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# WIR SCHAFFEN DAS?

How Merkel's Response to the Refugee Crisis Sparked a Divided Europe



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## Abstract

In 2015, the southern border of Europe was seized by a migration crisis. Despite the urgency, European leaders were unable to enforce common border and asylum policies. In the absence of any solidarity, German Chancellor Angela Merkel unilaterally opened German (and European) borders to an unlimited number of Syrian refugees, confidently declaring ‘we can manage this’. I aim to explore how Merkel’s response to the refugee crisis has impacted the course of European integration. Using a constructivist framework, this paper connects recent disruptions in Europe – the wave of asylum-seekers, lack of policy coordination, and rise of nationalism – with the increasingly contentious course of European integration, notably exploring the competing visions of liberal and illiberal Europe. Employing document analysis, I use a variety of sources and perspectives, such as speeches, policy documents, and media articles. The paper begins with a brief context on the state of European integration, as well as the migration crisis itself. I argue that Merkel’s response impacted far more than simple policy cohesiveness but sparked a debate about Europe itself. Part One analyzes the competing visions for European common migration policy. In the first chapter, I observe the failures of the Common European Asylum System and the resulting loss of legitimacy for the European Union to manage multinational crises. Next, I examine how divided national responses challenge the Schengen Area and continental policy cohesion. Part Two explores the deeper impact of Merkel’s response on the identity, values and vision of Europe itself. The third chapter explains how competing visions of Europe are informed by worldview. The final chapter follows the rise of illiberalism in member states, culminating in the growing rejection of a liberal worldview. Merkel’s liberal response and the subsequent illiberal backlash demonstrates a growing tension between clashing visions of Europe: as irreconcilable worldviews inform the policies and values, the very future of Europe as we know it is threatened. The course of European integration, after all, is what states make of it.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	1
Introduction.....	3
Theoretical Framework and Methodology.....	5
Context.....	7
The State of European Integration.....	7
The Refugee Crisis and the Nature of Merkel's Response.....	8
Part One: Competing Visions for European Policy in Crisis.....	11
I. Common Asylum Policy Failures Shake EU Legitimacy.....	12
Cracks in the CEAS Divide the Union.....	12
Incapacity to Handle Crisis Hurts Europe's Legitimacy.....	16
II. Divided National Responses Challenge Cohesion and Integration.....	18
Lack of Solidarity Among Member States.....	18
National Leaders Refute European Approach.....	20
Unilateral Responses Jeopardize European Integration.....	22
Part Two: Deeper than Policy, Response Impacts European Identity and Values.....	25
III. Constructed by Identity and Values, Worldview Informs Vision of Europe.....	26
IV. Illiberal Worldview Clashes with Liberal Vision for Europe.....	31
Identifying the Rise of Illiberalism.....	31
Member States Elect a Different Vision for Europe.....	34
Rejection of Liberal Worldview Undermines Europe.....	38
Conclusions.....	42
Bibliography.....	45

## Introduction

At the peak of the migration crisis on September 5, 2015, Chancellor Angela Merkel made a historic decision which upheld liberal values, stunned her allies and partners, and deeply influenced the course of European integration: she opened Germany's borders to an unlimited number of Syrian refugees in the face of common policies on migration. The Chancellor's fateful response to the crisis amplified the cracks between opposing visions of Europe: the open, cohesive vision advocated by the European Union and its supporters clashes with the nationalist, anti-immigrant narrative defended by populist leaders. At the October 2015 European Council summit – featuring a revised agenda focused on migration – Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán declared: “It is only a matter of time before Germany builds a fence. Then I'll have the Europe I believe is right.” After a period of silence, Merkel replied: “I lived a long time behind a fence. It is not something I wish to do again.”<sup>1</sup>

As German Chancellor, Angela Merkel has “played a major role at a transformative moment in national and European history.”<sup>2</sup> Since 2005, Merkel has been deeply involved in milestones of European integration, such as ensuring ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, steering the European response to the financial crisis, and securing the Eurozone's survival. However, she made her most consequential decision as Chancellor at the height of the European refugee crisis. In 2015, Europe was seized in this crisis, unable to agree on new measures or enforce previous agreements on asylum-seekers and refugees. During her visit to a refugee camp in Germany, Merkel gave a matter-of-fact statement: “We have managed so many things, we can manage

