



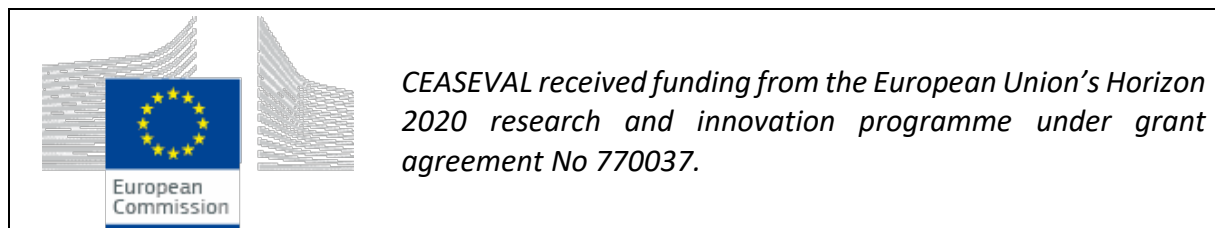
**Who is responsible, for what and to whom?  
Patterns of politicisation on refugees  
and the European solidarity crisis**

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### Abstract

*This report addresses the relationship between public opinion, political discourse and policy responses in the context of the so-called refugee crisis. In doing so, it speaks to the literature concerned with the saliency, polarisation and politicisation of migration, but shifting the focus from the politicisation of immigration to the politicisation of responsibility. Rather than about how migration is covered, perceived and responded (in terms of political discourse and policies), the questions at stake regard the meaning of responsibility, namely who is responsible, for what and to whom, both at the national and European levels. To answer such questions the report draws upon CEASEVAL WP5's analyses and country reports, trying to identify patterns of politicisation across eight country-cases. Ten key-findings emerge from the analysis: The discussion on responsibility vis-à-vis refugees in Europe has become an issue of politicisation across countries (i), and it has generally turned towards more restrictive positions (ii). The very meaning of responsibility differs in each context, depending on country-specific issues related to immigration (iii). Whom responsibility is due in the first place tends to be framed within a broader discussion about the imagined community of people deserving rights, recognition, and responses (iv) and - across countries and parties – it varies from narrow conceptions centred on the national interest to a broader one focused on refugee protection (v). Despite certain variation, three main groups of entities are held responsible across countries: European Institutions, Member States and the national government (vi). Politicisation (i.e. high salience and high polarization) is observed in most of the countries analysed (vii) and in both the political arena and the media sphere (viii). Hegemonisation (i.e. high salience and low polarization), emerge as novel and interesting pattern in different countries (e.g. Hungary and Bulgaria), calling for further research and theoretical speculation (xix). Finally, significant cross-national variation is observed regarding the viable solution to the crisis of solidarity in the EU, where some countries (i.e. Greece, Italy, Spain and Germany) call for “more Europe”, while others (i.e. Finland, Hungary and Bulgaria) ask for “less Europe” (x).*

**Keywords:** Refugee, Solidarity, Relocation quota, Politicization, EU, Political discourse, Public opinion, Media.

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## 1. Introduction

In August 2015 Angela Merkel stated that “Dublin doesn’t work” and that we “need a common response for Europe as a whole”. One of the main criticisms to the Dublin system was that it *didn’t work fairly*. Given that the most commonly-used criterion is that of the first country of arrival, the responsibility falls disproportionately (in theory at least) on the border countries. Another criticism was that *Dublin didn’t work efficiently*. It is inefficient because, despite the criteria of giving responsibility to the first country of arrival, most applicants seek asylum in a different country to the one in which they arrived. This should be explained by asylum seekers having different preferences, linked to personal concerns (such as the presence of friends and acquaintances and knowledge of the language), but also to significant differences between reception systems across the EU (Garcés-Masareñas 2015).

In this context, rethinking how to build a genuine common European asylum system means returning to two fundamental questions: how to distribute responsibility fairly and how to harmonise standards on both asylum procedures and reception conditions. Both imply more Europe instead of less Europe and, for some countries, more responsibility instead of less responsibility. The discussions around the relocation quota from Italy and Greece illustrate Member States’ reluctance to accept both. First, should Member States be more *solidaire* with other Member States facing an increasing influx of asylum seekers? As shown by Wagner, Kraler and Baumgartner (CEASEVAL WP 5/2018), solidarity is often understood as a “matter of will”, thus distinguishing solidarity from the duty of cooperation. Countries such as Hungary and Bulgaria saw the relocation quota proposed by the European Commission as an imposition from above and therefore against their national sovereignty. Second, should some Member States take more responsibility? Countries such as Spain considered that they were already taking a disproportionate share, referring to previous efforts on migration control and immigrant integration.

This has led to a difficult *cul-de-sac*: On the one hand, there is a need for more co-responsibility in view to ensure more “fairness”, which is a condition for a truly common European asylum system; on the other, EU leaders have been more and more unwilling to collaborate. This should be explained by the high levels of public anxiety about immigration and asylum across Europe. Public backlashes, partly fuelled by media and political discourse, represent serious obstacles for any reform that brings in more responsibility. Another reason for leaders unwillingness to collaborate has to do with the EU integration process. As noted by Raspotnik et al. (2012: 1), solidarity as a principle factor of European integration is connected to the notion of (European) legitimacy. The fewer the legitimacy, the fewer thus the willingness for more solidarity. Interestingly, as we will see, Bansak et al (2017) found that most citizens would tolerate an increase in the number of asylum seekers allocated to their own country as long as responsibilities are fairly shared across Europe. This suggests that public opinion may not always go in line with political leaders’ concerns and stances.

This report aims at disentangling the complicated and multifaceted relationship between public opinion, politicisation and political and policy responses in the context of the so-called refugee crisis – labelled by many as a “crisis in solidarity” – and in view to the latest discussion on the third generation of the CEAS. So far most academic literature has focused on the politicisation of immigration, including how public opinion, political rhetoric and media coverage shape the debates, saliency and polarisation of migration and in turn how such contestations influence policy responses

(see Consterdine 2018 for overview). Taking cues from this literature, this report shifts the focus from the *politicisation of immigration* to the *politicisation of responsibility*. This means a shift from questions such as how migration is covered, perceived and responded to questions on what responsibility means, to whom we should be responsible and who should be responsible both at the national and European levels. The final purpose is to identify different patterns and mechanisms of politicisation and by so doing understand the relationship between politics, politicisation and policies vis-à-vis debates on responsibility both between and within Member States.

