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Slonina, Alisa. *Refugee reception in the EU: discursive strategies and implicit bias in the treatment of Syrians and Ukrainians*. Treball de Final de Grau (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona), 2025 (Relacions Internacionals)

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**Faculty of Political Science and Sociology**

**Autonomous University of Barcelona**



**Bachelor's Thesis**

**Refugee Reception in the EU: Discursive Strategies and Implicit Bias in the  
Treatment of Syrians and Ukrainians**

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**Date: 26.05.2025**

**Degree in: International Relations**

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## Introduction

The issue of refugee reception in the European Union (hereinafter—the EU) has become one of the central topics on the migration agenda in recent decades, particularly in the context of the two largest waves of forced migration in recent history: the Syrian crisis of 2015–2016 and the Ukrainian crisis of 2022. Both events triggered a large-scale influx of displaced persons into EU countries and required urgent responses. Despite the similar root causes of forced displacement, the approaches to hosting Syrian and Ukrainian refugees differed significantly. There is an ongoing debate about the reasons behind these divergent responses, which have manifested both in the institutional mechanisms of protection and in the level of governmental support and public perception. Ukrainian refugees received an immediate and favorable response, including the implementation of a simplified Temporary Protection regime. In contrast, Syrian applicants faced lengthy procedures, restrictive criteria, and, in many cases, pronounced social and political apprehension.

In academic discourse, ongoing debates seek to explain the reasons behind the divergent reception of Syrian and Ukrainian refugees. Some scholars attribute these differences primarily to deep-seated racial and cultural biases, arguing that perceptions of “Europeanness” play a decisive role. Others emphasize geopolitical considerations and the so-called “proximity trap,” suggesting that neighboring conflicts elicit stronger humanitarian responses due to shared borders and immediate political stakes.

**Research Objective:** To assess the influence of underlying factors on the contrasting treatment of Syrian and Ukrainian refugees, through a comparative study of European leaders<sup>1</sup> public rhetoric.

**Research Question:** What discursive strategies do EU leaders use to justify the different treatment of Syrian and Ukrainian refugees?

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this study, the term “EU leaders” is used in a broad sense to encompass heads of state and government, members of parliaments, and high-ranking EU officials involved in shaping public discourse and policymaking on refugee reception.

To achieve the study's objective and answer the research question, a content-analysis of public statements by senior EU officials was conducted for two distinct periods (the Syrian refugee crisis of 2015–2016 and the Ukrainian refugee crisis of 2022). The methodological framework follows the approach outlined by Krippendorff in *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*<sup>2</sup>. All pertinent utterances were transcribed, coded according to pre-defined discursive frames (security threat, cultural-moral threat, dehumanization, solidarity, legal order, etc.), and subjected to quantitative lexical counting.

**Research Hypothesis:** Xenophobic attitudes and implicit biases, disguised as rational justifications (such as security threats), may be the principal force explaining these differences.

Drawing on both lexical frequency patterns and qualitative discourse interpretation, the analysis identifies recurring rhetorical structures that shape the public legitimization of refugee policies. The juxtaposition of thematic frequency data with qualitative discourse analysis revealed the latent xenophobic logic that legitimizes unequal treatment of different refugee groups.

### **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

This literature review examines the evolution of the EU's migration policy, tracing historical developments in asylum law and analyzing contemporary approaches to regulating migration. Central to the review is an investigation into the origins of unequal treatment, which, as emphasized in the analysis, may stem from manifestations of latent xenophobia. Particular attention is given to the factors shaping public perceptions of migration and their indirect influence on legislative decisions. The review seeks to identify elements that exacerbate contradictions within the European migration system, reflecting a profound tension between proclaimed humanitarian values and practical implementation.

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<sup>2</sup> Krippendorff, 2019

### Historical Context

FitzGerald in his book “Refuge Beyond Reach. How Rich Democracies Repel Asylum Seekers”<sup>3</sup> conducts a historical analysis of the evolution of asylum policies, highlighting the interplay between global events and the formation of Western states’ approaches. The author demonstrates that the denial of visas to Jewish refugees during the Holocaust and World War II, later recognized as a moral failure of the international community, reflected not only legal but also ideological foundations of asylum policy. These foundations, as FitzGerald underscores, were shaped not merely by fears of provoking Nazi Germany but also by entrenched antisemitism prevalent at the time. This historical context catalyzed the drafting of the 1951 Refugee Convention, which enshrined the cornerstone principle of international law: non-refoulement, prohibiting the forced return of individuals to regions where their lives or freedoms are threatened. This principle was later universalized through the 1967 Protocol, which removed the original document’s geographic and temporal limitations.

Following the Cold War, a period during which asylum policies were often instrumentalized for propagandistic purposes, Western migration policies underwent significant transformation. Security and enhanced border control became priorities. In the 1990s–2000s, this shift manifested in the adoption of Remote-Control System aimed at restricting refugees’ physical access to state territories. While ostensibly compliant with international legal obligations, such measures *de facto* minimized opportunities to exercise the right to asylum. Within this framework, FitzGerald introduces the conceptual term hyper-legalism, defined as the systematic use of legal procedural norms to adhere to the letter of the law while disregarding its humanitarian essence. The author argues that hyper-legalism legitimizes policies aimed at reducing refugee inflows through excessive regulation, bureaucratic barriers, and interpretative loopholes. Thus, formal compliance with international standards masks states’ strategic efforts to curtail migration, driven by hidden motives ranging from xenophobic sentiments to geopolitical pragmatism.

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<sup>3</sup> FitzGerald, 2019

In his work, Skordas<sup>4</sup> examines how the Yugoslav Wars intensified debates over EU asylum policy regulation. As the first major post-World War II conflict in Europe, this crisis triggered mass displacement on a scale unprecedented since 1945. In response, the EU adopted the Temporary Protection Directive (hereinafter—TPD, 2001/55/EC) in 2001, establishing a framework to manage large-scale refugee flows. The directive aimed to ensure swift and coordinated EU action during sudden mass arrivals, particularly when national asylum systems risked collapse.

#### Differences in the Perception of Syrian and Ukrainian Refugees

In the academic sphere, there are differing opinions and two main debates regarding the reasons behind the markedly distinct attitudes toward Syrian and Ukrainian refugees. Some scholars attribute these differences primarily to deep-seated racial and cultural biases while others point to geopolitical factors and the so-called “proximity trap.” In this part of the literature review, this idea will be explored through a comparison of the two main debates, ultimately guiding the development of the hypothesis of the research. Both lines of argument will be considered in the further empirical analysis to assess their explanatory power.

