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Unpacking the Double Standards in EU's Response to Refugee Crises: Post-structural Discourse Analysis and Identity Construction during the 2015 Refugee Crisis and 2022 Ukrainian Refugee Crisis.

Adamova, Viktoria

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Governance and Global Affairs

Unpacking the Double Standards in EU's Response to Refugee Crises:

Post-structural Discourse Analysis and Identity Construction during
the 2015 Refugee Crisis and 2022 Ukrainian Refugee Crisis.



(Hajjaj, 2021)

Viktoria Adamova

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Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs, Leiden University

Supervisor: Dr. Carina van de Wetering

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Abstract:

The thesis unpacked the double standards that has been used as a metaphor to describe the contrasting responses of the European Union (EU) regarding managing the 2015 refugee crisis and 2022 Ukrainian refugee crisis. The study, applying poststructuralist discourse analysis analysed official discourse of the EU institutions and explored how do constructed identities enabled different responses to the 2015 refugee crisis and 2022 Ukrainian refugee crisis. The study found that while spatial otherness was more dominant during the 2015 refugee crisis, temporal otherness and the notion of “return of a war” in Europe determined the discourse in 2022. Moreover, different construction of threat and solidarity also contributed to the different treatment towards Ukrainian refugees and refugees fleeing from Middle East and Africa. The research contributed to crucial examination of the EU’s identity as a moral global authority and promoted more inclusive and fairer treatment of refugees fleeing conflict and war.

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1 INTRODUCTION

"This isn't a place, with all due respect, like Iraq or Afghanistan, that has seen conflict raging for decades, ... You know, this is a relatively civilized, relatively European — I have to choose those words carefully, too — a city where you wouldn't expect that or hope that it's going to happen," – comments by Charlie D'Agata - a senior CBS News correspondent - who reported from Kyiv in the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in early 2022, caused a widespread backlash that re-opened the discussions of Western double standards (Twaij, 2022, NBC). European governments have opened borders and European citizens have opened their homes in an unprecedented showing of solidarity towards Ukrainian refugees fleeing their country after the war broke out in Ukraine which ended the peace in Europe since the World War II (Venturi and Vallianatou, 2022). The overwhelming migration of Ukrainians fleeing the conflict prompted EU to introduce the Temporary Protection Directive that grants refugee asylum to the Ukrainians (Larsen, 2022). The world witnessed a shift in migration policy as well as the political discourse in the European Union (EU), with Ursula van der Leyen stating the EU *"welcome with open arms those Ukrainians who have to flee from Putin's bombs"* (European Commission, 2022).

Although, the wave of solidarity that Ukraine has received is inspiring, it showcases the standards and abilities of Western foreign policy in migration that have not been previously applied. In fact, amidst Russian invasion of Ukraine, Europe faced another mass displacement that broke records – the 2015 refugee crisis where over 1.3 million refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq sought refuge in Europe. For instance, Syrian refugees saw a very different reception than the Ukrainians currently fleeing Russia's assault have. While there was initial positive response to the significant influxes of refugees from Germany or Sweden, which operated open-door policies (DW, 2020), Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán called arriving refugees fleeing the Syrian war a Muslim invasion in 2015 and built border walls to fence them off (Schultheis, 2018). Poland entered a state of emergency when thousands of refugees from Afghanistan and Iraq attempted to cross the border from Belarus into the European Union (BBC News, 2021). While all eyes on Ukraine, the Greek coastguard continues to this day illegally push back asylum-seekers crossing from Turkey while Spanish police forcefully repel those who dare to jump the fence in Melilla (Venturi and Vallianatou, 2022).

The European Union's response to the 2015 refugee crisis and the 2022 Ukrainian refugee crisis has been subject to criticism for its apparent double standards in dealing with the two events. While it is easy to critique the double standards and this bias that we have seen in

media and the rhetoric of political elites who warmly welcome Ukrainian refugees but opt for more hostile treatment of refugees from Syria and other non-European countries. However, acknowledging these faults in Western foreign policy should not obscure the focus of today's atrocities – Russia's imperialist ambitions (Lievent, 2015) and legacy of unprovoked aggression in its neighbourhood. Nevertheless, the puzzle at the heart of this paper is to understand how these contrasting treatments of the refugees emerged in the EU's response. On one hand, is understandable why Ukraine is receiving a flurry of European support (albeit not a direct military intervention) during its grave humanitarian crisis, considering its proximity to the EU and a different political context. It is also understandable why other regions of the world suffering from state-sponsored violence or external invasion are not. Nevertheless, taking into account Europe's proud self-portrayal as a moral and ethical authority, it is still worth examining discursive practises and identities that enabled and make possible such contrasting responses. In talks on EU identity, Manners' (2002) idea of Normative Power Europe (NPE) has taken on a substantial amount of significance. The fact that NPE is well-received in EU policy circles supports its role in advancing a particular conception of "Europe" as a political body that disseminates its standards and positions them as an example for the rest of the world. Although the European Union positions itself as a champion of human rights on the international stage, the actions it has implemented in response to the Mediterranean refugee crisis were found to be problematic from a human rights standpoint (Barbulescu, 2016). The objective of this thesis is to bring awareness and delve into the discourses, identities that are constructed through the language and its meanings of these different responses and then narrow the gap.

Thus, the research question that this thesis will seek to answer is *how do identities constructed in the EU's official discourse enabled different responses to the 2015 refugee crisis and 2022 Ukrainian refugee crisis?* By examining the ways in which Western countries have responded differently to different crises, this thesis can shed light on any biases or power imbalances and dynamics that may exist in the international community. Also, it can help to identify instances where certain groups or regions are being unfairly excluded from international assistance, thus promoting greater justice and fairness in the international system (Venturi and Vallianatou, 2022). Through poststructural discourse analysis, the thesis into discursive practises, identities, its meanings and power dynamics that shaped the EU's response and highlight underlying biases and inconsistencies that occurred in their responses. The thesis identifies possible disparities and variations in the treatment of various refugee groups by

contrasting and assessing the responses during the 2015 refugee crisis and the 2022 Ukrainian refugee crisis. This analysis highlights the existence of unequal discourses, where various refugees may be given varying degrees of inspection, support, or exclusion based on constructed identities, otherness - whether spatial or temporal and perceived threats.

The thesis paper firstly provides an overview of both refugee crises in Chapter 2, highlighting the difference in the EU's response to further illustrate the puzzle in place. Chapter 3 will provide an overview of previous studies as well as finding related to the literature of various discourses between the relevant actors such as the EU-Russia-Ukraine relations, EU-Middle East relations and studies on refugees and migration. The following section (Chapter 4) will introduce poststructuralism as a theoretical framework, applying mostly works by Lene Hansen (2006) and concepts of "*othering*" as well as post-positivists approach by Roxanne Doty (1993). Research design and navigating poststructuralist discourse analysis will be explained in Chapter 5 with instructions on how the

2 BACKGROUND

The writing discourse analysis of primary texts requires knowledge of the cases in question, and knowledge comes, in part, from reading standard works on the history, processes, events, and debates constituting a foreign policy phenomenon (Hansen, 2006). Thus, the following chapter will provide a short overview of the two cases in question – the two refugee crises that were labelled as the Ukrainian refugee crisis in 2022 and 2015 refugee crisis, as well as contrasting policy responses from the EU.

2.1 Ukraine Refugee Crisis

Ukrainian refugee crisis occurred after the escalation of the international armed conflict between Ukraine and Russia. In February 2022, Russia launched an unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, resulting in one of the deadliest and most violent conflicts in Europe since the Second World War. The conflict is rooted in decades of political struggle within Ukraine, as leaders have tried to navigate the deep divisions between a Western-oriented, nationalists and a Russian-speaking population in the East who favour closer ties with Russia (Masters, 2023). Tensions escalated in 2013 when former President Viktor Yanukovich rejected an association agreement with the EU, leading to widespread protests, and subsequently, armed conflicts in mid-2014 when Russia annexed Crimea and supported separatists in the Donbas region (acaps,

2019). Eight years of fighting have resulted in the deaths of over 3,000 people, forced more than 850,000 people from their homes, and left almost 3 million in need of aid. Eight years later, the conflict escalated into a war (International Rescue Committee, 2023). The 2022 invasion was the result of Russia's increasing frustration and resentment of the post-Cold War expansion of the EU/NATO into the former Soviet sphere of influence. According to some experts, the invasion may have been driven by Russia's fear that Ukraine's progress towards becoming a modern, Western-style democracy would pose a threat to its own autocratic regime (Masters, 2023).

Some 5.9 million people have now been displaced inside Ukraine, while over 8 million have fled and still continue to arrive to neighbouring countries across borders to Poland, Moldova and other European states as refugees to seek safety—most of them women, girls and the elderly—to flee (International Rescue Committee, 2023). For the first time in its history, the European Union activated the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) setting the legal rules to help manage the mass arrival of people (European Commission, 2022). The EU announced on March 4 that Ukrainian citizens (who, pre-war, didn't need a visa to stay up to 90 days in the EU territory) would be entitled to the newly enacted TPD—without having to apply for asylum, with rights to a residence permit and access to education, housing, and the labour market, permitting them to live, work, and study in EU member states for up to three years (European Commission, 2023). Data up to March 2023 shows that more than 5 million people from Ukraine benefit from the mechanism (Refugees Operational Data Portal by UNHCR, 2023).

2.2 2015 Refugee Crisis

While the EU calls Ukraine refugee crisis the largest humanitarian crisis that Europe has witnessed in “many, many years,” it is important to remember that it was not so long ago that the continent faced another critical humanitarian challenge, the 2015 refugee “crisis” spurred by the conflict in Syria (Reilly and Flynn, 2022). The year 2015 will be remembered as the year in which an unprecedented number of arrivals of refugees and migrants lead to a crisis in the EU. Total arrivals to Europe at roughly 1,005,504, with just 3% coming by land. The total is the highest migration flow since World War II. 3,550 lives had been lost during the journey. At numerous entry locations at different European borders, border violence, mistreatment, pushbacks, detention, and prolonged asylum procedures started to become the norm (UN Refugee Agency, 2022). The vast majority of the refugees crossing the borders were Syrians,

followed by Iraqi and Afghans (International Organisation for Migration, 2015). Over 84 per cent of those arriving in Europe had fled conflict and persecution in Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Somalia, and Iraq (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Conflicts, both fresh and long-standing, in each of these states have led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. Some have been displaced within their homelands; others have sought refuge in neighbouring countries; and still others have made the often-perilous journey to Europe (and elsewhere) to seek asylum (Connor, 2016). These three conflicts, the Syrian War, Afghan War, and Iraq War, are all ongoing or recently concluded military conflicts that have resulted in massive displacement, destruction, and loss of life. They have involved various nations and groups with differing agendas, resulting in complex and protracted conflicts that have had significant regional and global ramifications. The Syrian War began in 2011 as a peaceful uprising against the president, which escalated into a civil war when the government responded with deadly force (Phillips, 2020). The war has had a devastating impact on the Syrian people, resulting in the largest refugee movements in recent history and leaving over 306,000 civilians dead (UN Human Rights Office, 2022). The Afghan War began in 2001, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, with the US-led coalition invading Afghanistan to topple the Taliban government. The war lasted over 20 years, with coalition forces fighting against the Taliban and other extremist groups (Witte, 2023). There are currently over 8.2 million Afghan refugees globally (UN Refugee Agency, 2023a). The Iraq War began in 2003, with a US-led coalition invading Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein's government, which was accused of possessing weapons of mass destruction (Schwartz, 2008, p. 2). The war lasted for nearly a decade, that resulted in over 1.2 million Iraqi refugees that continue to be displaced (UN Refugee Agency, 2023b).

