first responders, disaster risk managers, scientists and decision-makers and matches their needs for expertise and best practices with methodologies, tools, solutions and resources (Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network 2024).

Humanitarian action and civil protection have been organisationally linked under the umbrella of the Directorate-General for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) since 2010. This framework should enable complementary crisis management of both areas, aiming to increase the efficiency of activities, raise crisis response to a higher level, improve society's resilience to crises, provide the framework for cross-sectoral integration, and promote resilience in crisis response in international fora (Foreign and Security Policy 2022).

3.2 Recent UCPM actions of solidarity

Any country in the world can request assistance from the UCPM when affected by a major crisis. Between 2014 and 2023, the Mechanism participated in at least 536 actions (Table 1) [10] . Interventions have included some of the most devastating and challenging disasters and other crises like the Ebola virus disease in West Africa (2014) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (2018), the earthquake in Nepal (2015), the migrant crisis in Europe (2015–2016), forest fires in the Mediterranean (2017), in Greece (2018), in Sweden (2018) and in Austria (2021), the explosion in Beirut (2020), floods in Ukraine (2020), earthquake in Croatia (2020), refugee crisis in Jordan (2020), COVID-19 (2020–2021), the war in Ukraine since 2022, earthquakes in Turkey and Syria (2023), floods in Slovenia (2023), and a myriad of other disasters (Union Civil Protection Mechanism 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic saw the mechanism being activated around 100 times each in 2020 and 2021 (EU Civil Protection Mechanism 2024). Various emergency medical teams, which form part of the European Emergency Response Capacity, were deployed, initially in northern Italy and later in Armenia and other countries.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF UCPM ACTIONS PER YEAR IN THE LAST DECADE

2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
26	25	32	43	29	23	100	110	95	53
TOTAL 536									

Source: own presentation based on the EU's websites.

The number of UCPM actions per year depends on several factors, including the number of disasters per year, the number of disasters that overwhelm the capacities of the affected countries, the number of requests for assistance and the available civil protection and other capacities of the EU. Table 1 shows the average number of UCPM actions per year over the last 10 years has been 54, with the majority of actions occurring in the last 4 years and the average number of actions reaching 91. This is an obvious consequence of the COVID-19 outbreak, which caused a pandemic of huge proportions, notably in 2020 and 2021. Nevertheless, only 35 and 9 actions were related to COVID-19 in 2022 and 2023 respectively, meaning in those years there were 60 and 44 other actions. This is much higher than the average for the first 6 years of the decade (30 actions). The increase is chiefly due to civil protection assistance to Ukraine, which is a victim of Russia's aggression.

TABLE 2: NUMBER OF UCPM ACTIONS BY DISASTER/CRISIS TYPE

Contagious diseases	Natural disasters	Environmental disasters	Migrations/ refugees	Repatriation/ Evacuation	Conflict/ War	Prepared-ness	Other disasters
223	206	26	24	21	14	12	10
TOTAL 536							

Source: own presentation based on the EU's websites.

Actions in response to outbreaks of infectious diseases were the most prevalent in the last decade (Table 2). This is largely due to COVID-19, yet there have also been cases of Mpox, Ebola, yellow fever, cholera and several other diseases. Natural disasters have also dominated the past decade. Fires (90), floods (46), earthquakes (26), cyclones (23) and volcanoes (8) were the most frequent events triggering EU aid in this category. The number of disasters producing a direct

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[10] There is no single, standardised list of UCPM actions. Our list is the result of a search and extraction of data and information from various EU websites.

negative impact on our environment totalled 26, while mass migrations and refugee crises required 24 EU interventions. The repatriation of EU citizens due to COVID-19 and evacuations due to various conflicts involved 21 actions. Fourteen actions were directly related to situations caused by armed conflicts or wars, while 12 actions were dedicated to improving countries' preparedness for various disasters.

TABLE 3: GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE OF THE UCPM'S ACTIONS

Europe	Africa	Asia	Central and South America	North America	Australia and Oceania	Middle East
255	85	78	71	1	17	29
TOTAL 536						

Source: own presentation based on the EU's websites.

