



**NOVAMIGRA**

NORMS AND VALUES IN THE  
EUROPEAN MIGRATION AND REFUGEE CRISIS

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## **Disarming Populism: Recommendations for Designing an Inclusive European Migration and Refugee Policy**

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## Developing Pro-Migration Policies Based on Values in European Discourses – Key Observations and Recommendations

The ‘refugee crisis’<sup>2</sup> has affected the European social and political discourse and policies at all levels of governance and society, including the European Union, national governments, and the civil society. The arrival of hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers at Europe’s doorstep has deepened existing divisions regarding refugee admissions and more broadly migration and immigrant integration policies.

This policy research alert **looks for answers on how to regain the EU’s stability and bridge the gap** that has deepened during this period and provides **policy recommendations aimed at promoting European values and open immigration societies and consolidating the EU’s stability and unity** in regards to the question at hand. It brings together the NOVAMIGRA project analysis of the EU’s migration/refugee policy and the values it draws from, as well as the related controversies in political and social discourses. The analysis looks for answers on how European Union institutions, right-wing populist parties in EU Member States, and pro-migration media influence appear in public discourse. And how do the different political levels represent the relevant values. The main insight of the research is that **populist practices undermine not only the migration/refugee policy but also the values in which the policy is rooted**. The findings show that **democratic views, pro-EU, and migration friendly sentiments are correlated with each other**. The **recommendations aim to reconcile conflicts between the different political levels**. They also outline the EU’s direction: **support democratic initiatives and freedom of the press, along with open-migration policies because they enhance each other’s development**.

Emphasizing the importance of European cohesion and pro-migration approaches in the assessment of the ‘refugee crisis’, this policy research alert summarizes NOVAMIGRA studies about discourses on migration on three levels:

- ◆ EU institutional discourses and policies;
- ◆ Political anti-migration discourses in EU Member States; and
- ◆ Public pro-migration discourses.

**The chief conclusions of the research include:** international documents and conventions (e.g. Geneva Convention and EU Charter) are a frequent point of reference in the narratives of EU institutions, but compliance with them is not enforced with sufficient resolve. Current regulations, such as the Dublin Convention, leave some countries with a high degree of responsibility, and the decentralized migration and asylum system does not support solid burden-sharing among the Member States. Right-wing populists incite anti-migrant sentiments and tend to undermine the unity of the EU. The presence of newspapers that dedicate longer pieces to the human or beneficial aspect of migration positively correlates with the public acceptance of migrants.

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<sup>2</sup> The term ‘refugee crisis’ is understood in the public discourse as the high number of migrating people, however, the term should refer to the crisis of the management of migration.

**Devoted to European cooperation and building a migrant-friendly community, the summary concludes with the following selected recommendations. The EU should:**

- ◆ Promote integration and European unity instead of a differentiated asylum system.
- ◆ Launch EU information campaigns and move the conversation to issues other than immigration.
- ◆ Standardize the reception of migrants so regardless of the entry point or their future legal status they receive the same humane care. Their temporary legal status should not affect their living circumstances.
- ◆ Disarm the threat of populism by require stricter monitoring of and sanctions against populist political activities that incite hatred against refugees, migrants or minorities (even in indirect forms), or endorse anti-democratic practices/intentions.
- ◆ Empower through the press: defend and promote freedom of speech: independent journalism and critical academic research.

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## I. Introduction

The ‘refugee crisis’<sup>3</sup> has affected the European social and political discourse and policies at all levels of governance and society, including the European Union, national governments, and the civil society. The arrival of hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers at Europe’s doorstep has deepened existing divisions regarding refugee admissions and more broadly migration and immigrant integration policies. In order to regain stability, it is crucial for the EU to bridge the gap that has only deepened during this period.

NOVAMIGRA’s Work Package Values in European Migration and Refugee Policy analyses the values and norms underpinning refugee and migration policies through the narratives of certain EU bodies and examines whether and how the migration debates in and among the EU Member States affected the design of the EU refugee and migration policies. This policy research alert is based on these studies conducted on three different political levels:

- ◆ **EU institutional discourses and policies:** political discourses on values enshrined in various EU institutions and values informing their policies;
- ◆ **Political anti-migration discourses in and among EU Member States:** right-wing populist parties’ political debates on migration and European values in seven European countries (France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden) between 2013 and 2017; and
- ◆ **Public pro-migration discourses:** the represented values in pro-migration writings in quality newspapers, and their presumed effect on public opinion of migration, examined in five Member States (France, Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Sweden).

This summary focuses on the shared perspective of the analyses: What are the values that underpin these discourses? How are the values represented at these different levels? How do the respective value agents appear in public discourse? The three different political levels discussed here include the **EU, national politics, and public discourse**. This policy research alert provides recommendations aimed at promoting European values and open immigration societies and consolidating the EU’s stability and unity in regards to the question at hand.

The first section of this document elaborates on the study *Talking of Values: Understanding the Normative Discourse of EU Migration Policy*.<sup>4</sup> The paper discusses the different EU bodies’ discursive position on migration and relevant values such as solidarity, freedom of movement (Schengen), and fundamental human rights. The EU’s ineffective collective response to the crisis has challenged the idea of solidarity. The focus of the EU’s understanding has shifted from solidarity with migrants to solidarity between EU Member States (i.e. internal solidarity). This approach was most pronounced when insufficient resources from EU Member States put unfair and unequal pressure on front line Member States such as Greece and Italy. Furthermore, the study touches upon the correlation between a growing inequality in burden-sharing and the salient popularity of right-wing populists in the majority of member states. The second section of this policy research alert encapsulates the

<sup>3</sup> The term ‘refugee crisis’ is understood in the public discourse as the high number of migrating people, however, the term should refer to the crisis of the management of migration.