Divergent perceptions of Ukrainian and Syrian refugees have been significantly shaped by media narratives and political discourse. As highlighted in the work of Sosa Popovic & Welfens<sup>5</sup>, which examines the discursive dimensions of migration policy, language and narratives play a pivotal role in shaping public attitudes toward refugees. Content analyses of media coverage reveal that Ukrainian displaced persons are frequently framed as “refugees like us,” fostering a positive image and association with European values. In contrast, Syrian refugees are often subjected to narratives of “otherness,” reinforcing negative perceptions. A critical distinction lies in the conceptualization of the “crisis”: in 2015, the crisis was framed as the refugee influx itself rather than the Syrian war, whereas in 2022, the crisis was unequivocally identified as the war in Ukraine. This divergence led to contrasting policy approaches: the Syrian crisis remained under national jurisdiction, while the Ukrainian crisis was addressed at the supranational level. For instance, Hungary

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<sup>4</sup> Skordas, 2022

<sup>5</sup> Sosa Popovic & Welfens, 2024

and Poland rejected Syrian relocation quotas, labeling their arrival as “illegal migration,” whereas the EU swiftly activated the TPD for Ukrainians. Sosa Popovic and Welfens attribute these disparities to racial stereotypes, Ukraine’s geographic proximity, legal factors (e.g., visa-free regimes), and the perception of the Ukrainian crisis as a direct security threat to the EU. Furthermore, solidarity with Ukraine became intertwined with the construction of a pan-European identity framed as a defense of democracy against authoritarian Russia. In 2015, the Syrian war failed to elicit comparable solidarity due to cultural distance and the absence of perceived direct threats to the EU. This underscores how European solidarity is mobilized when crises resonate with EU identity and security concerns, rather than being dismissed as “peripheral issues.” Consequently, despite similar migration drivers, the EU’s approach to these refugee groups diverged fundamentally.

A critical addition to this analysis is the concept of the “proximity trap,” introduced by Bueno Lacy and Van Houtum<sup>6</sup>. The authors argue that Ukraine’s geographic proximity to the EU has been instrumentalized to legitimize differential refugee treatment, masking structural racism and colonial underpinnings within Europe’s border regime. Narratives emphasizing Ukrainians’ cultural and spatial proximity (“like us”) create an illusion of humanitarian exceptionalism, while denying Syrians comparable protection is justified through their perceived “foreignness” and geographic remoteness. However, as the researchers stress, such rhetoric ignores historical EU ties with Middle Eastern states and perpetuates hierarchies of “global apartheid,” wherein rights to mobility and protection are contingent on racial and geographic belonging. Moreover, following this logic, it might be expected other countries to have responded similarly in comparable cases. However, as FitzGerald<sup>7</sup> illustrates in his book, migration relations between the United States and Mexico remain strained despite their geographic proximity and the ethnic ties between Mexico and parts of the U.S. border states.

Further insight into the EU’s double standards is provided by Abdelaaty<sup>8</sup>, who argues that perceptions of non-European migrants in EU policy are rooted in

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<sup>6</sup> Bueno Lacy & Van Houtum, 2022

<sup>7</sup> FitzGerald, 2019

<sup>8</sup> Abdelaaty, 2021

colonial stereotypes that construct the image of the “uncivilized Other.” This narrative, Abdelaaty contends, legitimizes systemic rights violations against these groups, including restricted access to asylum procedures and basic protections. To conceptualize this phenomenon, the author introduces the term liberal violence—institutionalized violence by the EU masked by rhetoric upholding liberal values such as human rights, rule of law, and democracy. Abdelaaty emphasizes that refugee rights violations are systemic, particularly in the context of EU partnerships with authoritarian regimes like Libya and Turkey under its “migration control outsourcing” policy. A stark example is Italy’s funding of Libyan coast guard patrols, which have been documented using firearms against migrants in the Mediterranean and forcibly returning detainees to centers where torture and abuse are rampant. Additionally, Abdelaaty critiques the EU’s “buffer zone” strategy along external borders, which delegates migration containment to third countries. While ostensibly aimed at combating “illegal migration,” this practice reinforces institutional racism, transmuting xenophobic attitudes into security-driven policy mechanisms. Such measures are rationalized as necessary to preserve “European values,” exposing a profound contradiction between proclaimed humanitarian principles and restrictive practices. Similar mechanisms are explored by Esposito<sup>9</sup>, who analyzes the “limits of humanity”: Ukrainians receive temporary protection and social guarantees, while Syrians endure prolonged procedures, restrictions, and deportations. This imbalance, Esposito argues, reflects not merely perceptual differences but a structural hierarchization of human life, wherein protection rights are determined by racial and cultural belonging. Thus, these disparities underscore that access to protection in the EU hinges on racial and cultural identity, revealing systemic xenophobia.

Börzel and Risse<sup>10</sup> describe the negative attitudes toward Syrian refugees through the lens of postfunctionalism. The authors emphasize that postfunctionalism focuses on the shift from technocratic elite governance to the politicization of previously depoliticized issues, such as migration. This shift triggers public debates dominated by collective identity and societal perceptions. The researchers note that

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<sup>9</sup> Esposito, 2022

<sup>10</sup> Börzel & Risse, 2017

during crises (e.g., the 2015 migration crisis), postfunctionalism explains the emergence of “restrictive dissensus”, a phenomenon where depoliticized migration issues become subjects of public contention, fueling citizen and political party resistance. This process fragments EU member states’ positions and complicates consensus-building.

In Eastern Europe, migration was framed as a threat to national identity, amplifying populist narratives and undermining EU solidarity principles. In this context, a Foreign Policy article<sup>11</sup> introduces the concept of “solidarity hypocrisy,” revealing how the EU’s moral rhetoric toward Ukrainian refugees, lauding them as “defenders of European values,” masks systemic policy hypocrisy. European leaders condemn Russian aggression while ignoring their role in Middle Eastern conflicts, such as arms supplies to Syria and coalition interventions that destabilized Libya. This constructs a narrative where Ukrainian suffering is legitimized as “unjust sacrifice,” while Syrian refugees are depicted as “collateral damage of distant conflicts” for which the EU bears no responsibility.

Ineli-Ciger<sup>12</sup> further illustrates that the activation of the TPD for Ukrainians in 2022 reflects not a humanitarian response but the systemic selectivity of EU migration policy. Researchers note that the legal conditions for invoking the TPD (mass influx, inability to process individual claims) existed during the 2015–2016 Syrian crisis, yet the EU opted for restrictive measures—border closures, deals with Turkey, and the normalization of “detention camps.” In contrast, the TPD was activated instantaneously for Ukraine despite requiring unanimous EU consensus—previously deemed unattainable. This contrast, the authors argue, demonstrates that the decisive factor was not objective humanitarian need but the politicization of refugees as “deserving” or “threatening” based on racial and cultural profiles.

Moreover, the demographic composition of refugee flows plays a significant role in either mitigating or reinforcing the securitization of migration. In the case of the Syrian crisis, the primary group consisted of young men<sup>13</sup>, who were often

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<sup>11</sup> Traub, 2022

<sup>12</sup> Ineli-Ciger, 2022

<sup>13</sup> Pew Research Center, 2016

associated in European discourse with potential threats, ranging from radicalization to involvement in terrorist networks. In contrast, Ukrainian refugees are predominantly women and children<sup>14</sup>. The gender and age profile of this wave of migrants shaped a different perceptual “frame,” one dominated by images of vulnerability, motherhood, innocence, and the need for protection rather than restriction.

