What are the underlying reasons for the differing treatment of Ukrainian and Syrian refugees in Europe identifiable in the debates within the European Parliament?

By:

Simon Benedikt Haack

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List of Abbreviations

CEAS	Common European Asylum System
DN	Debate Number
ENF	Europe of Nations and Freedom
EP	European Parliament
EPP	European People's Party
EU	European Union
GPC	Great Power Competition
GUE/NGL	United European Left/Nordic Green Left
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PKK	Kurdistan's Workers Party
PYD	Democratic Union Party
QCA	Qualitative Content Analysis
S&D	Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats
TPD	Temporary Protection Directive
UN	United Nations
US	United States
YPG	People's Defense Units

Abstract

Migration is and has been a highly topical issue within the EU over the last years and will remain so in the near future. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the EU's reaction to immigration from different countries has been markedly different throughout the last years. This thesis aims at tracing the reasons for these differing reactions through a qualitative content analysis of the debates held on refugees from Syria and Ukraine within the European Parliament. It is able to show that geopolitical considerations have played a major role in shaping the reaction to Ukrainian refugees while they have virtually not played a role in the reaction to Syrian refugees. Here, discrimination on the ethnic and religious background as well as a strong securitization of the issue of Syrian immigration have played an important role in the discourse of the European Parliament. Finally, even though a perceived failure of EU migration policy was noticed years ago, this thesis was not able to show that any relevant policy learning processes have taken place as EU migration policies in general have experienced a year-long standstill despite the outstanding reaction to Ukrainian refugees. Overall, it can thus be concluded that discrimination and geopolitical considerations seem to be more relevant factors in designing EU migration policies than learning from past experience.

1   Introduction

The Ukraine war has had dramatic consequences for the global as well as the European sphere since its outbreak. One of the most remarkable effects in Europe has been the big number of refugees fleeing the war and arriving in EU member states. Between February and May 2022 alone, 7 million people have fled Ukraine to neighboring countries (de Coninck, 2022). In a response to this and immediately after the Russian attack on Ukraine, several EU member states have simplified the rules of entry for refugees coming from Ukraine (Jaroszewicz et al., 2022). The primary reaction towards refugees was solidarity instead of extensive control of the arrivals, which had been the case with prior refugee movements (Jaroszewicz et al., 2022). This is especially noteworthy as some of the countries welcoming Ukrainian refugees without reluctance have been among those that had blocked all initiatives on a common EU migration policy in the years before in order to prevent the arrival of any migrants. Furthermore, the EU thus was able to quickly activate the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) and refugees from Ukraine were enabled to move on within the EU without being forced to remain in the country of first entry, which is the usual case for those migrants being subject to the Dublin Procedure (de Coninck, 2022; Jaroszewicz et al., 2022).

The welcoming reaction towards Ukrainians is especially remarkable when considering the EU's reaction to the migratory movements of Syrians around 2015. Back then, when thousands of Syrians fleeing the Syrian Civil War tried to reach Europe, the reaction was quite different. To prevent mass arrivals of migrants, the EU member states entered into an agreement with Turkey, which required the latter to step up its security efforts to prevent departures (Council of the EU, 2016). Turkey furthermore accepted the return of migrants who had illegally crossed the border to the EU prior (van Liempt et al., 2017). In return, it received money from the EU and talks on visa liberalization and Turkish EU accession were reactivated (van Liempt et al., 2017). Reaching Europe was thus made considerably more complicated in response to the Syrian refugee movements.

On the backdrop of this comparison, it is relevant to work out the differences and similarities between the two situations in order to be able to assess what has led to the differing reactions. Several potential explanations that might explain the differences arise and should therefore be compared to assess their explanatory potential. It could be the case, for instance, that discrimination towards Syrians has played an important role in producing the differing reactions. Others would claim that the geopolitical circumstances have made a more welcoming reaction in the Ukrainian case necessary. Finally, one could argue that temporality has played a major role and the more welcoming reaction to Ukrainian refugees was a direct consequence of a perceived failure of the earlier reaction towards Syrian refugees. To

investigate the explanatory potential of these three assumptions, this analysis will study how prominent the respective concepts have been in the debates of the European Parliament (EP).

Therefore, the research question for this thesis is:

> *What are the underlying reasons for the differing treatment of Ukrainian and Syrian refugees in Europe identifiable in the debates within the European Parliament?*

The focus on the EU and its parliament was chosen as the EU is a central actor in the area of immigration policy and its institutions have played a vital role in shaping the responses to the above-mentioned situations. The parliament was singled out as a point of analysis since it is the public place of debate where actors from all three EU bodies convene to discuss and compare their views, thereby providing the fullest account of the state of play of EU debates. The specific focus on debates was chosen because the (political) discourse plays an important role in shaping EU policies in general and also the reaction to migrants was repeatedly shown to be heavily shaped by different kinds of discourse (Wodak & Reisigl, 2008; Zawadzka-Paluektau, 2023).

Analyzing the actions of and within parliaments is an established scientific approach for identifying the motivations behind a given policy (see Kantola & Miller, 2021; Raunio & Wagner, 2021; van Dijk, 2023). While voting patterns and interviews of deputies are common data sources, the analysis of the statements given in parliamentary debates is a well-established approach as well (see Fernandes et al., 2021; Ghinoi & Steiner, 2020; Mackieson et al., 2019; Onursal & Kirkpatrick, 2021; Poulos, 2020; Schmidt et al., 2019; van Dijk, 2000). Debates within the EP have also repeatedly attracted scholarly attention (see e.g., Vogeler et al., 2021). However, with regard to the EP, a clear focus on gender-related questions is visible (see Ahrens et al., 2022; Kantola & Lombardo, 2021a, 2021b). Migration is therefore an under-researched policy area for the EP[1] despite an arguably growing importance of the EP in the area of foreign policy decisions (Goinard, 2020). For national parliamentary debates in contrast, migration is a more prominent research topic (see Abdelaaty, 2021; Kovář, 2022). This lack of scholarly attention in the attitudes of MEPs towards migration is also reflected in the existing research on the Ukraine war. Although the EU's reaction to the war has attracted a lot of scholarly attention and the differences between the treatment of Ukrainian refugees and prior refugee groups are widely noted, the respective analyses often remain superficial and merely focus on the statements of a few politicians or media outlets considered relevant (see Iov & Vascan, 2023; Sales, 2023; Sipahioğlu, 2023).

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[1] The work of Krotký and Kaniok (2021) on the attitudes towards irregular migration within the EP is a notable exception in this regard.

Thus, despite the fact that de Coninck (2022) has issued a call to conduct further research on the response to migration from Ukraine already months after the Russian invasion and has identified discrimination and fears of the aggressor as potential explanations for a changed EU response, a thorough analysis of the positions held by individual EU institutions is lacking so far. This thesis is therefore scientifically relevant as it aims at filling this gap by investigating the motivations of MEPs behind the new approach taken towards Ukrainian refugees. By doing so it can shed new light on the priorities and procedures of and within EU migration policy and identify the motivations to adopt a certain stance present within the EP. Furthermore, it can identify the motives behind EU migration policy more broadly, an issue so far largely unaddressed due to the lack of scholarly interest in the debates on EU migration policy within the EP.

From a societal perspective, the question is relevant especially to human rights and migration activists and NGOs who try to improve the situation for migrants from all countries of origin. Having a more thorough understanding of what shapes the way migrants are treated in Europe could help them in advocating for a more uniform treatment of all migrants and in thus reaching a better outcome for all those arriving in Europe. The research could furthermore prove helpful for EU policymakers themselves as knowing what influences the decisions of other EU policymakers and EU institutions is vital to shape these decisions and EU politics more generally. Therefore, both groups can much benefit from this research as it provides them with new approaches of how to reach their goals in the field of EU policymaking.

The structure of the thesis is as follows: The second chapter will lay the foundation for the research by describing the cases and by mapping important theoretical insights from the existing literature. It will first give a brief overview of the two conflicts analyzed in this research and the refugee movements caused by them. Then, the chapter will lay out the three theory strands that can potentially explain the different reactions of the EU in the Syrian and Ukrainian cases. The three approaches are taken from the areas of discrimination studies, (neo)realist foreign policy theory and the policy learning literature. Chapter three will then lay out the methodological approach of this research to prepare for the empirical analysis that follows. The research conducted afterwards will then, on the backdrop of the theory section, analyze statements from the EP in both contexts and try to link frames and statements found in the texts to the theoretical expectations. A short conclusion will finally sum up the main findings of the research and give an outlook on potential further research opportunities.

2   Theoretical Framework

The following chapter will first provide a short description of the two conflicts central to this work and the refugee movements they have provoked in order to make the differences between the two situations visible.

Afterwards, it will map the relevant literature for this thesis. It will thus outline the research from three different theoretical fields that provide potentially relevant explanations for the differences between the treatments of Ukrainian and Syrian refugees and explain which concepts from these angles might be relevant for explaining the differences. This part will therefore provide the theoretical basis for the analysis conducted later.

2.1   Case Description

2.1.1   Syria

2.1.1.1   The Conflict[2]

In March 2011, the Arab Spring arrived in Syria and led to peaceful protests against abuses by the Syrian security forces. However, the conflict quickly turned violent as the government reacted to the protests with extensive brutality and by July 2011 the protests had turned into an armed rebellion. While the conflict was a struggle for accountability at the outset, it thus quickly became a battle for absolute control and turned into a fully-fledged civil war in 2012.

Over the following years, several external state and non-state actors became involved in the conflict. The first new actor on the scene was ISIS which declared its caliphate in Iraq and Syria in 2014. This development provoked severe Western unrest ultimately leading the US, which previously had had a focus on the whole conflict, to shift its attention to tackling the extremist threat posed by ISIS and to allying with the Kurdish political party PYD and its militia YPG. In 2015, Russia entered the conflict as well and began to fly air strikes to support the Syrian government, its last remaining ally in the region. Since the West decided not to intervene on equal terms, Russia and Iran, which is also heavily involved in the conflict since it Is dependent on Syrian support in its rivalry with Israel, became the most important external actors in the conflict.

Later, Turkey still entered the conflict in the Syrian North as well since it was interested in preventing a Syrian Kurdish entity, which it saw as a threat in its own struggle with the Turkish Kurdistan's Workers Party (PKK). The direct or indirect involvement of external actors has led

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[2] The following description of the conflict in Syria is based on the description by Ford (2019).

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to a shattered image, with different parts of the country being under the control of different actors nowadays, although the Syrian government has regained control over most of the country in recent years. As the government is currently in a favorable position, it is not willing to give any concessions to opposition groups, so that negotiations have repeatedly failed and are also likely to fail in the future. All efforts to stabilize the situation will likely be impeded by extremist movements in Syria and the devastating earthquake and the government's reluctance to allow external support to opposition-held regions have recently complicated the situation even further (Guardian, 2023).

2.1.1.2   Refugee Movements

Crawley and Skleparis (2018) rightfully state that decisions to migrate are often based on a mixture of reasons. For example, economic factors also contribute to migration decisions in the case of war, as economic and political factors become entangled and both represent important push factors. Consequently, the Syrian Civil War quickly led to big emigration movements when the situation in Syria worsened. Since Syria has no visa agreement with the EU and is not situated in its direct vicinity, the movements initially focused on the surrounding countries (European Council, n.d.).

Thus, especially Turkey, Jordan and the Lebanon had to bear the bulk of the humanitarian costs provoked by the Syrian civil war at the beginning (Berti, 2015). They also quickly ceased to be able to provide sufficient health care, education and employment opportunities for all refugees so that the situation rapidly worsened for refugees and the host states' population alike (Berti, 2015). Most Syrian refugees migrated to Turkey, where they could not request asylum, however, as Turkey applies the Geneva Convention on the Protection of Refugees with a geographical limitation limiting its scope to refugees coming from Europe (Kaya, 2021; Rygiel et al., 2016). Therefore, Syrians were only granted temporary protection under a law passed in 2014 as a response to Syrian immigration (Kaya, 2021). Under temporary protection, a status referred to by Rygiel at al. (2016, p. 318) as "a precarious status that makes them [the Syrians] increasingly vulnerable to insecurity, destitution, and exploitation", Syrians are entitled to indefinite temporary residence without a long-term perspective (Rygiel et al., 2016). While Syrians were welcomed warmly at the beginning, the public opinion changed over time which worsened their situation and has led to onward migration to Europe, a result foreseen by Berti already in 2015 due to a Western lack of commitment to help Syrian refugees in the host countries (Kaya, 2021; Rygiel et al., 2016). Motives for this onward migration were mixed as shown by the study of Crawley and Skleparis (2018) who claim that 34% of Syrian refugees moved for economic reasons with the rest having other dominant motives such as concerns for their families' well-being.

The huge numbers of migrants arriving in Europe have led to a political panic (Icoz & Martin, 2021). A widely shared EU position to the issue is summarized well by Crawley and Skleparis:

> "Despite a clear evidence about the difficult living circumstances and lack of protection for Syrians living in Turkey, there appears to be an expectation on the part of EU policymakers that, having survived the bombs and gunshots, Syrians should 'stay put'. If they decide to move on then the legitimacy of their status as 'real refugees' is brought into question." (2018, p. 58)

This general assumption has led to the adoption of the EU Turkey Statement in 2016, in which Turkey has declared its will to step up efforts to prevent migration to Europe and to take back all migrants not in need of international protection or arriving illegally in Europe after March 20, 2016 (Council of the EU, 2016; van Liempt et al., 2017). In return, the EU states have promised to set up a fund of 3 billion euro to support Turkey with the handling of Syrian refugees, to start immediate talks on visa liberalization for Turkish citizens and to resume Turkish accession negotiations to the EU (van Liempt et al., 2017). After the deal, the number of migrants coming to Europe actually went down, whereas the number of deaths on the Mediterranean Sea rose as people were forced to take higher risks (van Liempt et al., 2017). Further problems included the fact that people were often stuck on the Greek islands for years and that the acceleration of the asylum process severely harmed its fairness (van Liempt et al., 2017). Critics claimed that the deal treated refugees as 'interchangeable commodities' and 'bargaining chips' and that it violated the non-refoulement obligation of international law, banning removals to countries where migrants are in grave danger for their life or physical well-being (Kaya, 2021; van Liempt et al., 2017). Overall, one can conclude that "[t]he EU sealed the deal despite challenges to its liberal principles in the face of rising populism and opposition to immigration in some member states" (Icoz & Martin, 2021, p. 99).