## 2. What we know so far

Most of the literature on the politicisation of the so-called refugee crisis has focused on how immigration is covered, perceived or instrumentalised without paying much attention to the politicisation of responsibility. If we look at the literature focusing on *public opinion*, the majority of academic studies do not disaggregate attitudes towards migrants and asylum seekers and refugees. It is thus difficult to assess whether attitudes towards labour and humanitarian migrants differ.

Following Consterdine's report (2018), a number of key themes and consensus can be derived from the literature on public opinion. First, social identity and culture seem to matter more than economic and demographic situations in informing opinions on immigration. Second, the literature also shows that the more the contact with immigrants, the more the permissiveness towards immigration. Consistently, resistance to immigrants and asylum seekers tends to be weaker in bigger cities. Third, in terms of individual level characteristics, there is overwhelming consensus that more educated individuals are less likely to express prejudice and negative stereotypes towards minorities and immigrants. Fourth, public attitudes seem to be differentiated depending on the type of migrant, for instance being more positive towards high-skilled immigrants, asylum seekers (vis-à-vis economic migrants) or those perceived as culturally and religiously similar.

Focusing on asylum and refugees specifically, Consterdine refers to Bansak et al (2017) research, based on a survey with 18,000 citizens from 15 European countries. Interestingly, as we already pointed out, they found that a large majority of respondents supported an allocation that is proportional to each country's capacity over the status quo policy of allocation based on the country of first entry. This support is surprising if we consider that, in many countries, this would imply receiving a higher number of asylum seekers. In line with the findings of the literature on public opinion on immigration, Bansak et al. (2017) also found that most respondents had preferences for asylum seekers with higher employability, severe vulnerabilities and with a Christian cultural background. According to their analysis, Muslim asylum seekers were about 11 percentage points less likely to be accepted than Christian asylum seekers.

These findings are in line with those of Simonovits and Bernát (2016), which give an in-depth view of the European refugee crisis and its repercussions in Hungary. Using a series of opinion surveys, the study found that most of the EU population (85 per cent) agreed that "additional measures should be taken to fight illegal immigration of people from outside the EU" and three fourth of them would also support "a common European policy on migration". Citizens from Hungary, Denmark and Estonia would give support above average for additional measures to fight irregular migration and below average for a common European migration policy. Glorius' report (2018) identifies a pattern according

to which the Nordic countries tend to be more positive, while the Eastern European countries are more negative towards refugees. The same research also highlights that while on the policy level many debates until 2015 were concentrated on the overall economic impact of migration, the European public was more concerned about the practical effects of migration which might affect their daily lives, such as the competition for social services or increasing crime rates.

Looking at the academic literature *on media coverage of immigration*, Consterdine (2018) concludes there is general consensus among scholars regarding the relevant effect that media's framing of immigration (often through securitisation or threat frames) has on public attitudes, including a sense of panic and causing public anxieties. Consterdine also highlights that the dominant trend in the media is that of representing migrants in a negative manner and as a problem (Berry et al. 2015; Esses et al 2013). The press tend to be dominated by political elites' perspective while lacking migrants' voice. Despite political actors make implicit distinctions between genuine asylum seekers and so-called bogus economic refugees, media reporting tends to conflate all types of migrants. Regarding the refugee crisis, the literature systematically shows a relevant shift in the framing, from an initial humanitarian and empathetic framing towards a hostile and suspicious one. In many cases these shifts followed specific triggering events, such as the New Year's Eve 2015 Cologne event. Scholars' contributions also demonstrate large regional and country variations in media coverage with divergent frames between the East and West. The interaction between political sphere and media agenda setting remain less clear, with different studies providing contrasting results and reaching opposite conclusions.

As regard media coverage and framing of the 2015 refugee crisis, Greussing and Boomgaarden (2017) identify three approaches in the Austrian media: refugees and asylum seekers are presented as victims, as a threat to the culture, security and welfare of the host country or as a dehumanised and anonymous (out-)group. One of their conclusions is that narratives of security threat and economisation dominated over humanitarianism frames and background information on the refugees' situation. Broadening the scope of analysis beyond national case-studies, Georgiou and Zaborowski (2017) conducted a cross-national report for the Council of Europe, analysing European press' treatment of the refugee arrivals in 2015. These authors highlight that the European press played a central role in framing refugee arrivals in 2015 as a crisis from Europe, that there were significant differences across regions (particularly between East and West and between receiving and non-receiving countries) and, again, that there were important time shifts, with sympathetic frames in early stages to more hostility ones in the last phases. Similar conclusions were reached by a study by Berry et al. (2015: 45), which also points to the fact that "the European Union's response to the crisis was widely seen as inadequate, yet it was still defined as the key institution responsible for solving the crisis".

In terms of explanatory factors, Consterdine (2018) concludes that the domestic arena remains crucial for determining *political discourse on the refugee crisis*: historical legacies and, ultimately, Member States' relationship with the EU are key drivers to account for cross-national variation in terms of discourses and responses vis-à-vis the refugee crisis. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the special issue published at the Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies edited by Krzyzanowski, Triandafyllidou and Wodak (2018). In the concluding article, Triandafyllidou (2018) highlights important cross-national differences regarding the ways of framing the refugee crisis. The author argues that two competing frames emerged: the moralizing frame and the threat frame. Embedded in

humanitarian values, the moralizing frame places the responsibility of the flows on wars, conflict and violence in the countries of origin and presents refugees as victims deprived of any agency. The threat frame perceives the movement of people as an uncontrollable natural disaster. In this discourse the polarisation of “us versus them” comes to the fore. This distinction extends beyond natives and migrants. Indeed, in Italy and Greece “them” is associated as well with an unresponsive Europe which has left frontline countries with little solidarity and support (Triandafyllidou 2018: 212). According to Triandafyllidou, contrasting political discourses have to be understood in relation to: 1) the positioning of each country as a “frontline or final destination”, as directly or peripherally involved; 2) past experiences of seeking or offering refuge and hosting migrants (or lack thereof); and 3) current challenges including Euro-scepticism. In the light of these remarks, national – rather than European – factors seem thus to drive national responses to the so-called refugee crisis.

