

The Impact of the 2022 European Union Migration Crisis on the Migratory Discourses Adopted by the European Parliament

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Abstract

When Russian forces attacked Ukraine on 24 February 2022, masses of people moved towards the borders of the European Union (EU). The unexpected increase in arrivals within a relatively short time span became a significant challenge for the EU to manage, turning into a crisis. This paper assesses whether the political alignment of different party groups in the European Parliament (EP) (e.g., left-wing, right-wing, populist) helps explain the discursive frames they adopt on migration within the context of the 2022 EU migration crisis. Using qualitative content analysis, the study identifies the discursive frames employed by members of the parliament in plenary debates. It finds that factors like the EU's legislative procedure, institutional structure, and the EP's political position contribute to overlapping discourses, which also vary based on the country of origin of migrants and the ideological positions of party groups.

Keywords: migration, Ukraine crisis, parliamentary debates, discursive frames, qualitative content analysis

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Introduction

On 24 February 2022, Putin authorized “special military operations” in Ukraine, leading to missile and artillery strikes on major cities, including Kiev (Aloisi and Daniel 2022: 22). After Russian forces started the operations, one of the most immediate and dramatic outcomes of the war involved masses of forcibly displaced people moving towards the borders of the European Union (EU). The war quickly displaced millions, with 12 million forced from their homes and 5.1 million fleeing Ukraine by mid-April 2022 (Gerlach and Ryndzak 2022: 18). On 4 March 2022, after eight days following the Russian occupation of Ukraine, the European Council unanimously activated the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) (European Commission

n.d.). By 31 August 2023, over 4.15 million non-EU citizens fleeing the conflict held temporary protection status in EU member states (Eurostat 2023).

Unexpected arrivals within a relatively short period became a significant challenge for the EU to manage, thus turning arrivals of forced migrants to the EU during 2022 into a crisis (IOM n.d.). As a result of the intensity of arrivals to the EU borders during the first months of the war, public and political debates about migration went up on the EU political agenda, where different EU institutions, member states, the press, and the EU public were all focusing on the issue. Therefore, this paper adopts the term “the 2022 EU migration crisis” instead of “migration crisis”. Against this background, this paper investigates the reasons for the emergence of various discursive frames in European Parliament (EP) debates towards forcibly displaced persons during the 2022 EU migration crisis.

The EP has been one of the key EU institutions, and members of the EP (MEPs) from different sides of the political spectrum have all taken part in debates and discussions about the migration crisis. By analyzing these discussions, we hope to reveal the priorities of different MEPs in managing the crisis and highlight areas of agreement and divergence. This paper uses a discursive institutionalist theoretical framework to analyze MEPs’ speeches from relevant plenary debates. It approaches the identification of discursive frames adopted by MEPs during the 2022 EU migration crisis as an important analytical tool since during the framing process, communicators bring forward certain elements of a particular matter more than some of its other aspects so the issue under consideration “is interpreted in a specific manner” (Kuypers 1997: 39). In line with the key research question, this paper seeks to assess how the political positioning of different party-political groups impacts the way they frame migration crisis by identifying different discursive frames.

The paper reviews the relevant literature and then outlines its theoretical framework, methodology, and key arguments. It then examines the dominant discursive frames used by MEPs during the 2022 EU migration crisis, identifying main and sub-categories based on primary data analysis and exploring the factors shaping these frames. Afterwards, it concludes by providing a summary of the key research findings.

Security vs. Human Rights: Clashing Discourses?

The EP increased its power in shaping the design of migration and asylum policies when the 1999 Amsterdam Treaty enabled the ordinary legislative procedure (European Parliament n.d.). With authority equal to the European Council, the EP’s role grew further during the migration crisis, allowing MEPs to directly engage in the legislative process (Givens and Luedtke 2004; Acosta 2009; Ripoll Servent 2018; Genschel and Jachtefuchs 2018). Several scholars argue (Givens and Luedtke 2004; Acosta 2009; Genschel and Jachtefuchs 2018; Ripoll Servent 2019; Kauffman 2021) that the EP positively contributes to addressing issues within the Common European and Asylum System (CEAS), such as relocations among member states and sharing the financial burden of migration management. However, the EP has achieved limited progress in improving financial burden-sharing and relocation mechanisms, which

are crucial for efficient EU migration management (Givens and Luedtke 2004; Genschel and Jachtefuchs 2018). Therefore, this study analyzes how EP debates during the migration crisis shaped migration politics, proposed solutions, and the discursive frames used by MEPs by focusing on the plenaries throughout the crisis.