In effect, although Turkey opened up its labor market to Syrians in the process culminating in the EU Turkey Statement, the situation for Syrian refugees in Turkey stayed difficult due to the bad living conditions and Turkey's poor human rights record leading critics to doubt whether Turkey actually is a safe country for refugees (Council of the EU, 2016; Icoz & Martin, 2021; van Liempt et al., 2017). Nonetheless, more than three million refugees stayed in Turkey as a result of the statement, which presents one reason why Turkey has an interest in preventing further refugee movements from Syria (Ford, 2019; Kaya, 2021). Nevertheless, even without new refugees, the situation is most likely not going to change fundamentally in the near future and most refugees will probably stay in Turkey and other nearby states, as the Syrian government has no interest in the return of refugees and most refugees have little incentive to return too as they would face severe security risks (Ford, 2019).

2.1.2   Ukraine

2.1.2.1   The Conflict

Ukraine has historically been one of the most important states for the Soviet Union (Masters, 2023). After the end of the Soviet Union, it was still considered to be central to the Russian identity and self-perception in the world so that losing influence over Ukraine was held to be dangerous for Russia's superpower image (Masters, 2023). Furthermore, Russia was always concerned about the huge Russian diaspora in Ukraine (Masters, 2023). With the growing Western turn in Ukraine, the country thus found itself on the front lines of a new great power rivalry (Masters, 2023).

In 2014, anti-government protests, which Russia considered to be a Western coup, led to the establishment of a new pro-Western government in Kiev (Masters, 2023). In response, Russia invaded Crimea and provided support to pro-Russian armed forces in the Donbas region in what it considered a new conflict with the West (Katchanovski, 2022). Despite efforts to arrange a ceasefire in the Minsk agreement, the conflict never really settled and led to various sanctions by Western states against Russia (Masters, 2023). In February 2022, Russia then started a large-scale invasion into Ukraine and justified the invasion by referring to alleged threats from Ukraine and the dangers of its possible NATO membership (Katchanovski, 2022). Several war crimes and huge numbers of civilian casualties have been reported in this conflict especially in the regions under attack by Russian forces (Katchanovski, 2022). For its defense, Ukraine is highly dependent on Western support and resources so that some authors claim that the war is mainly a proxy war with Ukraine being a client state of the US (Katchanovski, 2022). However, Katchanovski (2022, p. 7) also holds that the conflict can by no means be limited to this depiction: "The war combines elements of interstate war between Russia and Ukraine, a proxy war between the West and Russia, and a civil war in Ukraine."

2.1.2.2   Refugee Movements

The war in Ukraine immediately had severe consequences for the Ukrainian population with 4.6 million externally displaced people in the first months, a number which had even risen further to 7 million by May 2022 (de Coninck, 2022; Jaroszewicz et al., 2022). Migration to Europe was simplified by the fact that Ukraine has an active visa agreement with the EU and is located in the direct vicinity of the EU so that cross-border social networks already existed and Ukrainian people in contrast to the Syrian population already had had experience with crossing the Schengen border (European Council, n.d.; Jaroszewicz et al., 2022). Furthermore, Poland and other EU states simplified the rules of entry and the EU activated its

TPD shortly after the Russian invasion (de Coninck, 2022; Jaroszewicz et al., 2022). This welcoming reaction by the European societies was likely at least partly due to the sociodemographic composition of the refugee population, consisting almost exclusively of women and children, and the perceived proximity of the Ukrainians' value system which is also illustrated by the more positive depiction of this group in the media (de Coninck, 2022; Jaroszewicz et al., 2022; Zawadzka-Paluektau, 2023). While some Ukrainians have stayed in the neighboring EU countries, many have also travelled on to other EU countries such as Germany (Jaroszewicz et al., 2022).

2.1.3 Brief Case Comparison

This short overview has shown that, despite some differences, the two groups of refugees are very similar in several relevant aspects such as the reasons for fleeing, the urgent need for external support and the insecurity about the situation in their home countries. However, similar to the observation by de Coninck (2022) that Afghan refugees are treated differently than Ukrainian ones, it has become obvious that Syrians were not treated in the same manner as Ukrainians. From the beginning on, accepting Syrian war refugees in Europe was not considered necessary whereas measures to welcome Ukrainians were quickly adopted. When the migratory pressure on the EU grew as Syrians were lacking perspective in neighboring countries and hence tried to migrate onwards, the EU negotiated the EU Turkey Statement in order to prevent migrant arrivals. This has led to a growing number of deaths on the migratory routes and even those migrants still reaching Europe were usually forced to stay on the Greek islands awaiting an uncertain future for years. While the TPD, which simplifies procedures for refugees considerably, was never activated for Syrians, it got activated only days after the start of the war for Ukrainian refugees. This has given the Ukrainians quick labor market access, further simplified onward migration within the EU and prevented them from being forced to live in refugee residences. It is thus clearly visible that the activation of the TPD has opened ample opportunities for Ukrainian refugees, whereas such opportunities were not given to Syrian refugees and the adoption of the EU Turkey Statement in contrast rather rendered their situation even more precarious. To identify potential reasons for this differentiation will be the task of the following sections. The three angles of discrimination studies, neorealism and policy learning will be considered more in-depth to this end.

2.2   First theoretical angle: Discrimination studies

The first relevant angle to explain the different reactions laid out above is the field of discrimination studies. It sheds light on how discrimination works and how it influences peoples'

lives and therefore has a focus on the internal processes of the policy-making bodies and the beliefs held by policymakers. In contrast to the following two explanations, it thus largely disregards the environment of the particular policy field as a central factor and rather focuses on the structural level as the explanatory factor for the differing treatment of different groups.

Discrimination scholars often stress the importance of power as power relations largely influence who has the ability to discriminate and who can be discriminated against. These power relations are largely shaped by discourse as the narratives of those in more powerful positions usually hold a lot of authority, while counter-narratives lack legitimacy (Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2013). While intent is often still seen as a necessary condition for discrimination, existing research states the opposite and often rather focuses explicitly on those instances where discrimination without intent takes place (Araújo, 2016; Selmi, 2018).

An important sub-discipline of discrimination studies is the study of 'racism'. Racism is a social practice and ideology which "manifests itself discursively" (Wodak & Reisigl, 2008, p. 372). Racism plays an important role in the everyday life of racialized groups as institutionalized racism is considered to be the main reason for disparities experienced by them (Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015). However, Wodak and Reisigl (2008, p. 377) also state that racism is hard to comprehend: "We believe that no monocausal and monodimensional approach is adequate to grasp the complexity of racism." Elite discourses play an important role in the establishment of racism and racist discourses are overall not static but rather dynamic and contradictory (Wodak & Reisigl, 2008). Racism furthermore operates on the conscious as well as on the unconscious level (Carbado & Roithmayr, 2014).

Orsini et al. (2022) state that structural racist discrimination can take place on the macro, meso and micro level. While the macro level refers to broad policies, the meso level deals with the reproduction of discrimination within the judicial and administrative system and the micro level refers to the conduct of individual public servants within these systems. The three levels influence each other and the higher levels shape the practices on the lower levels pointing to the importance of political decisions. This supports the claim by Carbado and Roithmayr (2014) that structures are more important than the individual conduct. Finally, the model of Orsini et al. (2022) also offers an explanation of how agent and structure interact in producing discriminatory outcomes.

For the particular analysis of this thesis, three broad concepts from discrimination studies and the insights related to them offer promising tools of analysis: racism, securitization, and intersectionality.

Racism

According to racism scholars, deliberately racist decision-making is no longer easily possible in the open in many Western societies as the public has become increasingly attentive towards racism. Therefore, discrimination nowadays often takes place indirectly (Oberman, 2020). It is deeply woven into the structures of most of the prosperous world, where discrimination against Muslims and other racialized groups happens regularly (Orsini et al., 2021). Moreover, disbalances of the racialized system are often projected on individuals and their purported failures to properly 'integrate', whereas a focus on the historical, structural and institutional origins of racism is often lacking (Araújo, 2016; Roig, 2017). As racism is so deeply inscribed into the institutional setup of Western states, active discriminatory actions are often not even necessary, as it is already sufficient not to act on the systematic disbalances for racism and discrimination to become operative (Araújo, 2016). However, discrimination is not always only a direct implication of a racially biased system. Policy-makers often actively make use of discrimination and categorizations when trying to exclude (certain groups of) refugees from access to protection and rights (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). A good example for such a behavior is a statement of Bulgaria's prime minister Petkov who has stated that "[t]hese [the Ukrainians, author's note] are not the refugees we are used to…these people are Europeans. These people are intelligent, they are educated people […]" (Brito, 2022). This reemerging racist political discourse opens up new spaces for more racist bureaucratic decision-making (Orsini et al., 2022). All this has led to the fact that "admission policies are clearly stacked against the settlement of low-skilled workers and asylum seekers" (Ellermann, 2020, p. 2470).

Securitization

Furthermore, while outright and open discrimination is not as common anymore, the securitization of many policy areas has proven to be a fertile ground for a reemergence of more subtle forms of discrimination (Orsini et al., 2021). Hidden racist decision-making thus still often takes place (usually basing discriminatory decisions on security concerns rather than race) (Orsini et al., 2022). Migrants have historically been discriminated against as immigration is often considered a threat to public order, national security, the socio-economic order or the culture of the majority and these concerns have regained strength in the political discourse of the last years (Orsini et al., 2021).

Intersectionality

Some authors claim that discrimination has seized to exist for migrants due to the rise of skill-based immigrant policies. Ellermann (2020) however rightfully points out that this assumption is heavily contested by critical theory strands such as feminist and critical race scholarship. Crawley and Skleparis (2018, p. 51) for example state that still today "[m]igration regimes

create […] hierarchical systems of rights" and Oberman (2020, p. 695) claims that "[s]ome refugees, from some groups, may be systematically advantaged over others". The focus on the interplay between different axes of discrimination, referred to as intersectionality, plays an important role in explaining this differing perception. The concept of intersectionality deals with "the entanglements of different axes of stratification such as race, class, and gender […]. An intersectionality perspective asks how various axes of stratification mutually construct one another and articulate simultaneously." (Roth, 2015) It can thus help in explaining how purportedly neutral categories are still heavily shaped by discriminatory categories operating in the background.

Due to the self-image of Western societies as post-racial, discrimination usually takes place based on different claims which are not deliberately racist (Orsini et al., 2022). Race-based discrimination is therefore often invisible as the official factor of differentiation is economic status / social class which, however, closely correlates with nationality and religion (Ellermann, 2020; Orsini et al., 2022). Consequently, due to the strong interaction between individual-level traits and group-level national capital, structural effects of discrimination remain despite an apparent focus on individual characteristics (Ellermann, 2020). In effect, neoliberal ideology and its focus on individual-level economic capabilities thus help to make institutional racism invisible (Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015).

First theoretical expectation

The theoretical angle of discrimination studies thus predicts that the different treatment of refugees from Syria and Ukraine is based on explicit or implicit discrimination against Syrian refugees. It thus expects to find in the data that EU politicians depict Syrians as less deserving of protection than Ukrainians. The angle furthermore predicts that Syrians are either explicitly classified as being less legitimate refugees or that their treatment is linked to a purported security threat. This security threat could also be associated with their Muslim origin, which might provide another basis for discriminatory statements. Further motives for justifying the differing treatment foreseen by the angle of discrimination studies include derogatory statements about Syrians' educational background or economic capabilities especially when contrasted to Ukrainians.

2.3   Second theoretical angle: Neorealism

The second theoretical angle which will provide a possible explanation for the differing treatment of Syrian and Ukrainian refugees is based on (neo)realist foreign policy and the concurring idea of great-power competition. In contrast to the explanation presented before, it has a less structural focus as it deals with power relations between states in the international

system. In contrast to the next explanation – namely policy learning – it has a less distinct focus on a particular policy and the (internal) processes causing it, but rather focusses on the international system as a whole and the relevant power relations within it.

According to the founding father of neorealism, Kenneth Waltz, the international system is a system of self-help. It would be difficult to establish any central authority in the international system as such an authority would inevitably require an enormous amount of power to control its client states, which would in turn provide a strong incentive for powerful states to control it. Therefore, such an all-encompassing central authority cannot exist. As a result, states must always look after themselves: "Because some states may at any time use force, all states must be prepared to do so." (Waltz, 1979, p. 102)

As a result, war is a constant possibility in the anarchic international system which has a sobering effect on states, as they consider more carefully how far to push their objectives. Waltz moreover states that an anarchic international system with units seeking to survive will inevitably produce a balance of power for structural reasons, regardless of the objectives and motives of the states involved. He therefore stresses that the balance-of-power-theory deals with the structures of the international system and is not about the objectives or motives of any individual state's foreign policy. However, he also asserts that the structures of the international system have important consequences for the conduct of individual states and for example condition the likelihood of cooperation, the extent of arms agreements and the jurisdiction of international organizations (Waltz, 1979).

Parent and Rosato (2015) and DiCicco and Onea (2023) have supplemented Waltz' theory with more specific assumptions about the competition between Great Powers. Di Cicco and Onea define Great Power Competition (GPC) as a "distinct contest among extraordinary states over supremacy in one or more regions, domains, or fields" (2023). It always entails the option of major war but usually rather consists of more subtle competition for example through irregular wars or proxy wars and has many practical implications for weaker states. The idea of GPC is firmly based in realist thinking but differs from it insofar as it does not consider all states to be like units but differentiates between them according to their strength. Great Powers are identified by their competition with other Great Powers, their focus on power exercises, the search for predominant influence over a region and the objective of promoting their respective values abroad.