The literature on public attitudes and media and political discourses towards asylum seekers and refugees, with a particular focus on the 2015 refugee crisis, has widely grown in recent years. However, there are still some important gaps to be covered: 1) the literature on public opinion hardly distinguishes between economic migrants and refugees; 2) most studies focus on how immigration and refugees are perceived in public opinion and discussed by media and in party politics. Though central in these discussions, political responsibility is only partially analysed as an issue of politicisation; and 3) while politicisation includes salience and polarisation in public opinion, media coverage and party politics, few studies analyse these three settings together. This research wants to contribute at filling such gaps.

### **3. A definition of politicisation**

Hooghe and Marks (2009) argued that the key mechanism that changed the political climate in the European Union (EU) from a “permissive consensus” to a “constraining dissensus” was politicisation. If we accept this premise, we would then conclude that politicisation changes politics. The inverse relationship could be held true though. For instance, there is great consensus that the growth and success of parties on the right flank of the party system increases the salience of issues traditionally “owned” by the right (Bale et al. 2010; Akkerman 2015). In this case, a change in politics leads to increasing politicisation. But what do we mean by politicisation?

In general terms, politicisation serves as a description of the process of making “all questions political questions, all issues political issues, all values political values and all decisions political decisions” (Hartwell 1979: 7). The agenda-setting literature (Jones and Baumgartner 2004; Kingdon 1995) highlights that it is only when a social topic is defined as a problem that we can really speak of a political issue. Treating an issue as a problem means considering it an issue that requires state action (van der Brug et al. 2015). From this perspective, politicisation requires that an issue becomes a political issue, which means treating it as a problem and thus as an object of policies. But the literature on politicisation also tells us that politicisation implies a certain degree of conflict. Scholars from the party politics or electoral competition school of thought (Downs 1957) highlight the importance of positional competition and the extent to which different parties have polarizing positions on the issue. Consterdine (2018b: 15) synthesises it as follows: “an issue only qualifies as politicised if there is also a high degree of conflict, be this conflict over the policy direction or conflict



upon the means, and instruments to resolve the problem". If an issue is not on the political agenda, opposing positions are not at stake, thus the conflict is dormant (van der Brug et al 2015).

Based on these features, de Wilde (2011: 561) operationalises politicisation as an increase in 1) salience and 2) diversity of opinions on specific societal topics (in our case, the refugee crisis and, more specifically, who is responsible for). *Salience* is defined as the importance attributed to a particular issue, which may be captured by the number of newspapers dedicated-articles, the degree of citizens' awareness, the amount of public statements party representatives dedicate or the number of parliamentary questions. *Polarisation* signifies an occupation of more extreme positions – either in favour of or against different aspects of EU governance – and/or a depletion of neutral, ambivalent or indifferent attitudes (de Wilde et al. 2016: 6). Although polarisation is expected to go hand in hand with salience, this is not always the case. Referring to European integration, De Wilde argues that there was a strong polarisation of opinion but not an intense debate. In our research, countries such as Hungary, Bulgaria and Italy show a high salience of the issue of the refugee crisis with a very limited polarisation or, as Krasteva (2018) argues, with an increasing hegemonisation of the dominant political discourse.

Still following de Wilde, politicisation takes place in three different settings: parliaments, (the mass mediated) public sphere and public opinion. Salience and polarisation of a particular issue are not consistent across settings. Indeed, there may be important differences in salience and polarisation in each of these three settings, for instance with salience and polarisation in the media but not in Parliament or the other way around. De Wilde also recalls that politicisation can be very time and space specific. In his own words, "contentiousness flares up in intense debates within some Member States, only to die away again. Thus, instances of politicisation take place in specific episodes of contention" (Tilly & Tarrow 2007, in Wilde, 2011: 563). For the analysis of these episodes of contention, it is fundamental to focus on the effect of particular driving events. When analysing the politicisation of immigration, this is particularly clear: massive shipwrecks, the photo of the child Aylan, statements by politicians (such as Merkel's "we can do it") or the Cologne incidents on New Year's Eve have been fundamental to explain moments of politicisation and subsequent policy shifts.

For the purpose of this research, WP partners have taken two "episodes of contention" per country (Finland, Germany, Hungary, Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece, Italy and Spain). The first episode is common to all and was on the discussions around the relocation quota from May to October 2015. The second episode depends on each national context but, again, it has to do with discussions on responsibility, either at the EU or national level. The key research questions are: To what extent and how responsibility vis-à-vis refugees in Europe has become an issue of politicisation in different EU countries? What does responsibility mean? Who is considered to be responsible within the EU? To whom should the EU and Member States be responsible? And finally, what are the main patterns of politicisation across the eight countries under study? To answer these questions, WP partners have analysed the main public opinion polls at the EU and national level, Parliamentary discussions and media analysis of those national newspapers with the largest audience according to the Reuters Institute website.

#### 4. Public opinion

The analysis of public opinion is fundamental to understand both politicisation and policy outcome. While public opinion may not determine policy outcomes, it does rather set boundaries within which policymakers find opportunity or constraints (Freeman, Hansen & Leal 2013). There is thus no direct relationship between public opinion and policy outcomes, but evidence shows that public opinion does determine the context in which the policymaking process takes place. This is what has led CEASEVAL partners to pay particular attention to public opinion polls. As part of WP5, Glorius (2018) reviewed the main research reports from major cross-national opinion polls such as the European Social Survey (ESS), the European Values Study (EVS) and the GAS and, in a second stage, analysed the Eurobarometer (concentrating on the issues EB 82, EB 84, EB 86 and EB 88) for all countries involved in WP5 from 2014 to 2017.

On the basis of the existing literature, Glorius' report concludes that hostile attitudes towards immigration find fertile ground in societies where few experiences with migrants were made, where economic and social security systems are unstable and where a low level of interpersonal and subjective trust is present. Based on Bansak et al. study (2017), Glorius also highlights that European citizens rely on the stability of the EU as economic and political stakeholders and that they would accept European solutions for their own country, if they were made on grounds of solidarity and trust. By relying on her own analysis of the Eurobarometer, the author identifies three different clusters of countries, among the eight cases targeted in our research: 1) cluster made of "critical and burdened countries", which includes Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Hungary; 2) cluster of "stable and indifferent countries", including Germany and Finland; and 3) cluster of "open and solidarity-oriented countries", covering only the case of Spain.