As the relevant literature underlines, the EU often sees immigration as an economic, domestic security, and cultural threat, leading to restrictive policies (Huysmans 2000; Bigo 2000; Baker-Beall 2009; Den Heijer et al. 2016; Mainwaring 2016; Steinhilper and Gruijters 2018; Erdoğan 2020; Sadik and Kaya 2020). Concerns about economic, social, and security risks posed by migrants, particularly from the Middle East and North Africa region, are prevalent (Delanty 1997; Baldwin Edwards 1999; Huysmans 2000; Bigo 2000; Baker-Beall 2009; Achilli and Sanchez, 2017; Pacciardi, 2020). Yet, there are also pro-migration ideas in the EU emphasizing the EU member states' responsibilities towards migrants emanating from the Geneva Convention, including humanitarian aid, lifesaving measures, and non-refoulement (Perkowski 2016; Cuttitta 2018). This research will thus also test whether any of the MEPs voiced any pro- and/or anti-immigrant views underlined in the literature during the 2022 EU migration crisis.

Moreover, according to the relevant literature, political ideologies shape immigration stances (Servent 2014; Krotký and Kaniok 2020). For instance, during the 2015 migration crisis, several political party groups, including the Greens, the Alternative, and the Liberals, put forward pro-migration stances. In contrast, the Conservatives, Nationalists, and Eurosceptics adopted an anti-migrant discourse (Krotký and Kaniok 2020: 186-188). This paper thus seeks to evaluate whether these different groups have shifted their traditional migration discourses.

Theoretical Framework, Methodology, and Key Assumptions

This paper analyses debates in the EP during the 2022 EU migration crisis, employing a discursive institutionalist (DI) framework. DI considers not only ideas but also the interactive processes of discourse that generate those ideas together with institutions and agents communicating these discourses to the public (Schmidt 2002; 2008; 2010; 2011). DI explains the actions of institutions by attributing them to the background ideational abilities and foregrounds discursive abilities of agents (Schmidt 2008; 2011). Background ideational abilities cover the agents' ability to make sense of the context, understand, and define it. However, institutional action can also be grounded in foreground discursive abilities of agents representing the logic of communication, which enables agents to think, speak, and act (Schmidt 2011: 314).

Agents use their ideational abilities to understand how institutions are established and maintained in a particular context and their discursive skills to maintain or transform these institutions (Schmidt 2008; 2011). Institutions, while constraining actors, can also be reshaped by them. DI emphasizes that discourse develops through an interactive process involving the expression, discussion, agenda-setting, and legitimization of ideas in a political context (Schmidt 2002; 2008; 2011). In this context, parliamentary debates are key in controlling the political agenda, discussing topics, and legitimizing discourse (Giordano 2020: 132).

This paper conducts a qualitative content analysis of verbatim reports from the EP's official website, starting from 24 February 2022—the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The war atrocities during the first year of the conflict led to a significant influx of Ukrainian migrants to the EU. Hence, this paper focuses on the plenary debates in the EP between 24 February 2022 and 24 February 2023, collected from the official website databases. In line with this paper's core focus, only debates involving the words “migration”, “asylum”, “refugees”, and “migrants” in their title were analyzed. Consequently, we analyzed nine EP plenary debates and eighty-nine speeches by MEPs in English. Of the nine plenary debates, the five took place on 8 March 2022, 24 March 2022, 5 April 2022, 5 May 2022, and 18 October 2022. These debates addressed migration flows due to the Russian invasion. Four plenary debates focused on EU-wide migration management on 6 April 2022, 13 September 2022, 23 November 2022, and 1 February 2023.

