



**MAPPING THE LANGUAGE OF ‘CRISIS’:  
HOW DISCOURSE MISMANAGEMENT IMPEDED SOLIDARITY IN THE  
EUROPEAN UNION?**

IED Research Project: “Migration, borders control and solidarity: Schengen at stake?”

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*Abstract: This aim of this paper is to map out the development of the ‘crisis’ discourse in the context of the mass refugee influx in 2015, and investigate its correlation with narratives related to solidarity, securitization, and humanitarianism, as well as the rising popularity of populist radical right political parties in the context of the refugee influx to the EU. Through political discourse analysis, two discursive shifts related to the ‘crisis’ are identified, namely, the shift away from humanitarian solutions to security measures, and the shift away from EU-focused solidarity to reliance on non-EU actors. Both of the identified discursive shifts are then analyzed in the context of their possible current and future effect on solidarity within the EU. Lastly, this paper addresses the possible long-term repercussions of the ‘crisis’ discourse on the EU’s asylum policy and the rise of populist radical right political parties.*

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The refugee and migrant flows, which began in 2015, presented an unprecedented challenge for EU Member States, highlighted best by the inability to come up with a cohesive response in line with international, EU, and national asylum laws. This paper attempts to map out the development of the ‘crisis’ discourse, as an independent variable, and investigate its connection with narratives of solidarity, securitization, humanitarianism, and rising populist radical right parties, as dependent variables, in the context of the refugee influx to the EU. The empirical issue of how the ‘crisis’ discourse has framed the refugee flow and measures directed at its management is still ongoing and has yet to be addressed in depth by scholars from the analytical framework of the securitization theory. However, apart from contributing to a shift from humanitarian to security concerns, I believe that the ‘crisis’ discourse has wider implications with regards to solidarity.

More precisely, although this paper utilizes securitization as its analytical framework, it does take into account one specific gap within securitization theory, namely, that it has not yet addressed what occurs when there is contestation within the securitizing actor who is, in this case, the European Union. The key argument of this paper is, hence, that this contested securitization has acted as an impediment to solidarity within the EU and opened up space for

populist radical right discourse. Although different authors have addressed the dangers of both left- and right-wing populism in the EU, given the context of the refugee crisis, this paper will focus on right-wing populism, as well as far right parties, and how they both fed into the crisis discourse and benefited from its related effects. Given the differences and nuances between right-wing, populist, and far right parties existing in the EU, this paper utilizes the term of populist radical right parties, in reference to Cas Mudde's work from 2007,<sup>1</sup> to account for political parties who have had both anti-immigration and populist claims within their discourse, especially in the context of the refugee crisis. Using this distinction in terminology, this paper argues that the management of migration flows became more difficult as populist radical right political parties across the EU began capitalizing on the increasing fear of migrants, and the issue of the refugee influx was even further securitized, not only through the 'crisis' discourse, but also through the rhetoric and growing popularity of these parties. Within the contents of this paper, the rise of populist radical right parties in the EU will not be addressed on its own, but only in the context of its role in the processes of securitization and impeding solidarity.

Overall, through political discourse analysis, this paper investigates the development of the 'crisis' discourse and the related process of securitization, and their relationship and possible effect on solidarity, or lack thereof, and the creation of cohesive solutions to the 'crisis' within the EU. The main argument presented through the paper is that using the 'crisis' discourse was not only instrumental in the employment of extraordinary measures and securitization of the refugee influx, but, more importantly, impeded the search for constructive solutions and cohesive action within the EU. The first part of the paper addresses the theoretical and methodological issues and related decisions, while the second focuses on the beginning of the 'crisis' and the development of the 'crisis' discourse through the framework of securitization, and addresses how the official discourse is correlated with and has possibly affected solidarity in the context of the refugee flows. The last part of the paper deals with how the current direction and future developments of asylum and refugee policies and politics Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> Cas Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

## **1 Progression of a Crisis: Handling the Refugee Crisis at the European and National Level**

The following sections will deal with how the ‘crisis’ discourse progressed since September 2015 and how this discourse is related to the way in which the refugee mass influx was handled by the EU, both within and beyond its borders. Before going into a detailed assessment of the way the refugee influx has been handled at the European and national level since the second half of 2015, it is important to briefly address the state of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) in the pre-refugee ‘crisis’ period. Work on CEAS began in 1999 and has since produced numerous legislative measures, as well as revisions of these measures, with the overall aim of harmonizing asylum standards across the EU.