*Critical and burdened:* In Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Hungary respondents perceive domestic issues such as economic development, unemployment, rising prices as most salient matters. Immigration from third countries and immigrants' contribution to the country is perceived negatively and, on the same line, the level of commitment for helping refugees is below average (with the exception of Greece). In these cases there is a low level of trust towards countries' national governments and local authorities (with the exception of Hungary). Trust in the European Union varies within the cluster, Bulgaria and Hungary shows above average scores, Italy on average while Greece presents below average scores. Hungary is characterized by average or below-average scores regarding the approval of a common European migration policy. According to Glorius, this should be explained by all these countries being affected by considerable domestic problems while at the same time having had important refugee migration, either as EU external border countries or as destination countries within the European Union.

*Stable but indifferent:* German and Finnish respondents show an average or above average positive perception of both third country immigration and immigrants' contribution and they hold a strong commitment (average/above average) for helping refugees. Public opinion in both countries display an average to above average level of trust in their national governments, local authorities and the European Union. German and Finnish respondents differ, however, as regard the attitude towards a common European migration policy: an above average approval is observed in Germany whereas a below average approval is noticed in Finland. In Germany the salience of domestic issues is below average while in Finland is above average. Glorius' conclusion is that both countries can be perceived

as economically and politically stable countries with functioning institutions. The salience of refugee migration seems to be moderate and does not deliver highly polarised attitudes in comparison to other countries of the sample. That being said, considering the economic stability (Germany) and the rather moderate affectedness by refugee arrivals (Finland), the perception towards refugee migration appears less positive than it could have been expected.

*Open and solidarity oriented:* Even though the salience of domestic issues is above average and trust in national government and local authorities is low, the Spanish public opinion holds a positive (above average) perception Spain presents an above average response to third country immigration and their contribution along with a high commitment to help refugees and develop a common European migration policy. According to Glorius (2018) such positive perception could be due, on the one hand, to the former migratory patterns (and consecutive regularisation processes) and, on the other, to the fact that Spain has been barely affected by the recent refugee migration to date (with asylum applications representing a share of 0,15% of its total population). Accordingly, the dispute about responsibility sharing was addressed from the position of an outsider.

In terms of national and EU policymaking, Glorius (2018) points out that most EU citizens feel a national responsibility to help refugees. Such attitude is rather stable over the period considered, though slightly increasing since 2015. Again, holding true this general trend, certain variation is observed across countries. In Germany and Spain, citizens show a high level of concern for national responsibility, Greek and Finnish scores are slightly above average and in Italy, Bulgaria and Hungary scores are below average. Almost 90 per cent of all respondents share the opinion that additional measures need to be taken to fight irregular migration to Europe and, among them, around two-thirds places the responsibility at the EU level or both at EU and national levels. Regarding the question whether a common European policy on migration would be appreciated, high variation is noted. Again, the highest shares of positive responses are found in Spain and Germany while the lowest are in Hungary and Finland.

## **5. How responsibility is framed**

In all the countries analysed the meaning of responsibility in relation to the issue of the relocation quotas is framed in close connection with country-specific issues related to immigration. In other words, responsibility as a discursive-construct assumes country-specific acceptations. Sometimes, as it occurs in border countries such as Greece, Italy and Spain, it is understood as the responsibility for arrivals. In August 2015, the Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, noted as regards an upcoming EU Council meeting that: *“Greece is the frontier of Europe and on the receiving end of mass refugee flows. It remains to be seen whether there are prospects for European solidarity or if everyone will look at its own borders”* (Dimitriadi and Sarantaki 2018, 9). In other contexts responsibility is envisaged stressing its link with the challenges that a (supposed) increased diversity brings about in terms of social cohesion. Prior to the Hungarian referendum on the quotas, Gabor Vona – leader of the nationalist party Jobbik – stated: *“[In the West,] the question is not whether to live in a multicultural society or not but how to live in a multicultural society. For us, here, in Central Eastern Europe we have a chance to choose whether we want a multicultural society, or we don’t”* (Éva, Sik and Suranyi 2018, 28)

It is worth noticing that this applies both to countries with significant stock of asylum applicants (Germany and Finland) as well as in countries where the size of the refugee population is extremely limited (Bulgaria and Hungary). The pool of actors referred to and called into question in the political discourse, either as “subject” or as “object” of responsibility”, is shared across countries. What differs cross-nationally – and across the political spectrum – is the moral evaluation made of such actors, namely how each one is framed vis-à-vis responsibility. The following section delves into this matter distinguishing similarities and differences across countries, by keeping apart the two main questions and dimensions of analysis investigated: “responsibility to whom?” and “who is responsible?”

## 6. Responsibility to whom

The first question, namely the political imaginary about the object of responsibility, tends to be related to broader discussions about the boundaries of the imagined community of people deserving rights, recognition, consideration and responses. The boundaries of such community, hence the assortment of actors included, are what differs among the parties involved in the discussion. Some parties narrow such community to the national demos, while others hold a more open understanding where the community of people includes refugees. More precisely, what emerges from the empirical material analysed in the national reports, are three distinct ways of answering the question about “whom responsibility is due in the first place”.

The first kind of discourse – the *humanitarian discourse* – follows a human-rights approach and sees refugees as the first and foremost object of responsibility. The accountability of the policymakers is assumed accordingly: policy measures should be fine-tuned in order to protect asylum seekers and ensure the safeguard of their rights. At a country-level, this perspective characterizes the political debate in Germany, Greece and Spain, particularly at the outset of the discussion about the relocation quota. At a party-level, this kind of discourse appears characterizing political actors placed in the left of the political spectrum: the more the party is moved towards the left, the stronger and more manifest are its concerns for the need of reception and protection of asylum seekers and refugees.

The second kind of discursive representation – what we label the *nationalist discourse* - gives priority to the national sovereignty and to the interest of the nation. This political imaginary is filled with security concerns related to illegal migration and the threat of terrorism and its main purpose in terms of policies is the strengthening of border controls. At a country-level, this perspective characterizes the debate in the Eastern EU countries (Bulgarian and Hungary) but also in Finland. At a party-level the aforementioned correlation seems to hold: the more the party points to the right of the political spectrum, the stronger and more manifest are its concerns for the citizenry and the need to protect the national cohesion and integrity. That being said, the nationalist discourse – as we have called it – shows certain variation. It is possible to identify, indeed, two different versions of such stance, one more oriented towards the respect of the national sovereignty (i.e. the “nationalist-sovereign acceptance”) and another more focused on national culture and identity (i.e. “the nationalist-ethnic acceptance”).