<sup>4</sup> A. Dimitriadi, H. Malamidis: *Talking of Values: Understanding the Normative Discourse of EU Migration Policy*, 2019, NOVAMIGRA Deliverable D2.1, <https://doi.org/10.17185/dupublico/49360> (accessed 29 September 2020).

internal NOVAMIGRA case-studies on populism, examining the history of populist parties and movements and their response to migration and refugee policies, respectively. Most of the investigated Member States experienced a shift in public opinion and an increase in public support for right-wing parties, characterized by populist political practices especially in respect of migration, i.e. demonization of migrants; labelling pro-migration incentives, activities, and organizations as antinational or anti-European. The third part elaborates on the NOVAMIGRA paper entitled *Quality Newspapers vs. Populism – Shaping pro-immigration attitudes in five EU Member States*. The study analyses how the media can be an effective tool in shaping public opinion. It concluded (through qualitative and quantitative analyses) that quality newspapers have remained the most reliable public sources challenging increasingly loud anti-immigration voices, making their support essential in building a more humane public opinion.<sup>5</sup>

In the present document, we use the definitions of “migrant”<sup>6</sup> and “asylum seeker”<sup>7</sup> promulgated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). We define “refugee” in accordance with the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees as a person “who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion”.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, it is important to mention that various political discourses assessed in the research do not always differentiate between refugees and migrants and use the umbrella-term ‘migration’ when speaking about forced migration and labour migration. Therefore, generally we follow this usage, especially in our descriptions. Although the research did not examine economic migrants, it is important to mention them because, while they do not fit into the definition of ‘refugee’, their treatment should not be less humane.<sup>9</sup> In short, in this policy research alert, we are concerned with people who have left their usual residence either for safety or economic reasons.

<sup>5</sup> V. M. Heins, *Quality Newspapers vs. Populism – Shaping pro-immigration attitudes in five EU Member States*, 2019, NOVAMIGRA Deliverable D2.3, <https://doi.org/10.17185/duerpublico/71553> (accessed 29 September 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Migrant here is understood as a general “umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence [...] across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons.” IOM: *Glossary on Migration*, 2019, p. 132. [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml\\_34\\_glossary.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf). For further elaboration on the problem, see: B. Anderson, S. Blinder: *Who Counts as a Migrant? Definitions and their consequences*, 2019. <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/who-counts-as-a-migrant-definitions-and-their-consequences/> (accessed 29 September 2020).

<sup>7</sup> “An asylum-seeker is an individual who is seeking international protection. In countries with individualized procedures, an asylum-seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which he or she has submitted it. Not every asylum-seeker will ultimately be recognized as a refugee, but every refugee is initially an asylum-seeker.” UNHCR: *Glossary of Terms*, 2006, p. 4. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/42ce7d444.html> (accessed: 29 September 2020).

<sup>8</sup> Office of the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees: *Introductory Note*, in: Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, p. 3. <https://cms.emergency.unhcr.org/documents/11982/55726/Convention+relating+to+the+Status+of+Refugees+%28signed+28+July+1951%2C+entered+into+force+22+April+1954%29+189+UNTS+150+and+Protocol+relating+to+the+Status+of+Refugees+%28signed+31+January+1967%2C+entered+into+force+4+October+1967%29+606+UNTS+267/0bf3248a-cfa8-4a60-864d-65cdfce1d47>.

The UNHCR Glossary defines similarly but with less details: “Persons recognized as refugees, by a State or UNHCR, on the basis of objective criteria related to the circumstances in their country of origin, which justify a presumption that they meet the criteria of the applicable refugee definition.” UNHCR: *Glossary of Terms*, 2006, p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> “Migrant (economic): Persons who leave their countries of origin purely for economic reasons not in any way related to the refugee definition, or in order to seek material improvements in their livelihood. Economic migrants do not fall within the criteria for refugee status and are therefore not entitled to benefit from international protection as refugees.” *Ibid.*, p. 14.

## II. The Relation between Values and Institutions

The authors of the NOVAMIGRA *Talking of Values*<sup>10</sup> paper examine which norms and values are mobilised in the narratives of different EU institutions and whether these values are shared across institutions, at least as regards the official discourse. The study focuses on the institutional narratives regarding migration/refugee policy and the values/norms from which they draw.

Since the Member States were brought together by shared values, their organizations presumably share the same values. However, various committees and bodies (e.g. Justice and Home Affairs Council, Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, European Commission, and European Council) do not interpret the discussed migration-related norms and core principles the same way, which leads to conflicts between different EU institutions. The application of norms and values by the various EU institutions shows noticeable distinctions between value-based and rights-based narratives. In the former, “values are regarded as the basis of duties, norms, rights, and human rights. Values (e.g. equality, solidarity, justice) are regarded as general aims. Furthering/realizing them is often regarded as a duty, and norms and rights, including human rights, are viewed in the light of how they further/realize values.”<sup>11</sup>

The rights-based approach, refers instead to “rights, which have associated duties, [and] are regarded as the fundamental normative concept. Values are based on a fundamental commitment to rights. When we talk of freedom(s) or equality, we may call them values, but it is really the rights and the duties associated with them, and especially human rights, that give content to what we mean.”<sup>12</sup> Both of them have their strengths and benefits. The study includes the following references to values or norms in different committees or bodies of the EU:

- ◆ The Justice and Home Affairs Council (JHA) – made up of national justice and home affairs ministers – relied on the legal framework and instrumentalized the value of internal free movement to argue for security. The JHA wanted to push the burden on the external borders instead of solving the shortcomings of the migration policy.<sup>13</sup> The European Council faced growing internal conflicts over national and supranational interests. The division within the European Council made it ineffective in responding to the ‘refugee crisis’, and the JHA was also “bound more by national interests” because the ministers lean towards their national interests over the EU’s.<sup>14</sup>
- ◆ The European Commission and the European Parliament along with the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) were predominantly on the same terms with each other. They stood up for the humanitarian approach to migration, their approach of the question was more value-based. LIBE’s documents show that its “Rapporteurs favor a more centralized system compared to the current system of individual responsibility of member-states on relocation”.<sup>15</sup> Although these bodies of the EU seemingly embrace the

<sup>10</sup> A. Dimitriadi, H. Malamidis: *Talking of Values - Understanding the Normative Discourse of EU Migration Policy*, 2019, NOVAMIGRA Deliverable D2.1, <https://doi.org/10.17185/dupublico/49360>.

<sup>11</sup> J. Philips, M. Düwell: *Conceptual Map of the “Value-Related” Grammar*, 2018, p. 15, NOVAMIGRA Deliverable D1.2 (confidential).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> A. Dimitriadi, H. Malamidis: *Talking of Values*, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

same values, their vague definitions still allow too much room for interpretation which is exploited by some Member States or politicians.

- ◆ From 2016, the LIBE and the Committee were looking forward to reforming the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and the European Asylum Support Office because burden-sharing requirements did not meet the Dublin Regulations. In the Commission's two-wave improvement plan, the first communication introduced the fairness mechanism: allocating application from front line Member States to the rest of the EU, the option of solidarity contribution,<sup>16</sup> the transformation of EASO into the European Union Agency for Asylum; the recommendations of the second package included the standardization of the procedural arrangements, harmonisation of the standards for recognising those who are in need of international protection, setting uniform reception conditions in the Member States, and ensuring legal and safe channels for migrants coming to Europe.<sup>17</sup> The LIBE's Rapporteur concluded that the refugee allocations should have an influence on the European Structural and Investment Funds allocated to each nation.
- ◆ Both CEAS and EASO were formed on the basis of the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 Protocol which declare that the right for asylum and non-refoulement is an undeniable principle. International documents (e.g. the Lisbon Treaty or the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights) are still the references for the most prominent and relevant values in migration policies and European unity. The most frequently invoked values include solidarity, cooperation (unity), human rights, dignity, freedom of movement, and security.<sup>18</sup>

The authors of the discussed paper show that burden-sharing was a prominently recurring topic and sometimes overshadowed values. When disruptive right-wing populist parties and politicians undermined the value-based discourse on migration, discussions shifted to burden-sharing. In order to preserve cooperation between Member States, internal solidarity, i.e. solidarity within the EU became a frequently discussed issue. Various groups rejected the admission of refugees for different reasons, and understanding these differences is crucial to properly assess the problem of burden-sharing.

- ◆ An equity approach argues that not all countries fulfil their legal obligations. First and foremost, In 2015, "Sweden formally requested the suspension of its obligations under the Council Decisions", rejecting the reallocation of asylum-seekers from the front-line Member States, arguing that Sweden had already taken its part in the asylum-seekers aid, and first other Member States should "fulfil their commitment to solidarity and responsibility-sharing."<sup>19</sup> In similar fashion, the Polish Law and Justice (PiS) party argued

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<sup>16</sup> The proposed solidarity contribution plan demands from Member States to pay the EU (250 000€) for each applicant whom they reallocated to another Member State. LIBE Rapporteur, Cecilia Wikström shrewdly criticized the idea claiming, it is unacceptable to put price tags on people. *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>18</sup> P. Parolari, A. Facchi, N. Riva: *Report on the normative content, genesis, historical background, and implementation of the EU Charter – Executive Summary* (public) of NOVAMIGRA Deliverable D1.3 (confidential). [https://novamigra.eu/index.php?s=file\\_download&id=10](https://novamigra.eu/index.php?s=file_download&id=10) (accessed 29 September 2020).

<sup>19</sup> A. Dimitriadi, H. Malamidis: *Talking of Values*, p. 35.

that they fulfilled their obligations by admitting Ukrainian and Belarusian labour migrants. PiS conveniently omitted the fact that Ukrainians rarely qualify for refugee status.

- ◆ Flexible solidarity was proposed by the Visegrad Group which argued that EU Member States should have the right to decide on the specific form of contribution to the ‘refugee crisis’ solutions. They also emphasized that “any distribution mechanism should be voluntary.”<sup>20</sup> The idea of flexible solidarity is similar to the solidarity contribution but would give more leeway to national governments and create other options for less developed economies. However, the loose definition of the mechanism leaves too much space for free interpretation, therefore countries might escape their responsibilities with cheap exchanges. Although the concept of flexible solidarity does not explicitly touch upon the reasons of rejecting refugee admissions, Hungary and Poland assert that cultural differences are irreconcilable and therefore they refuse to admit refugees (this, of course, implies that they refer to people who come from the Middle-East or Africa).