Neorealist foreign policy analysis can contribute two important insights to this analysis that will play a vital role in the analysis conducted later.

The first aspect is the importance of competition between states and the states' incentive to limit the capabilities of others. Waltz states that all states see each other as competitors so

that states are more interested in relative gains, for example through weakening their opponent, than in absolute mutual gains which would also strengthen their opponents' capacities. Power plays an important role in structuring states' relations in the international systems as it often prevents weaker states from asserting claims but also protects them from attacks by more powerful states as long as they are not considered a threat (Waltz, 1979).

The second relevant insight deals with the implications of GPC. Parent and Rosato (2015) state that Great Powers distrust alliances and therefore only rely on alliances to ensure their security[3] when this is urgently necessary: "[…][G]reat powers have rarely balanced externally. In wartime, they have had little choice but to enter into alliances, but not so in peacetime." (Parent & Rosato, 2015, p. 85) However, Parent and Rosato stress that less powerful states engage in more diverse forms of self-help, as for example diplomacy plays a bigger role for them. DiCicco and Onea (2023) in contrast advocate for a less restricted view on the importance of alliances. This should be considered the more compelling approach as their research in contrast to that of Parent and Rosato focuses on Great Powers after World War II and thus is a more suitable basis for analyzing modern-day conflicts. The former two authors hold the opinion that Great Powers regularly align with and against other Great Powers and alliances therefore play a central role in Great Powers' foreign policy. They furthermore state that the contest between Great Powers persists through periods of war and peace and is multidimensional. In their conduct, spheres of influence are of vital importance to Great Powers so that misrecognition by other Great Powers usually leads to increasingly risky conduct to earn recognition.

Second theoretical expectation

That a fear of the aggressor has played an important role for the different treatment of Ukrainians has repeatedly been argued by several authors (see de Coninck, 2022). Following this line of reasoning, it is important to establish in how far traditional (great) power politics and the motivation to stand up to the aggressor have influenced the European reaction to Ukrainian vis-à-vis Syrian refugees. According to neorealist foreign policy theory, accepting Ukrainian refugees could mainly have been a way to symbol European unity towards Russia, whereas such a motivation might have been absent for Syria which probably was not considered a relevant foreign policy actor. Neorealist foreign policy theory thus provides another potential explanation for the differing treatment of Ukrainian and Syrian refugees which is independent from the discrimination-based explanation laid out above.

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[3] Relying on alliances to ensure one's safety against other states is usually referred to as 'external balancing', whereas stepping up one's own capacities is called 'internal balancing'.

2.4   Third theoretical angle: Policy change

A third and final approach for explaining the differing treatment is analyzing the (historical) background of a policy and the learning process over time. Within the general field of policy change literature, the two fields of historical institutionalism and policy learning provide especially helpful insights for this analysis. Both concepts share a focus on the events preceding a particular policy decision and try to base their respective explanations on these circumstances. In contrast to the two approaches mentioned above, they thus focus more on the historical background of a particular policy and the events that have taken place prior in the same policy field. These two 'history-based' approaches and their connection will be laid out in the following.

As a response to the common criticism that ignoring temporality might lead to overlooking causal relationships, historical institutionalism has chosen a distinct focus on analyzing processes over time and focuses on the concepts of stasis and change (Icoz & Martin, 2021). The concept of path dependency within historical institutionalism holds that policies are not only the result of deliberate choices but also rely on prior choices (Howlett & Rayner, 2006). This is the case since decision-makers act within institutional contexts which are heavily shaped by prior decisions and often employ learning from past experiences and history (Leithner & Libby, 2017). Choices made prior are furthermore reinforced by informal cultural and psychological processes (Leithner & Libby, 2017). While change can still happen within path dependency, it usually is bounded change until external events weaken "the mechanisms of reproduction that generate continuity" (Leithner & Libby, 2017, p. 17). Howlett and Rayner argue in a historical institutionalist tradition that historical processes are "highly contingent in origin and inertial in nature" (2006, p. 2) and early events therefore have an important influence on later events. This assumption also is the basis for the concept of 'path dependency'. It is used especially to explain how considerable policy change happens at certain times, while other approaches might be better adapted to explaining slow incremental change (Howlett & Rayner, 2006).

The moments of change within the concept of path dependency are considered to happen at so-called 'critical junctures' which are defined as random events enabling change (Howlett & Rayner, 2006). Critical junctures are the results of external shocks or internal events and can thus be attributed to causes either exogenous or endogenous to the political system in question (Icoz & Martin, 2021; Leithner & Libby, 2017). At these critical junctures, policy-makers have the unique opportunity to choose from a range of options, which however are dependent on antecedent conditions (Leithner & Libby, 2017). Thus, individuals have a considerably higher leverage to influence policymaking at critical junctures (Icoz & Martin, 2021). After choices are

made, these again trigger new self-reinforcing feedback mechanisms, so that a new path-dependent process is started (Icoz & Martin, 2021; Leithner & Libby, 2017).

As the concept of 'critical juncture' does not offer a sufficient explanation about when and why change occurs, the concept can fruitfully be coupled with the notion of 'paradigm shift' taken from the literature on policy learning to close this gap. The main belief of the policy learning literature is that a "[p]olicy responds less directly to social and economic conditions than it does to the consequences of past policy" (Hall, 1993, p. 277), which means that it shares a core basic assumption with the path dependency literature. Within the concept of policy change, Hall (1993) has distinguished three different types of change called 'orders'. Orders one and two refer to the change of instruments and instrument settings, whereas the third order, which is most relevant for this analysis, refers to the change of underlying priorities in designing a policy. Hall holds that third-order-change usually happens due to a change of the dominant paradigm which he defines as "a framework of ideas and standards that specifies not only the goals of policy and the kind of instruments that can be used to attain them, but also the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing" (Hall, 1993, p. 279). The change of a paradigm is a very political process where outside pressures, the failure of policies derived from the prior paradigm, and the power configurations and situatedness of relevant actors play central roles. Furthermore, prior policies and political actors' search for power importantly contribute to a paradigm shift. The shift of a paradigm is thus brought about by a combination of the quest for power and the employment of new ideas in reaction to the failure of former paradigms. Paradigm shifts therefore are an ideal environment for policy change and thus are one possible explanation for the existence of a critical juncture. Hall (1993) finally stresses that paradigms are not equally elaborate in all policy fields.

Third theoretical expectation

As the EU has repeatedly been criticized for its perceivably failed migration policies over the last years by several actors (Amnesty International, 2017; Digidiki & Bhabha, 2020; Medecins sans Frontieres, 2021; Riegert, 2020), the final potential explanation for the changed reaction towards Ukrainian refugees could be that this new approach is the reaction to a perceived failure of prior EU migration policies. This assumption can be assessed from the angle of historical institutionalism and policy learning which both stress the historical embeddedness of a particular policy. Policy change theory would argue that the different approach to Ukrainian refugees in 2022 than to Syrian refugees in 2016 is based on a general acknowledgement of failed prior migration policies on the EU level. It thus expects to find statements advocating for the need of an entirely new approach to migration regardless of the individuals affected and a concomitant change of policy. In contrast to the other approaches, it therefore does not focus

on the particularities of the cases but rather aims at detecting an overall shift in the make-up of migration policies.

3   Methodology

In order to answer the research question raised in this thesis, a qualitative content analysis (QCA) of the debates in the European Parliament for the two cases laid out in chapter 2.1 will be conducted. The two cases of the refugee movements from Syria and Ukraine were chosen as they provide two contrasting EU reactions to migratory movements and therefore can illuminate the motives that have shaped these reactions. The focus on EP debates was chosen as it is the public place for debate where actors from all three EU bodies convene to discuss and compare their views, therefore providing the fullest account of the state of play of EU debates. Moreover, the European Parliament is the most transparent of the EU institutions and it is thus best suited for an in-depth analysis of the positions held by different EU politicians. Furthermore, the EP provides an abundance of data since the minutes of its debates are publicly available on its website. For these reasons, the EP is the best institution to be analyzed in this thesis both due to data availability and richness.

The method of a qualitative content analysis was chosen as this methodological approach is considered to be well adapted for analyzing texts in a theory-guided way (see Kohlbacher, 2006). In general, content analyses can be used for texts, visual and audio data and are usually either empirically- or theoretically-driven or present a combination of the two approaches (Stemler, 2015). While the origins of content analysis were quantitative, scholars increasingly came to believe that an interpretation of the context of a statement rather than the mere number of its occurrences within a text was central in establishing the meaning of a text (Kohlbacher, 2006). This focus on the latent meaning of statements led to the establishment of QCA as a sub-discipline of content analysis (Selvi, 2019). QCA as an interpretive approach to social knowledge is well-suited for this analysis as it can help in systematically uncovering the positions held by EU politicians in their respective EP statements (see Kohlbacher, 2006). Although DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2011) have stressed that QCA often is conducted by a group of researchers for a considerable amount of time, such an approach is not possible in this analysis due to resource constraints. This constitutes a limitation of this study which should be considered when interpreting the results.

The statements analyzed in this thesis are taken from the minutes the EP published on its website and are then translated into English using Google Translate for Croatian, Bosnian, and Maltese and DeepL for all other languages as the original minutes protocol speeches in the language in which they were held. However, as the focus of QCA is on the content of entire

texts and texts fragments rather than the meaning of individual words, the necessity of translating texts using software is not detrimental for the results of this analysis.

In some debates, several parliamentarians from the same political group have handed in identical written statements to the protocol. In these cases, the statements have been analyzed only once to avoid diluting the results of a comparative frequency analysis between the two cases. For similar reasons, statements from guests to the European Parliament such as the Ukrainian President and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees neither were included as they would offer no insights into the positions held by EU politicians.

After now having laid out the methodological choices, the following paragraphs will explain the data choices of this analysis. Selvi (2019) underscores that qualitative content analysts must identify the relevant sources for their respective research as QCA only focuses on the most relevant texts and does not aim at analyzing all texts available on a particular topic. To identify the relevant debates held in the European Parliament, the minute database of the EP was first searched for the term 'Syria' in the eighth and ninth parliamentary term and for the term 'Ukraine' for the period since the beginning of the war on February 24, 2022. This search was then supplemented by also searching for the terms 'refugee' and 'migration' in the eighth and ninth term, which produced further results especially regarding the Syrian case.

These combined searches produced several hundred results which made it necessary to further diminish the dataset. First of all, only parliamentary debates were selected as the other data categories such as voting procedures provide considerably less rich data since no debates take place. For the case of Ukraine, the number of results was then further limited by excluding all debates that focused on issues such as weapons and defense, war crimes, sanctions and budgetary questions and thus only marginally touched upon questions relevant to migration studies, so that ten debates with particular relevance for the research question remained in the end. These debates, which will form the dataset for the Ukrainian case in this analysis focus either on refugees, the humanitarian situation in Ukraine, the situation of specific vulnerable groups or the overall situation because of the war.[4]

As the conflict in Syria is older than the Ukrainian conflict, the number of debates is respectively higher so that a more thorough limiting process was necessary here. As the analysis of the Syrian case mainly focuses on the European reaction to the big migratory movements of 2015, the temporal focus point of the analysis is on the years 2014 to 2016. Consequently, debates from the seventh parliamentary term and from 2017 onwards were in principle excluded. However, in order to investigate the explanatory power of the policy learning literature, it was necessary to also include some later debates, which is why two debates on the situation at the

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[4] See Appendix C for an overview of all debates analyzed.

Greek-Turkish border and in Moria from 2020 as well as two debates from after the Russian invasion of Ukraine are included. The resulting dataset was then further narrowed down by excluding debates focusing on the internal situation in Syria, the UN Compact on Migration, and the situation of specific camps within Syria as these debates would provide little insights for the research question of this thesis which focuses on the situation of externally displaced people. The remaining seventeen debates deal with general outlines for a European migration policy, the migrants' situation in the Mediterranean, the specific situation of Syrians and vulnerable migrant groups or the specific contexts mentioned above.

The central activity within a QCA is coding which can be defined as "the assigning of codes […] to raw data" (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011, p. 138). Applying codes to the data helps in explaining how data supports or contradicts the theory (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). Codebooks play a central role in this regard as they transform data into manageable units of information (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011; Kohlbacher, 2006; Selvi, 2019). For deductive QCA, the method employed here, the drafting of a codebook is theory-guided (Kohlbacher, 2006). The importance of drafting the codebook prior to the analysis lies in the fact that this ensures a methodologically sound assignment of codes to a text and that the close adherence to a codebook enhances the trustworthiness of the analysis (Kohlbacher, 2006; Selvi, 2019).

Based on the theoretical insights laid out in Chapter 2, a codebook has thus been created that should be used for analyzing the data of this analysis. For the three theoretical subsections discrimination studies, neorealist foreign policy and policy change literature, codes and categories of grouped codes have been created in order to systematize the dataset. The preliminary codebook is depicted in Appendix A.

To assess the usefulness of the codebook, it is necessary to conduct a first test before running the actual analysis and to revise the codebook if necessary (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). For a QCA, this test should be run on parts of the actual data analyzed later (Selvi, 2019). In order to fulfill this requirement and improve the reliability of the analysis, one debate from each of the two subsets was selected for a first test of the codebook. This test as well as the whole analysis was run on the coding program ATLAS.ti.