In 2000, Virginie Guiraudon argued that the manner in which this common framework arose, i.e. the ‘communitarization of asylum’, would lead to more restrictive asylum and migration policies.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, Guiraudon framed the policy setting in which migration policy has been produced in terms of lifting the asylum and migration policy-making setting to a higher level of EU-wide cooperation, decision-making, and implementation, as a case of “internationalization of migration control” through ‘venue shopping’.<sup>3</sup> Guiraudon’s explanation is that “political actors seek policy venues where the balance of forces is tipped in their favor” and, using this logic, political actors in the EU have chosen the ‘venue’ of internationalized EU-wide migration policy with the goal of avoiding their respective national judicial constraints, domestic political opposition, as well as national aid organizations, and all in the name of restrictive asylum and migration policies.<sup>4</sup> However, in 2012, Christian Kaunert and Sarah Léonard revisited Guiraudon’s arguments and demonstrated that, rather than producing restrictive measures, the EU-wide cooperation on asylum policy has resulted in higher legal standards for asylum seekers and those who are granted international protection in the EU.<sup>5</sup> As Kaunert and Léonard explain, the internationalization or ‘communitarization of asylum’ through the ‘venue-shopping’ system in the EU has led to an increased importance of roles of the

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<sup>2</sup> Virginie Guiraudon, “European Integration and Migration Policy: Vertical Policy-making as Venue Shopping,” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 38.2 (2000): 251-71.

<sup>3</sup> Guiraudon, “European Integration and Migration Policy: Vertical Policy-making as Venue Shopping,” 252.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Christian Kaunert and Sarah Léonard, “The development of the EU asylum policy: venue-shopping in perspective,” *Journal of European Public Policy*, 19.9 (2012): 1396-1413.

European Commission, the European Parliament, and the European Court of Justice, institutions which the authors claim to be more ‘refugee-friendly’ and present an obstacle to national political actors who would opt for more restrictive asylum policies.<sup>6</sup>

Nonetheless, while there is consensus that CEAS has improved in its second phase, which ended in 2013, there is a lack of consensus among both scholars and practitioners on exactly how ‘refugee-friendly’ the EU’s asylum policies are. As an example, while the UNHCR called the second phase of CEAS as an ‘achievement’<sup>7</sup>, a Statewatch analysis characterized the new EU asylum legislation as ‘lipstick on a pig’.<sup>8</sup> As another example, the Policy Department C of the European Parliament focusing on citizen’s rights and constitutional affairs published a study “Enhancing the Common European Asylum System and Alternatives to Dublin,” which provides a critical assessment of CEAS and its functioning.<sup>9</sup> The study argues that the Dublin system, as the foundation of CEAS, is “neither fit for its intended purpose nor designed as a solidarity measure” and that it actually infringes upon fundamental rights of the refugees.<sup>10</sup>

Overall, taking into account the extensive timeframe, different phases of CEAS, revisited legislation, and the complex nature of the asylum system in the EU, as well as the different critiques of it, it would be impossible to assess how ‘refugee-friendly’ the CEAS and its implementation were prior to the ‘crisis’ within the scope of this paper, but it is relevant to state that asylum policy in the EU had its inherent issues, controversies, deficiencies, and imbalances in terms of its implementation across different Member States. These issues vary from systemic problems such as unequal asylum reception rates across different Member States,<sup>11</sup> to country-

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 1406.

<sup>7</sup> UNHCR, “Moving Further Toward a Common European Asylum System,” UNHCR’s statement on the EU asylum legislative package, June 2013, accessed May 13, 2016, <http://www.unhcr.org/51b7348c9.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Steve Peers, “The second phase of the Common European Asylum System: A brave new world – or lipstick on a pig?”, Statewatch analysis, April 2013, accessed May 13, 2016, <http://www.statewatch.org/analyses/no-220-ceas-second-phase.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> European Parliament, Policy Department C: Citizens’ Rights and Constitutional Affairs, “Enhancing the Common European Asylum System and Alternatives to Dublin,” study, July 2015, accessed April 18, 2016, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/519234/IPOL\\_STU\(2015\)519234\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/519234/IPOL_STU(2015)519234_EN.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>11</sup> For example, Eurostat reported data on the 4th quarter of 2015 showcases the disparate recognition rates across different EU Member States with Croatia granting refugee and subsidiary protection status to only 14% of applicants, Hungary to 17%, Germany granting it to 72%, and Malta to 85%. See more:

specific issues as Greece's exclusion from Dublin transfers in 2011 due to numerous deficiencies in its asylum procedures.<sup>12</sup> However, it is safe to argue that the mass influx of refugees in 2015 not only shed more light on the problematic nature of asylum policy in the EU, but also helped to bring these existing issues to the surface and exacerbate inherent deficiencies, especially in Member States which were along the migrant route and border non-EU countries, such as Greece and Hungary.