More than two million undocumented refugees entered Europe, putting a strain on the system and triggering a backlash in public opinion. The acceptance and distribution of refugees in Europe have been the subject of heated debates between Eastern and Western EU nations. At five borders, both inside and outside the Schengen region, physical barriers were put in place. Inspections at the border were resumed. Although there was no obvious connection, the horrendous atrocities in Paris in November ignited a national discussion about immigration and terrorism (Wagner, 2015). In the pre-crisis system, refugees often risked their lives to enter the EU and apply for asylum, but more than half were usually denied (Strazzari, Raineri, 2021). In response to the European Agenda on Migration from May which was renewed on 13 May 2015 as the refugee influx rose, the European Commission put forth a comprehensive package of proposals. Those included enhancing search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean and the Aegean to reduce the risk of maritime fatalities; launching military action against smuggler

networks; implementing resettlement and relocation quotas to reduce pressure on the member states that act as entry points (Italy, Greece, and Hungary); creating a list of safe countries to help and speed the repatriation of rejected asylum seekers and illegal migrants; and enhancing collaboration with transit and countries of origin to readmit migrants and tighten border restrictions. ([Geddes, 2018](#)). Reforms introduced during the crisis only partially address the system's weaknesses. The shortcomings of the system are only partially addressed by the reforms implemented during the crisis. notably, they solely slightly shift the balance towards the direction of refugee resettlement as opposed to one of spontaneous asylum-seeking (Hatton, 2020).

Looking at the two refugee crises, it is evident that both rewrote the history of the EU in terms of the massive influx of people seeking protection inside the Union. More importantly, considering these crises happened just few years apart, the contrasting approaches of the EU in their response become even more pronounce. While it only took 7 days after the Russian invasion for the EU to come to a unanimous decision to activate TPD and open their borders to the Ukrainian refugees, 8 years have passed since the 2015 crisis and EU institutions have not resolved and agreed on the best way to create more equal and durable responsibility sharing framework for refugees.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

The following part will present academic scholarship on the central points of discussion in regard to actors and regions from which refugees flee – countries/regions¹ of origin and regions in which they seek the refuge – destination countries/regions². For instance, when examining discourses on 2015 refugee crisis and Ukrainian refugee crisis in 2022, the EU's institutions are naturally the key actors involved in shaping policies and responses to these crises as they are the central actors in charge of the EU's migration and asylum policy. Equally, the discourses of non-EU actors, such as Russia and Middle Eastern countries, are also important to consider due to a wider conceptualisation and context surrounding the displacement of Ukrainian refugees and refugees from the Middle East and Africa. Thus, this section will discuss (3.1) relations between the European Union, Russia and Ukraine, (3.2)

¹ The term “origin country” refer to the country of citizenship for asylum seekers, not the most recent country asylum seekers passed through prior to reaching their country of application. (Connor, 2016)

² The term “destination country” refers to the country of application where an asylum seeker first applied for asylum in Europe. Although the Dublin Regulation calls for asylum applicants to apply for asylum in the first European country they enter, the destination country where they apply is not always the same as their first entry point into Europe. (Connor, 2016)

relations between the EU and Middle East and (3.3) discourses on migration and refugees. These topics will be discussed with particular attention to the following two themes: different discourses that exist within a certain topic; and power structures or tensions between the actors. The chapter will provide valuable information on the gaps in the literature on the topic under examination, elements that has not received enough attention and argue how this thesis will contribute to the scholarship.

3.1 The EU-Russia-Ukraine Relations

The literature review starts with providing an overview of scholarly work on relations and identity building between the EU (or Europe), Ukraine and Russia. While claiming that Russia was perceived as the exclusive, sole and dominant “*Other*” – different and separate from Europe would be inaccurate, multiple primary sources imply that Russia has taken on the role of Europe’s “*Other*” for more than four centuries (Siddi, 2020 p.11; Neumann, 1998). Russians were frequently portrayed as "barbarous and deficient at the gates" of the strong Eastern neighbour in the pre-Cold War period, in terms of civility, government type, and religion. (Siddi, 2020, p.11; Poe 2003: 21). It developed into the prevalent subject in European discourses after first emerging in the descriptions of Russian soldiers during the early eighteenth-century Northern War against Sweden. At that point in time, geographical books maintained that Russians were built as "body and nature," and Europeans were portrayed as "mind and civilization." This imagery evolved to associate Russia with a wild nature, a nation without reasoning, and a backward social and economic power, which lasted throughout the Napoleonic War and the Enlightenment period. Finally, it converted into perceiving the Soviet Union as a danger during the Bolshevik Revolution. Its longevity may be shown in the fact that it continues to be utilized today in various forms, particularly the image of Russia as a frightening and hostile bear. (Siddi, 2020, p.12; Naarden, 1992, 7–27; Neumann 1998, 67–80). Although the notion that Russians were a primitive civilization did not lose significance for European discourse, the Cold War was crucial and critical in shaping European opinions of Russia. The exiled Czech author Kundera (1984) claimed that the communist Russian culture had "kidnapped, displaced, and brainwashed" Central Europe, which he claimed to be a part of the West. To distinguish Soviet Russia from Europe and the West, various labels were applied to it, including "Second World," "authoritarian," and "totalitarian" (as opposed to "First World," "democratic," and "free"). Additionally, when East-Central European countries became part of the European Union, they brought with them the effects of four decades of conflict and animosity with Soviet Russia, including concerns about a resurfacing Russian military capacity

and economic problems that were exacerbated by the region's reliance on Russia for energy. The construction of Russia as Europe's Other was aided and further reinforced by the accession of East-Central European nations to the EU and their contribution to the discourse inside the Union's institutions. (Siddi, 2020, p.13-14)

Contrary to this, scholars such as Tom Cashier (2013) provide counterargument, challenge the normative agenda of the EU that portrays Russia as fundamentally different, threatening, inferior, and in violation of universal principles. Instead, Cashier suggests that strong representations of Russia's otherness are difficult to find at the highest political level. His approach suggests that the EU's agenda contributes to the establishment of a new hierarchy of identities between Russia and other East European neighbours. Rather than explicitly "othering" Russia, the EU includes certain post-Soviet states in a community of shared values and norms, such as presenting Ukraine as a more European partner with common normative agendas. Also, relations with Russia are based on pragmatic considerations, emphasizing a strategic partnership of constructive engagement. The EU has adopted a complex prioritization process, varying across different areas and internal divisions within the EU, with member states holding different attitudes and preferences towards Russia, contribute to this differentiated prioritization (p. 1391).

Nevertheless, since the beginning of the Ukraine crisis and the annexation of Crimea in March 2014, Russia has returned to the centre stage of European political debates with the question of preserving security. Analysts and politicians have argued that in 2014 'the European security system established in the wake of the Cold War collapsed in a spectacular manner' (Sakwa 2017: 1) and described the ensuing confrontation between Russia and the West as 'the most profound menace to European security for many decades' (Youngs 2017: 1). For instance, scholars such as Hakkula (2015) focused on exploring the relations between the EU and Russia from the security perspective and he argues that both sides have contributed to the crisis in Ukraine. Hakkula discusses how the European Union has attempted to order the Pan-European space and how Russia has sought to position itself in the EU-centric unipolar order during the post-Cold War era (p.25). Similarly, John J. Mearsheimer (2014) further explains how Western policymakers ignored Russia's security concerns and pursued a policy of NATO expansion, which threatened Russia's national security and consequently contributed to the crisis in Ukraine.

Although scholars' debates vary on the causes of the Ukrainian crisis and security tensions between Europe and Russia, many have emphasised that it was particularly due to the

political developments involving Russia since 2014 that have led to a resurgence of the Russian image of the “*Other*” (Siddi, 2017). This reconstruction played a crucial role in shaping the response of European states towards Russia in the post-2014 crises. Condemnation of Russia’s acts in Ukraine between 2014 to 2018 monopolised discourses among the national leaders leading to introducing sanctions at the EU level. Discussions drifted away from narratives of economic collaboration to issues of law and security (Siddi, 2020, p.56). Valenza (2023) discovered, for instance, that this encompassed strategic communication in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and presenting Russia as an existential threat, as well as a recent language featuring a conversation on an equal footing with non-competitive states (p. 91).

The situation in Ukraine has served as the primary catalyst for conflict between the two countries, and this has been reflected in the power dynamics between them. Mistrust and crises have plagued their relationship, and the EU now views Russia as a revisionist actor (Siddi, 2020, p. 59, 69). On the other side, Russia has cast the EU as a declining and dishonest force that backed a coup in Ukraine as part of a hegemonic geopolitical strategy (Siddi, 2020, p.2; DeBardeleben, 2018). Ukraine conflict remained the main stumbling block in EU– Russia relations throughout the period under analysis. Ukraine, historically and geographically, is between these two regimes led by the European Union and Russia. Some attribute the Ukrainian crisis to Russia's aggressive efforts to enlarge its sphere of influence, particularly through the Eurasian integration initiative. The establishment of the Eurasian Union represented a new approach to region-building in the post-Soviet space, seen as a significant step in a multipolar world. Others consider West to be responsible according to the Mearsheimer’s analysis. Dregneva-Lewers and Wolczuk (2015), therefore, argue that Ukraine has actively and dynamically participated in these processes, aspiring to align with Western influences while also being resistant in some aspects. The underlying assumption is that Ukraine has been intricately connected and involved in various interdependencies and integration processes (p.3). Valentina Feklyunia (2016) does mention that after the Orange Revolution, Russian authorities were increasingly apprehensive of Ukraine's closer cooperation with the EU, however they struggled to persuade Kyiv to join its Customs Union with Belarus and Kazakhstan (p.282). On the other hand, there is no question that the European discourse, consider the eastern partnership (including Ukraine) belongs to the community threatened by Russia and in need of EU’ ‘protection’ (Valenza, 2023, p.100). This perception places a sense of responsibility on the EU to take action to ensure the security and protection of these countries. This perception is likely

to influence the EU's policies and actions towards Ukraine and other Eastern Partnership countries and may also affect the power dynamics between the EU and Russia in the region.