The test showed that all codes established prior can be usefully employed for the analysis. However, it was also visible that some codes were missing in the codebook. Firstly, several statements referred to the necessity of treating migrants similarly regardless of their backgrounds, which is why the code *call for indiscriminate treatment* was added within the dimension 'discrimination on the basis of the migrants' cultural / ethnic / religious background'. Secondly, it became obvious that speakers in the EP debates repeatedly referred to the geographic and legal circumstances of the cases to justify the need for a differing treatment. In order to be able to take this justification into account when analyzing the underlying reasons

for the different treatment of Syrians and Ukrainians, the concept 'specificities of the case' consisting of the codes *geographical distance*, *geographical proximity*, *help in the region* and *legal circumstances* was included into the codebook as well. The final codebook can be seen in Appendix B.

4   Results

The following chapter will lay out the findings of the analysis. It will start by giving a general overview of the findings before then giving a more detailed outlook on the different explanations. Next to an overview of the (comparative) frequency of codes, a close analysis of some quotes for each subsection will provide further insights into the content of the debates analyzed. The final subchapter will then analyze the implications of the findings for the research question.

4.1   Overall Results

In order to lay a first foundation for the analysis conducted later, the frequency of certain codes can provide some guidance on which concepts have proven relevant in the analysis (see Table 1).

Theory School	Concept	Dimension	Dimension Count
Discrimination Studies	(Hidden) Racism	Expected behavior	19
		Legitimate migrants	648
		Background	230
	Securitization	Threats	552
	Intersectionality	Individual Skills	113
Neorealist Foreign Policy	Balance of power	Support against rival	874
Policy Change	Historical Institutionalism	External shock	68
	Policy Learning	Policy Failure	1079
/	Specificities of the case	Specific circumstances	223

Table 1: Occurrence of Codes

It becomes evident that some codes were referred to considerably more often than others and the concepts connected to them are therefore likely to be more relevant for the analysis of a differing treatment. The dimensions referred to least often were the dimension 'expected behavior' and the dimension of war as an 'external shock' with impacts on the policy landscape. Within their theory school these dimensions were of particularly little importance as well, which

is why they will not be analyzed further. The specificities of the two cases were only touched upon seldomly too so that this concept will only briefly be analyzed later. In contrast, the dimensions 'policy failure' from the theory of policy change, 'support against a rival' from neorealism, and 'legitimate migrants' and 'threats' from the field of discrimination studies were referred to more often so that they will receive a closer analysis later. This is necessary as the mere frequency of codes provides no guidance on how the codes and concepts are actually used within the debates, a question which can only be answered by looking more closely at the individual codes and the statements they refer to.

In a visual depiction of the codes, the most relevant theory schools for explaining the treatment of migrants from both groups is illustrated (see Fig. 1 + 2).
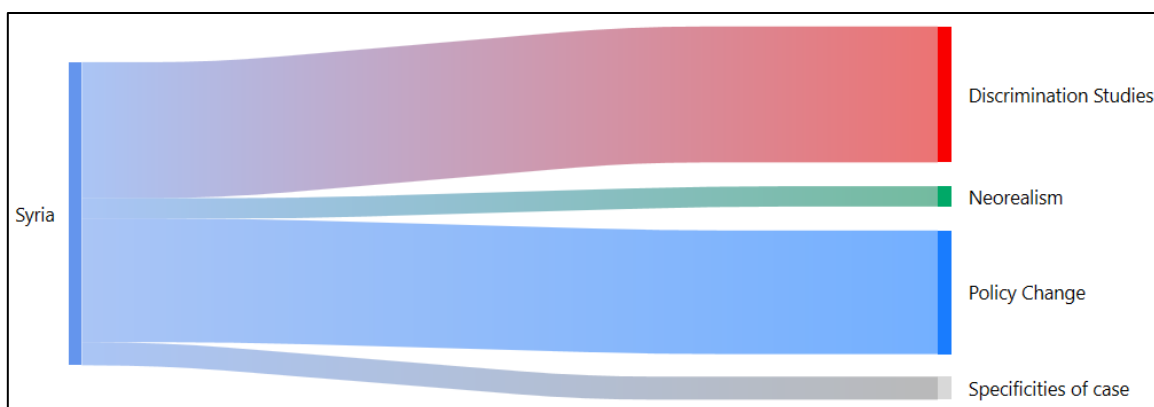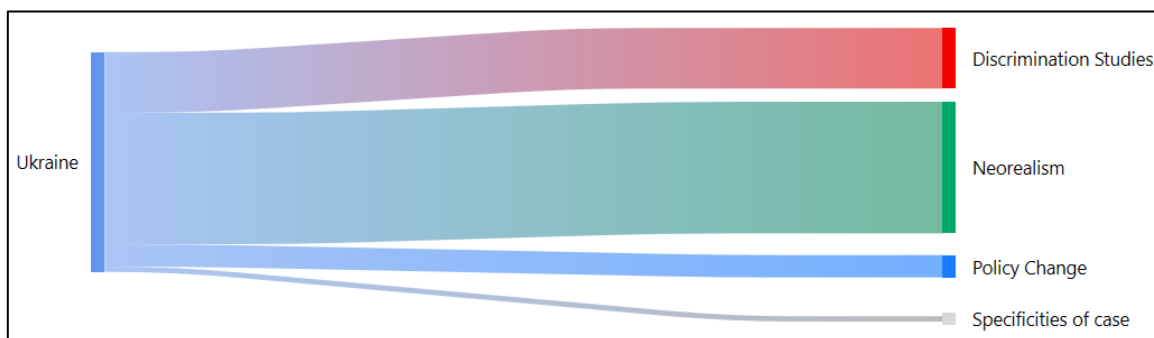

Figure 1: Codes Syria

Figure 2: Codes Ukraine

First of all, it can be seen that the reactions towards migrants and the justification of that reaction differed in the two cases. Looking at the numbers alone, it becomes immediately visible that the codes from the discrimination studies theory school and the policy change theory school are considerably more prominent than the neorealist theory school for the Syrian case. Contrastingly, for Ukraine the picture is different. Here, neorealism plays the most important role, whereas the other two theory schools are less important. However, these figures alone do not yet provide considerable new insights as the codes present within one theory school also sometimes contradict the assumptions of the theory school concerned and the policy change literature also is interested in the change over time. Therefore, a more thorough analysis of the individual codes within a theory school is still necessary.

Whatsoever, it is already visible that the code category 'specificities of the case' is of minor importance for both cases. Within this code category, it furthermore needs to be noted that more than 80% of the codes found deal with a call to *help in the region*. The concept of *help in the region* is used with different motivations and for different regions throughout the debates and the question in how far it is interconnected with a reluctance to welcome migrants is therefore difficult to answer. Since the code is furthermore not part of one of the three explanations focused upon in this analysis and is therefore only of comparatively minor importance for this thesis, the code category will not be analyzed any further here. However, it should be stressed that the belief that refugees should best be helped within their region might have played a role in the differing reaction to Ukrainian and Syrian refugees as the following statement by Jeroen Lenaers, MEP for the EPP, shows: "And when talking about refugees, we often speak about reception and protection in the region. Well, this is our region. This is our continent and it's our duty to step up." (Lenaers, Debate Number[5] 17). Therefore, a closer future analysis of the concept of *help in the region* and its interplay with the treatment of different migrant groups could prove fruitful.

To be able to assess the relevance of certain codes for both groups in a comparative perspective, it is important to analyze the frequency of codes for the two cases jointly. Therefore, the following figures will always have a comparative view on the frequency of the codes. However, when interpreting the results, it needs to be considered that the dataset for Syria consisted of 692 pages of text and that of Ukraine of only 375, meaning that the number of pages for Syria was 1.85 times higher, which should be considered when comparing the absolute numbers of code occurrences. Unfortunately, it was not possible to correct for this disbalance in the figures created by ATLAS.ti. However, as the differences between the two cases are mostly still relevant even when considering the differing size of the two datasets, the implications of this disbalance will be mentioned explicitly only if relevant when discussing the figures.

When analyzing the two subsets comparatively, it becomes clear that the codes from the discrimination studies and the policy change theory school are more prominent for the Syrian case, whereas codes from the neorealist theory school are more frequent for the Ukrainian case, even when taking into account the different size of the datasets (see Fig. 3). A final factor that needs to be considered when comparing the two subsets is the fact that three debates for Ukraine mostly focused on the conflict, whereas none of the Syrian debates had such a clear conflict-focus, which thus could explain the comparative prominence of the neorealist theory school for Ukraine. However, even after excluding these three debates from the Ukrainian subset, the picture is still largely the same and the neorealist policy school stays an important

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[5] In the following DN.

factor within the debates on Ukraine (see Fig. 4). Therefore, the following analysis will again work with the complete Ukrainian subset.
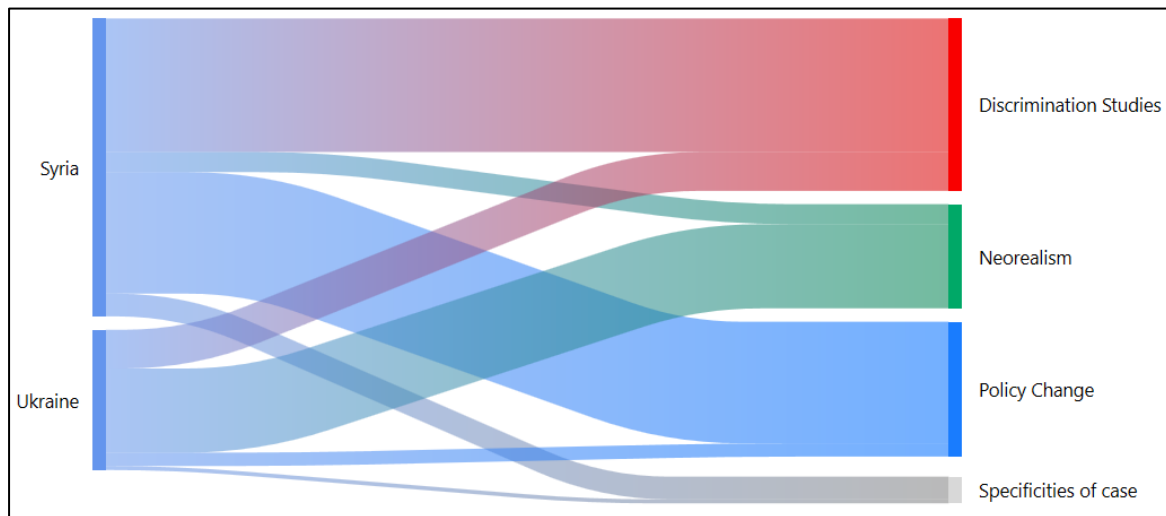

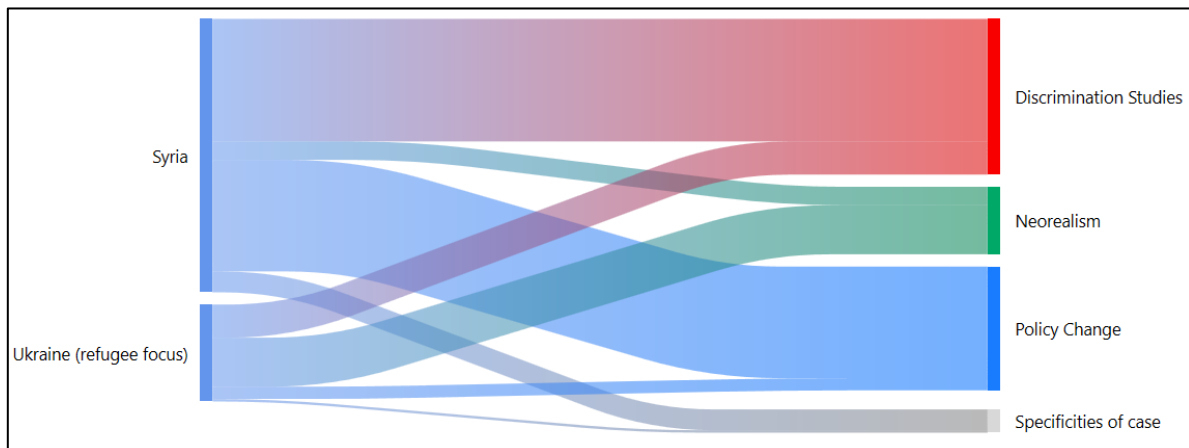Figure 3: Codes Syria and Ukraine

Figure 4: Codes Syria and Subset Ukraine

After having now laid out a few first findings from the analysis on a general level, the following chapters will deal more closely with the individual explanations, detail the findings for the different theory schools and assess in how far they match the theoretical expectations.

4.2   Discrimination Studies

The theory school of discrimination studies expects to find that the less welcoming treatment of Syrian refugees vis-à-vis Ukrainian refugees is based on assumptions and stereotypes about the two groups. These assumptions can deal with the migrants' background, their behavior, their economic potential, or their need for protection (see Appendix B for a more detailed description). In order to analyze whether this assumption is confirmed by the data, it is necessary to analyze the different codes and their distribution over the groups in detail, which will be done in the following.

