

**Complicated Realities of EU Refugee and Asylum Policy:
Taking a closer look at EU Response Towards Syrian and Ukrainian Refugees**

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Abstract

This paper explores the different factors that have led to the divergence of policy and attitude of the EU towards the Ukrainian and Syrian refugee crises. Although both crises are very similar in political origin, context, and magnitude, the EU immediately sprang into action by activating TPD to accept Ukrainian refugees into the Union, whereas it took a restrictive approach towards the Syrian refugee crisis, enacting policy to “prevent illegal migration flows” and reinforce internal security. Through the analysis of scholarly articles, news coverage, and surveys on public opinion, I consider the different factors that shape and impact decision & policy making, using Social Identity Theory to contextualize both case studies. I come to the conclusion that for reasons of the composition of race, religion, culture, and ethnicity of the refugee groups, and their proximity to “Europeanness,” the EU shifted its policy when it came to responding to the different groups. I support this claim by showcasing how the EU’s clashing interests create a situation where the discrimination and exclusion of refugees is inevitable. However, through analysis of academic texts and Social Identity Theory, I argue that an exception is made when refugee groups are seen as integrated with mainstream European culture and no longer pose a threat. Additionally, I analyze how the media used specific word choices, rhetoric, and visual imagery to create an identity that perpetuates the in-group and out-group division.

The united global condemnation of Russian aggression and subsequent acceptance of Ukrainian refugees has been inspiring to watch, especially in this increasingly polarizing world. However, this isn't the first time the world has seen a refugee crisis of this magnitude, so it begs the question – why now?

The Syrian civil war and the Russian invasion of Ukraine have instigated the two largest refugee crises of this century. After only a few days into the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Ukrainian refugees received an instantaneous outpour of support from all of Europe; Syrian refugees were not met with the same warmth and acceptance in 2015. Although the Syrian conflict has created around 5.7 million refugees, Europeans still hold reservations and strong contrary attitudes about Syrians' place within European society (UNHCR, 2022). There have been no such reservations when considering Ukrainians' place and positionality within Europe. Why did it take millions of Ukrainians to seek asylum for the European Union (EU) to finally enact the Temporary Protection Directive when it could have been extremely helpful during the peak of the 2015 crisis? Why Ukrainians and not Syrians? These questions and considerations have led to the central research question posed in this paper: What factors have led to the EU's divergence in response and attitude towards the Syrian and Ukrainian Refugee Crises?

I hypothesize that the racial, cultural, and religious identities of both refugee groups and their proximity to normative European culture have been the main factor driving the EU's policy response to the respective refugee crises. I base my argument on Social Identity Theory which argues that individuals derive a sense of self-worth, belongingness, and identity from their memberships in groups and through the favorable comparison of their own group against others. By analyzing news coverage, surveys on public opinion, and existing literature on the perception of threat and identity, I find that the racial and ethnic composition of the majority of Syrian

refugees in the 2015 crisis played a driving role in selling and adopting a more restrictive refugee and asylum policy on the basis of protecting the EU's national security and preserving its national identity. Whereas Ukrainian refugees' adjacency to the normative European culture has led to the opposite phenomenon, with the EU and its public feeling compelled to do anything in their power to help, opening their borders and immediately activating the Temporary Protection Directive. The EU's stark divergence in response has not only showcased to the world the hypocrisy regarding its supposed refugee and asylum policy but has left it at a crucial impasse that can have lasting ramifications for its future as an institution.

To cover the full scope of this question, this paper is divided into five sections. Section 1, Contextualizing the Syrian and Ukrainian Refugee Crises, provides a background of the refugee crises and how the EU responded, setting the stage for comparison. Section 2, Literature Review, presents a comprehensive overview of the existing work pertaining to factors that influence policy and decision-making. Section 3, Theory & Methodology, describes what Social Identity Theory is and how it helps support my hypothesis on the matter. Section 4, Analysis, dives into the intricacies of my arguments, providing evidence to support my thesis by comparing how both crises were depicted in the media and by the proximity of each refugee group to the in-group of "Europeanness". Finally, I conclude my paper with Section 5, Policy Implications, where I discuss possible steps forward the EU can take considering these revelations.

Contextualizing the Syrian and Ukrainian Refugee Crises

What makes the Syrian Refugee Crisis a formidable comparison to the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis is the similarities in the origins of their political statuses. Both groups are considered refugees due to being "unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin"

because of the physical danger they are in by the ongoing political situation (United Nations General Assembly, 1951). Currently, both nations are enthralled in violent conflicts, displacing more than 5.5 million Syrians and 8 million Ukrainians across Europe and other neighboring countries (UNHCR, 2022). Due to its proximity to the conflicts, the EU has emerged as a large player, both politically and as a destination for refugees to start a new life.

The Syrian Refugee Crisis

In late 2010 the Arab Spring erupted in northern Africa and the Middle East, kick-starting what would be a series of uprisings, protests, and toppled regimes in favor of new democratic systems. As the rumblings of dissent reached Syria, it seemed as though the nation would be next to fall considering Bashar al-Assad's regime had ruled in a repressive and autocratic manner since 2000. Assad's true colors quickly revealed themselves as he responded to "protestors immediately", using tactics such as mass arrests, torture, firing into crowds, and extrajudicial executions to control his citizens calling for change (Laub, 2023). The situation escalated from uprising to civil war when Assad's Syrian army rolled through the streets of Deraa with tanks, cutting off civilians from "food, water, medicine, telephones, and electricity for eleven days" (Laub, 2023). Since then, the country has been in a violent civil war between the FSA, the SNC, and various other splintered opposition groups. This imminent danger posed to Syrian civilians triggered one of the most dire and extensive refugee crises the region has seen, with mass waves of civilians embarking on treacherous journeys toward Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, and Europe.