The first acceptance dominates the debate in Finland, but some of its elements are found in other countries as well (e.g. Bulgaria, Germany and Hungary). The nationalist-sovereign perspective stresses

the need to respect the global system of sovereign states as well as their autonomy and decisional power. This stance goes along with the denial of decision imposed by supranational actors (i.e. EU institutions) and emphasizes the importance of voluntary participation in inter-national agreements. Cultural and identarian considerations are left aside and leave room for rationally-imbued remarks concerning the (economic and social) pros and cons of international migration. Such acceptance is well summarized by a declaration of the leader of the Finns Party and Finnish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Timo Soini, who in 2015 stated that: *“Every state is responsible for the asylum seekers in its own territory. The decision-making power must be in national hands. Decision-making power in migration policy should not be moved to the Commission”* (Soini 2015, translated from Finnish by ÖW) (Pyrhönen and Wahlbeck 2018, 8).

Notwithstanding references to the national sovereignty are still present, the “nationalist-ethnic” emphasizes cultural and identity-making concerns. This political imaginary deeply draws upon a dichotomous contraposition between “us” and “them”. In the case of Hungary, where such contraposition is plainly evident, an “us” made of white, Christians, Hungarian, European, strong, active and democratic Hungarians is juxtaposed to a “them” made of black, Muslim, naïve, passive, oppressive, weak and anti-democratic migrants. According to Hungarian president Viktor Orban, *‘the EU is floating, weak, insecure and paralysed. Meetings and conferences aplenty, but no solutions’ – he said. ‘We are entangled in a web of ideologies instead of acting according to common sense, our own culture and tradition.’* (REF. HUN. P.12)

In between such opposed standpoints, it is possible to identify a “third-way” discourse – the *bargained discourse* – that holds both refugees and nationals in consideration when addressing the issue of responsibility. While keeping both groups as object of responsibility, the “bargained discourse” develops around the distinction between migrants who meet the conditions for international protection (simply put, refugees) and those who do not, namely economic migrants. This type of discursive construct is able to keep together humanitarian stances with concerns for national security: while calling for the protection of “genuine” asylum seekers and refugees, it points to the necessity to increase border controls and ensure efficient repatriation mechanisms. This perspective marks mainstream parties positioned at the center of the political spectrum, whether more to the left or the right. Traces of such discourse are located across all the countries investigated, though with a significant degree of variation. In Germany this discourse finds the broadest representation, as clearly testified by the following declaration of SPD’s member of the Parliament: *“Protection against persecution and human rights violations must never be a question of economic advantage. The asylum system is the wrong way for people who are primarily looking for work in our country. With an immigration law, we regulate transparently and comprehensibly who may immigrate to Germany for economic reasons. The immigration of qualified specialists depends on the interests of our country.”* (Beinhorn and Glorius 2018, 35).

These three discursive representations are spread across the political spectrum over the countries considered and, in some cases, the same party can even change its stance on the issue over time, moving – for instance – from a more humanitarian discourse towards a “bargained” one. This is the case of the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE), which held a clear humanitarian standpoint at the outset of the crisis and gradually headed towards a more restrictive and bargained position (Amat i Puigsech and Garcés-Masareñas 2018).

A final remark regards the view of the European Union as object of responsibility. In some countries, as Italy, Germany and Greece, the unity and future of the European Union itself are envisioned as a core priority worth of consideration in the debate over the relocation quota. In these countries' the refugee crisis is a European problem which should be dealt with and solved only through solidarity among Member States. Such evidence points to a more general finding of the research: in the discursive construction of refugee-related matters, the object of responsibility precedes (and determines) the subject of responsibility. The political narrative seems indeed to start from defining to whom responsibility is due (e.g. national citizenry versus migrants) and - only as an afterthought - who is held responsible (e.g. European Institutions versus national government) is determined. In this sense the underlying conception of the imagined community of people seems to affect the blame-game about who is considered responsible.

## 7. Who is responsible

As for the subject of responsibility, the cross-national comparison carried out demonstrates that the discussion about the relocation quotas as well as other related to the refugee crisis are understood as global matters in which several stakeholders are believed to be responsible. In short, it is possible to identify three different groups of entities that in every country are recognized as subjects of responsibility: 1) The European Union and, specifically, the European Institutions; 2) Member States, either singularly or grouped according to certain affinities; and 3) the national government. These elements are organized following a blame-game logic so that the very question "who's responsible?" is re-framed as "who's to blame?". As pertains to European institutions, the political discussions about the relocation quota tend to turn into a dispute about EU's action and its legitimacy and efficacy. European Institutions are recognized as the main actor responsible to deal with the emerging humanitarian crisis. Such point of view is generally shared across parties and goes beyond the ideological spectrum so that differences between left- and right-wing parties tend to fade away in this regard. The following quotes by Matteo Renzi and Krasimir Donchev Karakachanov, sat at opposite ends of the ideological continuum, well testify this evidence:

*"When we deliver our speeches at the Council of Europe and we say that immigration is a European problem, we do not say it because we think that Europe should replace us. We are able to do what is to be done alone, if it is needed. But it's the EU that should not allow Italy to do the job alone, because our borders are not just our borders: they are borders of Europe." (Matteo Renzi) (Pogliano and Ponzo 2018, 19).*

*'We cannot allow Bulgaria to fall victim to the irresponsible European politics of certain large countries' We've witnessed the fact that the EU leaders pursue an absolutely mistaken policy, which let Europe be flooded by over 2 million illegal immigrants, all of them part of the Muslim religion, which has nothing to do with the cultural character of Europe's Christian identity.' (Krasimir Donchev Karakachanov in press). (Krsteva 2018, 24)*