The request for equity stems, on the one hand, from structural errors and aims to amend the legislative shortcomings while it strengthens cooperation between Member States. On the other hand, other reasons for rejecting the admission of refugees – as the research on populism shows – are founded in cultural racism, although subtly and in different degrees. In this respect, “solidarity is used both as a value for encouragement but also as a forewarning in the Commission’s discourse.” Rights-based narratives aim to restore internal solidarity through referring to international documents (e.g. the 1951 Convention and the Charta) which the Member States should mutually observe. Equity in this form does not belong to the value-based narratives because fairness is not a value on its own, rather a bridge between solidarity and responsibility, i.e. fulfilling international legal obligations.

Human rights are among the most fundamental values in (inter)actions with migrants, but even such a core concept has been used for political purposes. “Human rights become perhaps more prominent in the discourse pertaining to cooperation with third countries. Indeed, a crucial element of externalisation of migration control for the EU is that the third countries incorporate fully the human rights dimension in their respective policies.”<sup>21</sup> Human rights turned out to be relevant only in the case of returning migrants<sup>22</sup> or encouraging them to stay outside of Europe.

Since the 2015 ‘refugee crisis’, border management has become a central topic while internal solidarity (as burden-sharing) and securitization have been reoccurring more and more often in the discussions on migration policies. This discursive shift has produced a hierarchy of values, i.e. solidarity has been subordinated to security. Although border security has a long history in the EU,<sup>23</sup> and is by definition inherent to the Schengen Area, in 2015, it returned to the agenda with renewed intensity. The Commission proposed a regulation on the European Border and Coast Guard which aimed to “improve the internal security of the European Union” but most importantly, to “safeguard the principle of free movement of persons.”<sup>24</sup> In this context, burden-sharing (i.e. solidarity between Member States) has been rejected because right-wing populist parties consider (and misrepresent) migrants and refugees

<sup>20</sup> Zs. Végh: ‘Flexible Solidarity’, 2016. <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/flexible-solidarity> (accessed 29 September 2020).

<sup>21</sup> A. Dimitriadi, H. Malamidis: *Talking of Values*, p. 49.

<sup>22</sup> This can be viewed as a friendlier term for refoulement. See: *Ibid.*, pp. 50-52.

<sup>23</sup> “Securitisation of migration is not a product of 9/11 or the 2004 and 2005 terrorist attacks in Europe. Rather, it pre-exists these events and can be traced all the way back to the early days of the Union (Huysmans, 2006).” *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

as a potential source of danger. Thus, in this argument the right-wing populists emphasised the safeguarding of the external borders. For the EP and the Commission, fairness as a value appeared to counter the disruption of the Union. Fairness was used as a bridge between solidarity and responsibility. However, it does not address the problem itself; fairness is only a reaction to the growing division. For the Commission, the role of Frontex seems rather crucial in “assisting member-states and saving migrants lives, mostly by contributing to national efforts such as the Italian Mare Nostrum.”<sup>25</sup> While some EU institutions considered FRONTEX an important agent in managing migration,<sup>26</sup> the agency received much criticism from civil society organizations. The agency often played a role in turning back boats amid the EU’s deferred response, it has been blamed for deaths at sea, and its actions have been strongly criticized by civil society members.<sup>27</sup> By pushing boats carrying asylum seekers back to the sea, FRONTEX put people in danger and violated the norm/principle of non-refoulement the cornerstone of the global refugee policy. The Commission wanted to further increase the agency’s role in returning refugees to their country of origin or the third country before entering the EU.<sup>28</sup> The reformation of FRONTEX had been underway even before the migration crisis and the EU tried to propose reforms during the discussed period, without significant changes or success.<sup>29</sup>

The EU faces two cardinal issues: the values that serve as the foundation of the policies are not well defined and this ambiguity was exploited by some countries. Furthermore, burden-sharing is dysfunctional, on the one hand, because of the “renegade” countries (such as members of the V4 group) which do not participate in the burden sharing, and on the other hand, the disproportional burden on the front-line Member States. Although solidarity is usually reduced to an inter-state political value, fortunately, some speeches still invoke it in a humane sense. “Cecilia Malmström (at the time European Commissioner for Home Affairs) called for an increase in search and rescue patrols by FRONTEX and noted that “we have to act at European level to show concrete solidarity both with migrants and with countries confronted with extreme migratory pressure.”<sup>30</sup>

### III. Populist Parties and Migration

Populist parties have gained wider support since the early 2010s, and the 2015 refugee-crisis only strengthened their positions. They were able to send representatives to the European Parliament (EP) and in some cases to the Council and the committees as well. This section summarizes the conclusions of unpublished country-studies written by members of the NOVAMIGRA consortium. The draft papers look at values and how the analysed populist parties have mobilized these values in their assessment of migration. The values derive either from the narratives of the respective parties or their political acts. The summary describes the features of populism from two perspectives: self-proclaimed political behaviour and value-related migration assessment. The parties, introduced below, pose problems and

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>26</sup> The European Council considered FRONTEX as the agent in management of external borders. “The European Council further underlined the importance of solidarity and cooperation in the management of external borders [...]. Cooperation in the management of external borders is an indirect reference to FRONTEX.” *Ibid.*, p. 18. Also see: p. 20.

<sup>27</sup> A. Bilgic: *Push-back and the violence of Frontex*, n.d., <https://civilsocietyfutures.org/push-back-violence-frontex/> (accessed 29 September 2020).

<sup>28</sup> “In this context, Frontex was considered an important actor in the field of returns and, therefore, its operations should be in line with Union *acquis* and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.” A. Dimitriadi, H. Malamidis: *Talking of Values*, p. 52.