As the first group of asylum seekers started to arrive on the shores of Italy and Greece by boat, the initial reaction was "shock and compassion" in the face of the tremendous loss of life (Coi et al., 2023). However, after much deliberation, the European Council decided to build up

their forces in the Mediterranean Sea to stop the “traffickers, prevent illegal migration flows and reinforce internal solidarity and responsibility”, heavily relying on their antiquated Dublin Regulation to establish the rules of engagement for asylum seekers (Special meeting of the European Council, 2015). International Organizations quickly stepped up and provided the humanitarian assistance and coordination needed, with the EU taking the back seat by mostly providing some financial assistance (Amaral et al., 2018). To tackle the overwhelming pressure Italy and Greece were experiencing handling the bulk of the influx, the EU attempted to implement a pilot resettlement program for individuals who qualified, imposing a minimum quota all member states had to reach. (European Commission, 2015). However, this quickly fell apart as various member states refused to admit refugees, rejecting the imposed quotas (Rankin, 2020).

Instead of reforming their own asylum policy considering the failure of the resettlement scheme, the EU decided to divert the problem, signing a statement of cooperation with Turkey in 2016. Known as the EU-Turkey deal, Turkey agreed to three things: that it would take measures to stop the ‘irregular’ travel of Syrian refugees from Turkey to the Greek islands, allow refugees that arrived in Greece from Turkey to be returned to Turkey, and for every Syrian returned from the Greek islands, they would admit one Syrian refugee who was waiting to seek refuge in Turkey (International Rescue Committee, 2023). In exchange, the EU provided €6 billion to Turkey to support the humanitarian effort of taking care of the large influx of refugees. Additionally, the EU sweetened the deal by providing all Turkish nationals with visa-free travel to Europe.

The Ukrainian Refugee Crisis

In early 2022, Russia surprised the world by invading Ukraine in a full-blown attack, instigating a massive refugee crisis. Immediately, the world condemned the actions of Russia, taking measures to ween off Russian gas, and quickly serving them with sanctions (Amaro, 2022). Sharing a border with Ukraine, the EU was the obvious place to flee from the Russian attacks, with Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania, quickly seeing a mass influx of refugees at their borders. The EU public quickly came to the Ukrainian's support, with 90% of Poles, usually the most apprehensive about immigration policy, saying they support accepting refugees into their country (Tilles, 2022). Over a little more than a week into the crisis, the European Council followed this same sentiment and voted unanimously to activate the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) for all Ukrainian nationals (European Parliamentary Research Services, 2023). The TPD is a mechanism that provides immediate emergency temporary status during a mass influx of refugees or displaced persons into the EU. The status provides the refugees with "harmonized rights" within the EU, which include access to the labor market, housing, social welfare, medical assistance, and residency rights, in addition to the freedom to move throughout the EU (European Council, 2023). The TPD has allowed for the rapid integration of Ukrainian refugees into the EU fold because it gives this status without having to individually revise and approve each application. It is important to note that for this mechanism to be activated, it needs to pass unanimously by a vote of the European Council, and it is the first time it has ever been activated since its inception in 2001 (European Commission).

Apart from the TPD, the EU has allocated significant financial resources to support humanitarian organizations working on the ground, offering shelter, food, and healthcare to displaced individuals. With Poland receiving the largest influx of refugees at around 1.6 million

in total, the EU pledged around €145 million to aid Poland in providing comprehensive and speedy relief (Lesinska, 2022). Moreover, the EU facilitated the relocation of Ukrainian refugees within member states, promoting burden-sharing among countries (European Commission). As the war reaches its two- and half-year mark, the number of Ukrainian refugees falls to around 6.6 million (Statista Research Department, 2023). With the end date of the conflict unclear, there has been some doubt regarding the continuation of the TPD and what the EU's long-term integration plans look like. Despite this, the EU's support for Ukrainian refugees doesn't seem to be going anywhere albeit it might look a bit different in the near future.

Literature Review

Theoretically, under the international refugee regime, every nation is held to the moral standards of the 1951 Geneva Convention, which outlines the humane and equal treatment for all refugees (United Nations General Assembly, 1951). However, considering there is not an overarching governing body regulating the adherence to these regulations, the laws themselves are up to the interpretation of each individual nation-state. This, therefore, creates a divergence in refugee and asylum seeker treatment and policy from nation to nation. A large movement of people into any given area has economic, political, and social effects, depending on the state, that may be interpreted as beneficial or detrimental. Because of these inevitable effects, governments take into consideration how they will impact their nation, making way for the formation of this aforementioned divergence in policy and opinion. Subsequently, this divergence opens the door for an in-depth analysis regarding what factors influence how nations respond to large crises.

Current literature suggests a myriad of factors influence policy decisions about refugees, falling under two categories: threats and actors.