In inductive category applications, a limited and tentative definition criterion is formulated from the theoretical background and textual material derived from the research question (Hsieh and Shannon 2005; Elo and Kyngäs 2008). Following this criterion, the material is studied, and categories are tentatively determined, then revised in a feedback loop, and eventually reduced to main categories (Hsieh and Shannon 2005; Elo and Kyngäs 2008). Main and sub-categories of discursive frames are identified by coding available text based on the repeated words, sentences, and paragraphs in MEPs' speeches during the first year of the 2022 EU migration crisis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005; Elo and Kyngäs 2008; Baltacı 2019).

We expect that any overlaps of the analyzed discursive frames will occur due to the legislative procedure of the EU, the institutional structure, and the political position of the EP. Since the 2007 Lisbon Treaty, the EP has held co-decision power and a supervisory role over EU institutions (European Union n.d.), influencing the 2022 EU migration crisis management. In addition, EP plenary sessions allow all MEPs to participate in general assembly meetings, with final decisions voted on at the end. MEPs tailored their speeches to directly influence EU stakeholders in managing the crisis.

Since nine plenary debates also involve references to groups of migrants other than Ukrainians, this research also seeks to identify whether MEPs' ideas and the discursive frames they adopt concerning migration and migrants show variations depending on the country of origin of a migrant group. In light of previous research conducted on the topic by other scholars (Kaunert and Léonard 2012; Lopatin 2013; Servent 2014; Krotký and Kaniok 2020), this paper makes the following key assumptions:

- The ideological positions of MEPs on migration will significantly define the specific contents of the political discourse they adopt on different types of migratory movements.
- Those MEPs with left-wing and liberal ideological positions will tend to use relatively more liberal and pro-immigration discourses than those MEPs with conservative and nationalist political positions, who are expected to use relatively more anti-immigrant discourses by framing migration primarily as a threat and will favour restrictive policies much more than the former.

Findings

The 2022 Migration Crisis and the EP debates

As mentioned, nine EP plenary debates, including speeches from eighty-nine MEPs, were analyzed through qualitative content analysis. The discursive frames used by MEPs across the political spectrum were identified based on repeated words and phrases in plenary sessions, such as migration crisis, migration routes, immigrants, refugees, refugee rights, asylum, and migration policies. Table 1 summarizes the political party groups examined in this paper and their political leanings.

Table 1. EP Party Groups and Their Political Positions (2022)

Party Groups	Political Positions
Group of the European People's Party (EPP)	Centre-Right, Christian Democrat
Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D)	Centre-Left, Social Democrat
European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR)	Right-Wing, Conservative
Renew Europe Group (Renew)	Centre, Liberal
Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL)	Far-Left, Greens
Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA)	Greens, Regionalism
Identity and Democracy (ID)	Far-right, Nationalist

Source: Calossi and Cicchi 2019

We identified four main categories and sub-categories based on our analysis of the words, sentences, and paragraphs repeatedly used by MEPs in their speeches during the first year of the 2022 EU migration crisis. The four main categories involved: (1) debates on arrivals; (2) debates on crisis policies; (3) debates on the relevant EU stakeholders; and (4) debates on relevant international stakeholders. The main reason for forming four categories is the basic rhetorical frameworks embedded in MEPs' speeches. For example, the discourses surrounding the arrivals have distinct frames, such as the migrants' country of origin and reasons for coming. In contrast, the discourses on how the EU will manage the 2022 migration crisis should be analyzed as a separate category. In addition, the discourses regarding the relevant EU stakeholders emerged under a separate category to show the internal dynamics of the EU and the internal communication between the EU institutions. Finally, the EP's relationship with non-EU actors to reveal EU foreign policy was analyzed under debates among relevant international stakeholders. The analysis included how the EP presented different institutional frameworks in the first year of the 2022 EU migration crisis. Table 2 summarizes the primary and sub-categories identified as a result of this analysis.

Table 2. Main and Sub Categories of Discursive Frames Conducted in the 2022 EU Migration Crisis

(1) Debates towards Arrivals	(3) Debates on the Relevant EU Stakeholders
Refugee-based frames	The EU Member States
Frames emphasizing the importance of avoiding discrimination	The European Council
Conditional refugee frames	The European Commission
Non-refugee-based frames	The European Union Agencies
	The EU community
(2) Debates on Crisis Policies	(4) Debates on Relevant International Stakeholders
Policies about migration flows	Third Countries
Policies towards migrants who have already arrived in the EU	Non-State Actors

Debates Towards Arrivals

The first main category involves debates on arrivals, and MEPs referred to this specific matter sixty-two times. These discussions cover the factors driving people to EU borders, including refugees, asylum-seekers, and economic migrants, and identify the countries of origin. MEPs addressed arrivals from the Russia-Ukraine War and those arriving via the Mediterranean and Aegean. MEPs' speeches were classified into four sub-categories: (i) refugee-based frames; (ii) frames emphasizing the importance of avoiding discrimination; (iii) conditional refugee frames; and (iv) non-refugee-based frames.