Explaining the battle of regimes in Ukraine has also been studied in the aspects of how Europe is represented in Ukrainian public discourse and how this representation in turn has shaped the foreign policy and worked as a catalyst for Euromaidan protests (Orlova, 2017). The research employs a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to reveal the elitist discourses of Europe that form the Ukrainian public opinion. Orlova (2017) comes to the conclusion that the European normative model has become commonsensical through the use of positive connotations to Europeanness in the discourse. Ukrainian political elites use the concept of 'Europe' as a normative model to establish the 'European model' as the most attractive one for Ukraine. They do this by actively producing and re-producing an image of Europe as the home of best practices, democratic values, and welfare. This helps to reinforce the view that Europe has to be seen as a source of norms and hence a desirable 'destination'. (Orlova, 2017, p.18) In regard to Ukraine-Russia relations, Russians and Ukrainians did not normally have a hostile relationship because both sides felt that there should be good connections between the two nations. However, she points out that each side had a different perspective on the relations between the two countries. (Olga Onuch, 2015, p.37)

The literature study emphasizes the formation of Russia as the "Other" in European discourses and particularly focuses on the historical and contemporary dynamics of ties between the EU, Ukraine, and Russia. The influence of the Ukraine crisis on the balance of power and security tensions between Europe and Russia is also covered. While there are numerous gaps in the literature that can be detected such as the need for a more nuanced assessment of Ukraine's agency and views in shaping relations with the EU and Russia, the thesis will concentrate on the new phenomena that has recently emerged and is likely to influence the dynamic between these actors – refugee influxes from the conflict raging Ukraine.

3.2 EU and Middle East (& Africa)

After discussing scholarship on the EU-Russia-Ukraine relations, the following section will introduce main themes and findings that scholars focused on when analysing the relationship between the European Union (EU) and the Middle East (Hollis, 1997; Dosenrode and Stubkjaer, 2002; Nonneman, 2004; Wassenberg and Faleg, 2012; Bouris, at al., 2021, p.1). Number of scholars have focused specifically on European far-right discourse, their anti-immigrant

statements and historical understanding of the circumstances that led to the constitution of a negative European perception of Arab-Muslim peoples. According to Said (1978), knowledge production was used to create the narrative that depicted Arab-Muslims as exotic and savage beings incapable of surviving without higher guidance (European guidance). This approach was described by Said as Orientalism, a subjective process of dominance that figured an epistemic control over the portrayal of the Arab-Muslim. Researchers, writers, politicians, and artists in Europe created this artificial picture, which was then transmitted through language until it reached common people, who would then support the rhetoric of subjugation over such communities. (Gontijo and Lana, 2020, p.93).

The exploitative actions of Western countries throughout the Middle East's imperialism in the 18th to 20th centuries had devastating effects on local societies, including warfare and poverty. Western nation-state concepts and institutions were imposed throughout the transition from colonialism to independence, which resulted in unstable governments characterised by authoritarianism, Islamist uprisings, and internal disputes (Sadiki 2009; Afsah 2008; Hourani 1991; Gontijo and Lana, 2020, p.94). These events helped to shape a negative Western impression of the Middle East, which is frequently linked to conflict, war, fundamentalism and underdevelopment (Said, 1978; Gontijo and Lana, 2020, p.94). As a result of the 9/11 attacks, which led to the generalization and labelling of Arabs and Muslims as terrorists, the terrorism phenomenon has further contributed to negative impressions of the Middle East in the twenty-first century. The impact of these events has been felt globally, with Europe experiencing terrorist attacks such as the Madrid bombings in 2004, the London bombings in 2005, and the Paris attacks in 2015, among others. These events have had a considerable impact on the European perception of Islam, perpetuating negative stereotypes and contributing to a climate of fear and mistrust (DW, 2017; Gontijo and Lana, 2020, p.94-95).

Over time, the power dynamic between the West and the Middle East has allowed for the creation of narratives that frame the relationship between Europeans and Arab-Muslims as an Us vs. Them (Self vs. Other) dichotomy. The Middle East is seen as an external and threatening Other that should be avoided. In recent decades, this construction has been largely based on regional conflicts, terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, illegal immigration, refugee flows, and religious fundamentalism. The Middle East has become Europe's historical Arab-speaking Muslim other (Wintle, 2016, 45; Gontijo, Lana, 2020; Cebeci, 2021, p.70). Despite the fact that Europe and the Middle East are geographically, historically, and socially intertwined as the two shores of the Mediterranean, scholars have noted Western and EU discourses portray the Middle East and Arab Muslims as "out there" and dangerous, backward,

and threatening, which has the potential to harm Europe's economy, safety, and sense of identity (Gontijo, Lana, 2020; Cebeci, 2021, p.70). The authors suggest that the depiction of the Middle East as a crisis-ridden region, full of danger and threats to Europe, allows for the implementation of drastic measures to address the situation. Or in other words, this portrayal of the Middle East as inferior and flawed, according to Cebeci, enables Europe to construct an ideal identity for itself, legitimizing its securitized and asymmetric policies towards the region (Gontijo, Lana, 2020; Cebeci, 2022, p.71).

In the debate surrounding the EU's foreign policy towards the Middle East, there are contributions that move beyond the traditional mind-world dualism of international relations theory, and instead examine how IR as a discipline represents and reproduces the EU as an actor (Jackson, 2011, 37; Dionigi, 2021, p.97). These approaches, known as reflectivists approaches, are rooted in various theoretical frameworks, such as Gramscian hegemony theory (Diez, 2013), Foucauldian poststructuralism (Malmvig, 2014), postcolonial theory (Pace, 2002), or critical constructivist perspectives (Del Sarto, 2016, Dionigi, 2021, p.98). While each framework has its unique features, they all aim to analyse the EU's external actions towards the Middle East by critically questioning the conceptualization of the EU as an actor in this region. The concept of the EU as a normative power has been a significant area of focus in these critical analyses. The idea of the European Union as a normative power (NPE – Normative Power Europe), rather than a military or civilian power was introduced by Ian Manners (2002) by examining its pursuit of the abolition of the death penalty. Manners argues that the EU's power lies in its ability to shape international norms and values, rather than its military or economic might. On the basis of this normative force, states are subjected to the EU's foreign policy to acknowledge the universal legitimacy of its founding ideals, such as peace, liberty, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law (Dionigi, 2021, p.93).

This notion is challenged in Malmvig's study on EU-Middle East relations that engages with the emerging debate on Foucault's concept of counter-conduct, which is a key aspect of Foucauldian poststructuralism. Foucauldian poststructuralism is reflected in the article through its analysis of power relations and resistance strategies in the context of European democracy promotion initiatives in the Arab world. The article discusses how European democracy promotion initiatives in the Arab world are resisted, reversed, and countered by Arab governments through various forms of counter-conduct. Malmvig shows how resistance takes on a character of being explicitly against certain power relations and shouting this from the rooftops in its obvious, overt and critical forms (anti-globalization, Occupy Wall Street, indigenous rights). In contrast to these forms of resistance, the types of counter-conduct

analysed within the context of this article are more subtle and less spectacular. They include selection of entry, setting conditions, and simulating reform. Therefore, some examples of these initiatives that enable resistance through subtle forms of counter-conduct include European reform initiatives that assume ownership and absence of power in promoting democratic reform in the Arab world. These initiatives enable Arab governments to resist by selectively choosing which aspects to adopt or reject while still appearing to comply with European demands for reform.

There is a dynamic of superior-inferior interactions in which some groups are perceived as norm-recipients, prompting calls for challenging Eurocentric beliefs and relationships. Therefore, phrase "new narrative for Europe" refers to a change in the way that the continent's identity and history are discussed and understood. It seeks to advance a more inclusive and diverse narrative of Europe while challenging conventional Eurocentric ideas. The new narrative acknowledges the historical sacrifices incurred by people from other continents and notes that Europe's success in current times was frequently attained through colonial conquest and exploitation. It places a strong emphasis on celebrating diversity within Europe, which is reflected in the EU's motto, "united in diversity". However, Valenza (2023) asserts that the EU discourse stands between "diversity" and "difference". Donal Tusk, a former president of the European Council, made a similar point in his speech at the College of Europe's opening ceremony for the 2019–2020 academic year, where he stressed *'things and issues, which cannot be the subject of compromise and negotiations. And I'm talking about our fundamental values: freedom, the rule of law, the dignity of individuals'* (Tusk 2019). While Task's speech was pointing at the tensions between the EU and Russia, Valenza refers to this as a broader trend of replacing temporal othering with geographical othering. While Ole Wæver (1996) claims that the EU is constituted as a temporal other fearing of a return to its own violent past ranging with two world wars at the beginning of the last century. Contrary to this, geographical othering suggests boundary-producing foreign policy practices, particularly in the sense of portraying specific regions or countries as threatening. It involves establishing a sense of difference or distance or projecting fears or anxieties onto specific regions, such as the fear of a foreign invasion, disease, or cultural contamination (Valenza, 2023).

This research thesis offers a comparative dimension to the body of knowledge regarding EU-Middle East ties and EU-Russia-Ukraine relations by contrasting the responses to the 2015 refugee crisis with the 2022 Ukrainian refugee crisis. It sheds light on the complexities and nuances of the EU's relationships with various actors in different circumstances are revealed,

allowing for improved comprehension of any potential double standards, inconsistencies, or shifts in EU discourses and policies towards different regions. As the thesis applies poststructuralist approach, an enhanced understanding of the effects of othering in EU external relations is also made possible by the analysis of the 2015 refugee crisis and the 2022 Ukrainian refugee crisis. The thesis could bring insight into the potential consequences and repercussions for relations between the EU and the Middle East as well as between EU-Russia-Ukraine, and the general pattern of the EU's engagement with regions during crises by studying the results of discursive practices, such as their impact on policy decisions, perceptions, and power dynamics.