#### The EU’s Selectivity in Refugee Reception: Beyond the Syrian and Ukrainian Context

The 2022 study by the Global Detention Project provides a critical analysis of double standards in migration governance, framing migrant detention practices as an indicator of the EU’s systemic selectivity. The authors demonstrate that despite rhetoric advocating the “humanization” of policies toward Ukrainians, the EU’s border regime retains repressive mechanisms targeting refugees from other regions. For instance, in 2022, Ukrainians faced minimal risk of detention in holding facilities, while Syrians, Afghans, and African migrants continued to be disproportionately confined in such institutions, often under conditions violating Council of Europe standards. This underscores that the purported “transformation” of European policy has been selectively performative, entrenching privileges for certain groups while normalizing violence against others.

A critical dimension of the EU’s discriminatory practices is racial profiling within the Ukrainian refugee cohort itself, as revealed in Opinio Juris’ 2022 analysis<sup>15</sup>. The study highlights that non-white refugee from Ukraine, including students and labor migrants of African, Asian, and Middle Eastern origin, faced systematic segregation at EU borders, despite the ostensibly universal applicability of the TPD. In Poland and Hungary, for example, Black and Arab refugees were subjected to border delays, additional documentation demands, or forced deportation, while white Ukrainians received immediate access to protection. Such practices contravene the non-discrimination principle enshrined in Article 3 of the 1951 Refugee

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<sup>14</sup> UNHCR, 2022

<sup>15</sup> Luquerna, 2022

Convention, revealing that even within a “privileged” refugee category, rights are contingent on racial hierarchies.

The Brookings Institution’s 2023 study<sup>16</sup> introduces the concept of the EU’s “strategic pivot” in migration policy, arguing that the unprecedented activation of the TPD for Ukrainians reflects not merely a situational response but a geopolitical reimagining of migration as a tool of competition. The authors posit that solidarity with Ukraine aligns with a broader project of European “sovereignization”, enhancing the EU’s global actorness by juxtaposing a “democratic West” against an “authoritarian East.”

### Conclusion

The literature review demonstrates that migration and asylum policies within the European Union are the product of a long-term historical evolution shaped not only by legal norms but also by deeply rooted ideological, cultural, and geopolitical processes. Historical precedents, such as visa denials and subsequent responses to crises, have laid the groundwork for international refugee protection standards. The literature presents two main strands of explanation for the disparate reception of Syrian and Ukrainian refugees in the European Union. The first emphasizes legal, geopolitical, and institutional factors, such as border proximity, perceived threat levels, and international alliances. The second focuses on structural and cultural dimensions, including implicit bias and racial hierarchies that shape public and political perceptions. While some scholars prioritize one explanation over the other, there is no consensus on a singular driving factor.

Given this multiplicity of perspectives, it becomes essential to examine not only what arguments are made in political discourse, but how they are framed and legitimized. This research therefore asks: What discursive strategies do EU leaders use to justify the different treatment of Syrian and Ukrainian refugees? By exploring this question, the study aims to assess how the various explanatory factors identified in the literature are mobilized rhetorically in EU-level political communication.

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<sup>16</sup> Varma & Roehse, 2024

Building on these insights, this study hypothesizes that xenophobic attitudes and implicit biases, though rarely stated explicitly, may be encoded in the language used by EU leaders to justify refugee reception. Rather than relying solely on objective criteria such as geopolitical context or institutional capacity, policymakers may employ rational-sounding discursive strategies (e.g., appeals to security or cultural proximity) that indirectly reflect latent xenophobia. This hypothesis will be tested through a comparative discourse analysis of official statements concerning Syrian and Ukrainian refugees.

### **Research Methodology**

This study employs qualitative discourse analysis on a purposive sample of thirty-nine quotes of official statements made by twenty-five senior EU policymakers during the peak periods of the Syrian (2015–2016) and Ukrainian (2022) crises<sup>17</sup>. Statements were selected based on the following criteria:

- a) Institutional rank (only statements by high-ranking political figures were included);
- b) Thematic relevance (explicit references to “refugees” or “migrant reception”);

It is important to acknowledge that the selection of speakers was not intended to reflect a proportional distribution of political ideologies across the EU. Instead, the analysis prioritized public figures, particularly national government officials and prominent party leaders, whose statements played a formative role in shaping the discourse on refugee reception, whether supportive or exclusionary. While high-ranking EU officials such as von der Leyen, Borrell, Juncker, etc. are included to reflect institutional perspectives, the corpus also incorporates right-wing and far-right actors (e.g., Le Pen, Farage, Orbán), whose rhetoric often crystallizes the mechanisms of securitization and rejection. These voices were selected precisely because they articulate exclusionary logics with clarity, allowing for the identification of thematic frames used to legitimize rejection. As such, the study does not claim ideological neutrality in selection, but rather focuses on discursive

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<sup>17</sup> All analyzed quotations are presented in Annex 1.

function: how language constructs and justifies inclusion or exclusion. This imbalance is therefore methodological, not accidental.

Research Hypothesis: Xenophobic attitudes and implicit biases, disguised as rational justifications (such as security threats), may be the principal force explaining these differences.

To test this hypothesis, a comparative textual analysis will be conducted to demonstrate how specific linguistic markers reflect latent xenophobia rather than objective security concerns or other officially cited rationales.

### Novelty of the Study

Discourse analysis of EU leaders' statements on refugee reception remains underexplored in contemporary scholarship, where institutional and legal dimensions of migration policy dominate. Media content analysis predominates in existing literature, while systematic scrutiny of official rhetoric as an indicator of ideological biases is scarce. This study addresses this gap by conceptualizing EU leaders' statements as manifestations of covert ideological frameworks, thereby evaluating xenophobia's role in shaping double-standard policies toward distinct refugee groups. To address this gap, the present study sets out to compare directly the lexical and thematic structures of official rhetoric on Syrian refugee reception during the 2015–2016 crisis and rhetoric on Ukrainian refugee reception in 2022. The central aim is to illuminate how different refugee groups are represented, and to test the hypothesis that underlying xenophobic predispositions, rather than purely rational considerations, shape public argumentation.

### Data Collection

- a) Syrian case (2015–2016). A purposive sample of speeches, press-statements, and parliamentary addresses by leading EU figures (e.g. heads of state, EU institutional presidents, etc.) was compiled from official archives and verified media transcripts. Particular emphasis was placed on utterances articulating reasons against reception, in order to expose the mechanisms of exclusion.
- b) Ukrainian case (2022). All available public statements by the same cohort of officials about Ukrainian refugee admission were collected. Unlike the

Syrian corpus, this sample contains virtually no anti-reception arguments, reflecting the absence of such positions in the public sphere.

### Analytical Procedure

This study employed content analysis as the primary method of data interpretation, following the methodology outlined by Krippendorff<sup>18</sup>, widely recognized as a foundational and classical text in the field. The procedure was structured in accordance with Krippendorff's analytical framework, which emphasizes systematic unitizing, context-sensitive coding, and inferential interpretation of textual data.