Figure 5 shows that the code from the 'individual skills' dimension used most often is *welcome for workforce*. Derogatory statements about the *lack of education* in contrast were uncommon throughout the debates. However, if they were present, they were almost exclusively mentioned in the debates from the Syrian subset.
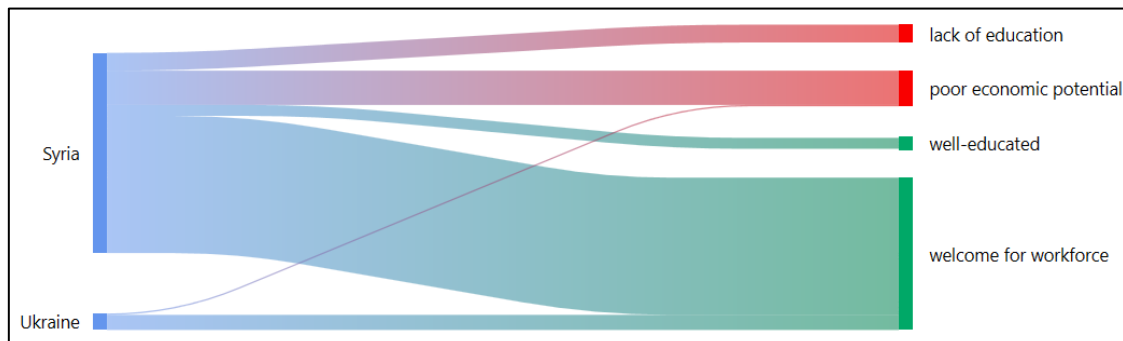

Figure 5: Intersectionality

In the debates, a referral to the economic potential was often used to differentiate wanted from unwanted migrants, which also explains the relative prominence of the code *welcome for workforce* which was often used to differentiate between different groups of migrants either implicitly or by contrasting skilled migrants with the *poor economic potential* of others. As the debates deal not only with Syrian refugees but often with migration as a whole, it needs to be stressed that no differentiation between Syrians and other migrants was made in the debates on economic potential. Rather, Syrians were included into an anonymous group of migrants with a *lack of education* that put a burden on the welfare state instead of being useful for the labor market as the following emblematic statement shows: "The truth is: we are not expecting an economic miracle, but an extreme burden on the welfare state, and we have not let any skilled workers into the country, but at best motivated people who are not qualified and cannot be qualified in our highly differentiated labour market, but whose skills are lacking in their home countries." (von Storch, DN 12) Some right-wing MEPs also clearly referred to the *poor economic potential* of (Syrian) refugees and thus presented them as a burden: "Because when we listen to the head of the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, Mr. Frank-Jürgen Weise - he assumes that around 10% of refugees are qualified for the labour market. Overall, he said, refugees are a burden on the labour market." (Voigt, DN 12). Taken together, it can be argued that the economic potential of Syrian refugees did not play a huge role in the debates (see Table 1) but was repeatedly used to criticize their reception, whereas statements about the economic potential, be they positive or negative, were virtually absent from the debates on Ukraine.

Towards refugees, representatives of the Commission have repeatedly stressed the European *duty to protect* regardless of the origin: "There are, without any doubt, increasing pressures at our external borders, and it is our duty to make sure that Europe continues to be a space for protection for those who need it." (von der Leyen, DN 25) This obligation is supported by the

two biggest groups within the EP, namely the S&D group ("Towards refugees there is only one word and one duty: welcome!" (Pittella, DN 7)) and the EPP ("Everyone agrees that we have to take in Syrian refugees, that we have to take in civil war refugees." (Weber, DN 3)).

A look at the code dimension 'legitimate migrants' within the theory school of discrimination studies supports this claim (see Fig. 6). The referral to the *duty to protect* refugees features most prominent here and is also about equally relevant for both cases considering the different size of the two subsets.

However, many right-wing MEPs also argue for a differentiated treatment of both groups. This is particularly visible when comparing the statements towards Ukrainians and other migrants by one MEP given on two consecutive days. Towards Ukrainian refugees, Kinga Gál, a MEP from Hungary's Fidesz party, sees a clear *duty to protect* and states: "We are doing our utmost to help the refugees." (Gál, DN 26) In general, however, she advocates for a tougher stance towards migration as she apparently considers other migrants *not to be in the need for protection*: "The migratory pressure on the external borders of the Union is offensive and is increasing at an alarming rate. Along the migration route to the Western Balkans, there are regular incidents of violence against border guards. The only solution is to protect the EU's external borders and stop illegal migration." (Gál, DN 25)
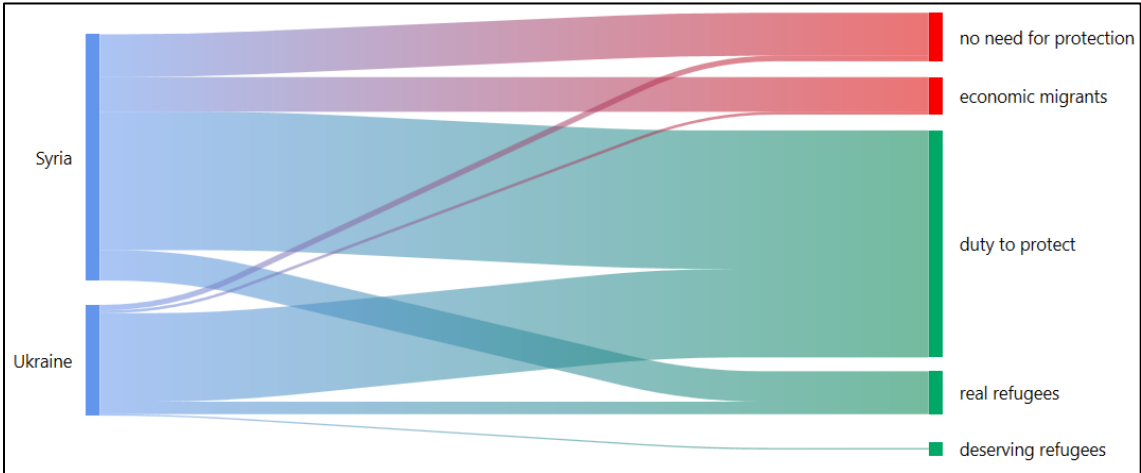

Figure 6: Legitimate Migrants

This position is by no means exceptional or based on the rather late date of this particular debate. Some MEPs simply state that the people arriving in Europe were no refugees but only *economic migrants* and therefore did *not have a need for protection* from the beginning on: "[…] listening to today's debate, I want to tell you my experience as mayor of an Italian city. Refugees or illegal immigrants, whatever you want to call them, have arrived in my town too, and not one of them is fleeing from war. They come from countries where there is no war." (Buonanno, DN 9) Also with regard to Syrian refugees, it was stated that they had *no need for protection* as they were not migrating from a country which posed an immediate threat to their life: "Refugees seeking to enter the EU from Turkey across the eastern Mediterranean via

Greece should be forced back to Turkey at sea. This does not violate international maritime law and the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits bringing someone back to an unsafe port." (Stevens, DN 5)

This statement can be considered representative for a certain fraction of MEPs who have repeatedly stressed that refugees who were arriving from Syria or other conflict states via a safe transit state were in *no need for protection*. However, for Ukrainian refugees this argument was never raised, even if they chose not to stay in the first European country of entry but decided to migrate onwards to countries like Germany, which hints at the fact that the migration route was not the only point of differentiation regarding the need for protection.

Instead, the need for protection of migrants coming from the Global South was called into question entirely by some MEPs. Furthermore, after the beginning of the war in Ukraine, people fleeing the country were implicitly contrasted with prior migration waves and thus depicted as *real refugees*: "The activation of the temporary protection mechanism […] is enabling us to welcome and help the real refugees: women and children fleeing war, while fathers, sons and husbands remain courageously defending their country." (Tardino, DN 17) Also, Ukrainians are considered to be the more *deserving refugees*: "These refugees [the Ukrainians] have papers. These refugees want to work. They want to learn German." (Reil, DN 18)

In these statements, MEPs especially from the right-wing political groups of the Parliament clearly state that Ukrainian refugees are more in need, more worthy and because of their individual commitment also more *deserving* of protection than others. This even leads to the call to only afford the right to asylum to some migrants where the *duty to protect* is the biggest, whereas others should be systematically excluded and *helped in the region*:

> "That is why we must temporarily suspend the right of asylum in Europe for people without Ukrainian citizenship, so that we maximise aid to those who need it most and who are most vulnerable: Ukrainian children. […] Reception must by definition be in our own region. Asians should be received in Asia, Africans in Africa and Europeans in Europe." (Vandendriessche, DN 18)

Overall, it can thus be concluded that the *duty to protect* refugees irrespective of their origin is still a clear priority for many MEPs. However, some migrant groups are *not considered to be in need for protection* especially by the right-wing political groups within the Parliament. This approach is justified by either pointing to the high percentage of rejected asylum applications, a denial of the fact that some of the people coming to Europe are actually in need of protection or the perceived *absence of a need for protection* given the fact that migrants have arrived via safe third countries. Furthermore, some politicians resort to presenting refugees from Ukraine as more *deserving* than others and thus as *real refugees*. Therefore, while a referral to the

duty to protect regardless of the origin of migrants is still common within the EP, it is by no means shared by all political groups.

The referral to a migrant's background is also fairly common in the debates on refugees from Syria. It is visible from the data that the codes *different cultural background* and *religious differences* are mentioned often in these debates, whereas the code *vicinity to own culture* is used much less throughout all debates (see Fig. 7). At first view, it is surprising that the code *ethnic origin* has been more prominent in the debates on Ukraine than in those on Syria, where a differing ethnic origin would be expected to be more relevant. However, this can be explained by the fact that after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine allegations of a discriminatory treatment based on the ethnic origin of refugees at the border have been fairly frequent and have then also repeatedly been discussed within the parliament.
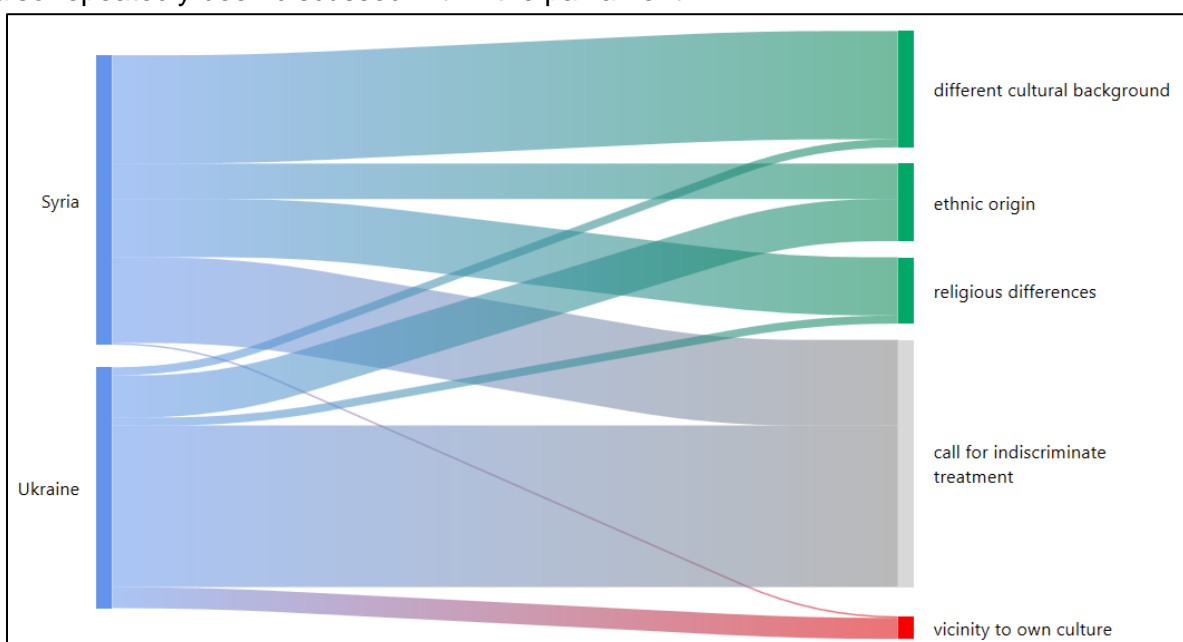

Figure 7: Background

With regard to a *different cultural background*, MEPs especially from the right-wing political groups have stressed a perceived need to protect a distinct European culture. The following statement by Lambros Fountoulis, Greek MEP for the right-wing extremist Golden Dawn is emblematic for this position: "We all owe it to ourselves to preserve the separate identities of all of us, both our own and those of our countries of origin, so that we do not create a multicultural soup at the mercy of the multinationals." (Fountoulis, DN 8)

These fears of a destruction of the European culture and national identity were often coupled with resentments against left-wing political ideologies and a fear for a Christian culture based on *religious differences*, so that some statements on the encounters between people with a *different cultural background* are similar to well-known right-wing conspiracy theories:

> "Immigrants have a very strong identity, and the European mainstream has been systematically working to destroy national, religious, and even sexual identity for

years. And in the encounter between a strong and a weak identity, the strong one simply wins. So, to expect the assimilation of that strong identity of these settlers into the European identity is quite unrealistic, and this is confirmed by the reality that shows the no-go zone and the further threat of identity and all values that derive from Christian traditional culture." (Ilčić, DN 25)

Within the debates, the fear for the traditional Christian culture is a prominent motive. Here, the perceived incompatibility of Christian and Muslim values based on *religious differences* leads to calls for a clear separation of the two religions to prevent a clash of cultures: "I think the so-called refugees on our borders need to be repatriated to Muslim countries, as their values are clearly incompatible with our liberal western democracies. This will avoid the current clash of cultures […]." (Atkinson, DN 10) Other MEPs also stir up the fear of a 'Muslim invasion': "I quote a Catholic archbishop in the press: 'The vast majority of immigrants are not refugees, not Syrians and not families. Muslims cannot and will not adapt. They have come to a war zone, not to adapt, but to conquer.'" (Balczó, DN 7)

Thus, within the debates in the EP fears for the European Christian culture, conspiracy theories and a talk about *security threats* become intermingled: "On the contrary, it leads to population alteration, the disintegration of the social fabric and, unfortunately, to Islamisation with the attendant effects of the creation of jihadist terrorist pockets." (Synadinos, DN 10) This combination of narratives is used to stir up anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiments in the political discourse and can therefore be seen as a clear incident of discrimination against Syrian refugees who should be treated differently than Europeans on the basis of their deviating *cultural, ethnic and religious background*.

However, this approach to non-European migration is by no means hegemonic within the EP as Figure 7 shows as well. While references to the background of migrants to argue for less protection or a less generous migration policy are fairly common, statements such as the following that *call for an indiscriminate treatment* of all migrants are common, too: "Such a spirit must characterise the entire migration policy towards all refugees fleeing war and discrimination. There must be no first- and second-class refugees." (Ernst, DN 17) Many of these statements come from the Left, the Greens, and the social democrats within the EP, but also Liberals and Conservatives participate in these appeals.