Table 3 shows that UCPM actions have been spread across the world in the last decade. Although the main focus of the UCPM has been Europe itself (255 actions), over half of the actions have been carried out on other continents, mainly in Africa (85), Asia (78) and Central and South America (71), but also in Australia and Oceania (17) and the Middle East (29). The United Nations has a programme for disaster relief that is implemented by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. In addition, there are bilateral and regional agreements for mutual assistance in the event of disasters, further increasing the EU's contribution to people in need and reflecting the EU's global solidarity. Assistance for North America has only been requested and provided once, in the case of the forest fires in Canada in 2023.

The analysed cases show that the forms of aid provided by the UCPM during disasters include material resources (food, water, medicine, clothing, tents, water pumps, mobile generators, heavy construction equipment, trucks, excavators…), experts, medical teams, rescue units, services and their equipment, airports and means of transport for the delivery of aid, as well as financial resources.

We now briefly present two recent UCPM actions. In 2020–2021, the mechanism responded to around 200 requests from around the world regarding the COVID-19 virus, but already in the initial phase of that crisis, when Italy was the first EU Member State severely affected by the virus to ask for help, not a single member responded positively to the request. It was only the intervention of the Commissioner for the Internal Market that prompted Germany and France to assist Italy. The latter, however, was then helped by non-European countries (China, Cuba, even Venezuela) and the Russian Federation. This fact triggered a discussion in political and academic circles about the flow of information and transparency within the UCPM (Beaucillon 2020, 400), European solidarity, the understanding of "realpolitik", geopolitics, and the image of the EU. In the following months, the EU successfully responded with appropriate measures to combat the devastating consequences of COVID-19. Measures were introduced in the areas of public health, research, the economy, food, travel, education, and pandemic exit strategy (De Pooter 2020, 1 and 4–7).

Slovenia was hit by devastating floods on 4 August 2023. Two days later, the country requested assistance from the UCPM. While 11 countries used this mechanism to help Slovenia, some others used bilateral agreements or the mil-to-mil (military-to-military) programme. In total, 18 countries provided assistance to the country, some through more than one mechanism. Five of them were non-EU member states and two were not even members of the UCPM. In total, 10 helicopters, 32 heavy machines, 14 temporary bridges, 729 rescue

workers and about €640,000 in financial resources were collected to help Slovenia. On the other hand, the European Commission provided €428.4 million from the Solidarity Fund for the reconstruction of the destroyed landscape, infrastructure, houses, businesses etc. Already in 2023, an advance payment of €100 million was made, with the rest to be transferred by the end of 2024. The President of the European Commission came to Slovenia on 9 August 2003, visited some of the affected areas and delivered a speech in the Slovenian Parliament in which she expressed her sorrow, sympathy, gratitude to the rescuers and compassion, and promised financial help from the EU. According to available data, there was no criticism of the UCPM measures during the floods in Slovenia and they may be labelled as a 'good practice' case. Decision-making was quick, the aid was timely, adequate and comprehensive.

4 DISCUSSION

A review of the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism in the light of the initial theoretical foundations of solidarity offers some useful insights. If we separate Durkheim's categorisation of solidarity into mechanical and organic types, or Weber's communal and associative relations in society, we could argue that solidarity through the UCPM works within all of the above types given that assistance is offered in the event of disasters or other crises in the affected countries, within the EU as a whole, within the UCPM membership beyond the EU membership, but also regionally and globally. In addition, the EU promotes mutual assistance on individual, group, community and institutional levels.

Aid under the UCPM involves a mix of concepts like generosity, morality, reciprocity, identity, connectedness and interdependence. It is undoubtedly generous to offer help to people affected by a disaster, especially when the recipient countries are not members of the UCPM. Still, it is at same time also a moral duty because those who are able to do so should not stand idly by and watch the disaster unfold. We believe that the concept of morality is the key to understanding solidarity in disasters and other crises. And that this morality stems from a common identity and a common humanity (institutions, organisations, groups and individuals helping those affected in different parts of the world).

Reciprocity is also, at least in part, an issue to be considered in the context of disaster solidarity. It is not expected that developing countries assisted in a disaster will be able to reciprocate to the same extent should developed donor countries become affected. In this context, solidarity under the UCPM is largely one-sided and asymmetrical. We speak here of 'solidarity with'. However, it is important to recognise the value of reciprocity because it is anchored in the disaster activities of the UCPM. The countries involved should namely adhere to the principle of subsidiarity and the balance mechanism, be prepared to respond to disasters, and could receive assistance if their capabilities become overwhelmed by the circumstances of a disaster. Many instances of crisis, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic, show that the donor countries offering aid to those affected, either bilaterally or through international mechanisms such as the UCPM, had in other cases been the recipients of aid via the same mechanism. Here, we speak of 'solidarity among'.