#### 1. Quotation Extraction.

Following Krippendorff's concept of unitizing, all documents were systematically reviewed, and utterances explicitly referencing refugee reception were extracted as discrete coding units.

#### 2. Thematic Coding.

Consistent with Krippendorff's recommendations for recording and analytical constructs, the extracted quotations were coded into thematic (e.g., security threat, dehumanization, solidarity, etc.).

#### 3. Frequency Count.

Following the representational techniques outlined by Krippendorff, representative terms associated with each thematic frame were identified, counted, and tabulated to assess their relative prominence.

#### 4. Comparative Interpretation.

Aligned with Krippendorff's logic of inference from textual data, Syrian and Ukrainian datasets were compared both qualitatively and quantitatively to identify asymmetries in representational strategies and dominant rhetorical frames.

This methodological framework enables a holistic interrogation of official discourses, revealing hidden ideological mechanisms and testing the hypothesis that xenophobia, not objective considerations, underpins disparate refugee policies. By bridging discourse analysis with critical migration studies, the study advances a

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<sup>18</sup> Krippendorff, 2019

nuanced understanding of how xenophobic narratives are institutionalized within EU governance.

## Study and Results

When examining the contrasting responses to the arrival of Syrian and Ukrainian refugees, it is important to analyze the role of key political actors. These individuals not only formally represent citizens (assuming free and fair democratic elections, which are rarely contested in EU member states), but also influence public opinion and contribute to the securitization of migration-related discourses. For reference and transparency, Annex 1 contains the full list of extracted quotations, organized by individual political figure.

### Reception of Syrian Refugees

Debates around the reception of Syrian refugees revealed deep divisions within European societies. Supporters of reception argued that young and able-bodied newcomers could help alleviate the strain on the pension systems of aging Western populations. Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel publicly endorsed this perspective and emerged as a prominent advocate of refugee reception, declaring in 2015 that those arriving should be seen as “*an opportunity for tomorrow*”<sup>19</sup>. However, not all political figures were equally optimistic. In Germany, the migration crisis of 2015–2016 coincided with a surge in support for the Alternative for Germany (hereinafter—the AfD) party. Initially formed in response to the 2008 economic crisis, the AfD rebranded itself as an overtly anti-immigration party and eventually secured second place in the recent Bundestag elections<sup>20</sup>. Prior to the arrival of Ukrainian refugees, Björn Höcke, one of the party’s leaders stated, “*Let’s not forget, the Syrian who comes to us has still his Syria. The Afghan who comes to us has still his Afghanistan [...] But if we lose our Germany, then we have no more home!*”<sup>21</sup>

The countries of the Visegrád Group (Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia) also expressed strong opposition to accepting Syrian refugees. In 2015,

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<sup>19</sup> Oltermann, 2015

<sup>20</sup> The Federal Returning Officer, 2025

<sup>21</sup> Chadwick & Oliveira, 2015

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán remarked: “*We shouldn’t forget that the people who are coming here grew up in a different religion and represent a completely different culture. Most are not Christian, but Muslim.*”<sup>22</sup> He went on to question: “*Or is it not worrying that Europe’s Christian culture is already barely able to maintain its own set of Christian values?*”<sup>23</sup> In 2016, Orbán intensified his rhetoric, asserting: “*Every single migrant poses a public security and terror risk,*”<sup>24</sup> and further insisted: “*For us migration is not a solution but a problem [...] not medicine but a poison, we don’t need it and won’t swallow it.*”<sup>25</sup> Polish President Andrzej Duda warned of the “*possible epidemics*”<sup>26</sup> that refugees might bring, while then Minister of the Interior Joachim Brudziński used inflammatory language, referring to refugees as “*young, horny bulls.*”<sup>27</sup> Jarosław Kaczyński, Deputy Prime Minister and leader of Poland’s Law and Justice Party, claimed that migrants were carriers of “*very dangerous diseases long absent from Europe [...] all sorts of parasites and protozoa, which [...] while not dangerous in the organisms of these people, could be dangerous here,*”<sup>28</sup> and insisted that refugees “*will not abide by the Polish law.*”<sup>29</sup> In the Czech Republic, President Miloš Zeman in 2015 made the controversial assertion that, under Islamic influence, “*We will be deprived of the women’s beauty since they will be shrouded in burkas from head to toe, including the face,*”<sup>30</sup> “*unfaithful women will be stoned and thieves will have their hands cut off.*”<sup>31</sup> That same year, Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico declared that Slovakia had been “*built for Slovaks, not for minorities.*”<sup>32</sup>

In France, the rise of anti-immigration rhetoric has likewise been associated with the 2015–2016 crisis. Marine Le Pen, leader of the National Front (now National Rally), gained significantly more support and consolidated her position as the third

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<sup>22</sup> Karnitschnig, 2015

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*

<sup>24</sup> The Guardian, 2016

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*

<sup>26</sup> Mazzini, 2022

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*

<sup>28</sup> Cienski, 2015

<sup>29</sup> Mazzini, 2022

<sup>30</sup> Prague Post, 2015

<sup>31</sup> Chadwick, 2015

<sup>32</sup> De la Baume, 2015

most influential political force<sup>33</sup>. In 2015, she delivered a series of sharply critical statements regarding Germany's migration policy. She claimed: "*Germany probably thinks its population is moribund, and it is probably seeking to lower wages and continue to recruit slaves through mass immigration.*"<sup>34</sup> Emphasizing the urgency of the situation, she urged: "*We must immediately stop this madness, in order to save our society, freedom and identity.*"<sup>35</sup> Le Pen further warned of the long-term consequences of uncontrolled migration, arguing: "*Without any action, this migratory influx will be like the barbarian invasion of the 4th century, and the consequences will be the same.*"<sup>36</sup> Similar views were expressed by Nadine Morano, French Member of the European Parliament: "*We're a Judeo-Christian country of white race.*"<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, the migration crisis and the contentious debate over refugee quotas within the EU partially contributed to the United Kingdom's growing momentum toward leaving the Union. In this context, several British political figures made some statements about the refugee reception. In 2015, then Prime Minister David Cameron referred to refugees as "*a swarm of people coming across the Mediterranean, seeking a better life, wanting to come to Britain,*"<sup>38</sup> a remark widely criticized for its dehumanizing tone. David Davies, Conservative Member of Parliament for Monmouth, suggested that dental checks and hand X-rays be used to verify the age of asylum seekers, arguing: "*We need to be quite hard-nosed here. People are desperate, they will say what they need to say to get in.*"<sup>39</sup> Nigel Farage, then leader of the UK Independence Party and Member of the European Parliament, played a prominent role in the Brexit campaign, unveiling a controversial poster and justifying it with the words: "*This is a photograph – an accurate, undoctored photograph – taken on 15 October last year following Angela Merkel's call in the summer and, frankly, if you believe, as I have always believed, that we should open our hearts to genuine refugees, that's one thing. But, frankly, as you can see from*