However, asylum policy has never been or could be divorced from horizontal trends on the political landscape of the EU, as well as those of its Member States. Anti-immigration rhetoric coming from populist radical right parties has had its influence on asylum- and migration-related debates by focusing on the issue of how immigration represents a threat in terms of security. Taking all of the existing deficiencies of the EU asylum policy into account, it is important to keep in mind that the securitization of refugees, migration mismanagement, anti-immigration discourse, and related processes and narratives which have appeared in the context of the 2015 refugee influx and still continue to grow in the EU, are not in any way novelties in the context of migration on the continent. While one study from April 2015 revealed that 15.2% of the European Parliament is made up of xenophobic populist MEPs representing anti-immigration narratives,<sup>13</sup> looking at national politics reveals numerous examples of anti-immigration policies and discourses, as well as specific examples of securitization of migrants.

For example, in April 2015, the Hungarian government distributed more than eight million questionnaires to its adult citizens which they presented as a "national consultation concerning immigration, economic immigration, and terrorism."<sup>14</sup> While the official explanation for this activity was that "a change in the Government's immigration policy requires wider social support," it is a clear example how political discourse can frame migrants as a threat by putting

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[http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:First\\_instance\\_decisions\\_by\\_outcome\\_and\\_recognition\\_rates,\\_4th\\_quarter\\_2015.png](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:First_instance_decisions_by_outcome_and_recognition_rates,_4th_quarter_2015.png).

<sup>12</sup> M.S.S. v. Belgium and Greece, Application no. 30696/09, Council of Europe: European Court of Human Rights, 21 January 2011, accessed May 18, 2016, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4d39bc7f2.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Heather Grabbe, "Feeding on Discontent," Berlin Policy Journal. German Council on Foreign Relations, 27 Apr. 2015, accessed 14 May 2016, <http://berlinpolicyjournal.com/feeding-on-discontent/>.

<sup>14</sup> Website of the Hungarian Government, Prime Minister's Office, April 24, 2015, accessed May 10, 2016, <http://www.kormany.hu/en/prime-minister-s-office/news/national-consultation-on-immigration-to-begin>.

them in the same context with a distinctively extreme security concern such as terrorism. In fact, it is exactly the continual anti-immigration rhetoric which gave populist radical right parties an unexpected boost in legitimacy when the 2015 refugee influx began. Prominent examples of this increase in popularity of specific political actors and their parties are undoubtedly Marine Le Pen (Front National) in France, Norbert Hofer (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs) in Austria, Geert Wilders (Partij voor de Vrijheid) in the Netherlands, and Prime Minister of Hungary, Viktor Orbán (Fidesz). However, even though there are established connections between asylum and migration issues and populist radical right parties in Europe through the latter's anti-immigration rhetoric, a common framework is necessary in order to compare the progression of the 'crisis' discourse and the rise of populist radical right political parties, as well as their relationship. Due to the specific nature of asylum policy in the EU and the security-related character of border management and migration policy in general, this paper will rely on securitization as its analytical framework.

### *1.1 Through the Lens of Security: Securitization as a Theoretical Framework*

Under the Copenhagen School within the field of international relations, which gave birth to securitization as an analytical framework, security threats are explained as social constructs arising from 'speech acts'. Scholarly endeavors exploring this specific topic have focused on analyzing security-related political and policy discourse with the intention of understanding the extent to which certain topics are being presented as a threat and, hence, framed as a security issue, which then results in the legitimization of using extraordinary means to address these topics or related issues which were constructed as a security threat. However, since the conceptualization of securitization, there have been various critical assessments of the constraints of this framework and its value. For example, in his text "Securitization and the Construction of Security," Matt McDonald identified three limitations of securitization as a theoretical framework: first being that focus is only placed on the speech of political actors in dominant positions; secondly, that the context of what constitutes acts of securitization is confined to the moments of action; and lastly, that it characterizes security solely in the context of threats to

security.<sup>15</sup> As another example, Amir Lupovici used observational criticism to trace how the choice of cases used within securitization scholarship reveals a scholarly bias. These are just two examples of many which expose the weaknesses of securitization and existing scholarly work based on it as an analytical framework.<sup>16</sup> Notwithstanding these legitimate critiques, and as McDonald himself claims, a theory cannot do ‘everything’ and securitization, even if its shortcomings are taken into account, still provides a useful theoretical framework for addressing how certain issues, such as the refugee influx in this particular case, can be framed as security threats through political discourse, hence legitimizing extraordinary measures to address them.

In the context of refugee flows, political discourse in which refugees can be defined as a security concern may serve as an instrument intended to justify restrictive migration policies and violent security measures targeting this group. Regarding the refugee influx which began in 2015, in the European political discourse it was never solely portrayed as a humanitarian ‘crisis’, but always with a tag of border control, migration management, and other security-related phrasing. As Huysmans argues: “Framing refuge as a humanitarian question introduces different relations to refugees than framing it as a security question... While the former allows for compassion or for relating to the refugee as a rights holder, the latter sustains fear of refugees and policies of territorial and administrative exclusion.”<sup>17</sup> Hence, securitization theory appears as an appropriate and convenient conceptual framework for analyzing the way the refugee influx was handled by the EU and its Member States given that the dichotomy between humanitarian values and security in this case is noticeable to any keen observer.