Refugees as an Economic Threat

Several scholars focus on the impact or perceived impacts refugees have on a host country. Simons, Stoke, and Wike (2016) explain that there is a rising narrative that refugees are economic burdens to host nations with the assertion that taking in refugees causes a strain on resources that may already be scarce, creating competition between refugees and local citizens. Blochliger, Dumont & Liebeg (2017), Jacobson (1996), and Collier & Betts (2017) elaborate by pointing out the potential ruinous fiscal impact refugees may have on a host nation caused by the long-term need for a myriad of costly basic needs, services, and supplies. Another consideration, which has become a large point of contention in national politics and the media, surrounds the participation of refugees in the labor market and whether it is creating unnecessary competition between refugees and local citizens for limited employment opportunities (Eaments & Pataccini, 2017; Simmons, Stoke, & Wike, 2016; Valenta & Thorshaug, 2013). This contention has led to restrictive policies regarding when refugees are able to join the workforce, with outright employment bans for individuals waiting for their asylum applications to be processed, a process that can take several months (Ahrens et al., 2022). Other scholars find that the opposite is true: the more time a host nation delays or withholds refugees' entrance into the workforce, the more detrimental it will be to their economy and their ability to integrate later on (Marbach, Hainmuller, & Hangartner, 2018; Ahrens et al., 2022), limiting their ability to participate and positively contribute to the economy (Bakker, Dagevos, & Enbersen, 2014; Hainmuller, Hangartner, & Lawrence, 2016).

Refugees as a Security Threat

Apart from what is considered traditional threats to national security, such as a regime's physical destabilization, internal or external military uprisings, and border control (Nye & Lynn Jones, 1988), security threats now also inhabit threats not only to a nation as a whole but to its individual citizen's safety, welfare, and quality of life (Ullman, 1983; Aliboni, 1998). During the last few decades, internal threats have taken on a new form with the global upsurge of violent acts of terrorism (Aliboni, 1998; Furuseth, 2003). The chaos that ensued after the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent US invasion of Iraq, began to foster a fear within the developed world of the rise and violent potential of the "Islamic State" (Collier & Betts, 2017; Zunes 2017). This was further perpetuated by the recent attacks in non-majority Muslim countries such as France, Belgium, and Germany (Collier & Betts, 2017) opening the door for this fear to develop into islamophobia (Hafez 2015; Zunes 2017). This public fear was quickly preyed upon by politicians to mobilize voters, publicly linking the large influx of Muslim refugees and asylum seekers with the increased presence of terrorism (Furuseth, 2003; Hafez, 2015) Even though there is no data backing this claim, with no evidence pointing to refugees as the perpetrators to any of the recent terrorist attacks, this narrative continues to run its course fueling the normalization of islamophobia in Europe (Osiewicz, 2023). While there is a call to integrate "newly arrived migrants" into the societal fold, there is this simultaneous fear of their violent radicalization, leading to a grouping of all Muslim refugees and asylum seekers as potential terrorists (Rajarm, 2022; Byman, 2015).

Refugees as a Cultural and Social Threat

A lot of what has been mentioned in previous sections ties to Xenos' (1999) theory regarding a government's compulsion to protect their cultural homogeneity, and homeland to retain sovereignty and control over their nation. Various scholars take this idea of cultural homogeneity and translate it in terms of identity, explicating how identity is used to justify actions and draw "political frontiers between insiders and outsiders" (Fearon, 1999; Howarth et al., 2000; Mole, 2007). Social Identification Theory explains this phenomenon through the mechanisms of social identification, social categorization, and social comparison. Attributing the relationship and conflict between the in-group and out-group to the natural need to compare both groups to build the self-esteem of the in-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Building on Social Identification Theory, Rousseau (2006) recognizes what holds together an in-group or an out-group is a collective identity, known as "bundles of shared values, beliefs, attitudes, norms, and roles that are used to draw a boundary between the in-group and the out-group". With this collective identity, comes the possible perception of threat rooted in the "fear that the out-group has the capability or intention to inflict a negative consequence on the in-group" (Rousseau and Garcia-Retamero, 2007). The modern need to protect identity derives in the face of increased globalization, with threats to cultural identity manifesting in the "opening of borders, rapid communication, proliferation of technologies, movement of peoples, trade, market and the spread of ideas" (Agius & Keep, 2018).

Therefore, when considering questions of immigration or admitting refugees, there is apprehension because it has the potential to redefine "the nation" through the changes in the ethnic composition of a population (Waever et al., 1993). From this point of view, since refugees are not part of the homeland, they will never be able to integrate into society. Thus, the

introduction of new ideals, religions, and persons, are threats to the homeland that they hold dear, because it has the potential to change it and be lost forever (Xenos, 1999). Essentially, governments that emphasize the priority of control and internal security “over the humanitarian value of asylum and refugee protection”, manage to politicize and securitize the issue of identity. Making identity depend on something like protecting borders and excluding people rather than other attributes such as tradition and history (Furuseth, 2003).

Influencing Actors in Policymaking

The individuals at the helm of decision-making are just as important as the factors they are considering when creating policy and responding to a crisis. Researchers argue that a leader’s motivations, personality traits, ideology, politics, and priorities shape his/her decision-making (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Hermann & Kegley, 1995; Gordenker 1987, Horowitz et al., 2005). Hermann et al. (2001), take it even further, by arguing that there are two categories of leaders: responsive and goal driven. Responsive leaders tend to be opportunists and pragmatists, with their policy taking shape as reactions to the crises “or setting in which the leader finds him or herself in”, whereas goal-driven leaders tend to build their response to a crisis within the boundaries of a lens “structured by their beliefs, attitudes, motives and passions” (Hermann et al., 2001). The type of system they are operating in is also a factor because it can greatly influence their capacity and the type of policy they can push for. (Lijphart, 1999).