<sup>29</sup> “Throughout 2016 and 2017 institutions sought to monitor progress on the EU-Turkey Statement, as well as moving discussion forward on the proposal to reform the CEAS (May 4th, 2016) and transforming FRONTEX into a European Border and Coastguard Agency.” *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

a threat to the EU in two aspects: they oppose and undermine the authority and legitimacy of EU legislation, and they present migration as a threat to security to justify the inhumane treatment of people. Right-wing populists identify migration as a threat to social order and European culture, claiming it cannot be reconciled with humanitarian values and decisions in migration policies, and incite political action against migrants, which goes against treaties and conventions already accepted by all EU and UN Member States (and against basic human dignity). Here, populism is understood as a political discourse which relies, first, on the polarization of society between the establishment and the underdog and second, populism is a party or movement which claims to represent an excluded/repressed part of society.<sup>31</sup> In respect to migration, the only examined leftist party, the Greek Syriza, pursues migrant-friendly politics, thus this report generally elaborates on right-wing parties.

The French National Front (FN, now: Rassemblement National) has always had an anti-immigration and xenophobic agenda. Although previously it had not had significant support from the electorate, since the 2010s their popularity has increased and the 'refugee crisis' positively affected their election-results. Their populist rhetoric is characterized by the call for direct democracy against the ruling elites, posing themselves as defenders of civilizational and cultural identity. Marine Le Pen went as far as demanding the permanent closure of borders to bar all migrants, whom she regularly associates with terrorism.

The German Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident (PEGIDA) only appeared shortly before the 2015 migration crisis. In the beginning, the AfD tried to distance itself from PEGIDA which openly took a far-right position. The 2015 immigration wave brought no changes in the politics of the party and the movement, they only gained more publicity. Their populist tendencies are characterized by anti-Muslim sentiments, accusing migrants of misusing the asylum system, claiming that most of the refugees are simply free-riders and welfare exploiters. During the years spanned by this analysis, they feared European centralization by the EU, and made allusions to changes to the constitution that would undermine the democratic system. Furthermore, in their view, only highly qualified migrants, needed by the labour market, should be accepted.

In Greece, the developments have taken a different path from the predominant pattern of the advancing right-wing populist parties in other countries, because the 2015 elections were won by the leftist populist Syriza which is pro-migration. However, they had to form a coalition with the right-wing populist party, Independent Greeks (ANEL) which is strongly against migration. Although their coalition constrained ANEL from openly endorsing anti-migration politics, ANEL remained xenophobic in its approach and perspective. They both claimed that they represent the people (although from a different perspective, with a different understanding of 'the people'), claiming – despite being governing parties at the time – to be anti-elitists, and designating the EU as the elites. As the party farthest to the right, Golden Dawn is not considered populist and are not relevant to our topic. Although Golden Dawn entered the parliament (with 7%), they had no direct impact on the legislative process. However, they were involved in criminal activities targeting migrants (as well as students, LGBT+, activists, and union members).

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<sup>31</sup> Y. Stavrakakis, I. Andreadis, G. Katsambekis: *A new populism index at work: identifying populist candidates and parties in the contemporary Greek context*, in: *European Politics and Society*, 18(4), 2017, pp. 446-464.

Hungary is in a special situation because, since 2010, its governing party, FIDESZ, has won absolute majorities in Parliament in three consecutive elections. This situation renders the other parties (populist or not) irrelevant, although the other far-right populist party, Jobbik, which has been stagnating with around 12% of the parliament for years, has been heavily involved in inciting xenophobia and harassing refugees during the crisis. The absolute majority provides FIDESZ with a strong argument supporting its claims to represent the people, although gerrymandering has played an important role in their re-election. Still, government decisions favour international corporations and the national bourgeoisie over the people. The party gained indirect control over most of the media (both national and local), which means it has an overwhelming influence on the public opinion. Since 2010, FIDESZ has been using anti-elitist rhetoric scapegoating George Soros and the EU for imposing malicious values on Hungary in different forms: forcing Hungary to take in migrants and funding civil society organizations. The wide-spread demagogic views laid the foundation for FIDESZ to legitimize the abolishment or weakening of democratic institutions and practices and to replace them with authoritarian structures.

In the Netherlands, Party for Freedom (PVV) and Forum for Democracy (FVD) were designated right-wing populist parties. They are characterized by such ideas as the superiority of Western values and culture, a preference for personal authority (e.g. party leader), and the claim they represent the people against the elites (PVV). They were pushing for national sovereignty and embracing national pride, while identifying immigrants with criminals, promoting and fuelling anti-Islamic views. They urged 'the people' to regain control over their own immigration policies, deny permanent residency permits in cases of unsuccessful integration. However, these Dutch parties are distinct from other European populists in some of the values they promote: they claim that the emancipation of women and homosexuals is under attack by alien cultures, and call for direct democracy (FVD). In 2017, FVD entered Parliament as a new party with 2 seats. PVV's position has been fluctuating between 10-14% of the total seats.

In Poland, Law and Justice (PiS), Kukiz'15, and Congress of the New Right are considered populist parties and they have had varied political influence since 2015. All three parties campaigned against elites to a different extent, but contempt for the EU has been a common theme. PiS attacked the Polish political elites from the early 2000s and after forming a government in 2015, its anti-establishment agenda shifted and the EU became its new target. Xenophobic and racist threads were present in the agenda of the populist parties prior to 2015 as well. During the 'refugee crisis', the parties listed above exploited the opportunity and focused their agenda on migrants. Based on cultural and biological racism, they normalized Islamophobia, once arguing that "a significant portion of Muslims do not integrate" (Witold Waszczykowski, PiS); thus, identifying migrants as a security issue for Poland. They fiercely opposed relocation and the refugee quotas.