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<sup>1</sup> Markus Feldenkirchen and René Pfister, “What Is Driving Angela Merkel?” *Der Spiegel Online*, January 25, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Deliso, *Migration, Terrorism, and the Future of a Divided Europe: A Continent Transformed* (Santa Barbara: Praeger Security International, 2017), 189.

this.” *Wir schaffen das*. After failing to cajole others into unified cooperation, Merkel unilaterally decided to open Germany’s borders, ultimately taking in well over a million people in one year. Her bold action in response to the refugee crisis would spark a battle over conflicting visions of Europe. This paper connects recent disruptions – the wave of asylum-seekers, lack of policy coordination, and rise of nationalism – with the increasingly divided process of European integration, which is deeply marked by the ideas and actions of national leaders. How has Merkel’s response to the refugee crisis impacted the course of European integration?

Although Merkel’s response impacted the cohesion and efficiency of common policies, it also has deeper implications for fundamental European identity and values. Though by no means the only cause, Merkel’s response weakened the European Union’s legitimacy to respond to crises, fortified borders within a borderless area, sparked nationalist and unilateral actions, and led to a battle on competing visions of Europe. Popular political movements, represented by elected officials in Germany, Austria, Hungary, Italy, and other member states, have constructed a strong opposition to underlying liberal values and common policies driving European integration. As noted by Carnegie Europe, “Merkel’s decision [...] has exposed a Europe that is now being torn between two competing agendas. The one that prevails will have a lasting consequence for Europe’s ability to act strategically.”<sup>3</sup> Fundamentally, this paper is about the competing visions of liberal and illiberal Europe, and the actions taken to secure one vision over another. The consequences of Merkel’s response deepened divisions between competing visions of Europe, revealing the European Union and member states’ attempts to forge European integration in the image of a particular worldview through irreconcilable policies, values and

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<sup>3</sup> Judy Dempsey, “The Merkel Way vs. the Orbán Way for Europe,” *Carnegie Europe, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 2016.

ideas. Paraphrasing Alexander Wendt, European integration is what key European actors make of it.

## **Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

The modern conception of the European Union demonstrates the power of a socially-constructed idea, as well as the importance of individual actors in maintaining or changing the integration process. For decades, the ambitious project of the European Union has depended on the collective buy-in from member states for legitimacy and the construction of a European identity, which are now threatened by an opposing worldview. Constructivism places importance upon ideas, norms, structures and actors in international relations, providing an ideal framework for this research question. Individuals embedded in a particular social structure, such as leaders in a complex set of European and national institutions, act in ways that produce, reproduce or alter those structures in specific ways. The constructivist perspective on productive power, rather than coercive power, will be used in this analysis. As political scientist Stefan Höjelijd reasons, nations are not just found but are shaped by history, politics, and instability.<sup>4</sup> In this analysis, I am interested in the debate on European norms and values, sparked by the migration crisis, on an individual, national and supranational level.

I use document analysis, a qualitative research method that involves extracting meaning from a variety of perspectives, to help prevent bias in this analysis. Close attention is paid to the author, audience, purpose, and platform of the documents, as they provide important context. This analysis interprets print and online documents representing pro- and anti-European, political, academic, and non-partisan views. I analyze official statements, quotes, and tweets by

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<sup>4</sup> Stefan Höjelijd, "European Integration and the Idea of European Identity: Obstacles and Possibilities," *ECPR Joint Sessions Grenoble, Växjö University*, 2001, 4.

political leaders in Germany, Austria, Hungary and Italy, as well as policy papers by international organizations and think tanks. The European Commission is a source for key documents and press releases relating to the European Agenda on Migration and broader European integration. Material from reputable media sources, such as *The Economist*, *Foreign Policy*, and *The New York Times*, are important in this analysis as they contain condensed, evolving information for a public audience.

In studying a contemporary topic, there are some practical constraints in finding relevant literature, since the lasting impact of the 2015 migration crisis continues to unfold each day. However, academics and authors have contributed to a growing body of research connecting the events of the crisis to present-day developments in Europe. In *European Stories*, Justine Lacroix and Kalypso Nicolaïdis explore broad themes of identity, integration, and migration in national contexts through a collection of intellectual debates. Tanja Börzel and Thomas Risse benefit from hindsight in their comparison of the Euro and Schengen crises, noting how unlike the financial crisis, the migration crisis has resulted in less European integration. Philomena Murray and Michael Longo trace Europe's legitimacy crisis in 2018 to the wave of refugees and general ineffectiveness in managing the crisis. In 2017, Christopher Deliso tracks the transformation of Europe after the "rude awakening" in 2015, describing consequences of "migration explosion" for the European project, responses and reactions from across the political spectrum, and the simmering tensions between national interests and Europe itself.<sup>5</sup> Authors have linked developments within Europe, such as the rise of right-wing politics, election results, terrorism, competing ideologies, weakening solidarity, failed common policies, institutional instability for the European Union, with the migration crisis in 2015. The literature on the migration crisis

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<sup>5</sup> Deliso, *Migration, Terrorism, and the Future of a Divided Europe*, v.

increasingly points to Merkel's response as a definitive moment in shifting the course of European integration in an unstable Europe.