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<sup>33</sup> Cokelaere & Goury-Laffont, 2024

<sup>34</sup> Oziel, 2015

<sup>35</sup> Teaching Right, 2015

<sup>36</sup> Kent, 2015

<sup>37</sup> Allen, 2015

<sup>38</sup> BBC News, 2015

<sup>39</sup> Weaver, 2016

*this picture, most of the people coming are young males and, yes, they may be coming from countries that are not in a very happy state, they may be coming from places that are poorer than us, but the EU has made a fundamental error that risks the security of everybody.”<sup>40</sup>*

Lastly, in Italy, one of the EU’s primary border countries receiving sea arrivals, anti-immigration sentiments intensified after 2015-2016, when the country faced a critical shortage of resources to manage the influx. Italian politicians such as Matteo Salvini at the time remarked: “*TB and scabies do not come from Finland. Unfortunately, with a backward health system in North Africa these people reported illnesses that we had defeated for years.*”<sup>41</sup>

Nonetheless, it is important to emphasize that not all statements were so categorical. Senior EU officials also expressed the following views: “*Lebanon alone hosts almost as many Syrians as the entire European Union. Those who believe that refugees will destroy our Union should look at these figures and feel ashamed*”<sup>42</sup> (Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy); “*This time of uncontrolled migration is coming to an end, and it won’t repeat itself. The final goal we are aiming at, is that the refugees will get asylum in EU member states through resettlement, and not by embarking on a risky often tragic journey organised by smugglers. [...] Our determination to protect the EU’s external border does not change the fact that Europe will remain the most open continent in the world*”<sup>43</sup> (Donald Tusk, President of the European Council); “*Compassion compels us to lend them a helping hand. But moral duty and international law do too. [...] By supporting Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey in their task of hosting refugees. By fairly sharing the refugees within Europe. [...] We should be proud that Europe has become a beacon of hope for men, women, children, old and young fleeing from wars*”<sup>44</sup> (Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament); “*We must replace this heinous trafficking of human beings with legal, controlled movements of asylum seekers. [...] A country’s place on the*

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<sup>40</sup> Mason & Stewart, 2016

<sup>41</sup> Chadwick, 2015

<sup>42</sup> Parlement.com, 2016

<sup>43</sup> European Council, 2016

<sup>44</sup> European Parliament, 2015

*map should not determine its share of the work to be done*<sup>45</sup> (Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission).

Quantitative Content Analysis. A keyword frequency count across all twenty-four quotes:

Theme	Representative Terms	Frequency
<b>Security-Threat</b>	“dangerous” (2); “hard-nosed”; “invasion”; “lose our Germany”; “poison”; “problem”; “protect the EU’s external border”; “risk” (2); “save our society, freedom and identity”; “security” (2); “terror”; “uncontrolled migration”; “will not abide by the Polish law”	16
<b>Cultural-Moral Threat</b>	“Christian values”; “completely different culture”; “different religion”; “Judeo-Christian”; “not for minorities”; “of white race”; “shrouded in burkas from head to toe”; “unfaithful women will be stoned”; “will have their hands cut off”	9
<b>Health</b>	“disease”; “epidemics”; “illnesses”; “parasites”; “scabies”; “TB”	6
<b>Dehumanization</b>	“Barbarian invasion”; “horny bulls”; “madness”; “recruit slaves”; “swarm of people”	5
<b>Solidarity</b>	“beacon of hope”; “compassion”; “feel ashamed”; “helping hand”; “moral duty”; “opportunity”; “sharing”; “solidarity”; “supporting”; “the most open continent”	10
<b>Legal-Order</b>	“controlled”; “international law”; “legal”; “resettlement”; “smugglers”; “trafficking”	6

*Table 1. Quantitative Content Analysis, Syrian Refugees*

Based on the analysis of quotations, six main clusters were identified, into which the key terms could be grouped.

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<sup>45</sup> EU Monitor, 2016

### Reception of Ukrainian Refugees

Regarding the reception of Ukrainian refugees, it can be argued that there was no substantial public debate, rather, a broad consensus emerged that refugees should be accepted and that the bureaucratic process should be simplified as much as possible. Notably, several figures who had previously expressed skepticism about refugee intake adopted a markedly different tone in this context.

The analysis also considered many of the same individuals or their political counterparts as in the discourse on Syrian refugees. For example, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán stated that refugees arriving from neighboring Ukraine “*can be assured they will be welcomed by friends in Hungary.*”<sup>46</sup> He added that assisting refugees from Ukraine is an “*elementary human, Christian instinct.*”<sup>47</sup> He also attempted to explain the difference in reception between Ukrainian and Syrian refugees. According to him, “*one doesn’t have to be a rocket scientist*” to distinguish between “*masses arriving from Muslim regions in hope of a better life in Europe*”<sup>48</sup> and Ukrainian refugees who have fled to Hungary due to the war.

Other leaders of the Visegrád Group expressed equally welcoming stances. Poland’s President, Andrzej Duda, affirmed that “*You are Ukrainians. You are not refugees. You are our guests,*”<sup>49</sup> and urged that “*the borders are opened and refugees are accepted.*”<sup>50</sup> His Czech counterpart, President Miloš Zeman, likewise endorsed Czechia’s reception of Ukrainian nationals, though he made a narrow exception for Romani Ukrainians: “*I would make one little exception here in terms of Romani Ukrainians, I am not sure whether they aren’t more economic migrants. However, they are a very minor exception, about two thousand people.*”<sup>51</sup> During her visit to Ukraine, Zuzana Čaputová, Slovakian President stated: “*Slovakia will take care of those who had to flee the war, of Ukrainian wives and children, as long as they need it.*”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> About Hungary, 2022

<sup>47</sup> *ibid*

<sup>48</sup> *ibid*

<sup>49</sup> Hromadske, 2022

<sup>50</sup> O'Reilly, 2022

<sup>51</sup> Ryšavý, 2022

<sup>52</sup> Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2022

In France and Italy, figures who had formerly criticized the admission of Syrian refugees reversed course considering the Ukrainian crisis. Marine Le Pen declared, “*What we can do is welcome refugees, keep hope alive, and work for peace.*”<sup>53</sup> In Italy, Matteo Salvini vowed: “*We want to help coordinate the aid, organize travel and accommodation in Italy for these families, with particular attention to the orphans and the disabled.*”<sup>54</sup>

Across the Channel, the United Kingdom adopted a similarly generous tone. Prime Minister Boris Johnson promised to be “*very generous*”<sup>55</sup> towards Ukrainian refugees, despite criticism over the number of visas granted. Adam Holloway, Conservative MP for Gravesham, added: “*These people really are refugees, and I think we can afford to be really very generous with the Ukrainians because this is not of their doing.*”<sup>56</sup>

Lastly, high-ranking EU officials also expressed welcoming views: “*Europe stands by those in need of protection. All those fleeing Putin’s bombs are welcome in Europe. We will provide protection to those seeking shelter and we will help those looking for a safe way home*”<sup>57</sup> (Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission); “*We are all Ukrainian*”<sup>58</sup> (Charles Michel, President of the European Council); “*We are ready to help all of them [Ukrainian refugees] [...] all Member States will act in full solidarity to attend these people*”<sup>59</sup> (Josep Borrell, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy); “*They [Ukrainian refugees] are received here with open arms*”<sup>60</sup> (Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament).