3.3 Discourse on Migration and Refugees

Although it is important to study the relations among the main actors involved in the two refugee crises under analysis, we cannot overlook the literature on the central figure in these crises – refugees. Migration has emerged as a key political issue in contemporary Europe, acting as an underlying theme that links a number of issues including identity control, immigration, asylum, social rights, and management of cultural diversity. This meta-issue is significantly impacted by the language and governmental tools used to portray immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees³, and foreigners as a danger to social order (Huysmans, 2000, p. 770). It is connected to a broader politicization where immigrants and asylum seekers are presented as a threat to the survival of national identity and social welfare policies (p. 751). The portrayal of migration has increasingly been discussed in relation to the threat to public order, cultural identity and homogeneity, domestic instability, and labour market instability. As a result, refugees have been securitized, which also had an effect on the significant part of the international relations scholarship that fixated on an examination of migration in terms of its securitization. Issues like multiculturalism, European identity, nationalism, xenophobia, and racism arise when criteria for belonging are frequently challenged and politically charged (Huysmans, 2000, p.762)

³ **Refugees** are people fleeing armed conflicts or persecution and seeking safety, who are protected by international law, specifically the 1951 Refugee Convention. An **asylum seeker** is someone who claims and applied to be a refugee but whose claim has not been evaluated, so every refugee is initially an asylum seeker. **Migrants**, on the contrary, choose to move not because of a direct threat or persecution but mostly to improve their lives through finding work, seeking better education, or reuniting with family. Moreover, ‘immigrants’ - people who are or intend to be settled in their new country - from ‘migrants’ who are temporarily resident. (Refugees, Asylum Seekers & Migrants: A Crucial Difference, 2020).

One side of the literature concentrated on the securitization of migration, while the other examined the subject in relation to humanitarianism, international border management, and migration management. According to Fassin (Fassin, 2012, 1; Little and Vaughan-Williams, 2017, p. 542), humanitarianism is a way of managing otherwise "threatened and forgotten lives" and entails a number of practices and initiatives aimed at "managing, regulating, and supporting the existence of human beings." He contends that compassion and repression, hospitality and hostility, and humanitarianism and securitization are not fundamentally at odds with one another. Fassin emphasizes that these seemingly opposing factors should actually be viewed as being intricately linked (Little and Vaughan-Williams, 2017, p.543). Words and phrases like invasion, menace, and border defence are frequently used while talking about migration, along with overtly racist or Islamophobic remarks. The effort to characterize movement across international borders as a security danger is part of an older and more widespread trend (Goz'dziak and Main, 2020, p. 5).

Similar claims to those made in the US following 9/11 have been made in Europe in response to the terrorist attacks in Paris, Brussels, and Nice: safeguarding national security through improving border security. Politicians on both sides of the Atlantic claim that international terrorism is spread through human trafficking and smuggling. These anti-immigrant attitudes and perceptions of immigrants as criminals and terrorists trace back at least a decade or more before the 9/11 attacks. The present disputes in Europe (and elsewhere) also contribute to 'othering' refugees and migrants, which is another method of marginalizing individuals. It facilitates the distinction between us and them by recognizing other people and cultures as a threat to the existence of the home culture (Huntington, 1996; Goz'dziak and Main, 2020, p.5-6) According to migration scholars, accepting crisis narratives about the recent influxes of asylum seekers to Europe leads to a "binary approach" - to managing and viewing migration in terms of "integration versus segregation, modernity versus cultural backwardness, the deserving versus the undeserving," and through the artificial distinction between refugees and economic migrants (Crawley and Skleparis 2018; McMahon and Sigona 2018; (Goz'dziak and Main, 2020, p. 2). The idea of "deserving" and "undeserving" asylum seeker was further developed by Chiara Marchetti (2020), who explains that only "real" refugees demonstrate adequately that they are deserving of trust and rights, making them the only ones who deserve protection as well as a social and political consideration (p.238). According to Anderson (2013), they are imagined as "good citizens, law-abiding and hardworking members of stable and respectable families (p.3)." In contrast to "*Others*", these ideal people share ideals and

behavioural patterns, forming “the legitimate us,” and may thus be granted privileges. Asylum seekers must demonstrate not just that they are 'true refugees,' but also show they are or have the ability to be “decent citizens.” (Marchetti, 2020, p.238)

The existing literature on the representation of refugees in the context of migratory crises has generally concentrated on two basic perspectives: migration securitization and humanitarian response. However, there is a gap in the literature when it comes to applying poststructuralism to analyse the rhetoric of EU institutions and their responses to specific refugee crises as most studies focused on examining national levels. The study addresses this gap by applying poststructuralism to investigate the language and discursive practices of EU institutions in their responses to the refugee crises of 2015 and 2022. It will focus on researching the construction of identity, power relations, and policy decisions within the EU's migration rhetoric by employing poststructuralist terms like as othering and spatial/geographical othering that will be further explained in the next chapter. Finally, due to the comparative element and examining empirical cases of the EU's response to refugees from Middle East and from Ukraine, this thesis further contributes to the literature on the “deserving” and “underserving” refugees.

4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK - Poststructuralism and the construction of ‘Othering’

The overview of the academic literature displayed scholarships – mainly from social constructivists and poststructuralists on different discourses and identity constructions in foreign policy when it comes to EU-Russia/Ukrainian relations, EU-Middle East relations, discourses on migration and refugees and finally on the EU's identity and how it has been reproduced through its various discourses. Thus indeed, while the thesis may further advance social constructivists' findings, it will rather take the perspective that views discourse as a set of practices and representations that contribute to the production and reproduction of identities. From a poststructuralist standpoint, centered on the connection between identity and foreign relations, identity construction is important since it is predicated on the idea that specific "representations of the threat, country, security problem, or crisis they seek to address" are necessary for effective policymaking (Hansen, 2006, p.5). Foreign policies articulate and rely on distinctive identities of foreign states, regions, peoples, and institutions as well as on the identity of a national, regional, or institutional Self in order to give meaning to the particular situation and to form the objects inside it. The overall goal is to highlight how certain forms of

identity serve as the basis and explanation for different policies and to increase awareness of the restrictions and boundaries that these constructions place on who is allowed to participate in a certain setting. This specific component of exclusion and inclusion within the poststructuralist theory enables us to consider how the EU's divergent immigration policies and resulting different refugee responses and shed light on marginalisation of the outgroups.

Poststructuralism also advances our knowledge of identity by focusing on the ways in which it is created and generated through language, discourse, and power dynamics. Foreign policy is viewed as a discursive activity in which discourses articulate and entwine conceptual and material elements (Hansen, 2006, p.1) It acknowledges that identity is formed through social actions and discourses rather than being fixed. Poststructuralist discourse analysis can show the power dynamics that underlie dominant identity conceptions by analysing the ways that language and discourse impact our perception of identity. This can support the advancement of a more inclusive and fair society by allowing us to confront negative identity conceptions. Additionally, poststructuralism also uncovers exclusionary effects, which refer to the ways in which particular discourses and practices marginalize or exclude particular people, groups, or viewpoints. These outcomes may result through the creation of identities, the setting of rules and limitations, and the elevation of particular discursive views.

In order to further the theoretical framework, it should be noted that while Campbell's (1992) method of identity construction, which relies on a single Self-Other dichotomy, is helpful in understanding the construction of a national Self and a radically different and threatening Other, it falls short in capturing the nuanced and complex identities that influence foreign policy decisions. Campbell's method would not be sufficient to explain the differences in the migration strategy that the EU adopted if one took into consideration the fact that both the Middle East and Russia were seen as Other by the EU. The complexity of identity building in the EU's discourse on migrants, however, is better captured by Hansen's (2006) method, which entails a sequence of similar yet slightly different juxtapositions (p.30). Hansen's approach can help to differentiate between the EU's responses to the '2015 refugee crisis' and '2022 Ukrainian refugee crisis' by reflecting how the Other is situated within a web of identities rather than simply arguing the Self-Other duality.

In order to establish and enforce the boundaries between various groups and to foster a sense of belonging and identity within those groups, the construction of identity can take place through a variety of channels, including geographic and political representations. This identity is developed in opposition to the "*Other*," or other states (Doty). By contrasting oneself with an "*Other*" that is seen as drastically different and dangerous in regard to established social norms

and power systems, we develop our identities to the extent that we see others as distinct from ourselves. Other people can be grouped in a number of ways, such as according to where they are on a map or according to political designations like "civilizations," "nations," "tribes," "terrorists," "women," "civilians," or "humanity" (Hansen, 2006, p.5). In the end, the process of creating an identity through these techniques is one that is continuously changing and subject to discussion through societal revisions. Geographical (spatial) othering is the practice of excluding or marginalizing people or groups because of where they are from or where they came from. The exclusion of people from those regions in social, economic, or political contexts might result from the perception that particular geographical regions or countries are inferior to or less significant than others. Geographical othering is frequently attributed by academics to xenophobic attitudes toward immigrants and refugees from particular nations as well as the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities across the globe.

On the contrary, temporal othering is the process of creating a sense of identity and belonging based on a common history or previous narrative. This is accomplished by establishing a distinction between "us" and "them" depending on various time contexts, such as the past and the present. Temporal othering can be viewed as an instance of "abjectivity" (Waeber, 1996), which is the process of defining what something is not in order to define its identity. The "other" in this situation is built as the history of Europe, which is perceived as a time of conflict and division, particularly in relation to World Wars I and II. In contrast, the present is portrayed as a period of harmony and peace, with the EU acting as a political body that disseminates its standards and refers to them as "a standard for the world." (Diez 2005, 629; Valenza, 2023, p.93).

Poststructuralist theory, along with critical theory, feminist theory, constructivism, and scientific realism, is part of the post-positivist approach to analysing international relations. Post-positivism entered the field of international relations (IR) studies more than three decades ago. Since the third (or fourth) "great debate" in the 1980s, which placed "rationalism" against "reflectivism". IR academia has started to embrace a variety of post-positivist (or "reflectivist") methodologies. In contrast to conventional ideas, post-positivism represents alternative and more critical interpretations of foreign policy practices. Traditional social research methods make the assumption that subjects/individuals have a particular mode of existence and are moulded by social and cultural practices that let them to act in particular ways. Post-positivist perspectives, however, dispute this presumption. They believe that meanings are created and connected to social subjects and objects through interactions with others and discursive behaviours rather than being inherent in them. In this sense, interpretive dispositions are created

in that they influence how people perceive and comprehend social occurrences, opening up some options for action while closing off others. Instead of treating social processes as objectively observable entities, post-positivism emphasizes the significance of recognizing the subjective experiences and meanings which form them. (Doty, 1993; Hansen, 2006, p.3).

Additionally, post-positivist approaches focus on *how* meanings are created rather than attempting to explain how a specific outcome came about. To put it another way, the social construction of subjects, objects, and interpretative dispositions gives practices certain meanings and openings while excluding others. We normally take their existence as given when trying to comprehend why states or decision-makers act in particular ways towards other states. To study the particular practices that enable these actors to act in specific ways, define their policies, and exercise their power, we must look beyond this presumption and ask how these practices became possible in the first place (Doty, 1993, p.298-299).