Both in the context of scholarly work and wider, in terms of practice and the shaping of the public opinion, it is thus worth asking: Was the official political focus tilted in the favor of humanitarian issues related to the refugee flows or the perceived security threats and concerns? However, as McDonald explained, securitization theory has focused on how dominant political actors can securitize a certain topic or group, whereby, the implied weakness of securitization is

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<sup>15</sup> Matt McDonald, “Securitization and the Construction of Security,” *European Journal of International Relations*, 14.4 (2008): 563-587.

<sup>16</sup> Amir Lupovici, “The Limits of Securitization Theory: Observational Criticism and the Curious Absence of Israel,” *International Studies Review* 16.3 (2014): 390-410.

<sup>17</sup> Jef Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU* (London: Routledge, 2006), xii.



that the analytical focus is placed on one certain dominant political actor or group of actors. The existing framework fails to account for what happens when the securitization is contested by equally dominant actors, i.e. as in the case of the EU where EU institutions, Member States, and their representatives have held differing views on how the refugee influx should be dealt with. Taking this theoretical gap into account, and given the variety of actors within the EU and different approaches to the influx and asylum in general, this paper explores the argument that securitization produced through the ‘crisis discourse’ had a side-effect of impeding solidarity and cohesion and resulted in two discursive shifts during the crisis.

### *1.2 Discourse analysis and methodological constraints: Approaching the ‘crisis’, solidarity, and populism*

Methodologically speaking, this paper is based on a qualitative analysis, namely political discourse analysis, of the existing documents created by EU institutions. As an interpretivist social science methodology, discourse analysis allows for an in-depth investigation into how specific, in this case political, actors construct their arguments and how these arguments then frame their actions. However, this methodology has its limitations, namely, while it may trace how discourse surrounding the crisis developed and even imply how it may have had influenced actions of certain actors, it cannot reveal the conversations which happened behind closed doors, the intentions of individual actors, differentiate between different voices represented by one institution, and related issues. There are numerous factors which could have and have actually influenced decision-making in the EU in the context of the ‘crisis’, but ‘crisis’ discourse has certainly been a factor in its own right and discourse analysis is a method highly compatible for analyzing this factor.

Looking at the logistics of this methodology, it encompasses the collection of documents, their coding, structural and contextual analysis, identification of rhetorical or linguistic instruments, and, lastly, the interpretation of the collected documents and identified discourse. While many dozens documents were analyzed with a sole focus on the term ‘crisis’, its use, and argumentation surrounding it, strategic documents and related press releases were analyzed in-depth. In short, political discourse analysis was specifically used to closely examine how the

term ‘crisis’ was used in strategic EU documents and related documents such as press releases, and what kind of discourse strands was it accompanied by since the intensification of the migrant flows. However, there were several questions related to the methodology which required extensive consideration before discourse analysis could be conducted.

The first issue was related to the scope of the research in terms of the time period it covers. Upon extensive research of all of the available documents and publications, the term ‘refugee crisis’ began appearing in EU documents early in September 2015.<sup>18</sup> Although the Syrian refugee crisis had been mentioned in official documents before, it was always in the context of either Syria itself or countries which were hosting large numbers of refugees, i.e. Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan. In comparison, early September was the period when the term ‘crisis’ started regularly appearing in the context of the territory of the EU and cemented itself in official, as well as public opinion. Keeping the aforementioned timeframe in mind, the scope of my research is limited to the period between September 2015 and the creation of the EU-Turkey deal and its early aftermath until the beginning of May.

The second methodological dilemma is related to the process of deciding which documents should undergo political discourse analysis. In this regard, this paper focuses on three strategic ‘moves’ made in the context of the refugee influx in the EU: the refugee relocation scheme made in September 2015, the 17-point plan of action following the meeting on the Western Balkans Migration Route in October 2015, and the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan from November 2015, including the related EU-Turkey statement from March 2016. These strategic steps and the official documents created in the context of these steps, their implementation, or their aftermath, are crucial in order to follow the progression of the EU’s response to the refugee influx. Although other documents and more minor statements, decisions, and events are addressed and analyzed more briefly, focusing on these identified strategic steps allows for a more in-depth discourse analysis and creates an opportunity to trace the development of the

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<sup>18</sup> For example, the term ‘refugee crisis’ first appeared in a Council of the European Union document, namely, “Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council - Addressing the Refugee Crisis in Europe: The Role of EU External Action” from the Secretary-General of the European Commission on September 9, 2015. In fact, the European Commission officially started official publishing documents using the term ‘refugee crisis’ in the context of the EU on that date.