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<sup>53</sup> Bauvois, 2022

<sup>54</sup> Amante, 2022

<sup>55</sup> Wright, 2022

<sup>56</sup> Hunter, 2022

<sup>57</sup> von der Leyen [@vonderleyen], 2022

<sup>58</sup> EU Neighbours East, 2023

<sup>59</sup> Ukrinform, 2022

<sup>60</sup> European Parliament, 2022

Quantitative Content Analysis. A keyword frequency count across all fifteen quotes:

Theme	Representative Terms	Frequency
<b>Protection / Aid</b>	“accepted”; “accommodation”; “aid”; “as long as they need it”; “attend”; “borders be opened”; “help” (3); “protection” (2); “safe way home”; “shelter”; “take care”; “work for peace”	15
<b>Solidarity / Welcome</b>	“elementary human, Christian instinct”; “friends”; “generous” (2); “guests”; “received”; “this is not of their doing”; “solidarity”; “with open arms”; “welcome” / “welcomed” (3)	12
<b>Identity / Shared</b>	“guests”; “not refugees”; “We are all Ukrainian”	3
<b>Exceptions</b>	“economic migrants”; “masses arriving from Muslim regions”; “they are a very minor exception”	3

*Table 2. Quantitative Content Analysis, Ukrainian Refugees*

Based on the analysis of quotations, three main categories were identified, into which the key terms could be grouped. Additionally, an “Exceptions” category was created for quotations that did not reflect the general tone regarding the reception of refugees from Ukraine. Notably, although fewer quotations were selected for the Ukrainian case, they contained more expressions of solidarity than those from the Syrian case.

### Analysis and Results

While this study draws on Krippendorff’s analytical framework, which allows for either predefined or emergent coding categories depending on the research context, the thematic frames were not fully standardized across the Syrian and Ukrainian corpora. The Syrian dataset exhibited a broad range of securitizing and exclusionary frames (e.g., security threats, dehumanization, health-related fears), many of which were virtually absent from the Ukrainian case. Consequently, only the themes that were meaningfully present in each corpus were initially coded. As Krippendorff emphasizes, content analysis must remain sensitive to the discourse context from which data emerge, rather than imposing a uniform coding scheme that risks

masking important asymmetries. Applying identical frames to both corpora would have artificially created symmetry where the rhetoric itself did not support it.

Nevertheless, in order to enable clearer and more systematic comparison, a second level of analysis was introduced using a harmonized set of broader, shared thematic frames. These higher-level categories, such as Solidarity / Welcome, Aid / Humanitarianism, and Identity Framing, were constructed by aggregating and renaming related codes from both corpora. This comparative layer was developed to enhance the interpretability and transparency of findings, while remaining consistent with Krippendorff's emphasis on contextual validity and analytical flexibility. The results are presented in Table 3.

Quantitative Content Analysis. A keyword frequency count across all thirty-nine quotes:

Unified Frame	Syrian Corpus Examples	Ukrainian Corpus Examples
<b>Solidarity</b> / <b>Welcome</b>	“beacon of hope”; “compassion”; “feel ashamed”; “moral duty”; “opportunity”; “sharing”; “solidarity”; “supporting”; “the most open continent”	“elementary human, Christian instinct”; “friends”; “generous” (2); “guests”; “received”; “this is not of their doing”; “solidarity”; “with open arms”; “welcome” / “welcomed” (3)
<b>Aid</b> / <b>Humanitarianism</b>	“helping hand”; “the most open continent”	“accepted”; “accommodation”; “aid”; “as long as they need it”; “attend”; “borders be opened”; “help” (3); “protection” (2); “safe way home”; “shelter”; “take care”; “work for peace”
<b>Identity Framing</b>	“completely different culture”; “different religion”; “shrouded in burkas from head to toe”; “unfaithful women will be stoned”; “will have their hands cut off”	“guests”; “not refugees”; “We are all Ukrainian”

Table 3. Quantitative Content Analysis, Syrian and Ukrainian Refugees

To better visualize these asymmetries, the following section interprets the findings from both the initial (Tables 1 and 2) and harmonized (Table 3) analyses.

A comparative examination of the two lexicon-analysis tables (Table 1 and Table 2) reveals a fundamental divergence in representational strategies. In the table charting rhetoric about Syrian refugees, frames of threat, alienation, and control overwhelmingly predominate. The most frequent theme, security threat, depicts refugees as a potential danger to society, the state, and European identity. Parallel narratives recur under cultural and moral threat, public-health concerns, and pronounced dehumanization, portraying Syrians as culturally alien, physically perilous, and anonymous masses, against whom biologicistic and aggressive metaphors are deemed acceptable. Such language serves to mask and legitimize the deeper cultural and racial biases that drive rejection. It should be noted that, although positive statements do occur, their lexical profile often renders them exceptions to the overwhelmingly negative narrative. In the discourse on Syrian refugees, it was not observed the emphatic calls for unconditional assistance and support that characterize the rhetoric surrounding Ukrainian refugees. Moreover, there is a clear bureaucratic-legal inflection: refugees are treated less as autonomous rights-bearing subjects and more as objects to be managed within a framework of legality and control. This legalistic discourse often functions as a rhetorical shield that obscures the emotional and cultural discomfort underlying rejection. By framing refugees as administrative problems or security risks, public and political actors avoid overt expressions of xenophobia while perpetuating exclusionary practices rooted in racial and cultural prejudices. In the table concerning Ukrainian refugees, a markedly different rhetoric emerges. The dominant themes are those of assistance, protection, and solidarity, with the language characterized by a positive, emotional, and explicitly humanitarian tone. Ukrainians are constructed as “guests” deserving of swift aid. The absence of threat frames and the predominance of humanitarian language in the Ukrainian refugee discourse signals a fundamentally different social perception, where the “otherness” of refugees is minimized or erased. This contrast highlights that pragmatic factors such as legal procedures or migration volume do not fully explain public attitudes. Rather, cultural and racial proximity enables a discourse of unconditional solidarity. It is important to note,

however, that negative frames do appear, though these are primarily directed at Ukrainian citizens of non-Ukrainian ethnic backgrounds.

A comparative reading of the harmonized frame table (Table 3) confirms that, even within overlapping categories such as Solidarity, Aid, and Identity, representational asymmetries persist. While both corpora feature references to solidarity and humanitarian aid, the tone and implications of these frames diverge significantly. In the Ukrainian case, solidarity is framed as instinctive and emotional, tied to proximity and sameness. Aid is described as unconditional and immediate, while identity markers affirm inclusion. In contrast, solidarity toward Syrians is more abstract or institutional, aid is bureaucratized, and identity is framed in exclusionary terms. These differences suggest that the discursive divergence is not simply a matter of context or geography but stems from deeper cultural and racial perceptions.