Identification is a cornerstone of solidarity. The case of EU disaster solidarity is special in this regard. It is international institutional solidarity, and the EU is

striving to achieve the identification effect. Indeed, it is assumed that disaster relief within the EU could raise awareness among citizens of EU Member States concerning the value of the EU's institutions and promote their stronger identification with the EU and the European idea generally. If the recipients of the aid are outside the EU, the EU's action could improve its image in those countries and mean the EU becomes stronger as a global actor.

Having led to greater interconnectedness and interdependence between states, globalisation has been another area where solidarity has received an additional boost. When disasters occur in distant areas, their consequences can be felt in different parts of the world not directly affected by them, including Europe. For example, the tsunami in South East Asia in 2004 caused casualties among tourists from several European countries. Further, the Japan crisis of 2011 affected economies in Europe and elsewhere in the world as stock markets suffered, oil and gas prices rose and the supply of spare parts from Japan was disrupted. The earthquake in Taiwan in March 2024 has brought a similar impact, especially on the production of semiconductors. In the case of COVID-19 in 2020–2021, this type of necessity was emphasised even more. Finally, the war in Ukraine following Russia's aggression has stimulated extensive EU solidarity with Ukraine in several areas, including civil protection. The motives for such support are humanitarian in nature, yet also fuelled by the fear that the war could spread even further into the European neighbourhood. It is thus assumed that solidarity is also a form of self-protection. These cases prove it is not just about helping others to recover, but the countries participating in the UCPM must at the same time ensure that the affected countries recover, also in the interest of the donor countries.

Data on UCPM actions in the last decade confirm that EU solidarity in disasters and other crises is universal in terms of the geographical and temporal scope, diversity and nature of the disasters and crises triggering the solidarity mechanism, as well as the different types of assistance provided to the affected countries and people. The data also suggest that the number of actions to improve prevention and the preparedness of countries has been quite modest over the last decade (12 out of 536 actions). Perhaps this is an opportunity for the EU to strengthen solidarity in the run-up to disasters and make the disaster management systems of countries at risk more robust and sustainable.

As the case of Italy during COVID-19 shows, solidarity can be jeopardised or limited when several EU Member States are (or expect to be) affected by a crisis at once. On the other hand, the case of the floods in Slovenia demonstrates that individual cases of affected countries are not questionable in this respect, and that, as a rule, help is organized and offered quickly.

This analysis also revealed some critical observations concerning how the UCPM functions: 1) The European Commission (EC) should play a greater role in decision-making related to disaster response, especially when disasters occur in EU Member States. A purely coordinating role of the EU may not be sufficient, particularly when several countries are affected at the same time. Nevertheless, the EC's decision-making role has grown in recent years, as we saw in the chronology of the UCPM's development and the two practical cases (Italy and Slovenia) we presented. A stronger role for the EC could also contribute to a faster response to disasters. 2) In terms of the form of assistance, more emphasis should be placed on direct socio-psychological assistance to affected people and first responders, while indirect psychological support in the form of visits to

affected areas, expressions of solidarity, actual assistance and the like is already taking place. 3) The EU could also increase the number of actions dedicated to improving preparedness and prevention in third countries (see Table 2). This would increase the self-reliance of countries and perhaps reduce the need for external assistance in future events.

To wrap up the discussion, the UCPM's functional objectives include cooperation, the coordination of the participating states, pooling their resources, and building reserve capacities to improve the prevention, preparedness and response to various crises, while the mechanism's political motives have been associated with concepts like European solidarity, identity, the "Europe of nations" and "Europe without borders". Or, as Nimark and Pawlak (2013, 4) put it: "Apart from the enhanced functional aspects that civil protection cooperation entails, any response to a crisis sends a political message that the EU is ready and able to provide assistance and solidarity when disaster strikes". In this sense, Prochazkova (2013, 89) reminds us of the EU's "safe community" concept, which encompasses the protection of people in terms of individual needs such as food and security as well as social needs, social recognition, self-realisation and protection in emergency situations. The general purpose of the mechanism is for European countries to cooperate in the field of civil protection, support EU Member States and other countries affected by major disasters, ensure the safety of people, property, the environment and cultural heritage in the event of disasters, and coordinate the provision and delivery of assistance.