Third-party actors are also major players, although the media and international organizations aren’t the ones with the final say, they hold great influence over governments and their leaders because of how they can influence and quickly weaponize public opinion. International Organizations, such as the UNHCR, have immense influence over governments

through the promise of aid, and institutional, and financial support (Jacobson, 1996). They are able to assume the “watchdog” role by leveraging this support to set humanitarian standards for operation (Gordenker, 1987). On the other hand, the media because of their power “over the selection, extent, frequency, and nature of their reporting”, influence public opinion by how they consciously or unconsciously frame stories (Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008; Entman, 1993).

Additionally, when it comes to whether it is possible to build a successful policy, regardless of the policy itself, the more voices involved in the decision-making process, the less likely it will have an effective outcome (Bariagaber, 1999). As Bariagaber (1999) argues, the various voices involved have different priorities, therefore tension between them will always exist, with actors behaving based on the assumption of other actors’ priorities. Refugees are not a new phenomenon. The factors explored in this section are simply scratching the surface of all the existing literature out there regarding the myriad of factors that influence decision-makers.

However, there is a huge importance placed on factors impacting security, with others falling secondary. This does not come as a surprise considering everyone perceives threats differently (Fernandes et al., 2013). This is where my paper comes in. The Ukrainian refugee crisis provides a new lens through which to assess the applicability of a lot of the pre-existing literature in this new modern context. In *Refuge: Rethinking Refugee Policy in a Changing World*, Betts and Collier (2017) bring up the consideration of the shifting global refugee regime since WW2 and the impact it had on host countries' responses. The type of refugee governments and international organizations were ready for were transients, people looking for temporary shelter and food while they await to return home. However, refugees fleeing civil war and ethnic conflicts had different needs, forcing the refugee regime to take a different shape. Since the Ukrainian refugee crisis is still relatively new and the war is still ongoing, we won't truly know

the full impact this wave of refugees will have on the global refugee regime, but it can start to give us some insight as to what these changes might be.

This paper seeks not only to re-evaluate existing literature through a new lens but to also shift the importance away from just security factors by focusing on social considerations within EU refugee and immigration decisions. By looking at the new case study of Ukrainian refugees and comparing it to the Syrian refugee crisis, I will provide insight into how a different type of crisis, with closer geographical proximity to Europe, challenges the status quo and parameters of a highly contentious topic; a topic which has led to the rise and fall of various governments and has been the fuel behind the increased radicalization of politics.

Theory & Hypothesis

In this paper, I argue that the racial, cultural, and religious identities of both refugee groups and their proximity to normative European culture have been the main factor driving the EU's policy response to the respective refugee crises. This hypothesis is supported by Social Identity Theory, which reconciles a person's sense of who they are based on the groups to which they belong, creating a dichotomy between in-group and out-group through the processes of social categorization, social identification, and social comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social categorization refers to how we first identify people in groups to understand them, to then understand what groups we belong to. The mechanism of social identification illustrates how your association with a group pushes you to develop an emotional investment in that identification. Lastly, the mechanism of social comparison states that after the categorization process has occurred, we tend to compare our groups against other groups, creating what is called in-groups and out-groups. Through this comparison, in order to maintain and bolster your

self-esteem, you and your group members will paint yourself in a favorable light against the out-group, essentially creating an Us vs. Them mentality often rooted in putting down and discriminating against the out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The Us vs. Them mentality rooted in the clashing of the in-group and out-group, applies to how the EU as a body and institution function in the region. With this in mind, since Ukrainians share similar racial compositions, religion, and culture to nations within the EU, they are identified as part of the EU's in-group, compelling the EU and its citizens to want to accept and help Ukrainian refugees in their time of need. As such because Europeans cannot identify with the racial, cultural, and religious identities of Syrians, they become the out-group, opening the door for extreme prejudice to take hold, minimizing the chances of a favorable policy towards them being implemented.

Apart from the pre-existing understandings of the different in-groups and identities citizens of the EU are part of and sympathize with, the media's depiction of the separate crises solidifies and brings these tensions to the forefront of all considerations taken. The media helps materialize the in-group and out-group through specific rhetoric, keywords, and imagery. This essentially helps explain the mindset with which the EU builds its policy with, weighing how it will potentially affect the integrity and superiority of its in-group.

Analysis

The aim of this paper is to take a critical look at the Syrian and Ukrainian refugee crises and decipher what factors led to the divergence in policy response by the EU. The following section is divided into two parts. *The EU: Creating an Out-group in the Face of Achieving the Single Market Ideal*, will look at the EU as an institution and entity; discussing how the clashing of its interests creates a situation where the discrimination and exclusion of refugees is

inevitable. However, through analysis of academic texts and social identity theory, I argue that an exception is made when refugee groups are seen as integrated with mainstream European culture and no longer pose a threat. *Difference in Rhetoric and Visualization of Refugee Groups in the Media*, will analyze how the media used specific word choices, rhetoric, and visual imagery to create an identity that perpetuates the in-group and out-group division and furthers discrimination of the out-group on an EU scale.