(i) Refugee-based frames, used forty-one times, refer to the arrivals as refugees escaping war. For example, Petras Auštrevičius (2022a: 6) from the Renew Group stated, "Putin's war against Ukraine is first and foremost a war against civilians, against women, against children, against all the Ukrainian people. We need to ensure the EU presence in every single border crossing and refugee reception center." This frame was used by five out of the seven party groups in the EP, including Group of the European People's Party (EPP), Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D), Renew Europe - Renew Europe group (Renew), Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL), all recognizing Ukrainians as refugees.

The second sub-category includes (ii) frames emphasizing the importance of avoiding discrimination, which appeared thirteen times in MEPs' speeches, emphasizing equal treatment of all those coming under the Geneva Convention through all migration routes. Tineke Strik (2023: 43) from Greens/EFA emphasized, "The EU seems to forget that a refugee is a refugee, no matter the country of origin. And most asylum seekers in Europe come from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Turkey. Those refugees are pushed back at Europe's borders or face huge obstacles in asking for asylum and getting a proper reception." These frames criticize the EU's inconsistent treatment of refugees, with Ukrainians benefiting from better

reception while others, such as those from Syria and Afghanistan, face pushback and obstacles. (iii) Conditional refugee frames were the third most frequently repeated sub-category. Six of the MEPs' speeches contained specific discursive frames in which they underline the EU's responsibility to support refugees fleeing war and uphold their human rights, while also asserting that the borders should not be open to all migrants indiscriminately. Assita Kanko (2022: 9) from the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR) exemplified this view, arguing, "We must be clear; we must be firm, and we must be fair. We must be strict with illegal migrants, with no need for protection, and fair to actual victims. Only then can we implement true solidarity with a migration policy aligned with our sense of humanity." Finally, the fourth sub-category relating to arrivals was (iv), which referred to the non-refugee-based framework. This framework was mentioned twice and suggested that migrants arriving at EU borders sought employment and benefits from member states' welfare systems. Jaak Madison (2022: 31), from the Identity and Democracy (ID) Group, explained this view by stating, "And last year in December, where they had thousands of migrants from Iraq who had just bought the tickets to Belarus and tried to enter the EU. And they said, no, the border is closed. You are not refugees, you are illegal migrants who are [sic] tried to enter the EU and there is no right for that."

Two key factors underlie the four discursive sub categories identified based on MEP's statements on arrivals. First, the type of discursive frame used depends on party ideology and migration priorities. Right-wing parties such as ECR and ID, with conservative and nationalist ideologies, used non-refugee and conditional refugee frames. Centrist, liberal, and democrat parties such as EPP, S&D, and Renew used conditional or refugee-based frames. In contrast, Greens and left-wing parties such as Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL focused on refugee-based frames, emphasizing the need to avoid discrimination.

Although ideologies of the party groups affect anti-immigrant rhetoric, the center-left S&D party has adopted conditional refugee frames. Victor Negrescu (2022: 51) states, "We act, we help people, we also support the country of origin. We are also investing a lot in border protection, but also in offering proper support to refugees. We have to act very precisely on this issue while at the same time caring about people." Another anomaly was found in the analysis, even though the relevant literature (Servent 2014; Krotký and Kaniok 2020) underlines that right-wing groups generally adopt anti-immigrant rhetoric. In this study, however, right-wing parties such as the EPP, ECR, and ID used non-refugee and conditional refugee frames only 8 times in a total of 62 MEPs' speeches. These frames were used less frequently than others during the 2022 EU migration crisis. The reason for these anomalies may be related to the second factor that appeared to shape MEPs' discourses, which is explained in the following paragraph.