In Sweden, only the Sweden Democrats (SD) are considered populist and they proposed extremely restrictive policies on migration, but other established parties from the conservative coalition, Alliance, to the Social Democrats also supported some forms of restrictions. SD's presented the EU as a threat to national sovereignty. The party is characterized by cultural racism because it claimed that cultures cannot mix and migrants cannot integrate into society (they are prone to criminal activity) which leads to the decay of social cohesion. SD also presents migrants as usufructuaries and illegitimate competitors who only exploit the welfare system. There are voices that would accept skilled migrant workers.

Although Italy is not among the examined countries, the prosecution of Pia Klemp and Carola Rackete, the captains of rescue boats *Iuventa* and *Sea-Watch 3*, became well known, and their cases show that the principle/norm of non-refoulement of the 1951 Convention is threatened by leading politicians, such as Matteo Salvini.

The intersection of the internal studies outlines the following features of populism:

- ◆ *Anti-elitism* is a core element of populism.<sup>32</sup> In this case, the EU or the national governing parties are considered to be the elites and presented as oppressors of the nation. Furthermore, anti-elitism is based on the parties' claim for popular representation. These parties often accuse the EU of centralization (depriving countries of their national liberty) and malicious migration policies.<sup>33</sup> This form of anti-elitism greatly discourages trust in the EU among the people and, by proposing to respond to the perceived oppression with oppression, they encourage anti-democratic sentiments.
- ◆ The self-proclaimed *representation of the people*<sup>34</sup> is another core element of populism. This claim builds on polarizing society into two camps, 'us' and 'them'. Furthermore, this argument presents particular interests as the general will. In the light of migration, this representation is revealed to imply a seriously exclusive sense of the "people", usually excluding migrants (or minorities). In many cases, these parties are not even backed by the people.
- ◆ While the *anti-immigration* agenda is not a defining feature of populist politics,<sup>35</sup> it is generally present in right-wing populist parties, in part, because of its effectiveness in propaganda campaigns. Migrants are the most visible and favoured target of right-wing populists who identify foreigners as a threat to society. The social and cultural threat was an important argument in rejecting reallocations. If refugee admission is sometimes accepted among right-wing populists, it is usually only for harnessing their skill and labour-power, an argument mostly used in Germany and Sweden. Meanwhile, the status of the refugees is consistently attacked, blurring the difference between refugees and immigrants, allowing the parties to reject migrants and refugees simultaneously in public speeches. Although before 2015 anti-immigration was not on the agenda of most right-wing populist parties, the refugee crisis led to the rapid proliferation of anti-immigration arguments.
- ◆ *Identity politics* (including, to a varying extent, both national and European identity concepts) is similarly significant; RN, FIDESZ, PVV, PiS, and the Sweden Democrats often campaign with a call for preserving national and/or European cultural identity that – according to their claims – is under attack by migrants. While cultural differences are overemphasized, the economic value of the migrants for the EU (through their labour) is

<sup>32</sup> C. Mudde: *Populism. A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. And E. Laclau: *On Populist Reason*, London: Verso, 2005.

<sup>33</sup> For example, in Germany: Alternative für Deutschland; in Hungary: Fidesz; in the Netherlands: Partij voor de Vrijheid and Forum voor Democratie as well. See: D. Bebnowski: *Repräsentanz: Entstehungsgeschichte und Flügel der AfD* in D. Bebnowski: *Die Alternative für Deutschland. Aufstieg und gesellschaftliche Repräsentanz einer rechten populistischen Partei*, Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2015, pp. 19-31.

<sup>34</sup> K. Vossen: *The power of populism: Geert Wilders and the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands*, New York: Routledge, 2017, p. 29.

<sup>35</sup> The Greek leftist party, Syriza is usually identified as a populist party but their approach to migration is highly inclusive and supports emancipatory measures.

recognized in this discourse. When it comes to their respective concepts of culture, there are significant differences among the countries.

The four features described above are based on the claims of the populist parties themselves, while the remaining attributes follow from the analysis of the country studies.

- ◆ *Scapegoating* is used the most frequently to incite hatred against migrants and refugees by presenting them as dangerous elements in society or the sources of most of social problems and ills. Refugees and migrants are depicted as usufructuaries who gain illegitimate access to the social welfare system and who do not want to enter the labour market, or sometimes, on the contrary, they are presented as cheap labour on the market.
- ◆ Scaremongering is supplemented by *securitization*. It is most prevalent in the case of the RS, which emphasizes the need for increased security measures and closing the borders for migrants. FIDESZ built a border fence in 2015, and both parties allude to the identification between migrants and terrorists. These parties question fundamental declarations such as the European Charter of Fundamental Rights and its ideals including: the universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity.