The EU: Creating an Out-group in the Face of Achieving the Single Market Ideal

The status of the European Union as an overarching body detracts from its ability to be an effective institution and decision-maker. Unlike any other nation-state, the EU has no physical power to extract legitimacy from. In its absence, the EU instead derives its authority from the strength of member states. Moreover, the institution itself is composed of a bureaucratic onslaught of competing voices. Its structure mimics that of a functioning national government, with member states having to renounce some control over certain areas to “collectively delegate” some power to the Union. Even so, these bodies aren’t autonomous decision-makers because they consist of representatives, members, and world leaders with their own responsibilities to the prosperity and well-being of their respective nations (European Parliament, 2023). Per Bariagaber’s theory on multiple actors (1999), the tension created by the presence of multiple voices, all with differing priorities, within the governing structure of the EU plus the everchanging sphere of member states national politics, decreases the effectiveness of the EU’s legitimacy and ability to govern in an effective manner. This dysfunction facilitated by competing voices is best showcased by the EU’s inability to agree on a new policy to replace the

long-outdated and limited Dublin Regulation regarding immigration admittance into the Union (Nattrass, 2020).

From this perspective, it is easy to blame the EU's convoluted structure and bureaucratic limitations for the poor response to the refugee crisis in 2015. However, the swift and comprehensive response toward the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the consequent refugee crisis that ensued disproves this rationale for policy divergence. Instead, forming the argument that depending on the crisis or situation affects the ability of the EU to act as a proper governing body. What Bariagaber doesn't consider is that actors' priorities can change in the face of an issue that has the ability to bring them together. One might argue that any extreme crisis with major repercussions can do this. However, once again, the EU's proactive response towards Ukrainian refugees dismisses this because of the similarity in severeness to the previous 2015 crisis with Syrian refugees.

Hence, I argue that in times of crisis, considerations of identity and self-preservation are at the forefront of EU decision-maker's minds because, at the end of the day, the EU is a goal-driven institution. As explored in the literature review, goal-driven actors are decision-makers that are bound by a set of ideals, with every action, policy, and response fitting within their larger framework (Hermann et al., 2001). Since its inception, the EU's larger goal has been to embody an "intergovernmental inspired vision of a liberal 'freedom-from'," achieved through the implementation of the single market ideal (Boccardi, 2002; Scheppele et al., 2020). However, achieving the single market ideal has proven to come at the price of being the envisioned regional moral sovereign.

To achieve the single market ideal, the free movement of goods, capital, services, and people, there needs to be a boundary in which this freedom of movement can occur. Therefore,

for the Schengen zone to function as it's intended, there needs to be some sort of exclusion and declaration from the EU of who doesn't belong or is allowed to enjoy the single market. As per Tajfel and Turner (1986), with any formation of an in-group, during the process of building its collective identity, there is a maximization of the perception of differences between it and the out-group to paint itself in a superior light. With this imbalance of power comes the fear that the out-group has the capacity to take that power away or has the "intention to inflict negative consequences on the in-group" (Rousseau and Garcia-Retamero, 2007; Motonyt  & Morkevicius, 2009). Thus, this threat association in the Us vs. Them dynamic gives the EU unprecedented power to use "feeling threatened" as a justification for any anti-immigration and asylum stance they decide to take, which, I argue, has taken form in protecting "Europeanness."

Although there is no set definition of what "Europeanness" is, various scholars who touch on the subject identify European values, Christianity, and shared traditions and history as factors that shape this collective identity (Rajaram, 2022; Vergara, 2007; Mikkeli, 1998). Various of these factors were publicized during discussions surrounding Turkey's application to join the EU at the start of this century. One of the concerns that arose was whether Turkey's historical and cultural roots were similar enough to the rest of Europe's. This concern is not unfounded, considering it was not part of the cultural processes of the Renaissance and Enlightenment, or shares the horrors of WW2. However, opposition based on islamophobia, with comments surrounding the "changing" of European culture through the admittance of a large Muslim population, became the norm. In 2002, Former French President Giscard exclaimed Turkey "would be the end of the European Union," with various elites expressing relief someone had finally said what they were all thinking, that Turkey was "too big, too poor, and too Muslim" (Richburg, 2002). In 2004, Former French Prime Minister Raffarin stressed "the EU constitution

would have "nothing to do with Turkey," asking his constituents before they were to take a vote on the matter if "[they] wanted the river of Islam to enter the riverbed of secularism?"

(Gentleman, 2004).

Although some of their counterparts called them out for being out of "touch with reality" at the time (Richburg, 2002), with hindsight, we can now say this was the start of a rapidly growing far-right consensus shaped by the protection and promulgation of "Europeanness." Identity and Democracy (ID), a party in the European parliament formed in 2019 by eight member-states' far-right national parties, is the newest manifestation of this sentiment. The ID state 'Identity' as one of its main priorities, declaring that "national identities should be embraced, respected and preserved," opposing mass immigration and Turkey's EU ascension for they are threats to the existing culture (Identity and Democracy Group, Priorities). Furthermore, on the EU's own website, there is a section that outlines "Democracy, Freedom, Human Dignity, and Equality" as some of the values it aims to represent as an institution (European Union, Aims and Values). If the out-group represents everything the in-group is not, then what is the EU saying about outsiders? That refugees that don't share the same culture, are part of Islam, do not have the same traditions, and do not look the same, therefore do not deserve to be granted asylum? That because they are the out-group, they represent everything that is wrong with the world? Even though there is no specific definition for what "Europeanness" means or entails, its potential vagueness is why using this as an excusatory factor is so dangerous; it essentially allows EU policymakers leeway to redefine what it means to serve their personal agenda on the basis of it being a social threat.