The "explosion" of the classical cleavages between left and right and their convergence towards a critical stance towards European institutions is shared across countries, still with significant national

idiosyncrasies. In Bulgaria, as pointed out by Krasteva (2018), left-wing parties left solidarity and humanitarian concerns aside while embracing a strong securitarian and anti-European rhetoric. The Europe Union's responsibility is upheld even from the other side of European frontiers. As traced in the analysis of the case of Turkey, media, public opinion and politicians agree on blaming EU Institutions for failing to take necessary measures against the emerging humanitarian crisis, especially in the aftermath of the incidents that took place in the country over September 2015. The excerpt from the *Hurriyet* online is very illustrative in this regard:

*While Turkey alone has been hosting nearly 50 times the number of people determined by the EU Commission, 28 EU countries could not reach the number 40 thousand despite the many meetings they have been organizing. The previous day, the Ministries of Interior and Justice of the EU had a meeting in Luxembourg and after intense negotiations they reached a commitment of 32,256 people. The rest 8 thousand people will be negotiated during the meeting in December. Despite the decision caused by nearly the half of the objection of the member states that has changed the Commission's suggestions of June from "obligatory" sharing to "voluntary" sharing, the lack of necessary steps are especially criticized by the human rights organizations ("They have no place for 40 thousand people", *Hurriyet*, 22 July 2015). (MiReKoc 2018, 18).*

Notwithstanding a general cross-national consensus on EU's responsibility, attitudes towards European Institutions and about the legitimacy of the European project differ significantly. While in some countries – as it is the case of border-countries such as Greece, Italy and Spain along with Germany – a European solution is praised and linked to the need for "more Europe" and for further solidarity among Member States, in others – as Finland and Hungary – media and politicians call for "less Europe" while reaffirming the priority of national sovereignty.

*"We have a right of asylum that hasn't unfortunately been regulated at national level. We struggle for a European asylum policy, which means that repatriations have to operate at European level, and also that dialogue with sending countries, especially in North Africa, has to be carried out at European level." (Matteo Renzi) (Pogliano and Ponzo 2018, 19)*

*A vision has been presented, according to which our country takes in tens of thousands of refugees annually, and hundreds of thousands in the future. Is Finland no longer a sovereign state that decides for itself how many and which people will be taken in here? (HS 28th September 2015). (Pyrhönen and Wahlbeck 2018, 15).*

As regards the second subject of responsibility, namely Member States, the blame-game usually take the shape of a contrast between "good" and "bad" countries, where the former are considered to have suffered most of the burden while the latter are blamed for selfishness and lack of accountability. While the specific countries considered "good/allies" and "bad/enemies" change across the cases considered, the juxtaposition holds steady, as a sort of all-encompassing frame suitable in different contexts.

Borders-countries as Italy, Spain and Greece perceive themselves as suffering the gravest consequences of the situation and accuse other member states, particularly Hungary and the other members of the Visegrád group, as bad examples of egoism and lack of solidarity. This is what points out, as a way of example, Marietta Tidei, a member of the Italian center-left Democratic Party, who refers to the wall built by Hungary along the Serbian border. In the same talk, Italy and Greece were mentioned as the “good countries” in need of help from other Member States: *“Italy has proved to be sensitive and willing. We must now guard against racism in our country and against indifference and hostility from our European partners.”* (Pogliano and Ponzio 2018, 19)

In Greece, the Visegrád group and Austria are criticised for their opposition to the EU-Turkey deal. On the other “side”, Hungary blames back border countries and, more generally, Western European countries for “inviting migrants” and for their misguided foreign policy which have destabilized the middle east region. Pointing the finger at other member states often serves governmental rhetoric to defend itself against the critics coming from the opposition.

As regard national governments, again, homogeneity is observed across cases: in all the countries under investigation the national government is generally acknowledged to hold responsibility vis-à-vis refugee matters. In this case, variation is found between the governing majority and the parties in the opposition. Parties holding office recognize being in charge of responsibility but, at the same time, sustain having already accomplished their duty. Such dynamic goes beyond the left/right cleavage. On the other side, parties in opposition tend to charge their own national government of not having done enough, whether in terms of refugees’ safeguard (left parties) or for the security and protection of the national citizenry (right parties).

Beyond such common trends, it is worth pointing out that, differently from the rest of the cases, in Germany, Italy and Spain the issue of responsibility is particularly discussed at the national level. The discursive construction about who is responsible goes beyond the main three-fold subject treated so far, to embrace a more complex picture including sub-national levels of governance, namely regional and municipal authorities. In these countries hence, the debate turns often into a multilevel blame-game between the central state, on the one hand, and regional and city actors on the other.

Following de Wilde’s definition, salience and polarization can be conceived as two axes along which drawing patterns of politicisation in comparative perspective. In other words, salience and polarization represent the morphological dimensions of politicisation. Before addressing politicisation patterns, it is interesting to consider such dimensions in isolation.

## **8. Salience**

The analysis of the national reports show a high level of salience in all cases. Across countries, discussions around the relocation quota – along with other episodes of contention investigated in each context – draw media and political attention. For example, the three episodes of contention covered in the case of Bulgaria (i.e. relocation quotas during May-November 2015, the 2016 presidential campaign and the end of the first Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of European Union) have demonstrated the interest of numerous political actors and parties, the abundance of narratives and a high level of affection.



It should be remembered that the political discourse tends to follow a wider approach beyond the mere discussion of the episode of contention at stake and therefore addressing more general issues on migration governance, immigrants' integration and the EU. This is to say that when speaking of the level of salience of a given issue what tends to be at stake are wider matters regarding immigration and internal European relations. The debate inside the Italian Parliament is paradigmatic in such regard: instead of focusing on the relocation quota, it was rather a general dispute about immigration framed within the contraposition between EU and Italy.

Indeed, in most of the cases the outset of the so called "refugee crisis" emerges as the starting point of an increasingly animated dispute on "immigration". Moreover - and here goes another important finding of the analysis - the more the debate gains salience, the more it seems to head towards restrictive positions. The case of Germany is worth of consideration in this regard. While the refugee matter gains salience in the public sphere, the political imaginary in the country moves from a clear humanitarian stance towards a more restrictive one. As pointed out by Beinhorn and Glorius (2018, 45), "while in 2015 many discourses dealt with human tragedies in the context of flight and the necessity to become active and show solidarity via humanitarian engagement, the terms "migration" and "migrants" in 2017 had adopted connotations of "strangeness" and "security threat", and had triggered debates on deservingness of individuals regarding their causes of flight, and limits of solidarity in terms of immigration numbers and integration efforts."