Nevertheless, it is important to stress that the common European Christian background and thus the *vicinity to one's own culture* is considered to be a relevant factor in arguing for the need to protect Ukrainian refugees, which shows that the call for a non-discriminatory migration policy is not shared by all MEPs: "Yes, we have a duty to welcome those Europeans who share a territory, a common civilisation or a Christian culture with us." (Lacapelle, DN 17)

Finally, it should be stressed that despite not being overly common, outright racist speeches devaluating migrants from the Global South are given in the EP as well and thus also influence the discourse on a European migration policy. The following statement in this way combines referrals to a *lack of education*, a fear of *terrorism* and *security threats* and a referral to a perceived *mass influx* with an emphasis on the *ethnic origin* of migrants:

> "By the tens of thousands, young men from Africa and the Middle East come in rickety boats and luxury yachts to idle Europe, lured with the promise of free money made by socialists who have completely lost their way. When you have spent generations walking behind camels or lying in front of your hut of date palm, when you can't even read or write, keep doing so in your own country. The EU needs educated and hard-working people, not fortune seekers and profiteers and certainly not jihadists and other scum. Those who cross the Mediterranean come to get instead of bring. We don't want those guys here." (de Graaff, DN 3)

Overall, the *cultural, ethnic, and religious background* of migrants therefore plays an important role in the European debates on migration especially with the contribution of right-wing political groups. While *calls for an indiscriminate treatment* are a common response from the left-wing political groups, it has become clear that discriminatory statements are still quite frequent among MEPs from certain groups and therefore might have influenced the policy decisions taken within the EP.

The last concept that should be dealt with in this subchapter is the concept of securitization. As Figure 8 shows, all codes from this concept are considerably more prominent in the Syrian than in the Ukrainian debates. Ukrainian refugees are rarely considered to *overburden* a state's reception system and they are also rarely referred to as a *security threat* or associated with *terrorism*. What is more, even when the code *security threat* was used for the Ukrainian case it rather refers to a threat for the refugees themselves than to a threat posed by them.
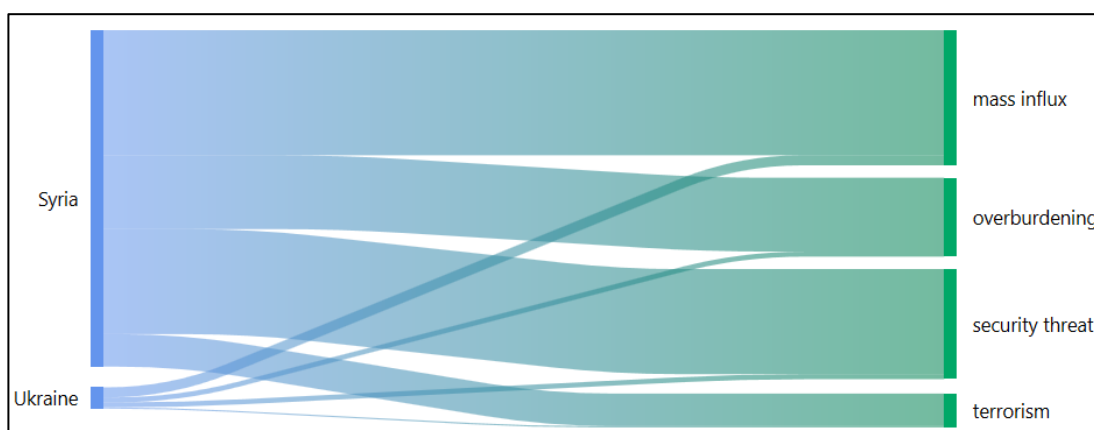

Figure 8: Securitization

When talking about Ukrainian refugees, even Hungarian politicians from the governing coalition, usually well-known for its anti-immigrant stance, stress the willingness to welcome more immigrants instead of criticizing a *mass influx* and *overburdening*: "[…] up to 600,000 refugees are expected to arrive at the Hungarian-Ukrainian border. The authorities, together with humanitarian organisations and citizens, are continuously taking care of thousands of Ukrainian refugees every day. We are therefore living in an unprecedented time of unity and a culture of welcome in our region." (Hölvényi, DN 16) The same is true for the Polish governing coalition: "Poland has already taken in hundreds of thousands of refugees from Ukraine and will welcome more with open arms; as a nation, we remember what war is and we will rise to the challenge." (Jaki, DN 16)

In contrast, when a comparatively smaller number of migrants from the Global South arrived in the EU around 2015, motives like the *overburdening* of capacities and the existence of migration waves constituting a *mass influx* were referred to frequently (see Fig. 8). Some of the claims were brought up by the right-wing groups within the European Parliament: "How can you even believe in a common asylum policy when the limit has long since been reached for many member states, which have received more than they can handle?" (Winberg, DN 10) However, also more centrist politicians like the EPP leader Weber warned from an *overburdening* of European capacities by these migrants: "On the other hand, however, it is also very clear that we must protect Europe from new waves of immigration […] of which Europeans are also afraid." (Weber, DN 11)

The strong difference between the two reactions, where a similar number of migrants is on the one hand referred to as a *mass influx* challenging the reception systems and on the other hand as a group of refugees that *must be protected* has also been criticized in the EP itself: "[…] since the start of Putin's war of aggression against Ukraine, […] at least four million have decided to remain there [in the EU] indefinitely. And none of this has called into question the European social model or our capacity for inclusion." (Aguilar, DN 25) This hints again at the assumption that no objective reason for the disparate treatment of the two migratory movements exists but that it rather amounts to discriminatory treatment.

Syrian refugees are, furthermore, often referred to as potential *threats to security* within the EU: "I would not like there to be a minute's silence in this room in the months to come because, among so many refugees and decent people, so many criminals are landing […]." (Salvini, DN 5) What is more, some MEPs also refer to Syrian refugees as a potential *terrorist threat*:

> "ISIS has already told us that it is going to flood our continent with their Islamist
> lunatics, so you would think we would be doing something to prevent that. But no, we
> are doing quite the opposite: we are putting the lives of our own citizens at risk – the

> lives of people like those here in the gallery. We are putting them at risk by not stopping
> the boats." (Nuttall, DN 6)

These debates about *security threats* posed by Syrian refugees are closely related to their *cultural background* as especially warnings of potential dangers for European women are based on the *cultural background* of the immigrants: "the preachers of multiculturalism are getting hit in the face like a boomerang. Rape rates are soaring in Europe, there are assaults in public swimming pools, all kinds of delinquency […]." (Chauprade, DN 7)

Finally, the fact that immigration in the Syrian case is seen as something negative is also underscored by the wording of statements such as that of Michał Marusik, MEP for the ENF group, who refers to the *mass influx* as an illness: "And start defending ourselves against the influx, against this huge infection that we are just infected with, and not nurturing the disease. The disease is not to be nurtured in our body, because the disease will destroy us." (Marusik, DN 9)

Summing up, it has become evident that the issue of Syrian immigration has been highly securitized while Ukrainian immigration has not. This is despite the fact that the numbers were comparable and also Ukrainian immigration could have been used to plant Russian agents within the EU. However, any allegations of this kind have been absent from the debates on Ukraine. Syrian refugees have been presented as a *security threat* which then led to a call to limit immigration and prevent the refugees from entering. The referral to a disparate *cultural background* has also played its role in this regard. For all these reasons, it seems likely that the depiction of Syrian refugees as a *security threat* has led to a more reluctant stance towards integrating Syrian than Ukrainian refugees among MEPs.

4.3   Neorealism

The neorealist foreign policy theory school holds the belief that the geopolitical ambitions and relations of a state strongly shape all its policy areas. It therefore expects to find that the willingness to accept migrants is to a certain degree shaped by a state's geopolitical environment. In order to see in how far this motive has been important in the debates on Syria and Ukraine, the following subchapter will analyze the codes from the balance of power concept and the respective statements on the conflicts and their geopolitical positioning throughout the debates.

When analyzing the frequency of the references to geopolitical motives for dealing with the two migratory movements, it becomes clear that the motive was particularly more prominent in the Ukrainian case (see Fig. 9). This disbalance grows even more prominent when considering that the Ukrainian dataset was much smaller than the Syrian one. All codes from this dimension

were referred to markedly more often in the Ukrainian than in the Syrian case. In order to assess what the codes refer to and in how far they are also explicitly related to the refugee situation, a more thorough analysis of the statements will be conducted now.
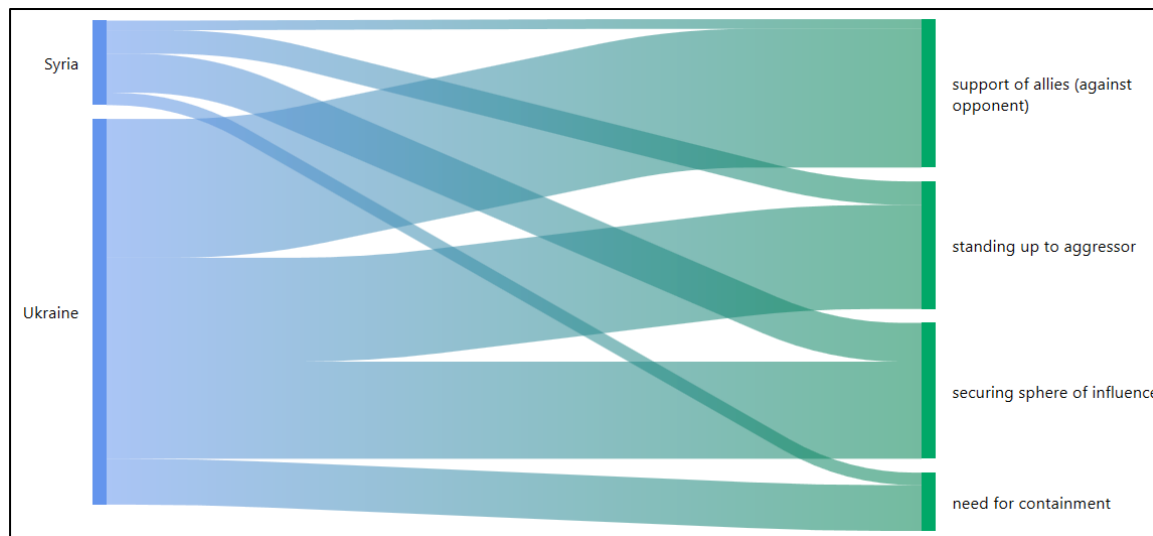

Figure 9: Neorealism

Overall, geopolitical motives were less prominent in the Syrian than in the Ukrainian case and where they appeared, they often had a different focus point than in the debates on Ukraine as will be visible in the analysis of the Ukrainian codes below.

The most prominent code for the Syrian dataset is the code *securing sphere of influence*. However, rather than as an objective for future undertakings, it is often used in retrospective as several MEPs claim that geopolitical ambitions of Western states have been one of the causes of the Syrian civil war:

> "But who is responsible for this situation? Who brought famine and destruction to Syria and is forcing its people to take the path of refuge? The major powers, which are trying to impose their policies through military operations and under the pretext of supposed liberation and the restoration of democracy. America and Europe are complicit in this situation." (Fountoulis, DN 2)

In contrast, other MEPs employed the motive of geopolitical ambitions to lament a perceived reluctance and passivity of the EU that arguably has led to a deepening of the Syrian conflict:

> "There is a direct link between the humanitarian situation in Syria and the international response. If the international community had cooperated earlier on in dealing with the brutal Assad regime, the humanitarian situation would not have spiralled out of control." (Khan, DN 2)

When the debates dealt with the *need for containment* of another power or the necessity to *stand up to an aggressor* in relation to the conflict in Syria, this was rather related to Turkey than to the conflict in Syria itself. The focus here was on the actions by Turkey which

deliberately had transported Syrian refugees to the Greek border to apply geopolitical pressure on the EU. MEPs thus repeatedly criticized Turkey for extorting the EU with migrants and called for *standing up to the aggressor* which in this case was Turkey: "We have a hybrid war on Europe's borders, with the Turkish authorities arming the immigration service without respect for human rights." (Kaili, DN 14) Furthermore, it was mentioned in this regard as well that Turkey would *need to be contained*: "We need to stop kidding ourselves that Turkey is our strategic partner. At best, Erdogan is a rival, and at the moment he is behaving like our enemy and blackmailer. We must end all financial relations with Turkey and embargo them." (Slabakov, DN 14)

Still, there were also a few calls to get geopolitically involved in the conflict in Syria as some MEPs saw a *need to contain* ISIS among others to reduce the number of refugees: "The long-term answer obviously is putting an end to the conflicts and the wars, facing the threat of Daesh [ISIS], starting processes of national reconciliation." (Mogherini, DN 5) ISIS is thus considered to be a relevant actor to be fought at least by some MEPs, whereas the Syrian Assad regime is virtually not referred to at all in the debates.

The motive of a *support of allies* is rarely used in the debates on Syria and even if it is employed, it rather deals with the situation in Ukraine in the later debates or stresses the need to support Greece in the 'attack' by Turkey already mentioned above. Statements such as the one by the Green MEP Indrek Tarand, who calls for a support of the Kurdish forces against ISIS (Tarand, DN 7), hence are a clear exception. It can thus be said that the willingness to *support any allies* in the Syrian conflict virtually plays no role in the MEPs' objectives.