## **Context**

### The State of European Integration

In the span of a few decades, European states have agreed to several treaties in “an effort to promote the diffusion of ideas across Europe” within an ever-closer union.<sup>6</sup> Since the 1951 Treaty of Paris, Europe has integrated incrementally into an economic, monetary, and political union. While awarding the 2018 Charlemagne Prize for services to European unification, Merkel praised continental unity for safeguarding the achievements of integration: peace, freedom, democracy, and the rule of law.<sup>7</sup>

In 1985, five states signed an agreement that would become the prized symbol of European integration. Now covering twenty-six states, the Schengen Agreement allows for “unprecedented freedom of movement among the signatory states and established a single external border relying on common rules and procedures.”<sup>8</sup> In 1999, the European Commission developed the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) due to “increasing concerns about security and the unequal distribution of the existing asylum burden across EU member states.”<sup>9</sup>

The European Commission identifies harmonization, “effective and well-supported practical

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<sup>6</sup> Tanja Börzel and Thomas Risse, “The Transformative Power of Europe: The European Union and the Diffusion of Ideas,” *KFG Working Paper Series* no. 1 (May 2009): 5.

<sup>7</sup> Bundeskanzlerin, “Speech by Federal Chancellor Dr Angela Merkel at the Ceremony Awarding the International Charlemagne Prize to French President Emmanuel Macron in Aachen,” 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Mushaben, 524.

<sup>9</sup> Jonathon W. Moses, “Chapter 42: Shadow of Schengen” in *The Oxford Handbook of the European Union*, ed. Erik Jones, Anand Menin and Stephen Weatherill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 606.



cooperation,” and “increased solidarity and sense of responsibility” as the system’s pillars.<sup>10</sup> The CEAS is comprised of four parts: Directives cover the entire asylum-seeking process, Frontex protects the exterior European border, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) facilitates cooperation between member states, and the Dublin Regulation determines which member state is responsible for processing and hosting of asylum-seekers.

In her analysis, Mushaben offers a comprehensive summary of the relationship between two common policies featured prominently in this paper: “Whereas the 1985 Schengen accord primarily sought to foster free movement inside the Community, the Dublin system strives to keep people out.”<sup>11</sup> Linking migration to divisions within Europe, Deliso remarks that Dublin III reaffirms the “most contentious aspect of the whole system [...] that the first EU member state to take an asylum seeker’s fingerprints and asylum claim is responsible for that individual’s asylum claim.”<sup>12</sup> Countries on the exterior border, especially on the Mediterranean Sea, have repeatedly questioned the fairness of the common asylum system as they bear a greater logistical and financial burden. Tensions between nationalist and pro-European forces were well established in Europe throughout the process of European integration.

### The Refugee Crisis and the Nature of Merkel’s Response

The 2011 Arab Spring uprising led to a prolonged civil war in Syria, forcibly displacing millions of people within and around the region. The European Commission points to the region’s conflict and crisis for “trigger[ing] record numbers of refugees and migrants arriving in

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<sup>10</sup> “Common European Asylum System,” European Commission, [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum_en).

<sup>11</sup> Joyce Marie Mushaben, “Wir Schaffen Das! Angela Merkel and the European Refugee Crisis,” *German Politics* 26, no. 4 (2017): 524.