Secondly, the types of discursive frames adopted by MEPs showed significant variations depending on where the migratory arrivals originated. For example, conditional refugee and non-refugee-based frames were referred to eight times during four EP plenary debates dated 6 April 2022, 13 September 2022, 23 November 2022, and 1 February 2023.

The four plenaries also touched upon the issue of migration flows in the Mediterranean and the Aegean routes, so conditional and non-refugee-based frames were only adopted towards arrivals from outside of Ukraine's borders. However, the non-refugee-based and conditional refugee frames were never used for those coming from the Ukrainian border. Discursive frames involving geographical differentiation among migrants had the following reasons: the war between Russia and Ukraine took place in Europe, and Ukrainians were considered Europeans in MEP speeches. For instance, Jeroen Lenaers (2022: 4) from EPP, the center-right political group, summarized the situation as "Two million individual stories of separation, loss, and pain. Well, this is our region. This is our continent, and it's our duty to step up. And Europe is stepping up, and it's heart-warming to see the warm welcome provided all over Europe."

On the other hand, refugees who came from Africa and Asia were identified using non-refugee or conditional refugee frames. In debates concerning the Mediterranean and Aegean routes, these frames reflected the EU's concern that irregular migration could threaten social cohesion (Delanty 1997; Huysmans 2000). Center and center-right groups such as the EPP, ECR, and ID party groups tended to use the conditional refugee and non-refugee-based frame. Charlie Weimers (2022: 25 *emphasis added*) from the ECR group highlighted his perspective, stating, "As illegal migration decreases in the western Med[iterranean]; it soars in the central Med[iterranean]: almost 300,000 illegal entries into the EU this year alone. As the Commissioner pointed out, right now we see economic migrants from Bangladesh, Egypt and Tunisia. The Danish asylum plan must be recognized as a serious attempt to safeguard social cohesion – our European way of life."

Debates on Crisis Policies

The second main discursive category involved in MEPs' speeches focused on crisis policies, which were discussed sixty times in plenary meetings. Within this main discursive category, we identified four sub-categories. The first sub-category involves references made to (i) policies on migration flows, such as the conduct of search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean and Aegean, creation of legal migration routes for all forcibly displaced people, and the opening of humanitarian corridors on Ukraine's border. These topics emerged twenty-six times, with pro-migration party groups like Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL highlighting the need for legal pathways. For example, Urmas Paet (2022: 99) from the Renew Group emphasized the need to create a humanitarian corridor between Ukraine and the EU as "Hundreds of thousands of people are trapped in Mariupol and other cities. These people need safe humanitarian corridors."

Moreover, preventing human trafficking and smuggling in the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas was part of the discursive frames on migration flows. The MEPs, who adopted the refugee-based frames to save lives at sea, emphasized the need to manage migration rather than focusing on control-oriented policies. Pro-migration political parties like Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL underlined the need to save lives in their speeches. Damian Boeselager (2022) from Greens/EFA Groups, supporting pro-migration policies, explained the importance of

search and rescue operations as “Please set up a European search—and—rescue mission. Please ensure that we have mechanisms to embark asylum seekers and please make sure that maritime law is upheld, and NGOs are safeguarded” (para. 55).

(ii) MEPs also discussed policies towards migrants who have already arrived in the EU thirty-four times in the first year of the 2022 EU migration crisis. Discursive frames of MEPs’ speeches referred to meeting the humanitarian needs of refugees, activating the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD). Since MEPs identified Ukrainians escaping from the Russian invasion as refugees, and as Europeans, there was no major criticism directed at policy proposals such as activation of the TPD and Cohesion’s Action for Refugees in Europe (CARE). The EPP, S&D, Renew, Greens/EFA, and GUE/NGL, having 559 of 751 seats in the EP, supported the TPD (European Parliament 2019). Jeroen Lenaers (2022: 3), on behalf of the EPP group, spoke highly of the TPD, saying, “And the EU delivered on this TPD. And we can be proud about how millions of refugees received a warm welcome all over Europe, particularly in countries bordering Ukraine – Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Moldova.” Nonetheless, only MEPs from party groups with a pro-migration stance, such as Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL, suggested that the TPD should be expanded to include all refugees in the EU, not just Ukrainians and those with permanent residence permits in Ukraine.