It is important to emphasize that the quotations concerning Syrian refugees were purposefully selected to identify and systematize the arguments made against their reception. This approach was not intended to distort the overall picture, but rather to uncover and understand how narratives legitimizing rejection and/or promoting negative and biased attitudes were constructed. Opposing viewpoints were also present and some were cited in the study; however, this analysis prioritized narratives articulating mechanisms of exclusion. In the case of Ukrainian refugees, the analysis revealed an almost complete absence of public statements aimed at justifying refusal of admission or spreading negative sentiment toward them. All the quotations analyzed displayed a clearly positive, solidaristic tone, emphasizing moral responsibility, the simplification of administrative procedures, and a shared identification with those affected. This discursive shift is not the result of selective bias, but instead reflects the actual dynamics of the media and political landscape: in the case of Ukrainian refugees, no reasons for rejection were publicly articulated at all.

The contrast between the two cases reveals a profound asymmetry in the perception of different refugee groups, rooted in racial, cultural, and religious differences. In the case of Syrians, a fundamental stance of rejection, anchored in xenophobic

representations, was subsequently masked using frames centered on threat and legality, particularly regarding the presence of refugees (or, as they were frequently labeled, economic migrants) within the EU. Direct articulation of xenophobia in the public sphere typically remains impermissible; however, it is often expressed indirectly through seemingly more rational justifications, such as concerns over security, public order, sanitary control, and civilizational incompatibility, frames that are predominantly applied to Muslim refugees. In the case of Ukrainian refugees, such a mechanism of rationalization was largely unnecessary. Ukrainians were implicitly perceived as proximate and familiar, geographically, religiously, and racially, which allowed the rhetoric of solidarity to dominate public discourse without competition from frames of threat. Furthermore, statements such as Angela Merkel's reference to "opportunities"<sup>61</sup> illustrate how the moral imperative to assist those in need often requires justification, especially when the individuals seeking help are not European, by invoking more pragmatic or rational arguments. In contrast, no such explanations were deemed necessary in the case of Ukrainians. Moreover, xenophobic sentiments were reported in European societies, particularly in the Visegrád Group countries, toward Ukrainian citizens of non-Ukrainian ethnic backgrounds and/or non-white refugees who also fled Ukraine due to the war<sup>62</sup>. This fact underscores that public attitudes are often shaped by markers such as religion and skin color, indicating the persistence of xenophobic undercurrents even in cases where humanitarian assistance is extended to people fleeing war, be they Syrians escaping conflict in Syria or Africans and Roma fleeing the war in Ukraine.

The findings indicate that the differences in public and political responses to Syrian and Ukrainian refugees cannot be attributed solely to pragmatic factors such as geopolitical interests, legal procedures, or the volume of migratory flows (notably, the number of Ukrainian refugees in the EU even exceeds that of Syrians<sup>63</sup><sup>64</sup>). Rather, these differences are rooted in deeper, structural mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, based on the symbolic opposition between "us" and "them," which underscores the fundamental role of xenophobia and implicit bias. It was precisely

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<sup>61</sup> Oltermann, 2015

<sup>62</sup> Akinwotu & Tondo, 2022

<sup>63</sup> UNHCR, 2025

<sup>64</sup> UNHCR, 2023

on this “xenophobic foundation” that resistance to the reception of Syrians in 2015–2016 was built, whereas the formally “rational” and socially acceptable arguments, such as the threat to security, served merely as a secondary layer of retouching, designed to lend the initial bias a veneer of legitimacy. This underscores the fundamental role of implicit bias and symbolic boundaries in shaping refugee reception beyond any purely pragmatic considerations.

## Conclusions

In academic debates on the divergent treatment of Syrian and Ukrainian refugees in the European Union, two primary explanatory perspectives have emerged. Some scholars emphasize geopolitical interests, legal mechanisms, or geographic proximity—the so-called “proximity trap.” Others argue that racial and cultural biases play a more decisive role in shaping refugee reception. This study was guided by the hypothesis that xenophobic attitudes and implicit biases, often disguised as rational justifications (such as security threats), may be the principal force explaining these differences.

To test this hypothesis, a comparative content analysis of public statements by senior EU officials and key national leaders was conducted, focusing on two distinct moments of two refugee influx: the Syrian one (2015–2016) and the Ukrainian one (2022). By analyzing the discursive strategies used to justify refugee treatment, this study aimed to answer the research question: What discursive strategies do EU leaders use to justify the different treatment of Syrian and Ukrainian refugees?

This study demonstrates that the EU’s disparate responses to the Syrian refugee crisis of 2015–2016 and the Ukrainian refugee influx of 2022 are driven not merely by pragmatic considerations, geopolitical interests, legal frameworks, or the scale of migration flows, but by deeper, structural mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion rooted in xenophobic prejudices. A systematic content analysis of public statements by senior EU officials revealed two sharply contrasting discursive repertoires:

1. Justifications for admission refusal or negative sentiment towards Syrian refugees overwhelmingly invoked frames of security threat, cultural–moral danger, public-health risk, and dehumanization. Syrians were portrayed as

potential terrorists, disease vectors, and cultural “others.” Legal and bureaucratic arguments functioned primarily to legitimate pre-existing exclusionary impulses. Although expressions of solidarity did appear, they were markedly more restrained than those in the Ukrainian case. Additionally, xenophobic attitudes toward non-citizen refugees from Ukraine and Ukrainian nationals of non-Ukrainian ethnicity were detected, further reinforcing exclusionary rationales.

2. Themes of assistance, protection, and shared identity dominated in the discourse about Ukrainian refugees. Ukrainians were constructed as “guests” deserving unconditional support, and almost no public statements justified refusal, cultural and religious proximity effectively neutralized threat frames.

These findings substantiate the central hypothesis: xenophobia and implicit bias, disguised as ostensibly “rational” security concerns, constitute the primary drivers of unequal treatment of different refugee groups. In the Syrian context, “rational” arguments served merely as a secondary layer of discursive retouching, providing a veneer of legitimacy to underlying prejudices, whereas in the Ukrainian case such rationalizations were altogether unnecessary.

By shifting the analytical focus from mediated media narratives to the original political discourse of EU leaders and by integrating quantitative lexico-thematic analysis with qualitative frame interpretation this study uncovers the symbolic “us versus them” logic at the heart of European migration policy. Genuine convergence of refugee reception standards demands a concerted effort to confront and dismantle the deep-seated ideological and cultural prejudices that obstruct true solidarity.