In line with poststructuralist theory framework and *how possible* approach, the thesis seeks to advance the scholarship by focusing on ***How do identities constructed in the EU's official discourse enabled different responses to the 2015 refugee crisis and 2022 Ukrainian refugee crisis?***

5 RESEARCH DESIGN – Poststructural Discourse Analysis

The following section will introduce an analytical framework and a methodology through which these identity constructions can be studied. There are a series of choices a researcher should make when adopting poststructural discourse analysis (PDA); whether one should examine the foreign policy discourse of one 'Self' or of multiple Selves; whether one should select one particular moment or a longer historical development; whether one should study one event or issue or a multiplicity; and, finally, which material should be selected as the foundation for and object of analysis (intertextual models) (Hansen, 2006, p. 65).

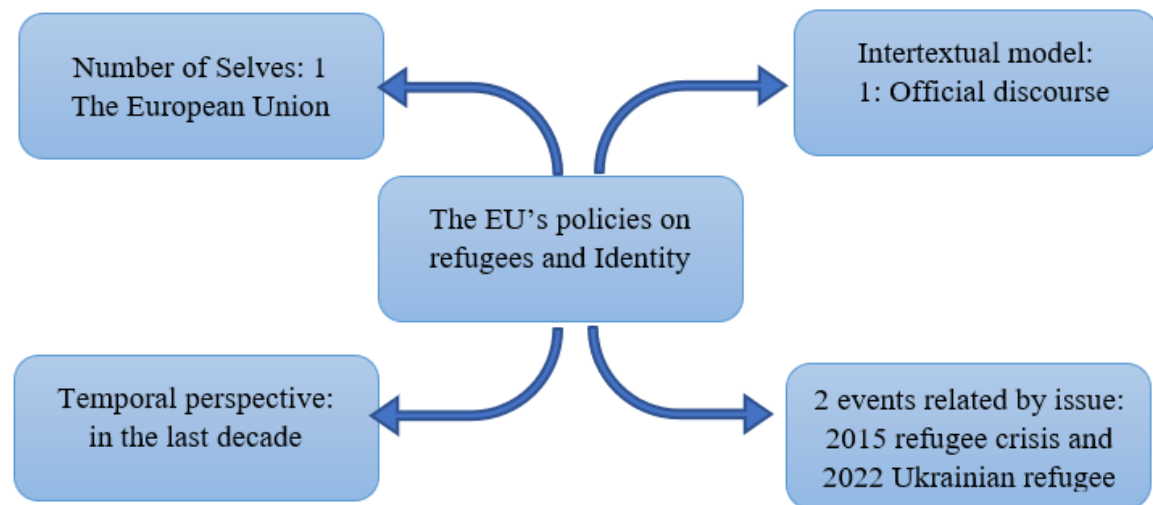
To begin with, PDA developed 3 intertextual models structured around official foreign policy. The research will apply Model 1 focused on the official discourse of heads of state, government seniors, heads of international institutions and official statements by international institutions. However, it is also important to note that political officials are not the only voices that matter in shaping narratives, and there are many other factors at play, including media coverage, public opinion, and the actions of various stakeholders. Nevertheless, political officials often play a significant role in setting the narratives around important issues, as they have a significant amount of power and influence over how information is communicated to

the public. For example, political officials can set the narrative around a particular policy or proposal, by framing it in a certain way, highlighting certain benefits or risks, and emphasizing certain aspects of the issue over others.

Regarding the first choice that the PDA requires – the number of “selves” or entities, such as states, nations, or foreign policy subjects, the research thesis will investigate political discourse of one regional entity, namely the “The EU Self.” This choice was made due to the nature of both refugee crises that overwhelmed the Union and significant part the EU took when managing the situation. Moreover, the research thesis is interested in the identity of the EU as a supranational body whose identity is still forming and shaping – considering its short existence in comparison with state nations in Europe or mainstream media discourses. While other scholars considered it to be a reason for pursuing analysis on the national level that is more influential than constructions of a shared European identity, I argue differently. Analysing the official discourse of the institutions such as European Commission, Council of Europe or European Parliament and other agencies provides an opportunity to analyse reconciled discourse of the EU and shed light on how the EU construct itself in its discourse at the highest levels in times of crises.

The rest of the choices one should make before performing the PDA – number of events refer to the amount and type of empirical material that is analysed and the temporal perspective refers to the researcher's focus on the time frame in which the events occurred. For example, this poststructuralist analysis of EU migration policies will focus on a specific time period - the last decade and examine 2 comparative events - the refugee crises followed by the Ukrainian war in 2022 and the 2015 refugee crisis, both striking periods of intense political concern that monopolised the political discourse for a significant amount of time and to this day, are the biggest refugee crises Europe faced since World War II. Key events can be used methodologically to establish a timeline that identifies when main events occurred, and central policies were either adopted or defended. Working with a case study that stretches over a longer period of time, a timeline identifies periods of heightened activity, where the density of events is greater (Hensen). Hence, it is important to note that large numbers of asylum seekers and refugees from Middle East reached Europe in recent years. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 34,196 refugees have risked their lives reaching Europe by sea in the first half of 2019. In previous years the numbers were much higher. The choices for the PDA – in accordance with Hansen’s approach to building research design, are graphically illustrate in Figure 1. below.

Figure 1.



Lastly, poststructuralist discourse analysis gives epistemological and methodological priority to the study of primary texts; that is, for instance, presidential statements, speeches, and interviews in the case of official foreign policy. The thesis therefore analysed 50 official statements of the European Union as well as speeches performed during country visits among the EU member states, visits of European policy and research institutes and during various plenary sessions in the EU institutions. The data was retrieved from official online websites of the European institutions including European Commission, the Council of Europe, Council of the EU and European Parliament. Speeches that were picked for analyses were states by high-level leaders of the EU such as presidents of the institutions or commissioners active at the time of the crises. When collecting the data, special attention was given to selecting speeches and statements that referred to the refugees in the wider context of the 2015 and 2022 Ukrainian crisis. The texts were read through the articulations of spatial, temporal, and ethical identity, their degree of radicalization of the Other, and their linkage of identity and policy. Methodologically, spatial, temporal, and ethical constructions are investigated through analysis of linking and differentiation, which refers to the Hansen's approach of constructing identities through a series of signs that are linked to each other to constitute relations of sameness as well as through a differentiation to another series of juxtaposed signs.

6 ANALYSIS

Analysis plays a crucial role in understanding and interpreting complex phenomena, uncovering underlying meanings, and examining the relationships and dynamics at play. In this chapter, I delve into a comprehensive analysis of different discourses on the 2015 and 2022 refugee crises using poststructural discourse analysis aiming to shed light on the intricate nuances and discursive formations that shape our understanding of the competing responses of the EU official institutions to the refugee crises. Specifically, I examine the contrasting responses that unfolded, one characterized by hostile treatment and the creation of internal crises within the EU, and the other marked by a welcoming response and the activation of the Temporary Protection Mechanism for Ukrainian refugees. I examine how the EU as a single actor constructs and shapes the narratives and through a critical lens, I explore the underlying power dynamics, meanings and identity constructions including the concept of “*othering*”, as well as “*spatial, temporal and ethical othering*” that influence the production and reception of discourse surrounding refugees. The analysis conducted in this chapter not only aims to provide an in-depth examination of competing responses to the refugee crises in the EU but also critically engage with relevant literature, theories, and previous research. The analysis will reflect on the scholarship, drawing upon foundational works and engaging in dialogue with existing academic discourses.

The analysis provides examination of various excerpts from speeches from 2015 and 2022. They are structured around certain common themes where each quote citation from 2015 (in blue citation block) mirror the 2022 quote (in yellow citation block). That way, the analysis shows how the discourses dealt with certain topics in different ways. Firstly, the analysis will construct identities of the Middle East and Northern Africa and the refugees coming from this region and evaluate the “*Otherness*” that the EU institutions pinned on this group. In the same fashion, the first part of the analysis will construct Ukrainian refugees and Russia’s identity – backed up by the evidence from the official speeches in the citation blocks. The second part of the analysis will focus on how these identity constructions of main actors influence most prevalent themes in the discourses, such as the threat, the EU unity and EU image.

6.1 Construction of identities: Middle East, Russia and Ukraine

In the first excerpt citation below, former first Vice-President of the European Commission Frans Timmermans begins his opening remarks at the 2015 Press Conference in Kos with the following quote:

Dimitris Avramopoulos and I are today at the place where Europe begins. We are at the place closest to the other parts of the world, where now conflict is rampant. The effects of those conflicts are felt all across Europe. There is not one single European nation that is not affected by the tragedies as a consequence of people fleeing for their lives from other parts of the world, especially from Syria. (Timmermans, 2015a)

The former Vice-President Timmermans, and Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, Dimitris Avramopoulos visited Kos - an island in the Dodecanese archipelago in the east of Greece to monitor the situation as local authorities have struggled to manage a surge in refugee arrivals over the summer. In analysing the provided excerpt using poststructuralist discourse analysis, we can examine the ways in which power relations, meanings and identities are constructed and contested within the speech. I will break down the excerpt and explore some key aspects. To begin with, highlighting their location at the place "where Europe begins" emphasis the spatial identity othering of the "Other" non-European parts of the world. By stating that they are at the place where Europe begins and locating themselves at the geographical border of Europe, the former VP invoked a discourse of territoriality and boundary control, by implicitly drawing a geographical boundary between Europe and non-European regions. This boundary serves to differentiate and distance Europe from regions outside its defined borders. In the context of the refugee crisis, this spatial othering can be understood as a way to construct a sense of "us" versus "them," with Europe being positioned as the centre and non-European regions as the periphery. Not only did the EU's Vice-President established a spatial distinction between Europe and the "other" parts of the world, but he also implied a sense of centrality or primacy in relation to other parts of the world. This positioning establishes them as central figures with authority, representing Europe and its interests. Timmermans implicitly positions Europe as a separate and privileged entity. This positioning creates a sense of Europe as a powerful actor and positions the other parts of the world as less privileged or marginalized.

Furthermore, the quote emphasizes their proximity to "other parts of the world, where now conflict is rampant." This positioning creates a spatial division between Europe, which is considered a privileged observer or even a victim of external conflicts. These other regions are portrayed as sources of conflict and tragedy, while Europe is presented as a space of safety and stability. The quote constructs a power relation where Europe is positioned as the "safe", "developed" and "stable" entity in contrast to the "other" part of the worlds, characterizes as "dangerous" and "troubled" due to ongoing conflicts and tragedies. In another speech at

Clingendael - Netherlands Institute of International Relations, the former VP of the EU stated that *"Europe has been exposed as unacceptably helpless in the face of the war-fuelled mass exodus underway from the Middle East and Africa"* (Timmermans, 2015b). The reference to a "war-fuelled mass exodus" from further reinforces the spatial othering of Middle East and Africa. It implies that these regions outside of Europe are marred by conflicts and instability, portraying them as sources of displacement and hardship. Europe, on the other hand, is implicitly portrayed as a relatively stable space from which people are seeking refuge. This framing positions Europe as a passive and vulnerable entity, emphasizing a spatial distinction between Europe and the regions from which people are fleeing. Moreover, the use of language such as "rampant conflict," "tragedies," and "fleeing for their lives" serves as discursive strategies to evoke emotions and emphasize the urgency and gravity of the situation. These strategies shape the perception of the conflicts and position Europe as a place of refuge and compassion.