Regarding policies towards migrants who have already arrived at the EU border, MEPs discussed developing a new migration and asylum pact in addition to the TPD and CARE. Frames about supporting the latest migration and asylum pact only emerged during four EP plenaries from 6 April 2022, 13 September 2022, 23 November 2022, and 1 February 2023. Centrist groups such as EPP, S&D, and Renew supported the idea, but often linked it to conditional frames for arrivals, particularly for the Mediterranean and Aegean routes. Tomas Tobé (2022: 40) from EPP, being in the center-right, expressed the necessity of the Migration Pact as “Yes, we need a system that will provide protection to refugees and, yes, that is firm to those who are not. That is why we urgently need the Migration Pact.”

The discursive frames on crisis mainly involved references to the geographical differentiation. Opening the humanitarian corridor for those coming from the Ukrainian border, providing the basic needs of those arriving and activating the TPD tended to be supported by both center-right and center-left party groups, because since the war took place in Europe, helping refugees and managing migration were the two key goals to be achieved by the EU to show its power in the region and also manage the migration crisis.

Yet, ideological differences of the EP’s groups led to a broader range of views concerning those coming via the Mediterranean and the Aegean routes. The groups, such as Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL, that define the arrivals as refugee arrivals, underlined the importance of adhering to anti-discrimination principles and emphasized the need to extend the TPD to all refugees irrespective of their countries of origin, and supported rescue operations to prevent people from dying at sea. Notwithstanding, party groups that used a conditional refugee frame for those coming via the Mediterranean and Aegean Sea routes favored new, control-oriented migration policies to achieve higher vigilance within the EU towards unwanted migration.

Debates on the Relevant EU Stakeholders

The third main discursive category involved MEPs' opinions about the relevant EU stakeholders in connection with the 2022 EU migration crisis and appeared in their speeches eighty-five times. These relevant EU stakeholders include (i) the member states, (ii) the Council of the European Union (Council), (iii) the European Commission (Commission), (iv) the European Union Agencies (Agencies) such as Frontex, Eurojust, and Europol, and (v) the EU community. Out of the eighty-five speeches analyzed, the member states were referred to twenty-one times, the Council eight times, the Commission thirteen times, the EU agencies eleven times, and the EU community was referred to thirty-two times. The analysis of the third main category focused on the frames related to crisis management policies. Party groups, which were satisfied with the policies that were put into force for managing the migration flow at the Ukrainian border, underlined the success of the implementation of the existing EU migration and asylum regulations by (i) the member states and (iv) the EU agencies at the borders. For example, since the TPD for the arrivals fleeing the Russia and Ukraine War had been activated, the TPD and the CARE implementation have had a significant role in successful crisis management.

EPP, Renew, S&D, Greens/EFA, and GUE/NGL groups praised the member states and the EU agencies for their accomplishments. Urmas Paet (2022: 99) from the Renew Group, which has a liberal-centrist stance, exemplifies this discursive frame by praising Poland's positive reception attitude as "I am grateful to the Polish people and to others on the border of Ukraine who are helping the incoming refugees as best they can. The whole of Europe must give its full support to Poland and the countries that receive the refugees first." Moreover, Dita Charanzová (2022: 39) from the Renew talked highly of Frontex's role in managing migration flows by underlining that "All this could be facilitated by having Frontex on the ground to help local officials deal with the immigration wave and provide safe transport of refugees further to other European countries." In addition, MEPs also occasionally criticized Member States for failing to implement common migration and asylum policies in the Mediterranean and Aegean. To give an example, Mick Wallace (2022: 33) from GUE/NGL, a far-left political group, criticized the EU Agencies by stating that "as Europe rightly welcomes Ukrainian refugees, the EU border agency Frontex is engaged in a brutal and illegal pushback campaign in the Aegean Sea against asylum seekers from Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen and much of Africa."

During the first year of the 2022 EU migration crisis, (ii) the Commission and (iii) the Council were also mentioned in MEPs' speeches. These speeches concentrated on the processes of introducing draft laws to the Commission and the Council or enacting them into law. MEPs noticed that the Commission and the Council activated the TPD eight days after the Russian attack against Ukraine and acted for refugees on the Ukrainian border, for which they praised these two EU institutions. At the EP meeting, Jeroen Lenaers (2022: 3), on behalf of the EPP Group, underlined this perceived success as "We called for the activation of the TPD, and it's a strong signal that the Commission and the Council acted so quickly."