In this process of exclusion and threat perception, the consequence of the characterization of the out-group as the antithesis of the in-group is the marginalization of refugees and asylum

on the basis that they do not represent the accepted perception of Europeanness. Rajaram (2022) argues that “the European public sphere legitimizes the participation of those who can feasibly be trusted to perform European values.” The speed at which the European Council unanimously decided to activate the TPD for Ukrainians indicated that there was no doubt in ‘trusting’ Ukrainians to properly embody ‘Europeanness’ in the global cultural context. However, even though there was a consensus during 2015 that a mass migrant crisis was occurring, the TPD was not activated, alluding to this “distrust” of Syrians with European values.

This distrust can be seen in the increased comfortableness of politicians using islamophobia and xenophobia as legitimate reasons to adopt a restrictive border policy. In defending his tough and restrictive stance on migration, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban openly said he doesn’t want Hungary to become a “multi-coloured country by being mixed...with others” (Miles, 2018), claiming that he doesn’t “see these people as Muslim refugees, [but] as Muslim invaders” (Pearson, 2018). A 2016 study conducted by the Pew Center, found that “a median of 59% across 10 EU countries voice concerned of increased terrorism” because of the presence of refugees (Poushter, 2016). Orban is just one politician of many that represent a significant subset of EU citizens that believe refugees coming from Syria pose a serious security and cultural threat.

Before the Ukrainian crisis, theorized reasonings for why the EU did not enact the TPD for Syrian refugees encapsulated arguments such as the TPD itself was an ineffectual policy, or the mechanism’s definition for ‘mass influx’ was vague, or its extremely difficult to achieve a unanimous vote from the European council (Ineli-Cigar, 2022). However, the Ukrainian circumstance negates these theories, proving that there is an ability for the EU to have a comprehensive, effective response and that it can support and accommodate upwards to 7 million

people in a short amount of time. Hence, what the response to both the Syrian and the Ukrainian refugee crises has taught us is that Syrians simply don't fit into the mold of 'Europeanness', and though it is not a perfect fit, Ukrainians do. In this vision, European citizens are "identified as the referent objects by separating them from the 'foreigners' who need to be excluded in order to make the citizens feel secure" (Boccardi, 2002). It all boils down to a trade-off, being an EU citizen becomes this exclusive club, counter-intuitive to the values it was built on and wants to represent. Open borders, open market, democratic freedoms, and protections but only for a specific subset of people.

Difference in Rhetoric and Visualization of Refugee Groups in the Media

Within the context of the refugee crises and implementation of EU refugee and asylum policy, the media has shown to be an important factor in the shaping of public opinion, denoting Ukrainian refugees as part of the in-group and Syrians as the out-group. Through word choice, use of rhetoric, and visual imagery, the media has been able to invalidate the plight of Syrian refugees and asylum seekers, while humanizing the Ukrainian refugee struggle in the eyes of the European public.

The stark difference between the method of arrival of both refugee groups to the Union has been a point of divergence within the media. The visual coverage of Ukrainians reaching the EU's borders showcased droves of refugees arriving by either train or car with suitcases in hand (Sieradzka, 2022a). Through an emphasis on what they brought with them, "fleeing the city with whatever they were able to carry", the media humanized their situation to EU citizens (Bahgat, 2022). Essentially appealing to the pathos of the public, signaling the sentiment that the refugees left things behind, left entire lives behind. Additionally, the emphasis on how they crossed the

border into Poland, ‘trying to ride out of Kyiv’, and “trains arrive from Ukraine every day”, reinforced the physical proximity of Ukraine to the EU (Sieradzka, 2022a; Bhagat 2022). The focus on geographical location evoked the moral responsibilities that pertain to ‘loving thy neighbor’, highlighting the similarities and cultural proximity of Ukrainians to the Union and its version of ‘Europeanness’. This depiction allows for EU citizens to socially identify with the Ukrainian struggle, making it easy for them to put themselves in the shoes of their neighbors.

On the other hand, the journey of Syrian refugees reaching the EU looks visually and is depicted by the media, very differently. In the absence of a shared border with the Schengen zone, the only way for Syrian refugees to reach the Union is either by crossing the Mediterranean Sea by boat or by embarking on an extensive land journey by crossing through various other nations undetected (Frontex, 2016). This means they arrived at the EU with only their person, the clothes on their backs, and give or take a backpack. Unlike Ukrainian refugees, Syrian refugees didn’t have anything to visually showcase the lives they left behind. Instead, their struggles and plight were shaped by the journey they took, not by the violence they experienced that forced them to seek asylum. The media quickly latched on to phrases like “illegal boat crossing” and “paying smugglers”, painting Syrian refugees as criminals instead of humans with no other option but to take a dangerous chance to escape a violent situation violence (BBC, 2023; Amos & Marrouch, 2013). The 1951 Geneva Convention does not factor the legality or method of arrival when granting a refugee’s right to asylum; however, there is still a question of legality surrounding Syrian’s refugee status in Europe because of their unconventional arrival. By using these terms, sentiments surrounding words such as criminal, irregular, prohibited, or wrongful, are evoked, transforming Syrian refugees into the epitome of an out-group to the Europeanness

in-group because of the potential physical threat they now seem to pose (Wike et al., 2016; Poushter, 2016; Rousseau & Garcia-Retamero, 2007).