The quote also asserts that the "effects of those conflicts are felt all across Europe" as well as that "there is not one single European nation that is not affected by the tragedies." It implies a shared experience and collective impact on European countries due to the flow of refugees from regions like Syria. This binary reinforces a notion of an essentialized Europe and potentially contributes to the exclusion of non-European individuals or regions from the European identity. This framing constructs a sense of shared vulnerability among European nations. By emphasizing the universality of the impact, it seeks to create a common understanding and mobilize collective action. The phrase "the tragedies as a consequence of people fleeing for their lives" positions the individuals affected by conflicts as victims in need of assistance. Building on the last elements of the previous quote focusing on the refugees' "tragedies", the next quote from the former Commissioner Avramopoulos is from his speech following his visit in Austria and provides valuable insights on the identity construction of refugees coming to the EU in 2015.

Thousands of desperate people reach our shores and/or try to cross the EU's land borders every day. The vast majority are fleeing conflict, persecution and war, and are trying to reach the EU in search of protection. ... Since the 1st of January 2015 more than 700,000 desperate people have reached Europe via the shores of Italy and Greece. More will come as long as our neighbourhood is in turmoil (Avramopoulos, 2015a)

In the given excerpt, the text constructs the notion of "desperate people" by presenting them as a distinct category of individuals who have reached Europe via the shores of Italy and

Greece. The term "desperate" contributes to the construction of a particular identity for these individuals. It suggests that they are fleeing dangerous or difficult situations in their home countries and are in need of immediate assistance and protection. It positions them as victims or survivors. It conveys a sense of urgency, vulnerability, and dire circumstances experienced by these individuals. By emphasizing their desperation and vulnerability, the discourse may elicit empathy and compassion, potentially mobilizing support for humanitarian efforts. However, it can also perpetuate stereotypes and stigmatization by framing migrants and refugees primarily through their perceived desperation, which may overshadow their individual agency, resilience, and diverse backgrounds.

The text suggests a cause-and-effect relationship between the turmoil in Europe's neighbourhood and the influx of people seeking refuge. This framing positions the "neighbourhood" as the source of instability and portrays Europe as a recipient of the consequences. This discursive construction implies a sense of externalization or othering, where the turmoil is located outside of Europe and perceived as a threat or disturbance to its stability. Moreover, the reference of "our neighbourhood" emphasizes the spatial othering between the origin countries of the refugees and the EU. This language implies that the instability and conflict in the neighbourhood are the driving factors behind the arrival of desperate people to Europe. It suggests that the source of the problem lies outside Europe's defined borders, further emphasizing the distinction between Europe and the regions from which people are fleeing.

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Moving to the construction of identities among the actors involved in 2022 refugee crisis, the following quote will be analysed, which is an excerpt quote from President of the European Commission – Ursula von der Leyen's speech at the European Parliament Plenary on the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

War has returned to Europe. Almost thirty years after the Balkan Wars, and over half a century after Soviet troops marched into Prague and Budapest, civil defence sirens again went off in the heart of a European capital. Thousands of people fleeing from bombs, ... Cars lined up towards Ukrainian Western borders, and when many of them ran out of fuel, They sought refuge inside our borders, because their country was not safe any longer. ... Men, women, children are dying, once again, because a foreign leader, President Putin, decided that their country, Ukraine, has no right to exist. (Von der Leyen, 2022a)

The reference to past conflicts like the Balkan Wars and Soviet troops in Prague and Budapest highlights a history of violence and conflict in Europe and prevalence of temporal othering in the 2022 discourse on refugees. This historical context shapes the understanding of the current refugee crisis and positions it within a continuum of European conflicts. The mention of civil defence sirens going off in a European capital and people fleeing from bombs signifies a return to the European violent past. The statement "War has returned to Europe" suggests that war is a part of Europe's identity. By using the term "return," the discourse constructs war as a recurring event that has resurfaced, reinforcing the idea that it is an inherent part of Europe's historical and temporal identity. The historical context has particularly monopolised and resonated in the European level discourse due to one of the main causes behind the establishment of the EU – maintaining peace and stability after the two world wars in the beginning of the 20th century. This historical context in the discourse on Ukrainian refugees has been present among other EU leader, for instance, current Commissioner for Home Affairs Ylva Johansson (2022a) reflected on how Russia invaded Ukraine and consequently *"Unravelling the international order as we know it. That has kept us safe since the end of the Second World War ... we are now facing the return of war on the European continent with the associated human suffering, destruction and economic shocks.* The statement "Unravelling the international order as we know it" frames the current situation as a disruption or breakdown of the existing global system. This framing suggests a departure from the established norms, principles, and mechanisms that have maintained stability since the end of World War II. The reference to the period "since the end of the Second World War" serves as a temporal marker, emphasizing the duration and stability of the international order. By invoking this specific timeframe, the discourse highlights the long-standing period of relative peace and safety that is now being challenged. The discourse emphasizes the negative consequences associated with the return of war, such as "human suffering, destruction, and economic shocks." This portrayal aims to evoke emotional responses and highlights the detrimental impact of war on individuals, societies, and economies.

The portrayal of President Putin as a foreign leader who decided that Ukraine has no right to exist indicates the exercise of power and dominance by Russia over Ukraine. The discourse establishes a power dynamic between President Putin and Ukraine by attributing to him the authority to decide the fate of Ukraine's existence. This power asymmetry positions Ukraine as the weaker party and reinforces the perception of President Putin as a significant threat to the country and its people. This construction creates a power relation where Ukraine

is portrayed as the oppressed and in need of assistance. By framing the conflict in this way, the speech reinforces a sense of injustice and moral obligation to support Ukraine. The quote constructs the "other" through the mention of "foreign leader, President Putin." By identifying President Putin as foreign, the discourse positions him as distinct from the speaker or the target audience, highlighting a division between "us" and "them." The language used constructs a narrative of victimhood and vulnerability. Phrases like "gruesome death count," "dying," and "no right to exist" evoke a sense of tragedy but also injustice. This framing positions Ukraine as an innocent victim and portrays the refugees as deserving of refuge and support. The mention of people picking up their children and backpacks and marching towards the European Union creates an image of resilience and determination.

To further analyse this portrayal of Ukrainians as resilient and determine, I will use the excerpt from a 2022 State of the Union speech address by President von der Leyen:

Today - courage has a name, and that name is Ukraine. Courage has a face, the face of Ukrainian men and women who are standing up to Russian aggression. And a nation of heroes has risen. Today, Ukraine stands strong because an entire country has fought street by street, home by home. To our friends in Ukraine... So I want the people of the Western Balkans, of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia to know: You are part of our family, your future is in our Union, and our Union is not complete without you! (Von der Leyen, 2022b)

The quote begins by attributing courage to Ukraine, stating that "courage has a name, and that name is Ukraine." This construction positions Ukraine as an embodiment of courage, valour, and resistance against Russian aggression. By naming and ascribing qualities to Ukraine, the speech creates a heroic narrative that celebrates the bravery of Ukrainian men and women. By attributing courage, valour, and resistance to Ukraine and its people, the analysis humanizes and celebrates the Ukrainian population. This humanization can foster empathy and understanding towards Ukrainian refugees, encouraging a more compassionate and welcoming attitude. This recognition can help challenge negative stereotypes and misconceptions about refugees, promoting a more positive perception and appreciation of their experiences and contributions. By framing Ukraine as courageous and resilient, the analysis encourages a shift from viewing refugees solely as victims to recognizing their strength and resilience, thus promoting a more compassionate approach. The phrase "a nation of heroes has risen" further reinforces the construction of heroism and positions Ukraine as a collective entity deserving of admiration and support. This portrayal of Ukraine as brave and strong serves to mobilize

solidarity and support for the country. It positions Ukraine as deserving of admiration and assistance, which can translate into a willingness to provide support and refuge to those fleeing the conflict and seeking safety.

Von der Leyen extends solidarity to Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia in her annual speech by stating, "You are part of our family, your future is in our Union, and our Union is not complete without you!" This construction positions these countries as integral to the European Union and emphasizes a shared destiny and future. The rhetoric of "family" and "Union" creates a sense of belonging and inclusion. By highlighting the Western Balkans, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia as part of the European family, the speech aims to build a sense of unity and common purpose. This inclusionary language suggests a potential expansion of the European Union and encourages the audience to view these countries as deserving of membership.

In summary, the provided excerpts from the speeches of Frans Timmermans, Dimitris Avramopoulos and Ursula van der Leyen highlight the construction of power relations, meanings, and identities within the discourse surrounding the refugee crisis in Europe. Following outtakes could be taken from this analysis. The speakers position Europe as the centre and non-European regions as the periphery by highlighting their location at the geographical border of Europe. This creates a sense of "us" versus "them" and establishes Europe as a separate and privileged entity that is based on spatial othering. Additionally, Europe is portrayed as a space of safety and stability in contrast to other parts of the world characterized by conflict and tragedy. The language used evokes emotions and emphasizes Europe as a place of refuge and compassion.

The 2015 discourse constructs the refugees as "desperate people" who are presented as victims or survivors fleeing dangerous situations. The emphasis on their desperation and vulnerability aims to elicit empathy and support but may also perpetuate stereotypes and overlook individual agency and resilience. On contrary, 2022 discourse emphasised the strength and resilience of Ukrainian refugees who deserve our admiration and support. The portrayal of refugees arriving from the MENA region fit into constructed stereotypes on refugees who are in need, who are vulnerable and potentially would require considerable amount of humanitarian support. Moreover, they arrive from regions outside of Europe who are discussed as dangerous and "out-there" fuelled by wars and conflict, while "here in Europe" the region is viewed as stable and developed – only affected by the outside. On the other hand, the 2022 discourse stressed and focused on the historical dichotomy between now – when Europe is faced with another conflict and war, versus before when it maintained peaceful relations for so long.

Moreover, the construction of the “other” differs considerably from the previous refugee crisis, which did not identify a specific enemy or perpetrator causing the crisis. While both refugees were portrayed as victims, the Ukrainians fleeing their country were victims of the Russian war, hence, Putin constructed as a clear and “*Radical Other*”

The discussions of the EU’s responsibility (or more particularly, moral responsibility and obligation) as well as the perceptions of threat and EU’s unity appeared in the quotes and discussion above. In fact, these themes kept re-emerging in both discourses during 2015 and 2022 refugee crises and will be discussed more in the following section. The aim is to further discover how these identity constructions highlighted in the above were positioned in the discourse that made possible and enabled contrasting policies to emerge.