Nonetheless, the left-wing party group Greens/EFA, which adopts a human-rights-based approach towards migration, criticized the Commission for ignoring member states' violations in the Aegean Sea. The crux of the criticisms directed against the Council was that it was late in making the necessary decisions to enact the common migration and asylum policies, which slowed down the legislative process. The group that mostly expressed these criticisms was the EPP. The EPP's criticism of the Council for disrupting the legislative process is unsurprising, given that this group has traditionally adopted a position that seeks to promote standard migration policies during policy debates. Tomas Tobé (2022: 36) from EPP, the center-right and conservative group, draws attention to the Council's action as "The events of last week have highlighted the urgency of a predictable, operational, and truly common approach to asylum and migration. This House has been waiting for the Council to get ready."

Finally, while MEPs supported the unity and solidarity shown by the EU community towards arrivals via the Ukraine borders, the failure of the EU public to act similarly in unity and solidarity towards arrivals via the Mediterranean and Aegean was criticized. Katalin Cseh's (2022: 15) words from *Renew* exemplify how the MEPs approved the solidarity at the border: "People showed up to cook warm food. Local governments set up hotlines and temporary shelters. They housed the refugees in schools and public buildings. Small-town mayors suddenly became international humanitarians. They are the face Europe shows in this crisis, and it is a beautiful face."

Within the context of debates on the relevant EU stakeholders, which constitute the third main discursive category in the MEPs' statements, MEPs generally approved of and showed support for the migration systems and practices introduced for those refugees arriving in the EU through the Ukrainian border. The way the Russia-Ukraine war was perceived as taking place in Europe and the labelling of Ukrainians as both Europeans and refugees appear to have played a significant role in determining the contents of MEPs' speeches under this third main discursive category.

Debates on the Relevant International Stakeholders

The last main discursive category, involving debates on relevant international stakeholders, was adopted in different MEPs' speeches thirteen times in the first year of the crisis. Within the scope of these debates, relations with (i) third countries and (ii) non-state actors involving international organizations (IOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were examined. Party groups such as the EPP, S&D, Renew, Greens/EFA, ECR, and GUEL/NGL showed clear support for Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees during the examined period. Witold Jan Waszczykowski (2022: 9), from the far-right and nationalist ECR, emphasized the need to support Ukraine as "the hot issue right now is humanitarian assistance. Delivering it to Ukraine is extremely difficult, but we must spare no effort to deliver."

Additionally, these groups argued in favor of the relevant (ii) IOs and NGOs working in Ukraine during the war. Petras Auštrevičius (2022b: 14) from Renew, a liberal-centrist party group called on The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) regarding the creation of

a humanitarian corridor necessary for the passage of refugees: “The Russian aggressors seek to impede the evacuation of civilians, oftentimes by taking advantage of humanitarian corridors to force the resettlements of Ukrainians to Russia. The UNHCR must facilitate the safe return of all Ukrainian refugees.”

Furthermore, party groups aiming to prevent or at least reduce the flow of refugees such as the ECR and EPP, called for increasing collaborations between the EU and key origin and transit countries, such as Turkey and Libya, as well as arguing in favor of increased financial support to be provided to the relevant IOs and NGOs in these countries. At the EP meeting, Tomas Tobé (2022: 36) from the EPP emphasized the importance of establishing partnerships with third countries to manage migration: “We must also do more to address the root causes and the drivers of migration. For this reason, we must deepen our cooperation with third countries.” In addition to supporting IOs and NGOs and drawing attention to their impact in effectively managing the migration crisis, some MEPs also directed criticism against them. The first of these criticisms was related to the Red Cross opening a refugee camp in Moscow. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was accused of ignoring the human rights violations in Russia’s Bucha region. The following words of Barry Andrews (2022: 59) from Renew provides an example for such criticism: “And that is a very difficult thing for the ICRC to do, and it’s very difficult for Members of the Rada to accept... the ICRC should be a lot more sensitive in circumstances where there is clearly an asymmetric approach to respect for international humanitarian law, where the Russian side has been so systematically in breach”.