Word choice is also a huge factor in how the refugees are seen, impacting the public's perception of them and willingness to help. In many articles and EU official documents, Ukrainian refugees are referred to by a singular identity: Ukrainian citizens. Through the constant use of the word citizen, it affirms that they have a right to the Rule of Law. Citizens, therefore, fit into the EU in-group because they are entitled to the same liberties and freedoms, once again allowing for the social identification towards Ukrainian refugees from the perspective of an EU citizen. We see the power of this identification through the outward willingness of Polish citizens in allowing refugees to stay in their own homes (Sieradzka, 2022b). Poland has been historically closed off to immigration, spearheading the Visegrad alliance against the proposed 2020 CEAS agreement (Nattrass, 2022). However, Poland has taken in 15% of their population in Ukrainian refugees, sharing strong sentiments such as “it was necessary to help these people” and “there is no other way” (de Caria & Olszanka, 2022).

The opposite phenomenon occurred during the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis. Unlike Ukrainian refugees' singular identity, Syrian refugees were subjected to a slew of terms such as “terrorists”, “Muslim”, “illegal”, “fake”, and “migrants” in the media and by politicians (Agerholm, 2018; Bahl, 2022; Sinjab, 2022; Jacobs, 2016; Al Jazeera, 2015; Weaver & Kingsley, 2016). Even though the proper term ‘refugee’ was also in the mix, once the other terms were in circulation, they take root and it's hard to disassociate words with violent connotations once they have been attached to a group of people (Poushter, 2016). Nobody wants to let a potential terrorist or criminal into their home. Criminals do not fit into what it means to be European, therefore there is an apprehension to accept them because of the potential threat they

pose (Rousseau & Garcia-Retamero, 2007). In addition, criminals fall outside the moral obligation dictated by the refugee regime, therefore there is no guilt in turning them away.

There has been a clear message behind the Ukrainian media coverage, however, due to the myriad of terms used during the coverage of the 2015 crisis, it has “made it even more difficult for policymakers in the EU member states to take a clear stance with regard to refugees” (d’Haenens et al., 2019). This indecisiveness regarding Syrian refugees is most stark through media outlets’ use of the term “migrant” instead of “refugee”. The term migrant can refer to anyone who moves from one place to another to improve their living conditions. Technically people fleeing Syria fit into this bill, however, an important distinction is missing: choice. Families and individuals fleeing Syria had no other choice but to leave their country to escape violence and death due to the raging civil war. Using titles such as “Dozens of migrants killed off the coast of Syria” (Sinjab, 2022) and “Migrants boat capsizes off Syria” (Saad & Engelbrecht, 2022), strips away the reason why Syrians were in this situation in the first place, dehumanizing them in the process. Therefore, because of this dehumanization, a door opens for the EU and the public to argue that they do not qualify under the moral obligation established by the Geneva Convention (Smith, 2019). The stark contrast in the characterization of these two refugee groups extends as far as the portrayal of motherhood; painting Ukrainian mothers as strong and brave for venturing toward the unknown and Syrian mothers are bad mothers who willingly put their children in harm’s way just to get a better economic opportunity in Europe (Russel, 2022; Casilli & Armellini, 2023).

The culmination of the characterization of both groups can be seen through the separate agreements the EU made with Turkey and Poland during the peak of the crises. In the case of Syrian refugees, Italy, and Greece, being the main destinations for Syrians traveling by boat,

were severely under-prepared and quickly overrun by the number of refugees arriving on their shores to file for asylum (Birnbaum & Pitrelli, 2017; Sciubba, 2015). What did the EU choose to do? Divert. Rather than deal with it themselves in the form of an agreement with Turkey (Terry, 2021). Whereas with the Ukrainian refugees, the EU inhabited the role of 'reactive leader' and created a solution to support the registration process that was already occurring in Poland (Hermann et al., 2001). Since the majority of refugees were entering through Poland, the EU provided them with €145 million, extra equipment, and aid for the refugees (Kononczuk, 2022). Something they could have done in 2015 when Italy and Greece were overrun but chose not to.

Connecting back to my initial hypothesis, the evidence that I have presented in this section proves the involvement of race, religion, culture, and ethnicity have in shaping EU refugee and asylum policy. Dismissing their individual prescribed identities, the media, through their power to interpret and shape 'reality' (d'Haenens et al., 2019; Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989), have helped create new identities for both Syrian and Ukrainian refugees for the EU public to absorb through their coverage. With these identities playing off from pre-existing stereotypes and ideas about race and religion in the EU, a higher level of shared identity between the projected 'Europeanness' identity of the EU and Ukrainians is recognized, making Ukrainian refugees appear less likely to "inflict negative consequences" on the in-group collective identity (Rousseau & Garcia-Retamero, 2007). Because of this lessened threat, the EU had no problem enacting TPD to give Ukrainians access to the job market and the Rule of Law. They aren't afraid of how Ukrainian integration will affect their in-group. The media, by playing from connotations that are associated with terrorism and criminals, were able to paint Syrian refugees as a cultural and physical threat to the EU in-group. Although not every member state believed this depiction, a lot of member states openly took anti-migration stances,

pushing for tighter border security in the face of this threat. This difference of opinion within the EU created a rift, essentially hindering the Union from having anything but a limited policy response towards the 2015 crisis, opening the door for individual member states to adopt policies shaped around their own beliefs. Within the span of a year, Germany's Angela Merkel proclaimed, "We can do it!" in a now infamous speech, while Hungary commenced building an electric fence on its southern border with the explicit purpose of stopping asylum seekers from gaining entry into their country (Livingstone, 2016; Dunai, 2017).