The resources for providing aid are limited and should therefore be used rationally. Given that many disasters often occur simultaneously around the world, EU coordination with other international organisations, in particular the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and NATO's Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre, is essential.

5 CONCLUSION

The analysis was guided by three research questions, which are answered below. First, the conceptualisation of solidarity reveals great differences and controversies among scholars. There are views that focus on individual and group solidarity (collective, communal), whereas other views stress the importance of institutional solidarity, which derives from social solidarity. Put briefly the arguments are: solidarity must be located outside the legal framework vs. it should always be institutionalised through the law. A difference also appears regarding whether solidarity is a pure act of generosity or whether it additionally includes reciprocal expectations. Moreover, there is a debate concerning the drivers of solidarity: are people extremely rational and exercise solidarity when forced to do so by regulators, or are norms, values and emotions the true drivers of solidarity? Some authors believe the link between rationality and solidarity is crucial, while others argue that solidarity is an expression of empathy, morality and altruism.

Second, recent research has shown that solidarity is a collective action in disasters. Solidarity comes in a range of forms (search and rescue, medical, material, psychological, financial aid…) and from various directions (family, friends, local community, region, state, international organisations etc.), while its socio-psychological drivers are social identification with the people affected by the disaster, the solidary behaviour of others (solidary behaviour is 'contagious'),

emotions, ethical and moral aspects. The pure rationality of people and institutions, their self-interest or the expectation of reciprocity are not decisive for extending solidarity to those affected yet should not be completely ruled out. The tradition of solidarity-based aid in a community should be respected and valorised by the official actors of disaster relief to achieve optimal aid results. Many people return to the norms, values and interactions they had before the disaster. However, some individuals internalise disaster-related ethical commitments and behave altruistically even after the disaster.

Third, the EU's foundation and development are based on the concept of solidarity and overcoming animosity between historical enemies. The EU most likely holds the potential to develop a post-national concept of citizenship in the future. The foundations for this could be social justice and solidarity. One expression of this solidarity is the Union Civil Protection Mechanism. When juxtaposed with different conceptual foundations, it shows that it works in all disasters and other crises, in various forms of solidarity, on all levels of society and without geographical limitation. The solidarity actions of the UCPM are generous, moral, rational and (at least partly) reciprocal. The empirical findings confirm the universality of the UCPM's solidarity in terms of geographical scope, variety, the nature of crises, and the diversity of forms of assistance to affected countries. The positive effects of solidarity could be the stronger identification of people with the EU as an institution, with its values, objectives and activities. At the same time, solidarity in the event of a disaster strengthens the EU's position as a global actor.

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UNIJIN MEHANIZEM ZA CIVILNO ZAŠČITO V LUČI TEORIJE O SOLIDARNOSTI

Predstavljena analiza zajema konceptualno razpravo o solidarnosti in empirične ugotovitve, ki zadevajo solidarnostno vedenje ob nesrečah. Analizirali smo izbrane znanstvene članke na temo solidarnosti in jih soočili s strukturnimi rešitvami in funkcionalnimi izkušnjami EU na področju solidarnosti ob nesreči. V začetni fazi nesreče vznikli akterji spontano, kolektivno in altruistično zagotavljajo pomoč žrtvam. Delujejo na podlagi skupnih vrednot in norm, pri čemer ignorirajo normativne družbene razlike in vedenje v obdobju pred nesrečo. To solidarnost nato okrepijo lokalni, nacionalni in v nekaterih resnih primerih tudi mednarodni akterji. Eden od njih je Unijin mehanizem za civilno zaščito, ki zagotavlja pomoč regionalno in globalno. Solidarnost Mehanizma je mehanična, organska, hkrati pa je specifična mešanica, odvisno od primera do primera, velikodušnosti, morale, racionalnosti, vzajemnosti, identificiranja, povezanosti in medsebojne odvisnosti. Unijin mehanizem za civilno zaščito ima funkcionalne cilje in politične motive.

Ključne besede: solidarnost; nesreča; unijin mehanizem za civilno zaščito; akcije.