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## Annexes

### Annex 1. Refugee Reception Discourse: Political Positions on Syrian and Ukrainian Refugees

Country / EU Institution	Position	Person	Quote(s) on Syrian Refugees	Quote(s) on Ukrainian Refugees
Czech Republic	President	Miloš Zeman	<p><i>“We will be deprived of the women’s beauty since they will be shrouded in burkas from head to toe, including the face”</i></p> <p><i>“unfaithful women will be stoned and thieves will have their hands cut off”</i></p>	<p>Made a narrow exception for Romani Ukrainians: <i>“I would make one little exception here in terms of Romani Ukrainians, I am not sure whether they aren’t more economic migrants.</i></p> <p><i>However, they are a very minor exception, about two thousand people”</i></p>
France	Leader of the National Rally Party	Marine Le Pen	<i>“Germany probably thinks its</i>	<i>“What we can do is welcome refugees, keep</i>

		<p><i>population is moribund, and it is probably seeking to lower wages and continue to recruit slaves through mass immigration”</i></p>	<p><i>hope alive, and work for peace”</i></p>
		<p><i>“We must immediately stop this madness, in order to save our society, freedom and identity”</i></p>	
		<p><i>“Without any action, this migratory influx will be like the barbarian invasion of the 4th century, and the consequences will be the same”</i></p>	

	Member of European Parliament, the Republicans Party	Nadine Morano	“ <i>We’re a Judeo-Christian country of white race</i> ”	
Germany	One of the AfD Leaders	Björn Höcke	“ <i>Let’s not forget, the Syrian who comes to us has still his Syria. The Afghan who comes to us has still his Afghanistan [...] But if we lose our Germany, then we have no more home!</i> ”	
	Chancellor, Leader of the Christian Democratic Union Party	Angela Merkel	“ <i>[arriving should be seen as] an opportunity for tomorrow</i> ”	
Hungary	Prime Minister, Leader of the Fidesz Party	Viktor Orbán	“ <i>We shouldn’t forget that the people who are coming</i>	“ <i>[refugees] can be assured they will be</i>

		<p><i>here grew up in a different religion and represent a completely different culture. Most are not Christian, but Muslim”</i></p>	<i>welcomed by friends in Hungary”</i>
		<p><i>“Or is it not worrying that Europe’s Christian culture is already barely able to maintain its own set of Christian values?”</i></p>	<i>“[assisting refugees from Ukraine is an] elementary human, Christian instinct”</i>
		<p><i>“Every single migrant poses a public security and terror risk,”</i> and further insisted: <i>“For us migration is not a solution but a problem [...]”</i></p>	

			<p><i>not medicine but a poison, we don't need it and won't swallow it”</i></p> <p><i>“one doesn't have to be a rocket scientist [to distinguish between] masses arriving from Muslim regions in hope of a better life in Europe”</i></p>	
Italy	Prime Minister, Minister of the Interior of Italy, Leader of the Northern League Party	Matteo Salvini	<p><i>“TB and scabies do not come from Finland. Unfortunately, with a backward health system in North Africa these people reported illnesses that we had</i></p> <p><i>“We want to help coordinate the aid, organize travel and accommodation in Italy for these families, with particular attention to the orphans and the disabled”</i></p>	

			<i>defeated for years”</i>	
Poland	Minister of the Interior, Law and Justice Party	Joachim Brudziński	“[referring to refugees as] <i>young, horny bulls</i> ”	
	President, Law and Justice Party	Andrzej Duda	“ <i>possible epidemics</i> [that refugees might bring]”	“ <i>You are Ukrainians. You are not refugees. You are our guests</i> ”
	Prime Minister; Leader of Law and Justice Party	Jarosław Kaczyński	“[migrants were carriers of] <i>very dangerous diseases long absent from Europe [...] all sorts of parasites and protozoa, which [...] while not dangerous in the organisms of these people, could be dangerous here</i> ”	“ <i>We want to help coordinate the aid, organize travel and accommodation in Italy for these families, with particular attention to the orphans and the disabled</i> ”

			<i>by the Polish law</i>	
Slovakia	President, Progressive Slovakia Party	Zuzana Čaputová		“Slovakia will take care of those who had to flee the war, of Ukrainian wives and children, as long as they need it”
	Prime Minister, Leader of the Direction – Social Democracy Party	Robert Fico	“[Slovakia had been] built for Slovaks, not for minorities”	
United Kingdom	Member of Parliament, Conservative Party	David Davies	“We need to be quite hard-nosed here. People are desperate, they will say what they need to say to get in”	
	Member of Parliament for Gravesham,	Adam Holloway		“These people really are refugees, and I think we can afford to be

	Conservative Party		<i>really very generous with the Ukrainians because this is not of their doing”</i>
	Leader of the Brexit Party (renamed Reform UK)	Nigel Farage	<i>“This is a photograph – an accurate, undoctored photograph – taken on 15 October last year following Angela Merkel’s call in the summer and, frankly, if you believe, as I have always believed, that we should open our hearts to genuine refugees, that’s one thing. But, frankly, as</i>

		<p><i>you can see from this picture, most of the people coming are young males and, yes, they may be coming from countries that are not in a very happy state, they may be coming from places that are poorer than us, but the EU has made a fundamental error that risks the security of everybody”</i></p>	
	Prime Minister, Leader of the Conservative Party	David Cameron	“[referred to refugees as] a swarm of people coming across the Mediterranean

			<i>n, seeking a better life, wanting to come to Britain”</i>	
		Boris Johnson		promised to be “ <i>very generous</i> ” towards Ukrainian refugees, despite criticism over the number of visas granted
European Commission	President	Jean Claude Juncker	<i>“We must replace this heinous trafficking of human beings with legal, controlled movements of asylum seekers. [...] A country’s place on the map should not determine its share of the work to be done”</i>	

		Ursula von der Leyen	<p><i>“Europe stands by those in need of protection. All those fleeing Putin’s bombs are welcome in Europe. We will provide protection to those seeking shelter and we will help those looking for a safe way home”</i></p>
European Council	President	Donald Tusk	<p><i>“This time of uncontrolled migration is coming to an end, and it won’t repeat itself. The final goal we are aiming at, is that the refugees will get asylum in EU member states through resettlement,</i></p>

			<p><i>and not by embarking on a risky often tragic journey organised by smugglers.</i></p> <p><i>[...] Our determination to protect the EU's external border does not change the fact that Europe will remain the most open continent in the world"</i></p>	
		Charles Michel		<i>"We are all Ukrainian"</i>
European External Action Service	High Representative for Foreign Affairs & Security Policy	Federica Mogherini	<p><i>"Lebanon alone hosts almost as many Syrians as the entire European Union. Those who believe that refugees will destroy our Union should look at</i></p>	

			<i>“these figures and feel ashamed”</i>	
		Josep Borrell		<i>“We are ready to help all of them [Ukrainian refugees] [...] all Member States will act in full solidarity to attend these people”</i>
European Parliament	President	Martin Schulz	<i>“Compassion compels us to lend them a helping hand. But moral duty and international law do too. [...] By supporting Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey in their task of hosting refugees. By fairly sharing the refugees</i>	

		<p><i>within Europe. [...] We should be proud that Europe has become a beacon of hope for men, women, children, old and young fleeing from wars”</i></p>	
	Roberta Metsola		“ <i>They [Ukrainian refugees] are received here with open arms”</i>