Policy Recommendations

This clear divergence and hypocrisy in the EU's actions pose various questions and concerns for the future. Now more than a year after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, various op-eds, asking what the sudden acceptance of refugees and asylum seekers means for the future of the Union, have started to pop up everywhere (Betts, 2022; Traub, 2022). The EU has shown its cards and therefore finds itself at a critical point amid an ever-so-polarizing world. As I see it, the EU has two options:

- 1) Ride the Momentum - The EU can acknowledge the hypocrisy in their actions, admitting to the role a refugee's identity, religion, and cultural background have had in the decision-making process. They can seize the opportunity, of their most staunch anti-immigration and refugee member states opening their borders to mass waves of refugees for the first time, to pass a comprehensive refugee and asylum policy. Start larger institutional conversations about race and how race plays a role within the institution and in policy making.

- 2) Double Down - Not acknowledge their hypocrisy in their divergence of policy and public response. Essentially continuing business as usual after the Ukrainian refugee crisis subsides.

Regardless of what the EU chooses, it is clear there needs to be an overhaul to the current refugee and asylum policy. One that includes a clear framework for burden sharing, accountability for member states, quick job market access for refugees, and long-term integration programs. A focus on integration is key to making sure refugees feel welcome and safe. There are various studies that suggest poor integration can lead to creating vulnerable populations among refugee youths, increasing the likelihood they turn to violence (Rajarm, 2022). Secondly, there needs to be a more comprehensive and effective punishment system for member states who choose not to follow EU-wide policies regarding refugees. After Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic were found guilty of refusing to accept the minimum number of refugees mandated by the EU in 2015, the EU failed to hand out effective punishment (Rankin, 2020). If the EU cannot hold member states accountable for their actions, then the entire Union loses legitimacy and capacity. Lastly, there needs to be a simplification of the bureaucratic nature of asylum processing. Month-long wait times for application processing only exacerbate the humanitarian issues in refugee camps. Streamlining the process by implementing a system where refugees can have access to the job market on a temporary basis while waiting on their application status, will not only do wonders to improve the lives of the refugees but will also go towards efforts of facilitating integration later on (Ahrens et al., 2022).

Even if the EU chooses to ‘ride the momentum’, experts have said the same thing during the migration crisis of 2015, that it could be an opportunity to implement migration diplomacy. What makes this circumstance different from before? This Ukrainian refugee crisis has shown

the global order that it is possible to manage a large influx of displaced persons and supply them with the tools to integrate into a new environment. A brighter future is possible for the refugee regime. Their success all depends on the following question: Are they willing to put in the hard work to not only build a comprehensive, inclusive policy but change the minds of EU citizens about stereotypes regarding refugees? Only time will tell.

Conclusion

Over the course of this paper, I have taken a closer look at EU policy and attitudes towards Ukrainian and Syrian Refugees, presenting evidence to suggest that per reason of differences in race, religion, culture, and ethnicity, the EU adopted a welcoming policy towards Ukrainian refugees, while adopting a restrictive one towards Syrians. The topic of immigration and a common asylum policy has long been contested in the EU and by scholars, thus, by analyzing a new case study, the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis, and comparing it to a previous crisis of the same nature, the Syrian Refugee Crisis, provides an opportunity to reevaluate what factors have been truly at play and prioritized. This comparison not only helps us better understand the EU as an institution and decision-maker but also gives us insight as to how the EU will handle future crises.

When considering possible limitations to my research, the fact that the Ukrainian refugee crisis is relatively new compared to the Syrian crisis creates a disparity in the amount of media coverage and scholarly articles available on the matter. Hence, we can only assess short-term policy decisions regarding the Ukrainian crisis, whereas we can already begin to see some long-term effects of certain policy choices pertaining to Syrians. Another area of limitation is access to media sources due to a language barrier. The countries of the two groups I am discussing, and

the host nations they arrive at, all have languages I do not speak. Therefore, there is a whole section of reporting that I cannot access to help me gauge the real-time reactions of the smaller, local news and media outlets. Lastly, another limitation is the lack of data-driven analysis of the success of each policy route through the factor of integration. Since the potential to integrate into European culture is one of the factors that I argue is considered during policymaking, the assessment of whether past attempts have worked or not is valuable information. While there are some studies looking at Syrians' integration into Germany five years on, there hasn't been enough time to truly assess the long-term effects yet considering both conflicts are still ongoing. For possible future avenues of research, I would expand my comparison by looking at the long-term effects this divergence of the policy has had culturally and politically in the EU. There are still a lot of questions surrounding the future of the EU's policy towards Ukrainians, with the possibility that with more time they may retract a bit and not be as forthcoming toward Ukrainian refugees. Secondly, I would expand my comparison to include other refugee contexts to test if my hypothesis is just a recent phenomenon that pertains to the EU or if parts of my analysis can be used to explain other circumstances.

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