Conclusion

This paper identified the following main categories based on the repeated specific discursive frames of MEPs’ speeches from the first year of the 2022 EU migration crisis, which covered the period from 24 February 2022 to 24 February 2023: (1) debates on arrivals; (2) debates on crisis policies; (3) debates on the EU stakeholders and (4) debates on relevant international stakeholders. The first main category, the debates towards arrivals, was about finding the correct label for those who attempted to arrive or arrived at the EU borders during the 2022 EU migration crisis. MEPs referred to this specific matter a total of sixty-two times.

First, the type of discursive frame MEPs adopted depended on the parties’ ideologies and migration priorities. Right-wing parties (i.e., ECR, ID) used non-refugee or conditional refugee frames, while Centre, liberal, and democrat parties (i.e., EPP, S&D, Renew) adopted conditional or refugee-based frames. Green and left-wing parties (i.e., Greens/EFA, GUE/NGL) favored refugee-based frames, emphasizing non-discrimination. Additionally, MEPs’ frames varied depending on the origin of migrants, with far-right parties using fewer non-refugee frames in response to Ukrainian arrivals.

The second main discursive category in MEPs’ speeches was references to the types of EU-wide migration policies to be activated. It was repeated a total of sixty times. Two sub-categories emerged: (i) policies on migration flows and (ii) policies for those who had

already crossed the EU border. Humanitarian corridors for Ukrainian arrivals and activating the TPD were widely supported across party groups. Pro-migration groups emphasized anti-discrimination and legal migration routes for all refugees, not just Ukrainians.

Under the third main category, MEPs expressed their opinions about the EU stakeholders eighty-five times. Party groups praised the successful implementation of policies by (i) member states, (iv) EU agencies, together with the rapid and joint decision-making of the (ii) Commission, and (iii) the Council, as well as the solidarity shown by the EU public. However, Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL criticized member states and EU institutions for human rights violations and the Commission for failing to address these issues. They also called for expanding the TPD and better coordination in the Mediterranean and Aegean.

The last main category, the debates on relevant international stakeholders, appeared thirteen times in the first year of the crisis. Party groups supporting Ukraine focused on isolating Russia and coordinating with IGOs and NGOs in Ukraine. Groups seeking to limit refugee flows supported financial collaborations with origin and transit countries in the Mediterranean and Aegean routes.

As a result, in the first year of the 2022 EU migration crisis, the EP's political groups and their ideologies were the determining factors. The discursive frames analyzed in the study align with findings in the relevant literature where the centre-left and Green groups supported more pro-immigration and liberal policies than centre-right and far-right groups (Hix and Noury 2007; Lopatin 2013; Servent 2014; Krotký and Kaniok 2020). Yet, even the parties from the right side of the political spectrum appeared to be cautious about not adopting overly negative tones towards arrivals during the analysed time frame, and they used anti-migrant rhetoric within a limited context. They did not repeat such rhetorical frames too frequently. In addition, although ideologies of the party groups affect anti-immigrant rhetoric, the centre-left party S&D appeared to adopt a conditional refugee frame in its rhetoric. We hope that these nuanced findings based on the analysis of recent data offer original contributions to the existing literature, which generally underlines a sharp distinction between the rhetoric of the Left and the Right, thus constituting a key strength of this paper. In addition, during the 2022 EU migration crisis, pro-refugee and liberal policies were more prominent than restrictive and anti-immigration frames in MEP speeches; a result that echoes the findings of Krotký and Kaniok (2020). Moreover, it was also found that MEPs' rhetoric varied based on migrants' country of origin, which is an underexplored aspect in the relevant literature. This is another contribution we hope this paper will offer to the field. The paper analyzed rhetorical frames using a limited time frame and a relatively small data sample. Therefore, its conclusions are hardly generalizable. Future research may adopt a broader temporal focus by including a larger data sample to overcome this shortcoming. Furthermore, comparing and contrasting different left-wing and right-wing parties' rhetoric on the 2022 EU migration crisis in national parliamentary contexts with those that emerged in the EP plenaries would also help increase the generalizability of some of the conclusions of this paper.

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