6.2 Construction of a threat, the question of EU unity and the responsibility of the EU

The following excerpt from a speech by former VP Frans Timmermans introduced number of additional themes in the 2015 discourse such as the notion of a challenge that the refugee crisis presents for the EU, the unequal impact across the EU – suggesting the West vs. East divide, a consequent threat to the EU’s unity and finally the question of solidarity and other values the EU identifies with versus interdependence or responsibility. Thus, these themes were most prevalent in the discourse in 2015, which all reinforce one another and also contribute to identity constructions.

These challenges – simply put: refugees and migration; ... –, these challenges impact differently across the EU. But each of them poses a threat to Europe's unity as a whole and can only be met with a truly European approach. So all of them raise basic questions of solidarity or its somewhat less attractive counterpart interdependence: should we stay together? Do we want to stay together? (Timmermans, 2015b)

The quote by Timmermans begins by describing refugees and migration as significant issue impacting the EU, establishing it as the most important and defining challenge. The Commissioner Stylianides (2015) – when addressing the Humanitarian Aid Partners in Brussels, also stated that “*It is not an exaggeration to say that the refugee crisis is the most important challenge we have faced in recent times. It is a crisis of mega proportions.*” It is evident that the crisis is portrayed as distressing, challenging, and defining, while “us” are

positioned as the ones who will respond, act as the international community. These binary distinctions create a separation between "us" and the crisis, reinforcing the idea of a challenge that is external. Hence, the refugee crisis is constructed as an external force that confronts "us" or in other words is imposed up on and demands a response. It is portrayed as something that cannot be ignored or dismissed, with references to the crisis being of "mega proportions" and not going away soon. It suggests that it is the refugees that are the cause behind the crisis and the fact that they will continue seeking refuge in Europe signified a challenge.

Timmerman's quote further recognizes that these challenges have varying impacts across the European Union, stating that they "impact differently across the EU." This acknowledges the diversity and heterogeneity within the EU and suggests that different member states may experience and perceive these challenges differently. However, most specifically, it implies unequal distribution of the refugee influx and that several EU member states located at the borders. On one side of the Union, Italy and Greece, in particular, as the main entry points for many refugees and migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea, faced significant challenges in managing the crisis, securing their borders, lacking the necessary capacities to cope with the large numbers of people seeking refuge. On the other side of the Union, countries were reluctant to accept the refugees and share the burden. For instance, Frans Timmermans (2015c) reflected on this fragmentation or disintegration of the EU at 'Prague European Summit' Conference, where he talked about *"the greatest success of the project which was the European reunification, the enlargement, but it happened so quickly and it was so far reaching that our people on both sides of what was previously a dividing line sometimes did not get enough time to digest this, to understand what the consequences are. And so today in the refugee crisis there are frictions and sometimes misunderstandings between East and West about how to provide solidarity in this crisis."* The discourse recognizes the existence of frictions and misunderstandings between the East and West of Europe regarding how to provide solidarity in the refugee crisis. This representation highlights the differences in perspectives and approaches between regions, suggesting potential divisions and tensions within the European Union – particularly the West and East divide. The acknowledgement of the diverse impacts, perceptions of the challenges as well as the divide on how to provide solidarity within the EU reflects the complexity of the EU's decision-making processes. The division among member states in terms of their interests and political contexts undermines the cohesion, endanger internal functioning of the EU. Consequently, through these discursive processes the refugees are being associated and their identities constructed through these divisions.

The quote by the former VP of the EU further framing the refugees as posing a “threat to Europe's unity.” It assigns meaning to these challenges of fragmentation and divide and positions them as important for the collective European identity. The question of EU’s unity was among the most prevalent themes in the discourse and most pressing as others leading EU figures such as former President of the European Commission Juncker (2015a) called on the member states and declared that “*when there are threats to our system, we have to take our responsibility and prepare a collective response.*” The EU discourse constructed refugees as dangerous and a threat to its unity, its ability to form cohesive agreement and a common approach, as was also expressed by the former Commissioner Avramopoulos (2015b) when he stated, “*And let me be clear: we urgently need a common approach,*” stressing the EU needed more coordinated approach in dealing with the refugee crisis. The quote under analyses further argues that these challenges can only be addressed and met with a “truly European approach”, which signified that is the only way to respond to the refugee crisis. Nevertheless, what exactly it is that constitute a “European approach” is unclear. I would argue that based on the contextualisation of the whole discourse, this framing emphasizes the need for collective action and a unified response and highlights the importance of cooperation and shared responsibility in tackling these challenges. However, at the same time, this European Approach suggest that the EU collectively need to stay in line within what the EU represents such as its values and solidarity. In his State of the Union speech titled *Time for Honesty, Unity and Solidarity*, Jean-Claude Juncker (2015b) voiced “*we need more union in our Union!*” Additionally, speech by Commissioner Avramopoulos (2015c) builds on this and states “*We need more solidarity. We need more responsibility. We need more union in our European Union.,*” implying three concepts – union, solidarity and responsibility are interconnected and necessary for the survival of the EU. This meaning of EU’s survival can also be derived from the final part of Timmerman’s speech where he concluded with word “do we want to stay together? Should we stay together?”. The formal Vice-President Timmermans signals that without solidarity and “its somewhat less attractive counterpart interdependence,” the EU existence is put into question. In fact, the 2015 refugee crisis discourse construct the EU as a vulnerable actor that stands on its unity and solidarity and taking responsibility in these two ideals are imperative for the survival of the EU as well as of its identity.

While the concepts of unity and solidarity are quite commonly used in the discourse of the EU institutions and are often used to describe the EU identity that stands on certain values that are commonly shared among the member states, the 2015 discourse on refugee crisis

constructed the notion of solidarity in relation with interdependence, responsibility or organised solidarity. As Frans Timmermans asserted in the quote under analyses above, "basic questions of solidarity or its somewhat less attractive counterpart interdependence," mentions interdependence and construct it as a "state" of being dependent upon one another or mutually responsible – implying that such "state" is indeed the establishment of the EU. Moreover, it describes it as a counterpart – thus, interdependence and mutual responsibility complete or go hand in hand with providing solidarity. Member states should, therefore, depend on each other in regard to expressing solidarity and responsibility with refugees. Timmerman (2015b) also re-stated in his other speech that *"Our society is built on certain premises of organised solidarity that would be undermined if we simply would say that everybody can come in. But Europe can't survive either if we take leave of our values and our legal obligations vis-à-vis people who have the right to protection when they flee from war and persecution."* "Organised solidarity" may initially seem like a positive, all-encompassing concept that denotes a group commitment to collaboration, mutual aid, and social cohesiveness. It suggests a feeling of cohesion and shared accountability among a society's citizens. From a critical perspective, however, the idea of "organised solidarity" can be viewed as a discursive tactic that establishes and controls the boundary lines of inclusion and exclusion. The word "organised" connotes an intentional and systematic approach to solidarity, meaning that it is constrained and subject to a set of standards and requirements. This begs the question of who's responsibility it is to define and set the rules of this solidarity. It places those in power as the ones who decide who deserves assistance and protection and who does not by portraying solidarity as organized. It can be used to defend restrictive policies on immigration and asylum and give precedence to the interests of the population at large over the rights and requirements of displaced people.

The last quote from the 2015 discourse to be analysed will act as a reflection on the EU reputation and image in the world and how refugee crisis not only uncover internal divisions in the EU but challenge its identity of a moral and ethical identity.

Ladies and gentlemen, if, together, over 500 million Europeans – the best-governed and most prosperous part of the globe – cannot deal with a share of refugees that in comparison with our population is very small, what would that say about our role in the world, about the values underlying the European project? (Timmermans, 2015b)

In another quote, Timmermans illustrates a discourse of power by referring to Europe and its population of over 500 million as the "best-governed and most prosperous part of the

globe." This portrayal emphasizes Europe's perceived authority and influence by portraying it as a strong and superior global entity. The potential inability to effectively deal with a relatively small share of refugees is presented as a concern that would impact the EU's standing in the world and raise questions about the values underlying the European project. The phrase "role in the world" takes on special meaning for the EU in light of the 2015 refugee crisis. It speaks to how the EU views its duties, moral commitments, and position in the world in light of the difficulties presented by the significant number of refugees looking for safety within its borders. The crisis forced a re-evaluation of the EU's place and reputation in the world. The statement implies that in light of the refugee crisis, the EU is reflecting on its own role and principles. Given that the EU is one of the richest and most well-run regions in the world with a population of over 500 million, it raises questions about its capacity to handle the situation and ability to show solidarity in order to fulfil its declared ideals. It reflects the EU's need to portray itself as a morally responsible, strong entity with a worldwide reach. According to the quote, the manner in which the EU handles the refugee situation will not only affect its internal dynamics but also the way its reputation appears internationally. Moreover, the EU's role in the world is not only endangered by the mismanagement of the refugee crisis but also by inability to preserve the values that underpin the European project. The EU's self-presentation as a moral authority and strong and united force on the global stage, which seems so be the crucial for the EU identity and survival, intersects with realities of the 2015 refugee crises, which exposed gaps, inconsistencies and divisions in EU's response.

The 2015 narrative at the EU level, however, does not pay a lot of attention to securitising refugees using military terms and takes a different stance on the refugee crisis than national discourses in a number of EU member states. The former Commissioner Avramopoulos' (2015d) bold claim that refugees *"will not be stopped by walls or fences, and they should not be stopped by them"* is indicative of this. It challenges and invalidates the idea that people may effectively stop seeking safety and protection inside the Union through physical obstacles like walls or fences. The EU's official discourse on refugees does not primarily portray them as a security issue in terms of military defence, border protection, or economic and labour market instability, in contrast to the pervasive securitization discourse seen in national-level debates. Instead, the EU discourse views refugees as a perceived danger to its cohesiveness, ability to come to agreements, and self-identity as a moral leader and role model for the world. It is important as it captures the distinct viewpoint and concerns of the EU as a supranational organization. The EU discourse frames the migration issue as a challenge

that goes beyond traditional security and economic reasons by highlighting the potential threats to its unity and moral authority in the world.

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Regarding the discourse of 2022, the following quotes will provide insights into and EU's portrayal of threat, divisions and EU's image. It argues that while these themes have been prevalent in both discourses, it shows some inconsistencies and different constructions of identities.