Two different dynamics seem to lie beyond the tendency of increasing salience, one related to the power of the media and the other linked to that of the government. The case of Finland well describes the former: here the increasing salience about the refugee matter does not take place at the same time in media and in the parliament. Whereas the parliamentary debates on the relocation quota took place behind the cabinet's closed doors, media debates plainly addressed the matter, thus not only contributing to a growing relevance for the public but also spreading a specific framing. The case of Hungary instead captures the second type of dynamic, in which salience of the issue is driven by political discourse. If the issue of the relocation quota and, more generally that of migration, has reached a high level of salience is due to the unique role played by the central government: "Governmental communication leads the discourse with its messages, which then shapes the discourse in the Parliament and the media, and finally the public gets (in)formed. The media is strongly dominated by the government, independent, critical journalism is shrinking and reaches less and less of the public as an increasing part of the population can only access media that is carrying the messages of the government" (Éva, Sik and Suranyi 2018, 30).

Many of the traditional factors emphasized by scholars in the field of party politics ((Bale et al. 2010; Akkerman 2015) – namely, the degree of electoral fragmentation, the colour of the ruling majority and the relative power-balance between the party/coalition holding office and the opposition - appear to have no significant effect on salience. While such conditions variate across countries, in all of them high level of salience is observed. What seems to matter most – remaining in the same domain of the literature - is the incidence of far-right parties. The presence of nationalistic and/or xenophobic right-wing parties presents itself as a sort of necessary condition for high salience: in all the countries where such type of party is found, the issue of responsibility vis-à-vis refugee and

immigration-related matters became a salient topic both in the public and political agenda. In our study, this includes all countries except Turkey, Spain and Italy.<sup>1</sup>

## 9. Polarization

The research has also observed high levels of polarization across countries. In general terms, political debates about the relocation quota, as well as discussions regarding other episodes of contention, take place with contrasting opinions and stances facing each other. The division among parties' views tends to be articulated along two main axes i) the partisan axis between government and opposition, and ii) the ideological axis between left and right. While partisan polarization is detected mainly with regard to the question of "who is responsible", ideological polarization mostly occurs when the question about "to whom responsibility is due" is at stake.

The first axis of polarization emerges as the main dimension of polarization: parties in office and parties in opposition tend to frame the debate about refugees in opposite ways. The main bone of contention regards the subject of responsibility. In other words, the polarization between government and opposition takes the shape of a blame-game where the party in government assumes to have "done enough" and shun responsibility to European institutions and other European member states, while parties in opposition stress the (lack of) responsibility of the national government. Such dynamic seems to apply beyond ideological distinctions, as it is observed between left-wing governments versus right wing opposition (e.g. Greece) and in right wing government versus left-wing opposition (e.g. Finland).

That being said – and here goes the second axis of polarization – significant polarization is also found along the ideological cleavage: on the one hand we find left wing parties holding a "humanitarian discourse" centred on the protection of asylum seekers, the respect of humanitarian obligations, the need to enhance efforts in sea rescue operations and to comply with relocation quotas; on the other, we find parties more to the right of the ideological spectrum closer to what we have defined a "nationalist discourse", giving priority to national citizenry, border controls, the fight of illegal immigration and the collaboration with third-countries for regulating migratory flows. The contraposition between The Left (*Die Linke*) and Alternative for Germany (*AFD, Alternative für Deutschland*) in Germany is rather emblematic in this regard, as their electoral programs testify. While the former calls for open borders, human rights protection and a fair sharing of responsibility of the reception and accommodation of refugees, the latter strongly opposes the reception of refugees and migrants (believed to destabilize the German state) and calls for a change in international treaties like the Geneva Convention on Refugees, arguing that migration policy is a question of national sovereignty.

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<sup>1</sup> As regard the case of Italy, it should be beard in mind that during the period of time analysed (204-2015) the Northern League (Lega Nord) reached its minimum in voting intentions, having just passed through a big scandal related to the illegal use of electoral funds; a fact that caused the accusation and the left of its historical leader.

Beyond partisan and ideological polarizations, convergence is found across parties regarding EU responsibility. Apart from the German ruling majorities, all the parties shared a critical stance towards the management of the so-called refugee crisis by European institutions, whether for failing to comply with humanitarian and international law's obligations (as pointed out by left-wing parties) or for lacking enough border controls and security measures (as stressed by right-wing parties).

Taking a longitudinal perspective, increasing polarization is noticed: since the outbreak of the so called "refugee crisis" and the opening of the debate about the relocation quota, visions and perspectives have progressively diverged. The case of Bulgaria represents a remarkable exception in this regard as the discourse moves from being highly polarized (along the two axes identified) to being almost uniform across parties. In this regard, Anna Krasteva (2018) speaks of *mainstreaming* or *hegemonisation*, referring to the spread and gradual imposition of a specific discourse in the public and political imaginaries. In Bulgaria, the progressive affirmation of the xenophobic and nationalistic discourse of the far-right, taking roots in parties at the opposite of the ideological spectrum, has gradually marginalized alternative points of views and has decreased the overall level of polarization in the country. The evolution of the discourse of the Bulgarian Socialist party says much to this regard. Since the Presidential Campaign of 2016, the main left-wing party placed the migration crisis at the centre of its political discourse, moving towards nationalist, securitarian and anti-European positions, which so far had only been held by the far-right. Such trend of "downward convergence" towards more negative stances on migration was set forth later on, when the party supported the Resolution (voted in the Bulgarian Parliament the 20<sup>th</sup> of July 2018) for the refusal of readmission of refugees and against more increased responsibility in a common European refugee policy.

## 10. Patterns of politicisation

Given that in most of the countries under observation both increasing salience and growing diversity of opinions have been observed, politicisation comes forth as one of the core findings of our analysis. Politicisation is generally observed both in the political arena and in the media sphere. In most of the cases, convergence between discursive constructions and patterns of politicisation are found in media and politics. The Italian case though represents a relevant exception, with politicisation alternating between media and politics: "a relative high level of politicisation in one of the two 'sites' corresponds with a very low level in the other (Pogliano and Ponzo 2018, 27)." While during the debate on internal relocation, politicisation was observed in the media but not in parliamentary debates, the opposite holds true when the issue at stake was the EU relocation quota.