‘crisis’ discourse and the related discursive shifts (some of which are the displacement of humanitarian narratives, propagation of solutions outside the territory of the EU, the neglect of the ‘solidarity’ narrative, the increase in security-related rhetoric, etc.).

Keeping in mind the elaborated analytical framework of securitization and political discourse analysis as the chosen methodological instrument, the following sections will dissect, analyze, and interpret the discursive strands surrounding the ‘crisis’ discourse, as well as identify two discursive shifts based on the analysis of 73 documents produced by the European Commission, the Council of the European Union, and the European Parliament. The ‘crisis’ discourse and its transformations will be placed into the context of the events happening ‘on the ground’ and analyzed in parallel with them in order to trace the correlation between the two processes, official discourse on one hand, and activities and measures implemented in the context of the ‘crisis’ on the other.

## **2 Tracing the ‘Crisis’ Discourse and its Strands**

The ‘crisis’ discourse was chosen as the main research focus of this paper due to both its prominence during the refugee influx and due to the fact that it opens up an avenue for increased securitization of refugees. Namely, as was previously explained, by presenting a topic or a group as a security threat, it is easier to justify extraordinary measures targeting this perceived threat. However, by having this group, i.e. refugees, under the umbrella of the term ‘crisis’, their securitization and extraordinary measures targeting them are more easily justified in the context of a crisis situation requiring an urgent political reaction. Hence, this paper argues that the term ‘crisis’ and its discursive power can, to a certain extent, account for the lack of solidarity and the variety of unprecedented security-related actions by different EU Member States - Hungary’s fence, Austria’s quotas, reintroduction of border controls between Denmark and Sweden, and others. Overall, the discourse analysis which will be presented in the following sections, indicates that, with an increase in crisis discourse, several discursive shifts unfolded which displaced humanitarian measures and solidarity, increased securitization, and opened up space for action for populist radical right parties.

While the political discourse analysis identified numerous relevant discursive strands, for the purposes of this paper, these strands were grouped and categorized into two dominant shifts in discourse: a) shifting away from humanitarian narratives to security issues such as border control and management of migration flows; b) shifting away from solutions founded on EU solidarity to solutions outside of the territory of the EU. The following sections address these two shifts and their relation to solidarity within the EU in the context of the ‘crisis’, while consistently paying attention to the EU’s political landscape and the role played by rising right-wing populism.

### *2.1 Discursive Shift I: Focusing on Security Measures, Yielding Humanitarianism*

The first shift, or the shift away from humanitarianism towards security issues, e.g. border controls and migration management, should not be taken as a claim that humanitarian values have disappeared completely from the ‘crisis’ discourse or that border management was not one of the principal goals at the start 2015 influx. This shift requires a more subtle and nuanced understanding of the ‘crisis’ discourse and the following analysis will attempt to demonstrate the pervasive shifts in discourse surrounding the refugee influx within the EU. For example, a document from September 9 last year, addressed from the European Commission to the Council of the European Union, indicated in its beginning:

“The European Union is stepping up its response to this crisis **based on the principles of solidarity and responsibility and in full respect of its values and international obligations.** Since the beginning of 2015, the EU has reoriented and mobilized all its external action instruments to respond to the refugee crisis with three objectives: saving lives, ensuring protection of those in need and managing borders and mobility.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> European Commission, “Addressing the Refugee Crisis in Europe: The Role of EU External Action,” JOIN(2015) 40 final of 9 September 2016. [annotation is not in the original]

Similar arguments and humanitarian objectives were expressed in documents related to the relocation scheme.<sup>20</sup> The following month, however, the 17-point plan is already less focused on the humanitarian needs and directed more towards border management, communication and coordination, limiting secondary movements of refugees and migrants, tackling smuggling and trafficking, and other security measures. What matters here is not solely that the security measures and language are prominent in the discourse, but also how refugees are addressed with regards to these measures. For example, the 16th point of the 17-point plan, placed under the tag “Information on the rights and obligations of refugees and migrants”, states that refugees and migrants will have to be informed on existing rules and obligations and “notably on the consequences of a refusal to be registered, fingerprinted and of a refusal to seek protection where they are.”<sup>21</sup> Hence, even when the document places emphasis on refugees and their rights and needs, there is a tendency to relate these humanitarian concerns to those of security. Therefore, compared to the texts related to the relocation scheme and other documents from the beginning of September, the humanitarian objectives appear to be getting on equal footing with security concerns in the official discourse. In comparison, the First Report on the progress made in the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement dated from April 20 2016 states:

**“The goal was to remove the incentive for migrants and asylum seekers to seek irregular routes to the EU, through a combination of action as close as possible to the entry point into the EU - in the Greek islands - and close cooperation between the EU and Turkey. The aim is to restore a legal and orderly admission system.”**<sup>22</sup>

In this text, as well as others related to the EU-Turkey action plan, security concerns are already framed as the priority goals or objectives, while humanitarian ones appear understated.