The country-studies concluded that the development of

- ◆ *'Alt-right' rhetoric* has greatly contributed to the advancement of the right-wing populists' territorial gain. These rhetorical methods include the use of *euphemism* and the *replacement of vocabulary* (to disguise their core ideas as to make them politically correct); to shift from ethnic racism to *cultural racism* to avoid being labelled as racist (while stating that the cultural differences threaten European identity and values)<sup>36</sup>; generalization of immigrants (to label and dehumanize them). Furthermore, the modern populist discourse relies on numbers, statistics, and abstractions, making the populists' agenda ostensibly compatible with rational speech, while their fundamental views of migrants remains racist and visceral. These persuasive methods have changed the general discourse by forcing other parties to accommodate these linguistic forms and normalize anti-immigration sentiments, thus they aim at the "rightification of the right" and the dissemination of populism. Its power lies not so much in its direct persuasion but in pushing the general language and discourse towards the far-right thus influencing the whole of the political imagination.
- ◆ The far-right co-opts concepts or phrases to support their current arguments, e.g. they refer to the freedom of movement (Schengen) to conceal their anti-establishment agenda and attack EU policies cloaking their message in the language of self-protection. Practically, front line states are the only ones exposed to migration because many countries (e.g. Germany) have laws to send back asylum-seekers to their first arrival-country, or the first entering point in the EU.

Most of these features may look obvious because we experience them on a daily basis. The case of the Polish PiS clearly demonstrates that political gain, or national chauvinism are the only significant values

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<sup>36</sup> G. Kauffman, *Le nouveau FN - Les vieux habits du populisme*, Paris: Seuil, 2016.

for the populist parties because migration is just another issue to be exploited, and not a humanitarian matter to be solved.

#### IV. The Role of the Media

In the third NOVAMIGRA study, *Quality Newspapers vs. Populism: Shaping pro-immigration attitudes in five EU Member States*<sup>37</sup>, the research team examined how certain print media promotes pro-migration ideas and how these ideas are reflected in public attitudes to migration. Volker Heins and colleagues analyse French, German, Hungarian, Polish, and Swedish written media that publish in-depth or investigative articles. Research shows that quality newspapers are rather impervious to demonizing rhetoric, e.g. scapegoating or cultural racism, through their thorough, in-depth elaboration of the topics, and it concludes that quality newspapers are crucial in countering the populist domination of public discourse.<sup>38</sup>

**Comparing discourses on immigration society, contrast popular and elite discourses on refugee and immigration policies.** The research aimed to go beyond the usual negative framing of migration by analysing media which generally tend to advocate migration. What we can infer from the role of the examined papers holds double importance, since quality newspapers can:

- ◆ shape normative attitudes;
- ◆ reinforce already existing attitudes.<sup>39</sup>

The analysed newspapers can be placed into two categories by the most prevalent frames used in the research (however, it is important to note that the different frames do not exclude each other):

- ◆ *dignity frame* encompasses journals which focus on the humanitarian side of migration, more often present the lives of the refugees and include their voices, invoke empathy, reinforce moral obligations, and are affirmative on cultural diversity and integration;
- ◆ *prosperity frame* designates newspapers which argue for a pro-migration standpoint from an economic perspective: the new labour force is beneficial for the economy, and the reproduction of the population. Arguments within this frame are more likely to make a distinction between migrants and refugees, or skilled workers and usufructuaries.

The empathy frame has been less common, although the paper points out that it is equally important to present migrant and refugee perspectives and voices as well. It is rather newspaper specific and an honoured practice to use the stories of famous artists and athletes with migrant background to create an affirmative perspective for cultural diversity.

It is a recurring opinion in print media that the treatment of migrants is a reflection of the moral fibre and general values of the given country. In Poland, a few articles presented humanitarian values as part of Christian tradition and utilized in arguments for a more humanitarian treatment of migrants.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> V. M. Heins (2020): *Quality Newspapers vs. Populism – Shaping pro-immigration attitudes in five EU Member States*, NOVAMIGRA Deliverable D2.3, <https://doi.org/10.17185/dupublico/71553> (accessed 29 September 2020).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17; p. 27.

<sup>39</sup> “Normative attitudes can be transformed through media, but equally important is the reinforcement of already existing attitudes in society.” *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

Besides this, economy-based arguments highlight the importance of the distinction between migrants and refugees and collides with the anti-immigration perspectives. In Poland, public discussions include Ukrainian and Belarus refugees filling the Polish quota, and it is not only right but important as well, since other countries might not even think about these people as refugees, yet a large number of Ukrainians are economic migrants. Nonetheless, the previous point claims that regardless of the status and the country of origin, the change towards a more humane treatment is essential for the EU.

Furthermore, the study shows that there is a linear correlation between freedom of the press and pro-immigration attitudes. For instance, while the Swedish pro-migration dailies (Svenska Dagbladet or Aftonbladet) discussed and questioned migration policies, the public opinion was still migration friendly.

In Hungary, after the government and its network of allies took over most of the mass media, public opinion has been turned against migration.

Hungary's example is alarming since the right-wing populist government either acquired or closed the major opposition newspapers, which means that by now pro-migration voices are heard only in academic and intellectual circles with little impact on public opinion. The decrease in freedom of the press is directly proportional to the level of xenophobia. This correlation between anti-immigration sentiments and press freedom demonstrates us the importance of independent media outlets.

## V. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Before making recommendations, we must answer what constitutes a successful EU migration/refugee policy.

- ◆ It satisfies the **claims, concerns, and needs of refugees and migrants**. Channels must be provided for people to communicate their concerns;
- ◆ Policy must also include an easily **accessible feedback system** for migrants' input;
- ◆ Refugee and migration policies must correspond with existing **European and international laws**. Moreover, these policies must align with the **values** that are fundamental to the EU treaties;
- ◆ Refugee and migration policies must **convince the populations** of the EU Member States that refugees have a **right to protection** and that right is also our obligation, i.e. their human dignity shall not be violated in Europe;
- ◆ The policies must be **beneficial** to the future of the EU and must not hinder cooperation between the Member States.