This finding paves the way for a broader consideration concerning the role of the media as potential driver of politicisation. The German case is illuminating in this regard: in this country politicisation in media and in the parliament takes place in turn rather than in parallel. While the parliamentary discussion on the relocation quota (2015) unfolded without polarization, the media discourse – centred on emerging extremist actors as the AfD or the PEGIDA-movement – was marked by high degree of politicisation. Non parliamentary-discourse seems to have gradually gained momentum and, finally, to have triggered a politicisation in the political arena (as testified by 2017 parliamentary debates). In the case of Italy such sort of media-driven mechanism of politicisation is even more complex, given that the dynamic of politicisation began at the level of local media. Getting back to

the central consideration about patterns of politicisation, a few more words should be dedicated to the aforementioned dynamic of hegemonisation described by Krasteva (2018). By relying on the assessment of the political debate about refugees-related matters in Bulgaria, the author makes the case for a specific and alternative pattern of politicisation, marked by high level of salience and low degree of polarization. In Bulgaria the discursive construction on refugee and immigration-related matters moves from a heterogeneity of stances and views to the gradual affirmation of one-and-only perspective, which spreads from right-wing parties across mainstream ones regardless of their ideological differences.

The affirmation of such dominant perspective in the debates –its *hegemonisation*, using Krasteva’s wording – comes along with the parallel marginalization of alternative views, which are gradually expelled from both the media and the political arenas. An analogous tendency is observed in Hungary, where growing salience and very limited polarization are present at the same time. However, the dynamic of hegemonisation in Hungary presents its own idiosyncrasies: differently from what has been observed in Bulgaria, the lack of polarization is due to state overall control of the discursive construction of the so-called refugee crisis in both the political and media sphere.

## 11. Conclusion

Responsibility vis-à-vis refugees in Europe has become an issue of politicisation across the eight countries under study. However, the very meaning of responsibility differs in each context due to the fact that responsibility is often framed in relation to country-specific issues related to immigration. In border countries such as Greece, Italy and Spain, responsibility is understood above all as the responsibility for arrivals. In other countries, regardless of the size of the refugee population, responsibility tends to be envisaged vis-à-vis immigration, in terms of reception but also regarding the effects of immigration on diversity and social cohesion.

Subjects and objects of responsibility - namely who is hold responsible and to whom responsibility is due - tend to be shared across countries. Discussions on the *object of responsibility* (responsibility to whom) are often related to broader debates about the boundaries of the imagined community of people deserving rights. This explains why most discussions on “to whom we should be responsible” have shifted to the question of “whom responsibility is due in the first place”. The analysis of the eight national reports points to three different frames: the *humanitarian frame*, which follows a human-rights approach and sees refugees as the first and foremost object of responsibility; the *nationalist frame*, which gives priority to the national sovereignty and consequently to security concerns; and the *third-way or bargained frame*, that holds both refugees and nationals into consideration, basically calling for the protection of “genuine” asylum seekers while asking for increasing border controls vis-à-vis the arrival of economic migrants.

Though left and centre-left parties embrace a discourse closer to the humanitarian frame and right and center-right parties more in line with the nationalist one, evidence from the eight countries under study shows that in practice these three frames are spread across the political spectrum and in some countries the same party can even change its position over time, moving for instance from a more humanitarian to a more bargained frame . In line with the literature on the politicisation of the so-called refugee crisis, it is clear from our analysis that discussions on responsibility have generally

changed towards more restrictive positions. In short, across parties and across countries instances for a stricter distinction between genuine and bogus refugees, increased border control, and safeguard of national cohesion have increased. Enclosed between claims for more solidarity and claims for the safeguard of national sovereignty, the very unity and future of the European Union has been harshly called into question.

Regarding the *subject of responsibility*, thus who is responsible, our research highlights that both national and European institutions are considered to be responsible. Looking at public opinion polls, Glorius (2018) found that almost 90 per cent of all respondents share the opinion that additional measures need to be taken to fight irregular migration to Europe and, among them, around two-thirds places the responsibility at the EU level or both at the EU and national levels. This conclusion is reinforced by that of Bansak et al. (2017), which points to a large majority of respondents supporting a share of responsibility proportional to each country's capacity as long as responsibilities were fairly shared across Europe.

In terms of political discourse, while there is no doubt that the subjects of responsibility are the European Union and its Member States, discussions on the role and legitimacy of the EU differ across countries. While in Greece, Italy, Spain and Germany the solution is praised and linked to the need for "more Europe", in Finland, Hungary and Bulgaria media and politicians call for "less Europe" while reaffirming the priority of national sovereignty. Interestingly, in all countries discussions around the question who is responsible tend to be re-framed as "who's to blame". At the EU level, discussions on the relocation quota tended to turn into a dispute about EU's action, the efficacy of its policies and the legitimacy of the EU project as a whole. At this level, the blame-game did also take the shape of a binary conceptualisation between "good" (often perceived as suffering and *solidaire*) and "bad" (as distant and selfish) Member States. At the national level, and this is particularly clear in Germany, Italy and Spain, the discussions on responsibility included sub-national administrative levels, often turning into a multilevel blame-game between the central state, on the one hand, and regional and local administrations and civil society actors, on the other.

Particularly in Eastern European countries, attacks towards European institutions and supranational powers limiting national authorities are often blended with anti-immigration stances. In such discursive construction immigrants may also be represented as victims, who are not criticized *per se* but are seen as a burden "created" by supranational powers and/or by other elites placed at both national and international levels. This framing of the debate takes the shape of populist rhetoric combining both eurosceptic and xenophobic and racist stances.

Finally, if we look at the different patterns of politicisation across the eight countries under study, one last conclusion is worth mentioning. In countries such as Italy, Bulgaria and Hungary salience seems to be more relevant than polarisation. Referring to the spread and gradual imposition of a specific discourse in the public and political imaginaries in Bulgaria, Krasteva (2018) speaks of *hegemonisation* or *mainstreaming*. If we understand hegemonisation as the progressive marginalisation of more pro-immigrant voices in favour of the xenophobic and nationalistic discourses of the far-right, we should conclude that some of these features can also be identified in other European countries. In this regard, our study shows the crucial role played by right wing parties and media outlets as drivers and catalyst of politicisation and, in last instance, the hegemonisation of anti-immigrant and eurosceptic discourses.

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