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example, “European schemes for relocation and resettlement”, [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/communication\\_on\\_the\\_european\\_agenda\\_on\\_migration\\_annex\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/communication_on_the_european_agenda_on_migration_annex_en.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> Leaders' Meeting on refugee flows along the Western Balkans Route, *Leaders' Statement*, October 2015, [http://ec.europa.eu/news/2015/docs/leader\\_statement\\_final.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/news/2015/docs/leader_statement_final.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> European Commission, “First Report on the progress made in the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement,” COM(2016) 231 final of 20 April 2016. [annotation is not in the original version]

Discourse-wise, this is a very clear shift in expressed goals, namely, while the quoted September 2015 document indicated three objectives, two of which are focused on humanitarian values, the quotes April 2016 document does not even refer to the humanitarian aspect of the ‘crisis’ directly. In fact, the discourse seems to put refugees as the cause of the ‘crisis’ rather than its victim, which can be best seen from the following statement from the previously quoted document: “Last month, decisive action was taken by European leaders to break the cycle of **uncontrolled flows of migrants creating an unsustainable humanitarian crisis.**”<sup>23</sup>

The discourse shift identified in the quoted and mentioned documents is a clear example of the growing securitization of the refugee influx in the EU. What is less obvious is how this securitization was used in the context of populist radical right politics and how that use affected solidarity within the EU. Given that anti-immigration rhetoric has been a long-term instrument of populist radical right parties, the ‘crisis’ discourse and the growing security concerns it paved the way for, opened up space for individuals and parties from the populist radical right political spectrum to gain legitimacy and use the urgency of the ‘crisis’ to propose extraordinary measures which are not fully in line with the rights which should be accorded to refugees within the context of the EU’s asylum system. Hence, the main argument behind this is that securitization led by right-wing anti-immigration rhetoric contributed not only to the disregard of humanitarian values, but also further impeded solidarity by giving legitimacy and voice to populist radical right parties, and possibly alienating those individuals and institutions who prioritized humanitarian values. At the same time, unilateral anti-immigration rhetoric and action in the political realm of the EU was applauded in the domestic sphere, as can be seen from rise in support for parties such as the Front National in France and Fidesz in Hungary, as well as their respective representatives. It is possible to argue that this created a vicious circle of growing support for such parties and politicians and the popularity of security-based solutions to the refugee influx, all under the urgency of the ‘crisis’ discourse. While this discursive shift has had a more intricate relationship with solidarity, the following discursive shift is directly related to

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

the displacement of solidarity and relocation of responsibility for handling the refugee influx to the countries which are directly on the migration route and neighbor the EU.

## *2.2 Discursive Shift II: Displacing Solidarity and Relocating Burdens*

The second identified discursive shift or the shift away from solutions founded on EU solidarity to solutions requiring the action and involvement of non-EU actors is less nuanced than the previous one. Namely, it can be observed just by acknowledging the nature of the proposed solutions to the ‘crisis’. The first proposed solution was the relocation scheme whereby each Member State would have to accept a certain number of refugees, and was accompanied by related discourse focusing on the humanitarian aspects of the influx and the needs and rights of asylum seekers. The distribution of quotas for each Member State was decided on “objective, quantifiable and verifiable criteria that reflect the capacity of the Member States to absorb and integrate refugees.”<sup>24</sup> What is crucial here is also the mentioning of integration, a long-term humanitarian goal in relation to the field of international protection, which has since been mentioned more rarely and is one of the least frequently appearing discursive strands identified through the discourse analysis.

The relocation scheme solution was followed by the Western Balkans Migration Route meeting the following month and the 17-point plan of action which ensued as a result of this meeting. With regards to this plan of action, the European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker stated that it represents “pragmatic and operational measures to ensure people are not left to fend for themselves in the rain and cold,”<sup>25</sup> which is a doubtful description of the plan since most of its action points focus on security measures. However, an important characteristic of the plan is in terms of its shift towards putting a part of the responsibility for taking in refugees and managing the influx on Western Balkan states which are not EU members, namely, Albania, Macedonia, and Serbia. The 17-point plan also references the EU-Turkey Action Plan

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<sup>24</sup> Annex “European schemes for relocation and resettlement”, [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/communication\\_on\\_the\\_european\\_agenda\\_on\\_migration\\_annex\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/communication_on_the_european_agenda_on_migration_annex_en.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> European Commission, “Meeting on the Western Balkans Migration Route: Leaders Agree on 17-point plan of action,” press release, 25 October 2015, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-15-5904\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-15-5904_en.htm).

in the context of border management. However, the discourse of the plan is still focused on EU solidarity to an extent, as a part of the Leaders' Statement demonstrates:

“The unprecedented flow of refugees and migrants along the Eastern Mediterranean-Western Balkans route is a challenge that will not be solved through national actions alone. **Only a determined, collective cross-border approach in a European spirit, based on solidarity**, responsibility, and pragmatic cooperation between national, regional, and local authorities can succeed.”<sup>26</sup>

Albeit the plan as a whole is deficient in terms of specificity and clarity, one of its main propositions are additional reception capacities along the Western Balkans migration route, which is a clear humanitarian goal focusing on collective responsibility. Nonetheless, it is also interesting to note that solidarity is now used in an expanded manner, meaning that it goes beyond the borders of the EU, and that the only Member States whose representatives attended the meeting are Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Romania, and Slovenia. It is relevant to mention that, through the EU-Turkey agreement, the EU goes geographically further away in terms of its goals by including “The EU and Turkey will work to improve humanitarian conditions inside Syria” as its last action point.<sup>27</sup> While this indicates the need to tackle the grave situation in Syria, it can also be framed as tackling the ‘issue’ of refugee flows at its root. On the other hand, the EU-Turkey plan goes even further in shifting the ‘crisis’ discourse away from the territory of the EU. As the “First Report on the progress made in the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement” states:

“The refugee crisis also needs to be viewed in the wider context of ongoing conflicts in the region and of terrorist threats. Added to this, our **joint efforts with Turkey to deal**

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<sup>26</sup> *Leaders' Statement*, October 2015. [annotation is not in the original version]

<sup>27</sup> European Commission, *Factsheet on the EU-Turkey Agreement*, 19 March, 2016, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-16-963\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-16-963_en.htm).



**with this common challenge** is a good example of our global engagement with a country that is both a candidate and a strategic partner.”<sup>28</sup>

Put crudely, solidarity within the EU was displaced as the focus of official discourse, and replaced by joint action outside of the territory of the EU, hence bypassing to an extent the responsibility of certain Member States, especially those which are not a part of the migration route. A possible overarching logic behind these strategic steps taken by the EU is that the refugee influx is being dealt with by following the migration route of the refugees, but in the opposite direction. More specifically, the solutions proposed by the EU first started with the relocation scheme which was focused only on the territory of the EU. The 17-point plan then expanded EU’s activities to non-EU Balkan states, while the EU-Turkey deal is a clear progression towards the ‘source’ of refugee flows. While large numbers of refugees have directed themselves towards the path to the EU Member States in search of international protection, it seems that the EU has directed itself towards the source of the refugee flows in search of a way to stem them. The EU’s progression can be followed by focusing on how ‘solidarity’ was used or discarded as a discursive instrument. Namely, with the increasing ‘crisis’ discourse and securitization, as well as there previously explained relationship in terms of impeding solidarity, EU solidarity started appearing less and less in official documents. In this light, the EU-Turkey deal appears as a logical result of the lack of solidarity within the Union - solidarity in the EU could be found only outside the territory of the Union.

### **3 Future developments of the ‘crisis’: The tightening grip of securitization and populism**

Following the meeting regarding refugee flows along the Western Balkans Route in October 2015, the *Leader’s Statement* was issued, stating that “the unprecedented flow of refugees and migrants along the Eastern Mediterranean-Western Balkans route is a challenge that will not be solved through national actions alone. Only a determined, collective cross-border approach in a European spirit, based on solidarity, responsibility, and pragmatic cooperation

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<sup>28</sup> European Commission, “First Report on the progress made in the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement.” [annotation is not in the original version]

between national, regional and local authorities can succeed. Unilateral action may trigger a chain reaction.”<sup>29</sup> In reality, the last sentence describes a part of what happened in the following months and is still happening both outside and inside the territory of the EU, namely, populist radical right politicians such as Orbán have not only taken unilateral action and triggered similar actions, but have contributed to shifting the discourse away from EU values and aided the problematic framing of the plight of the refugees as a security problem, rather than a humanitarian concern.

In *Europe’s Troublemakers: The Populist Challenge to Foreign Policy*, the authors attempted to address the rising populism across Europe in terms of its impact on EU foreign policy and related key issues such as EU integration and migration policy.<sup>30</sup> In the context of the ongoing refugee influx and related EU migration policy, the authors of the aforementioned report claim that: *The 2015 refugee influx has created a perfect storm for the populist parties of the right, which have been able to unleash their xenophobic and Islamophobic rhetoric, exploit widespread fears and profit from their long-standing opposition to immigration.*<sup>31</sup> More specifically, the claim which is made in this report is that it was the lack of solidarity and cohesion within the EU in the context of the refugee influx which has opened up space for the ‘perfect storm’ populist radical right parties needed to capitalize from their past and present anti-immigration rhetoric. Similar views are evoked by Mudde in an interview focusing on the increasing relevance of anti-immigration politics.<sup>32</sup>

The crisis discourse has arguably increased the level of securitization of refugees across EU member states and, as this paper argues, affected the ability of EU to act in solidarity and come up with a cohesive solution to the refugee influx within its own borders, rather than relying on external actors such as Western Balkan countries and Turkey. Its repercussions for the future of the EU’s asylum policy and its political landscape in general cannot be accurately assessed at

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<sup>29</sup> *Leaders’ Statement*, October 2015.