The following recommendations concern general and fundamental (philosophical) issues, but also more specific (political) topics. They are the products of the conclusions drawn from the studies and country reports in NOVAMIGRA's research summarized in this report. The suggestions aim for a more united European political perspective with a society more open to migration. The goal of these recommendations is to support policies which strengthen civil organizations, the press, and initiatives which are independent of governments, especially in states ruled by populists.

### 1. Improve the quality of reception of migrants and refugees and endorse integration instead of the return of people

Currently, the reception of any kind of migrants largely depends on the host country regardless of the existing directives. The legal process, may it be short or long, forces the migrants and potential refugees into an environment that may not ensure their human dignity and fundamental rights. A collective European response should **address their humane and comfortable reception** and **a swift processing of asylum applications**. Regardless of the future legal status of the person, everyone deserves to be accommodated in a proper environment and treated with dignity. The EU should address the quality of reception centres and set up a standard acceptable to everyone. A better reception system would help to **build trust** between the partners and **facilitate integration**. The EU should set an example for its citizens. Instead of emphasizing the policy of return of those who do not meet asylum requirements, a new migration policy should define ways of admission for those who embrace European values. Refugee admission policies must be fair and non-discriminatory on the basis of race, religion, gender or social status. Asylum seekers must be accorded a due process to launch their asylum claims.

### 2. Launch EU information campaigns and move the conversation to issues other than immigration

The EU should launch massive information campaigns in Member States whose governments violate European norms and values. These campaigns, to be organized together with domestic NGOs and citizen initiatives, should **highlight the positive sides of the EU**, including its **core values, harmonic coexistence with migrants**, and the success of integration and acceptance. Such information campaigns must avoid any paternalistic overtones, and provide broadcasting time for EU information messages (e.g. make EuroNews accessible in all the official EU languages and freely available in every European household). The message to be conveyed is that we Europeans belong together and that “being European” is constituted by fundamental EU norms and values. The information campaign should also explain the historical context of migration to facilitate the understanding of the role of migration in respect to economic growth and social development (i.e. the strengthening of the welfare state). In Europe, the mutual acceptance of other national values has been a precondition for mobility and cooperation between European countries. After all, a more effective approach means that, instead of migration, political discussions involving the EU and its citizens could focus on issues such as housing, welfare, employment and crime, such as political corruption, that affect daily lives, for example.

### 3. Disarm the threat of populism

Populist parties impede the development of a more inclusive migration and refugee policy, so the issue cannot be understood solely by looking at an asylum policy that focuses on the effectiveness of the procedures. The EU has to resist the political forces that fuel anti-immigration sentiments. The position of different populist forces varies greatly. While the Hungarian and Polish right-wing populists form their governments and have power, in other

Member States, populists are only in the opposition or are not in Parliament at all. The former group poses a more serious threat as they have the power to **influence policymaking at the European level**. They are also able to use EU funds to reinforce their populist politics and **turn public opinion against migration and refugees within their countries**. The EU's very survival and future require counter measures against these practices.

- ◆ We suggest that the respective EP fractions monitor emerging populist tendencies that may endanger democratic views and approaches.
- ◆ Stand up to and call out politicians or parties that rely on fake news in their speeches and propaganda.
- ◆ Sanction politicians and governments who incite hatred and exclusion against migrants and minorities, e.g. withdraw funds from such countries, or curtail speaking time in the EP. The EU Fundamental Rights Agency's scope of duties should be extended. Involve the Agency in the preparation and execution of the EU budget. Failure to observe fundamental rights should be given more weight when it comes to budget allocations.

#### 4. Empower through the press: defend and promote freedom of speech: independent journalism and critical academic research

The development of a successful migration-friendly society cannot be concerned only with migration and asylum policy, but should also address the attitude of the host countries as well. The rising support for right-wing populist parties indicates the growth of anti-immigrant sentiments in society. To tackle this tendency the EU should develop new ways to **support local opinion-makers** in illiberal democracies.

Since quality newspapers and other media are a crucial factor in shaping attitudes towards immigration and hence to the EU itself, their freedom must be protected by all means. Hungary and Poland should not be allowed an unchallenged and systematic assault on the freedom of press. The **independence of the judiciary, academic freedom and press freedom** are closely intertwined, which makes legal action all the more necessary. The EU should expand financial and legal support to independent journalism in Member States where media freedom and media pluralism are threatened. Financial support can take the form of grants available to journals that meet value-based EU criteria and prioritize analysis and counter populism by organizing conferences and research. In countries where right-wing populist governments are in a strong position and have influence over the media, the possibility of public debates is limited. The EU should support social sciences that openly oppose populist politics in their research, and fund events to facilitate new platforms for publicity. Funding applications should be reviewed at the EU rather than at the national level.

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## About NoVaMigra

Several, partly interconnected crises have profoundly challenged the European project in recent years. In particular, reactions to the arrival of 1.25 million refugees in 2015 called into question the idea(l) of a unified Europe. What is the impact of the so-called migration and refugee crisis on the normative foundations and values of the European Union? And what will the EU stand for in the future?

NOVAMIGRA studies these questions with a unique combination of social scientific analysis, legal and philosophical normative reconstruction and theory.

This project:

- Develops a precise descriptive and normative understanding of the current “value crisis”;
- Assesses possible evolutions of European values; and
- Considers Europe’s future in light of rights, norms and values that could contribute to overcoming the crises.

The project is funded with around 2.5 million Euros under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme for a period of three years.

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