<sup>12</sup> Deliso, *Migration, Terrorism, and the Future of a Divided Europe*, 42.

the European Union.”<sup>13</sup> When outlining the status of its Agenda on Migration in 2015, the European Commission emphasizes the gravity of the refugee crisis by calling it a “test for the European Union.”<sup>14</sup> Migration scholar Anna Lindley confirms the practice of crisis-labelling as productive, since it enables new actions or justifies established ones.<sup>15</sup>

The terms used to describe the crisis are inconsistent. Depending on the worldview, it has been labelled a crisis of refugees, migrants, irregular (or illegal) immigrants, the Schengen Area, or Europe itself. To clarify terms around the people themselves, ‘migrant’ is a general term encompassing any person on the move from their home, regardless of their legal status. As stated in the United Nations’ 1951 Convention, a refugee is defined as having “a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality” and is unable, or unwilling, to return.<sup>16</sup> An asylum seeker is a person who has applied for sanctuary in another country but has not yet been confirmed as a refugee. Irregular migrants are defined as third-country nationals “who do not fulfil, or no longer fulfil, the conditions of entry in [...] the Schengen Borders Code, or other conditions for entry, stay or residence in that Member State.”<sup>17</sup> In order to claim asylum, migrants must physically reach the European Union by air, land or sea. Although technically exempted from strict rules in air travel, asylum-seekers without valid visas or passports are often barred at the ticket counter by airline agents under Directive 2001/51/EC, which imposes heavy

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<sup>13</sup> European Commission, “Back to Schengen,” 2.

<sup>14</sup> European Union. European Commission, “Managing the Refugee Crisis: State of Play of the Implementation of the Priority Actions under the European Agenda on Migration” (Brussels, 2015), 2.

<sup>15</sup> Anna Lindley, *Crisis and Migration: Critical Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 115.

<sup>16</sup> UN General Assembly, *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 28 July 1951, United Nations.

<sup>17</sup> Giulio Sabbati and Eva-Maria Poptcheva, “Irregular Immigration in the EU: Facts and Figures,” European Parliamentary Research Service Blog, 2015, <https://epthinktank.eu/2015/04/27/irregular-immigration-in-the-eu-facts-and-figures/>.

financial penalties on airlines for bringing undocumented migrants into the European Union.<sup>18</sup> Left with few legal or safe options, asylum-seekers pay exorbitant fees to human smugglers to make the dangerous journey to the Union's external borders.

In the summer of 2015, the simmering refugee crisis boiled over in Europe. Member states at the exterior border were so overwhelmed that unregistered migrants continued travelling through the borderless area. On August 25, 2015 at 1:30pm, the German Federal Office of Migration and Refugees sent an inconspicuous tweet that provoked a massive reaction across the continent: "The #Dublin procedure for Syrian citizens is at this point in time effectively no longer being adhered to."<sup>19</sup> An internal administrative memo on procedure was interpreted as a public and political declaration that Germany's gates were open to refugees. In line with her belief that 'we can manage', Merkel declared "that there were no limits to the number of refugees Germany would accept."<sup>20</sup> On September 5, 2015, German Chancellor Angela Merkel invoked an exception in the Schengen Agreement that allows for sovereign control of borders in humanitarian emergencies. Her actions were a public declaration that Germany's borders were open to refugees; over one million migrants reached Europe through the Balkan and the Mediterranean routes in 2015, a sharp increase from previous years.<sup>21</sup> With this dramatic

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<sup>18</sup> Council Directive 2001/51/EC of 28 June 2001 supplementing the provisions of Article 26 of the Convention implementing the Schengen Agreement of 14 June 1985.

<sup>19</sup> Philip Oltermann and Patrick Kingsley, "It Took on a Life of its Own: How One Rogue Tweet Led Syrians to Germany," *The Guardian*, August 25, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/25/it-took-on-a-life-of-its-own-how-rogue-tweet-led-syrians-to-germany>.

<sup>20</sup> Roland Benedikter and Ireneusz Pawel Karolewski, "'We Can Handle This'—How the Refugee and Migration Crisis Is Changing the German Political Landscape," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 10, no. 3 (May 2016): 424.

<sup>21</sup> "Irregular Migrant, Refugee Arrivals in Europe Top One Million in 2015," *International Organization for Migration*, <https://www.iom.int/news/irregular-migrant-refugee-arrivals-europe-top-one-million-2015-iom>.

response, Merkel “singlehandedly set EU immigration and refugee policy, and Germany de facto unilaterally suspended a part of EU law.”<sup>22</sup>

## **Part One: Competing Visions for European Policy in Crisis**

Europe is grappling with significant challenges regarding migration, such as perceptions of weakening borders, difficulty integrating migrants, and moral dilemmas between human rights and national interests.<sup>23</sup> The 2015 influx of migrants to Europe completely overwhelmed member states, exposing major issues with common migration policies across the Continent. What was once a common vision for European policy has fractured into competing visions informed by drastically different worldviews. A worldview acts as a lens, influencing ideas, opinions, values, perspectives, and policies. Indeed, worldviews impact the way in which national leaders govern their country, interact with the world, or react to crisis. Member states favouring a closed, nationalist worldview, such as Hungary, are likely to chafe with the liberal migration policies of the European Union. Defined in the *Oxford Handbook of International Security*, nationalism is “the doctrine that nations have the right of self-determination” as well as “the most potent principle of political legitimacy in most of the modern world.”<sup>24</sup>