And this war is not only a war in Europe. It is also a war against Europe. ... Putin wants to destroy the European Union. That's why he wants to divide us. Why does he see the EU as such a threat? What is he so scared of? The EU doesn't have an army. We don't have a navy. Or an air force. What we do have is liberty, prosperity and democracy. Making the European Union the biggest inspiration. To people outside our borders. Suffering under corrupt dictators. (Johansson, 2022a)

The comment by Commissioner Johansson during his keynote address at the EU Days in Lund, Sweden, is an example of how EU leaders have been portraying Putin as a tyrant and a dictator who wants to destroy the EU. The quotation creates a power dynamic in which Putin is portrayed as a threat to the existence and unity of the European Union by asserting that the battle is not only in Europe but also against Europe. The excerpt claims that Putin's ambition to split apart the EU is motivated by fear. This portrayal places the EU as an entity that challenges Putin's goals and pursuits, which he wants to undermine by causing instability. The argument places a strong emphasis on the principles of democracy, freedom, and prosperity that are shared by the European Union. These principles are emphasized as what sets the European Union apart and act as an example to others around the world who live under despotic, corrupt governments. In this portrayal, the European Union is shown as a symbol of hope and a desirable goal. The argument compares the European Union's values with the absence of traditional armed capabilities such as an army, navy, or air force. This image implies that rather than through conventional military means, the power of the EU originates in its values, ideals, and the beneficial impact it has.

The idea of dangers to European unity is highlighted in both the 2015 and 2020 debates. In both situations, there is an awareness that the EU is in danger and that it is crucial to tackle these issues jointly. Both crises have been discussed in relation to European identity and values.

The discourse portrays Europe as a separate region with distinctive qualities like liberty, democracy, and cohesion. A sense of unified purpose and moral authority is established by referencing the EU's identity and ideals. The distinction exists in how the EU constructs the threat, or what exactly constitutes a threat, as well as how it constructs otherness. In the quote about the 2022 refugee issue in Ukraine, Putin and the Russian Federation are mentioned as the threat, whereas in the one about the 2015 refugee crisis, refugees and migration are mentioned as the problems. The emphasis turns from a geopolitical threat from the outside to internal problems caused by migration and the influx of refugees. Thus, one could argue that the discourses differ in terms of focus. The 2015 discourse centres on challenges such as refugees and migration, addressing questions of solidarity within the EU. It presents a broader perspective on internal challenges to European unity. While in 2025 the EU does not specifically name an enemy and focuses on issues affecting EU unity without specifically blaming any one player for them, the 2022 Ukraine discourse openly names Putin as the enemy aiming to destroy the EU. It presents a more specific geopolitical context and a distinct focus on external challenges.

The following analysis of the quote below analysed the “proud moment” of the EU and argues that it not only lies in its ability to respond united and with solidarity but also respond to a clear enemy – Putin. Moreover, it compares different constructions and meanings of solidarity that was discussion in relation to 2015 and 2022 refugees – solidarity vs. organised solidarity.

... a whole continent has risen in solidarity. ...Europeans neither hid nor hesitated. ... our Union as a whole has risen to the occasion. [But] this year, as soon as Russian troops crossed the border into Ukraine, our response was united, determined and immediate. And we should be proud of that. (Von der Leyen, 2022b).

In the 2022 State of the Union Speech addressed by Ursula von der Leyen, she emphasizes the notion of solidarity and unity within Europe in the aftermath of Russian invasion that prompted millions of Ukrainians to find refuge in the EU. According to Von der Leyen, Europeans should be proud of how they handled the situation – providing immediate and united solidarity conveying a sense of cooperation and group effort, within the entire continent that stood up to deal with the issue. The impression that the EU's actions – such as the cohesive solidarity of the member states that opened up their border and accepted Ukrainian refugees were praiseworthy, stressing a sense of accomplishment that reinforces the desired identity of

a powerful and united Europe. This discourse practise that praised opening the EU border for Ukrainians was further used by other EU leaders. For instance, Commissioner Johansson (2022a) referred to the EU's response as *"our proudest moment, when we welcomed millions of Ukrainian refugees. When we acted united, and we still do, towards Putin."* The construction of a proud moment signifies not only expressed solidarity towards refugees but the united front that the EU managed to create against a clear enemy – Putin.

The difference in emphasis between the 2015 discourse, which highlights the importance of "organized solidarity," and the 2022 discourse, which does not specifically address the organizational aspect of solidarity, reflects a significant shift in the EU's responses to the respective crises. While the 2022 discourse emphasizes the unity and immediate response of the EU that without hesitation expressed solidarity with concrete action was presented as a source of pride, the 2015 raised questions about its ability to handle the refugee crisis and placed emphasis on "organized solidarity" of the EU that prevented them from opening their border. This contrast of constructing the notion of solidarity in the EU discourse that on one hand defended protective measures and on the other praised the pure solidarity of the member states and unrestricted admission of refugees also contributed and played a significant role in shaping the contrasting treatment of refugees in these two instances. The 2015 response acknowledged the need for a well-coordinated and structured approach to address the challenges associated with the refugee crisis. In contrast, the 2022 response was more focused on immediate humanitarian assistance without referring to any challenges that may arise with such "un-organised solidarity". The absence of a similar emphasis on "organized solidarity" in the 2022 discourse suggests a different approach or perspective in the EU's response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis. This could indicate a shift towards a more immediate and reactive response, driven by the urgency of the situation and the need to address the immediate needs of the affected population.

The last part of the analysis will touch upon a changed perception and construction of migrants and refugees that appeared and gain a significant prevalence in the 2022 discourse. Commissioner Johansson in his speech titled "Time to Rethink Solidarity [and] EU Asylum Policy?" stated the following:

Migration is nothing to be afraid of. War is something to be afraid of. Putin is someone to be afraid of, but migrants themselves are nothing to be afraid of, it's something to manage and we have to manage it together. (Johansson, 2022b)

The quotation begins by characterizing migration as "nothing to be afraid of" and drawing a comparison between it and war, which is presented as something to be feared. This framing implies a distinction between the threats that migration and war are considered to entail. The contrasting of the potential threats posed by Putin with the manageable nature of migration in the quote establishes a power differential between the two. The phrase contradicts the prevalent narrative that connects migrants to fear, insecurity, and potential danger by framing migration as a manageable issue as opposed to something to fear. Furthermore, Putin is particularly mentioned in the remark as someone to be wary of, making him the main cause for worry or threat. This partial attributing of fear to Putin pulls attention away from immigration and toward a certain political figure. By doing so, the remark emphasizes the significance of having control over Putin's behaviour and intentions as opposed to stigmatizing or denigrating migrants themselves. It counteracts the stigmatization and exclusion of migrants and promotes a more inclusive approach towards migration.

While this shift in the discourse is present in relation to Ukrainian refugees, it raises a question what it means for the EU migration and asylum policies, migrant from Middle East and Asia and whether the West vs. East divisions can also be unified. Further research should, therefore, focus and explore how this shift influences EU migratory and asylum policies and what are the power dynamics among the member states that influence such policies. For instance, whether there are any attempts to unify the Western and Eastern divisions in the discourse or whether the EU's identity of a moral global authority is on a decline, or it will proceed to grow in its strength.

7 CONCLUSION

This thesis introduced interpretative, comparative study where it examined the official discourse of the EU institutions and analysed how do the constructed identities on the EU level enables different responses to the 2015 refugee crisis with influxes of people fleeing Middle East and Africa compared to the 2022 refugee influxes of Ukrainians fleeing conflict with Russia. Numerous criticisms have appeared during EU's inability to manage the crisis in 2015, which became more prevalent after the unrestricted admission of Ukrainian refugees and activating Temporary Protection Mechanism that opened borders for refugees fleeing Russian invasion.

Due to EU's self-presentation as a moral authority on a global scale and the fact is it imbedded in its identity, poststructuralist theoretical framework was applied as a best approach to study construction of various identities, discursive strategies, competing narratives, meanings and power dynamics to understand the difference between the 2015 and 2022 response to refugees. The first part of the thesis presented existing literature by various social constructivists and poststructuralists scholars who examines relations between the relevant actors, prevalent discourses and identities that were formed. Most of scholars agreed on the "otherness" of Russia as an irrational, backwards power, with its threatening aims of influence over the Central and Eastern Europe as well as "*otherness*" of Middle East and Africa as unstable regions, raging with wars, instability and aggression. Ukraine often perceived as an "in-between" power, making steps towards either Western or Eastern integration. The existing literature on refugee representation in migratory crises has predominantly focused on migration securitization and humanitarian response, leaving a gap in applying poststructuralism to analyse the rhetoric of EU institutions in response to refugee crises. This study aims to address this gap by employing poststructuralist perspectives to examine the language and discursive practices of EU institutions during the 2015 and 2022 refugee crises. It will explore the construction of identity, power relations, and policy decisions within the EU's migration and asylum rhetoric, using concepts such as othering and spatial/geographical othering, emphasizing the marginalization of certain groups. The study adopts a post-positivist approach, recognizing subjective experiences and discursive behaviours as key factors in shaping meanings and actions.

The analysis of speeches and statements by various political leaders of the EU addressing the Ukrainian refugees in 2022 and refugee crisis in 2015 highlights several significant points.

Firstly, the construction of identities of main actors, particularly the distinction between the "Radical" and "Threatening Other," played a crucial role in shaping the European response to the crisis. The construction of identities was significantly influenced by spatial and temporal othering. Spatial othering played a crucial role in creating a division between the Middle East and Africa regions, portraying them as dangerous sources of conflict imposed on the EU and Europe, while positioning the EU as obliged to accept them. On the other hand, temporal othering resonated strongly in the 2022 discourse, emphasizing a comparison between the past and the present. It highlighted the notion that Europe had experienced a period of peace, only to have instability reintroduced by Russia.

Contrary to initial expectations and previous scholarly views on refugee discourses, the discourse within EU institutions does not frame the perception of threat in military or security terms. Instead, it emphasizes concepts of unity, EU identity, and internal agreements. This observation extends to the broader discussions on EU identity, which is relatively new, underdeveloped, and weak, particularly in relation to the integration of countries with divergent backgrounds, cultures, and political views, such as post-Soviet countries and the coexistence of conservative and liberal ideologies. This dynamic not only impacts the strength of the EU as an economic cooperative, but also as a political organization. Consequently, it poses a challenge to the EU's role as a moral authority and leading advocate for human rights. In fact, the EU's self-presentation as a moral authority and a powerful, united entity on the global stage, which is pivotal for its identity and continued existence, intersects with the realities of the 2015 and 2022 refugee crises. Thus, the second part of the analysis focused on the recurrent themes in both discourses such as the perception of threat, solidarity and EU's image – whose different construction in the contrasting discourses further contributed to the different responses that the two groups of refugees received. One of the main takeaways from the second analysis is a critical assessment of "organised solidarity", which highlights the need to challenge and deconstruct the power relations and exclusions inherent in such conceptions. It necessitates a more complex interpretation of solidarity that transcends predetermined limits and embraces a more inclusive and just system of social interactions.

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