For the Ukrainian case in contrast, geopolitical ambitions are highly relevant in the EP debates. It becomes clear that the war in Ukraine is not seen as a mere regional conflict but rather as a conflict of ideologies where the EU and the West must take clear sides in order to *secure their sphere of influence*: "I stress that the Ukrainians are not only fighting for their freedom, but also for the freedom of the whole of democratic Europe […]." (Štefanec, DN 27) The fact that a Russian victory would endanger the democratic European system, the security of the EU and the EU's geopolitical status is widely shared among MEPs from all political groups. Still, there are also MEPs that advocate for a moderating position of the EU: "Our aim is not to take sides in this conflict, but to bring Ukraine and Russia to a ceasefire and peace negotiations." (Rivière, DN 21) However, this approach is not shared by many MEPs but is a clear outside position held mostly by MEPs from the Left group, whereas the idea of *securing a sphere of influence* was mentioned several hundred times by MEPs from different political groups throughout the debates.

The perceived necessity of treating the war in Ukraine as a geopolitical conflict and *securing one's sphere of influence* is also shared by other EU institutions as the following statement by

the High Representative Borrell shows: "The war in Ukraine has highlighted the importance of the common security and defence policy. It has been an awakening for Europe, a geopolitical awakening." (Borrell, DN 27)

In the Ukrainian case, the willingness to *stand up to the Russian aggressor* is also voiced explicitly time and again by many MEPs. This willingness is often coupled with the call for sanctions against Russia in order to limit its capacities to continue the war. The idea of sanctions is furthermore often accompanied by a perceived *need for containing* Russian power: "We also expect strong sanctions with one objective: to drain Putin's war funding, to end his regime and the war." (Séjourné, DN 16)

Supporting Ukraine as an ally in its war against Russia is considered to be a top priority by many MEPs as the EP president's statement exemplarily shows: "Mr. President, we stand with you in your fight for survival, in this dark moment in our history. When you look to this European Parliament you will always find an ally, a space to address Europe and the world, and always, always a friend." (Metsola, DN 16) In this respect, also the support of Ukrainian refugees is explicitly seen as one means of supporting the Ukrainian allies in their conflict: "We must do everything we can to support the Ukrainian people, and we can do this in two ways: one is to immediately establish humanitarian corridors to protect the Ukrainian civilian refugees, and the EU must provide all the support we can to protect them […]." (Al-Sahlani, DN 17) On other instances, this connection is even more clear when MEPs list the reception of refugees together with the supply of defense materials as a means *of support of allies*: "We have a duty to help and assist our attacked neighbours, starting with the reception of their war refugees or the provision of defence material." (Bardella, DN 26)

Finally, also the activation of the TPD regulating the reception of Ukrainian refugees is seen by some as a geopolitical signal showing again how motives like a perceived *duty to protect* and the willingness to *secure a sphere of influence* become interconnected in the Ukrainian case: "The Temporary Protection Directive had three objectives: to ensure immediate protection, to send a geopolitical signal, not to overburden national asylum systems." (Düpont, DN 22) It can thus be concluded that for the Ukrainian case geopolitical ambitions have strongly shaped the EU's reaction to refugees.

Comparing the two cases, it is visible that geopolitical motives and ambitions had a strongly different relevance. While they have been repeatedly and constantly voiced with regard to the Ukrainian conflict, they were considerably less frequent in the Syrian case. Moreover, it needs to be stressed that the motivations to bring up geopolitical considerations differed. While helping refugees was considered to be a means in supporting the EU's geopolitical agenda in the Ukrainian case and geopolitical objectives were thus the ultimate goal, getting geopolitically involved in the Syrian conflict was mainly seen as a means to limit the number of refugees

fleeing the country to Europe rather than as an objective in itself. This clearly shows that geopolitical considerations are markedly less relevant in dealing with Syrian than with Ukrainian refugees and are also considerably more instrumental even where they are present. Therefore, they do not provide a strong incentive to accept refugees in the former case while they do in the latter, which can at least partly explain the differing treatment of Syrian and Ukrainian refugees.

4.4   Policy Learning

The policy learning theory school expects to find that a new approach in a policy is based on the growing belief that a prior policy has failed and the need for a new approach therefore becomes increasingly pressing. In the case considered here, that would mean that the failure of the prior policy vis-à-vis Syrians has led to an overall new approach towards all migrants including Ukrainian and Syrian refugees. In order to assess whether this assumption holds true in the light of the data, it is important to analyze in how far a change in the beliefs about the success of EU migration policies has happened over time. If the policy learning assumption holds true, a growing disillusionment with the existing policy culminating in a new policy should be visible.
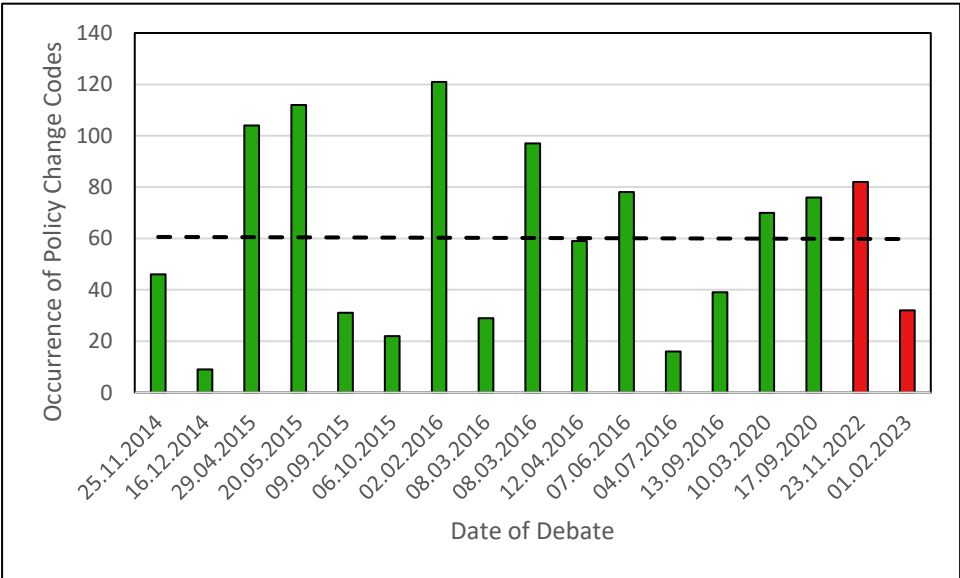
Figure 10: Policy Change

However, looking at the frequency of the respective codes, no systematic development can be found (see Fig.10)[6]. Instead, the frequency of policy change codes is randomly distributed over the debates on Syria over time. For this reason and as many statements coded as policy change resemble each other and thus do not touch upon a lot of different aspects, the analysis

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[6] The two debates that took place after the beginning of the Ukraine war and thus after the markedly different reaction to Ukrainian refugees, are marked in red.

of the policy change codes given in the following will be rather short. However, some relevant insights can still be gained from the analyses, which is why a few statements will be analyzed closely in the following.

First of all, it needs to be mentioned that *admitting a failure of the existing migration policy* was common throughout all of the debates mainly because of frequent attacks from the left-wing and right-wing groups within the EP, which continuously called for a more open or more closed migration policy, respectively. The following statement by Kostas Chrysogonos, MEP for the left-wing GUE/NGL group, is emblematic for this kind of criticism: "The pseudo-documentary common European asylum system established by these regulations is an inhumane system that traps refugees in the countries of entry […]." (Chrysogonos, DN 2) However, also among other groups within the EP such as the social democrats, criticism of the EU migration policy was frequent: "The European Union and its Member States have failed miserably to meet the challenge of receiving refugees." (Revault D'Allonnes Bonnefoy, DN 9) Some social democrats even claimed that the failure was not a failure but a deliberate decision on behalf of some political actors: "It's a collective moral failure of the European Union by the Member States, leaving the burden all on the shoulders of the people living on the Greek islands, and some even wanting the misery to be a deterrent for others to arrive." (Piri, DN 15)

This criticism of the existing policy was constantly coupled with an *emphasis on the need for a new approach*: "More generally, the current crisis has shown that the present system is not working, and many elements are reflected in your report. In particular we need to overhaul the asylum system […]. The refugee crisis has been a catalyst for the acceleration of these changes." (Avramapoulous, DN 10) *Calls for change* focusing more explicitly on particular policies often focused especially on the malfunctioning Dublin Regulation: "The next step for us Socialists and Democrats must be the revision of Dublin III." (Pittella, DN 3) Overall, several MEPs and Commissioners demanded a radical *new start to the EU's migration policy*: "We need a fresh start on migration and this is the right moment, as President von der Leyen said yesterday in the State of the European Union." (Johansson, DN 15) In this regard, the failure of the already existing migration policy was also seen as an opportunity by some: "It may eventually create momentum to be used for the long-awaited adoption of the Pact on Migration and Asylum." (Picula, DN 17)

It needs to be noted for the talk about *policy failures* as well as for the *calls for change* that these statements were given within several years' time so that one can clearly see a continuous criticism of the EU migration policy which apparently constituted a constant background noise in debates on migration over the years without having a practical effect. Furthermore, the assessment that the *policy system has failed* was not only shared by MEPs but also by the Commission as the two statements by Commissioners Avramapoulous and

Johansson show. Moreover, it is interesting to note the parallelism between the statements of Commissioner Avramapoulous and Tonino Picula from the S&D group which both point out the potential of the refugee crisis and the reaction to Ukraine war as potential facilitators of change. Even though about six years lie between the two statements, the need to reform has seemingly not seized to exist. This assumption is also shared by different MEPs who mourn several years of standstill on the policy proposals drafted by the EU Commission: "[…] after seven years of complete stagnation on the asylum and migration package in the Council, it's time for action." (in 't Veld, DN 25) Other MEPs even go as far as lamenting a complete standstill in the whole area of EU migration policies: "But the worst thing is that our European asylum policy is also still in 2016, despite all the good proposals from the European Commission." (Lenaers, DN 23)

Finally, it becomes clear especially in the debate about the situation of refugees of 8th March 2022 that many MEPs still see a pressing need to reform the EU's dealing with refugees. This disproves the assumption that such a new start had already taken place and also is the reason for the disparate treatment of Ukrainian refugees. Most prominent in *emphasizing the need for a new approach* are MEPs from the Left, the Greens, and the social democrats, but also conservative politicians like Othmar Karas and Seán Kelly from the EPP group are active here. On the left side of the political spectrum, this *emphasis on the need for a new approach* is strongly connected to a call for a non-discriminatory migration policy thus pointing back to the potential relevance of the discrimination studies theory school: "The surge of solidarity and generosity that is sweeping over us must make us aware that anyone fleeing their country must find refuge in Europe, at all times, without distinction, without discrimination. Fortress Europe must fall. Long live a welcoming Europe!" (Bricmont, DN 17)

In sum, the analysis of the statements in the EP does not provide any proof for the assumptions of the policy learning literature. It is not visible in the data that the urgency to reform the EU migration policy has increased over time resulting in a shift of policies. Talks of a *policy failure* have rather been a constant feature of EP debates on EU migration policies although apparently without consequences. Even in the latest debates of the dataset, the *need for a new approach* to the migration policy is still present so that no *new start* seems to have happened. Furthermore, appeals to treat other refugees in the same way as Ukrainians and referrals to the failure of reforming the migration policy are still voiced by several MEPs making it evident that the different treatment of Ukrainian refugees is not based on an overall new migration policy brought about by a prior policy failure.

4.5   Discussion

In the preceding subchapters the individual theory schools and their respective explanations for the differing treatment of Syrian and Ukrainian refugees have been analyzed. It has become clear from these analyses that concepts from the respective theory schools were differently prominent in the two sets of debates in the EP and that the underlying beliefs thus have shaped the policy response to refugees to a different degree.

Assessing the first theoretical expectation: discrimination studies

Within the discrimination studies theory school, it was clearly visible that a perceived duty to protect all refugees irrespective of their origin was a prominent motive throughout the debates. However, it was also shown that MEPs especially from the right of the political spectrum in practice made clear differences between different refugee groups in their statements and the things they referred to. While the picture is slightly complicated by the fact that Syrians are often mentioned among and alongside other migrant groups in the EP debates, important findings can still be deduced from the debates also due to the fact that the lack of a differentiation between Syrian refugees and other migrants is already telling in itself: Firstly, it could be seen that the economic situation of Ukrainian refugees was virtually not referred to whereas the motive played a role for the question of whether Syrian refugees should be accepted and helped in the EU. Secondly, the debate on Syrian refugees was heavily securitized. The potential of terrorist attacks and the threat of criminal attacks by Syrian refugees was repeatedly referred to, while such mentions were absent from the debates on the Ukrainian refugees. Thirdly, the different cultural and religious background of Syrian refugees and the perceived inability and unwillingness to integrate were also frequently mentioned. Given the findings of this qualitative content analysis of EP debates, it can thus be concluded that discrimination has in fact played a role in shaping the differing reactions towards Syrians and Ukrainians and the expectations of this theory school have thus by and large been confirmed.

Assessing the second theoretical expectation: neorealism

The neorealist theory school was especially helpful for explaining the welcoming reaction towards Ukrainian refugees. It became visible throughout the debates that the motivation to support Ukraine against an aggressor and to contain the Russian quest for power were important motives for most MEPs in dealing with the war in Ukraine. On several instances, this objective was also explicitly linked to the need to support Ukrainian refugees, which was seen as a 'geopolitical signal'. Such considerations were largely absent from the debates on Syria. While the Islamic State and to a different degree also Turkey were sometimes referred to as enemies that should be contained and therefore in a way that aligns well with neorealist foreign

policy reasoning, such statements never referred to the Assad government in a similar way they did to Putin and the Russian government. Furthermore, if present in the Syrian case, the neorealist arguments advocating for an intervention in the conflict were often only instrumental for limiting the number of refugee arrivals and not an objective in itself. Therefore, it can be deduced that foreign policy considerations had different foundations in both conflicts and hence also had different implications for the dealing with refugees. Overall, the findings of the qualitative content analysis in this thesis thus confirm the expectations of the neorealist theory school.