<sup>30</sup> Rosa Balfour, comp., *Europe’s Troublemakers: The Populist Challenge to Foreign Policy*, publication, Brussels: European Policy Centre, February 2016, 13-14.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>32</sup> Zack Beauchamp, “An expert on the European far right explains the growing influence of anti-immigrant politics,” *Vox*, May 31, 2016, accessed June 2, 2016, <http://www.vox.com/2016/5/31/11722994/european-far-right-cas-mudde>.

the moment when the ‘crisis’ is still ongoing, however, it can be assumed both the framing of refugees as a security threat, and the growing popularity of populist radical right parties, as well as the effect both have had on impeding solidarity within the EU, are not issues which could be resolved with short term measures. Rather, it appears that the EU will come out of the ‘crisis’ with legacies or leftovers of securitization, populist radical right parties who have gained legitimacy, and problematic discourse which might take years to shake off. Overall, while a more extensive research into populist radical right party politics in the EU could develop this argument further in-depth, the discourse analysis carried out for the purposes of this paper can also be used to pinpoint the pathways through which the ‘crisis’ discourse has fed populist narratives in particular and what future reverberations this might have on EU politics as whole and how other issues contentious are resolved.

## **Conclusion**

Given that refugee flows are ongoing and likely to continue, perhaps even increase globally due to the emergence and growth of displacement caused by climate change,<sup>33</sup> it is important to understand the consequences of ‘crisis’ framing as a possible impediment for creating cohesive solutions and putting EU solidarity into practice. This paper addressed the ‘crisis’ discourse as not only a process of securitizing refugees, which has its methodological issues, but also as an impediment to solidarity by expanding on the existing securitization theory. ‘Crisis’ framing has allowed space for unilateral action by non-humanitarian, securitized solutions to the refugee influx propagated by long-term anti-immigration oriented populist radical right parties and, in the process, alienated actors focusing on humanitarian values, while the former profited from widespread support in the domestic realm. While the discourse analysis carried out for this paper indicated the ‘crisis’ discourse shifted solutions away from the member states’ territories and responsibility due to a lack of solidarity and willingness to implement collective solutions “at home” and take on EU-wide responsibility, an even more extensive discourse analysis of the produced strategic documents, press releases, and other statements will

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<sup>33</sup> See more at <http://www.unhcr.org/climate-change-and-disasters.html>.

give better insight into all of the layers of the crisis discourse and its effects on solidarity, security, humanitarianism, and other issues currently of relevance at the European political landscape.

It is important to reiterate that there are several limitations to this research. First of all, it does not, unfortunately, include an analysis of the discourse prior to the appearance of the ‘crisis’ discourse - it would be both interesting and relevant to analyze how the discourse progressed to this term with the increasing number of refugees and other migrants arriving to the EU. Secondly, the discourse surrounding the ‘crisis’ is still developing so this research is limited in terms of its future contribution and analyzing the full aftermath of the strategic steps taken by the EU. Lastly, while this paper has established a discursive relationship between ‘crisis’ discourse and other relevant narratives, actually exploring the causal relationship between ‘crisis’ discourse would require process tracing and further methodological engagement with how the ‘crisis’ began and developed in a long-term context related to both asylum policy and populist radical right politics. Alternative explanations could be offered also by expanding the scope of the research to cover the pre-‘crisis’ period, which could be especially important for addressing domestic actors who began securitizing refugees in the context of the refugee flows before September 2015, such as Fidesz in Hungary.

In conclusion, this paper has argued that, given that the political discourse across the EU was under the umbrella of the term ‘crisis’, this type of discourse only exacerbated the perceived urgency and tension between Member States, making solidarity a nearly impossible goal to reach. The lack of solidarity then opened up space for unilateral action by populist radical right parties who used their long-standing anti-immigration platforms to further shift the ‘crisis’ discourse towards the securitization of the refugee flows. Political discourse and its effects are not easy to effectively and quickly remove from public opinion or other spheres where they have embedded themselves, hence, this paper has also emphasized the need for more extensive research on the effects of the ‘crisis’ discourse in terms of the increasing securitization of refugees, rising popularity for actors who utilize it, and solidarity within the EU which appears to be torn between its humanitarian values on one hand, and perceived security concerns on the

other. Even if the refugee ‘crisis’ ends, it is quite possible that its effects on asylum policies and its effect on the EU’s political landscape will linger around longer than we wish they would.

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