Assessing the third theoretical expectation: policy change

The final theory school analyzed in this thesis is the theory school of policy change. Here, it became clear that criticism of and attacks against EU migration policy were a constant feature of EU debates on migration. Attacks from the left and the right of the political spectrum as well as the call for a revision of certain policies or the entire approach to migration policy were a constant phenomenon. However, the analysis did not provide any proof for the assumptions of the policy learning theory school that the differing treatment of Ukrainian refugees was based on a complete turn-over of EU migration policies. The findings rather point into the opposite direction as MEPs also after the beginning of the Ukraine war have mourned the EU's failure to produce any meaningful progress in the area of migration policies. Therefore, the expectations of the policy change literature that the differing treatment of Ukrainian refugees was the implication of a change in migration policies based on the understanding that the prior policy had failed must be refuted on the basis of this qualitative content analysis.

Further relevant findings

The last dimension 'specificities of the case' which was not based on any theory school has overall been of little relevance for the analysis. The only relevant code from this dimension was the code *help in the region,* which could be an important point of analysis for future research. The assumption that migrants should best be helped in the region constitutes a possible foundation for the need of treating Syrian and Ukrainian refugees differently. However, it is not clear in how far this assumption is based on actual practical considerations and in how far it is connected to a discriminatory worldview which should only be shadowed by pointing to apparent practical considerations. Analyzing this dimension further, however, goes beyond the scope of this thesis so that this analysis must be left to future research.

Nonetheless, this thesis was able to prove that foreign policy considerations have played an important role in shaping the differing reactions towards Syrian and Ukrainian refugees who were fleeing conflicts situated in different geopolitical setups. Furthermore, it was visible that discrimination has played a role in shaping the discourses within the EP. This is especially

apparent in the topics that have and have not been brought up in relation to certain migrant groups such as the economic and religious background and the security threat certain groups of migrants allegedly pose. Here, it could be shown that the reluctance to accept refugees was not only based on the absolute numbers of arrivals that could arguably overburden reception systems but also on the concrete composition of the respective refugee groups. Thus, even though outright racist or discriminatory statements have largely, although not entirely, been absent from the debates, it can still be argued that discriminatory statements and mindsets have influenced the political discourse and consequently also political decisions within the EP. The assumptions of the policy learning theory school in contrast were not confirmed by the data. The debates did not show any growing convergence of opinions that a prior migration policy had failed that has then led to a new start in migration policies. Rather, EU migration policies were considered a failure already from the beginning on, which however did not materialize in a relevant policy change. This was also repeatedly criticized by several MEPs who consistently blamed the EU Council for its inability to produce a workable solution to reform EU migration policies. Overall, it can be concluded that the neorealist and the discrimination studies theory schools have played an important role in explaining the differing reactions towards Ukrainian and Syrian refugees as the assumptions presented by these two theory schools have largely been confirmed by the data. The assumptions of the policy learning theory school in contrast could not be confirmed by the data so that this theory school is not able to explain why Ukrainian and Syrian refugees have been treated differently when trying to enter the EU.

5   Concluding Remarks

This thesis has dealt with the question what factors determine the EU's response to refugees. It has analyzed the EP discourses on the refugee movements stemming from Ukraine and Syria. In these two cases, the EU reaction has been markedly different, and the two cases are therefore well-suited to establish the underlying reasons for a certain treatment of refugees. Three theoretical angles have been established and assessed for their potential to explain the differing treatment of the respective refugee groups. These angles were based on insights from the areas of discrimination studies, neorealist foreign policy studies and the policy learning literature. In a qualitative discourse analysis, relevant EP debates were then coded for the existence of statements related to one of the theory schools and the content of these statements has been analyzed in more detail afterwards.

The analysis has shown that the three possible explanations have a strongly differing explanatory potential. While discrimination studies and neorealist foreign policy were able to contribute important insights, the expectations of the policy learning literature were not

confirmed by the data. Instead, it was visible that a virtual standstill has dominated EU migration policies over the last years as it was impossible to reach agreement on any changes in the EU Council. Whether this gridlock has been solved by the recent Council agreement on the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) remains to be seen and goes beyond the scope of this analysis. What this analysis was able to show, however, is that discrimination and foreign policy considerations have played relevant roles regarding the two cases analyzed. While the motives of containing the aggressor and supporting one's allies were very strong in the case of Ukraine and were also mentioned as one reason for supporting Ukrainian refugees, such motives were absent from the debates on Syrian refugees. Here, foreign policy motivations were largely absent and where employed were often only mentioned as a means to limit the number of refugee arrivals and not as an objective in itself. Motives from the area of discrimination studies were repeatedly found in all debates and it was clear that a relevant fraction of MEPs actively discriminated against Syrian refugees based on their religious and ethnic background. This discriminatory approach was often connected to a securitization of the issue of Syrian immigration which was not present for Ukrainian refugees with regard neither to an overburdening of capacities nor to potential security threats. Still, it also needs to be noted that a discriminatory approach was by no means hegemonic, and many MEPs also actively opposed discriminatory migration policies.

The research question of this thesis can thus be answered by saying that foreign policy motivations as well as discrimination have played an important role in shaping the EU's response towards Ukrainian and Syrian refugees according to the debates in the European Parliament. The research is therefore able to help filling the research gap with regard to the EP identified in the introduction and hence is scientifically relevant. By analyzing the speeches given in the plenary of the EP, it was able to identify discrimination and foreign policy motivations as important incentives for MEPs to adopt a specific stance towards EU migration policy. The importance of foreign policy motivations is especially interesting as it is an aspect overlooked by analyses of the differing treatment of Ukrainian and Syrian refugees only focusing on public speeches of some politicians or the analysis of media articles (see Sales, 2023; Sipahioğlu, 2023). It furthermore complements the findings of Goinard (2020) by showing that not only the EP plays an increasingly important role in the area of EU foreign policy but also that foreign policy considerations are becoming increasingly important factors for decisions taken within the EP.

Moreover, the findings are societally relevant as well, as they provide guidance on which motives influence EU migration policy and can thus help politicians as well as activists and NGOs in tailoring their respective strategies to the factual circumstances. Especially on the backdrop of the CEAS reform currently underway, influencing EU migration policies will be a priority for these actors in the near future. Knowledge about relevant factors and leverage

points is thus especially relevant these days. Politicians and activists can learn from this research that addressing direct and indirect discrimination is more promising than pointing to the failure of prior migration policies as the policy change literature has not been able to explain the policy differences whereas discrimination, securitization and stereotyping have been proven to be relevant factors. The insight that foreign policy motives have been influential factors for helping Ukrainian refugees is interesting as well as this insight could be used by activists and NGOs as a potential leverage point in campaigns and proposals for a more uniform and better treatment of migrant groups. Here, the potential of publicly criticizing the apparent priority of foreign policy considerations over human rights is especially promising in order to change the existing migration policy and as a direct implication of this research stresses its societal relevance.

Due to resource constraints, this thesis was unable to invest extensive resources in drafting a codebook in a joint approach with different researchers and for the same reasons it was neither possible to code the data with more than one researcher to enhance data reliability. Further limitations of this research include the necessity to use automated translation tools to gain a uniform body of data and the lack of an in-depth analysis of the opinion of MEPs in relation to their respective group membership and power positions.

However, this also presents a potential starting point for future research, where the statements of MEPs could more systematically be connected to their group membership or power status to see in how far different party groups and party representatives differ regarding their approaches. A similar analysis could also focus on the differences between MEPs and representatives from the Commission or the Council. It could furthermore prove worthy to investigate in how far the motive of *help in the region*, which was only touched upon briefly in this analysis, is connected to theoretical approaches like discrimination studies and whether it can be established that the idea of help in the region is sometimes used to shift responsibility for refugees to other states. Finally, a stronger focus on the temporal dimension of the statements and the developments of the debates over time might also prove valuable as this could show the evolution of the positions of the EP and the individual party groups in a changing political climate.

All in all, it can be concluded that the issue of EU migration policy will stay highly topical with the current debate on the CEAS in the years to come. Whether the standstill on EU migration policies can be overcome with the agreement reached in the Council and whether it will be possible to complete negotiations with the Parliament before the EP election of 2024 remains to be seen. It is very well possible that no agreement will be reached and the whole process needs to be started anew after the EP elections. Nonetheless, even if an agreement can be found, it will be interesting to see whether it will pursue a restrictive approach towards migration

from the Global South and will thus closely resemble the agreement found in the Council or whether the trilogue will still result in meaningful changes. Given the prominence of restrictive approaches in the current debate and the relevance of discriminatory conduct also found in this analysis, an inclusive approach to migration is not overly likely to materialize. However, there is still leeway for negotiations on the CEAS and this research was able to produce a variety of findings relevant for actors trying to influence the final outcomes.

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7   Appendix

Appendix A – Preliminary Codebook

Theory School	Concept	Dimension	Code
Discrimination Studies	(Hidden) Racism	Discrimination on the basis of expected behavior	unwillingness to integrate; lack of motivation
		Discrimination on the basis of some groups being less deserving or legitimate migrants	real refugees; deserving refugees; economic migrants; duty to protect; no need for protection
		Discrimination on the basis of the migrants' cultural/ethnic/religious background	religious differences; different cultural background; ethnic origin; vicinity to own culture
	Securitization	Migrants from the respective groups are depicted as threat for public order or national security	security threat; terrorism; overburdening; mass influx
	Intersectionality	Referral to individual capabilities/skills of migrants as reasons for disparate treatment	lack of education; well-educated; poor economic potential; welcome for workforce
Neorealist Foreign Policy	Balance of power	Support as a form of power politics vis-à-vis opponents in the international arena	need for containment; standing up to aggressor; securing sphere of influence; support of allies (against opponent)
Policy Change	Historical Institutionalism	Start of war as dramatic external shock	war as dramatic turn; shock
	Policy Learning	Referral to prior EU migration policies and their failure	admitting EU migration policy failure; emphasis on the need for a new approach; call for change; new start to migration policy

Appendix B – Final Codebook

Theory School	Concept	Dimension	Code
Discrimination Studies	(Hidden) Racism	Discrimination on the basis of expected behavior	unwillingness to integrate; lack of motivation
		Discrimination on the basis of some groups being less deserving or legitimate migrants	real refugees; deserving refugees; economic migrants; duty to protect; no need for protection
		Discrimination on the basis of the migrants' cultural/ethnic/religious background	religious differences; different cultural background; ethnic origin; vicinity to own culture; call for indiscriminate treatment
	Securitization	Migrants from the respective groups are depicted as threat for public order or national security	security threat; terrorism; overburdening; mass influx
	Intersectionality	Referral to individual capabilities/skills of migrants as reasons for disparate treatment	lack of education; well-educated; poor economic potential; welcome for workforce
Neorealist Foreign Policy	Balance of power	Support as a form of power politics vis-à-vis opponents in the international arena	need for containment; standing up to aggressor; securing sphere of influence; support of allies (against opponent)
Policy Change	Historical Institutionalism	Start of war as dramatic external shock	war as dramatic turn; shock
	Policy Learning	Referral to prior EU migration policies and their failure	admitting EU migration policy failure; emphasis on the need for a new approach; call for change; new start to migration policy
/	Specificities of the case	Referral to the specific circumstances of a particular migratory movement	geographical distance; geographical proximity; help in the region; legal circumstances

Appendix C – List of Debates Analyzed

Debate Number	Date of Debate	Topic	Topic Group
1	25/11/14	Situation in the Mediterranean and the need for a holistic EU approach to migration	Syria
2	16/12/14	Shortage of funding for the World Food Programme aid scheme to Syrian refugees	Syria
3	29/04/15	Report of the extraordinary European Council meeting (23 April 2015) - The latest tragedies in the Mediterranean and EU migration and asylum policies	Syria
4	20/05/15	European Agenda on Migration	Syria
5	09/09/15	Migration and refugees in Europe	Syria
6	06/10/15	Humanitarian situation of refugees within the EU and neighbouring countries	Syria
7	02/02/16	Refugee emergency, external borders control and future of Schengen - Respect for the international principle of non-refoulement - Financing refugee facility for Turkey - Increased racist hatred and violence against refugees and migrants across Europe	Syria
8	08/03/16	The situation of women refugees and asylum seekers in the EU	Syria
9	08/03/16	Communication on implementing the European agenda on migration	Syria
10	12/04/16	The situation in the Mediterranean and the need for a holistic EU approach to migration	Syria
11	07/06/16	State of play of the external aspects of the European migration agenda: towards a new 'Migration Compact'	Syria
12	04/07/16	Refugees: social inclusion and integration into the labour market	Syria
13	13/09/16	UN High-level Summit on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants	Syria
14	10/03/20	Migration situation at the Greek-Turkish border and the EU's common response to it	Syria
15	17/09/20	The need for an immediate and humanitarian EU response to the current situation in the refugee camp in Moria	Syria
16	01/03/22	Russian aggression against Ukraine	Ukraine
17	08/03/22	The deterioration of the situation of refugees as a consequence of the Russian aggression against Ukraine	Ukraine
18	05/04/22	EU Protection of children and young people fleeing the war against Ukraine	Ukraine
19	04/05/22	The social and economic consequences for the EU of the Russian war in Ukraine - reinforcing the EU's capacity to act	Ukraine
20	05/05/22	The impact of the war against Ukraine on women	Ukraine
21	05/10/22	Russia's escalation of its war of aggression against Ukraine	Ukraine

22	18/10/22	Impact of Russian invasion of Ukraine on migration flows to the EU	Ukraine
23	23/11/22	The need for a European solution on asylum and migration including search and rescue	Syria
24	15/12/22	The humanitarian situation in Ukraine due to Russia's attacks against critical infrastructure and civilian areas	Ukraine
25	01/02/23	Preparation of the Special European Council meeting of February, in particular the need to develop sustainable solutions in the area of asylum and migration	Syria
26	02/02/23	Preparation of the EU-Ukraine Summit	Ukraine
27	15/02/23	One year of Russia's invasion and war of aggression against Ukraine	Ukraine