The effectiveness of European policy relies heavily on the support of its member states, who continue to possess a significant amount of control over migration policy. I explore how the perceived failures of the European Union, through the CEAS and Schengen Agreement, drove member states to unilateral actions. Through the various ways in which member states did not

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<sup>22</sup> Benedikter and Karolewski, 424.

<sup>23</sup> Lindley, *Crisis and Migration*, 13.

<sup>24</sup> Brendan O’Leary and Nicholas Sambanis, “Chapter 28: Nationalism and International Security,” in *The Oxford Handbook of International Security*, ed. Alexandra Gheciu and William Wolforth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) 415.

adhere to the spirit of common rules, “the inapplicability of the Dublin III agreement” contributed to Europe’s sudden urgency in dealing with the crisis.<sup>25</sup> Merkel’s decision to act outside the norms and policies prescribed by the EU signals a lack of confidence in the Union to effectively act. In retaliation against the European approach, national measures were taken without the European Council’s agreement, “which signalled the disintegration of a united front and of an increased self-governance response to the crisis.”<sup>26</sup> The fragmented approach to common asylum and border policies poses a risk to major achievements and further European integration.

## I. Common Asylum Policy Failures Shake EU Legitimacy

### *Cracks in the CEAS Divide the Union*

Not long after Merkel unilaterally voided the Dublin Regulation for refugees entering Germany, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker asserted that “we need more Europe in our asylum policy. We need more Union in our refugee policy.”<sup>27</sup> The Common European Asylum System is described as “an explicit attempt to harmonize the Union’s sundry asylum policies.”<sup>28</sup> However, the CEAS is designed for a “tidy, small-scale regulated group of refugees (and migrants)”; the events of 2015 have shown it is challenging to apply on a larger

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<sup>25</sup> Claudia Postelnicescu, “Europe’s New Identity: The Refugee Crisis and the Rise of Nationalism,” *Europe’s Journal of Psychology* 12, no. 2 (May 3, 2016): 204.

<sup>26</sup> Claudia Morsut and Bjørn Ivar Kruke, “Crisis Governance of the Refugee and Migrant Influx into Europe in 2015: A Tale of Disintegration,” *Journal of European Integration* 40, no. 2 (February 2018): 153.

<sup>27</sup> Jean-Claude Juncker, “State of the Union 2015: Time for Honesty, Unity and Solidarity,” accessed June 12, 2018, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_SPEECH-15-5614\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-15-5614_en.htm).

<sup>28</sup> Moses, 606.

scale.<sup>29</sup> The European Commission pushed to strengthen outer borders, redistribute asylum seekers fairly and open legal routes to Europe. However, difficulties coordinating member states has meant Europe has undergone a slow process of harmonization. The effectiveness of European policy is deeply impacted by the fragmented approach pursued by national leaders. Well-meaning policies to promote burden-sharing through quotas and relocation are especially ineffective as they are nearly impossible to enforce. Common standards and convergence between member states have created a race to the bottom in asylum policy.<sup>30</sup>

The European Commission maintains it has “a strong set of common rules on asylum and irregular migration”, but to make the CEAS a reality, “the rules have to be properly applied.”<sup>31</sup> Issues with common migration policies are rooted in their design. European asylum policies had pushed responsibility to the exterior border of the Schengen Area with the infamous ‘first-country’ clause, in which a migrant must be processed in the first country of entry within the EU. As Deliso notes, “EU asylum policy has never been geared up to the challenges of economic migration disguised asylum seeking.”<sup>32</sup> Even Europe’s “fundamental asylum policy,” the Dublin Agreements, are “a lightning rod for criticism, with numerous calls in recent years for its abolition or amendment.”<sup>33</sup> Merkel believes a common European asylum system should exist in reality, and not only on paper, because “Dublin III has been overtaken by events and is no longer appropriate for the challenges we are now having to master.”<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the German Chancellor’s

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<sup>29</sup> Claudia Morsut and Bjørn Ivar Kruke, “Crisis Governance of the Refugee and Migrant Influx into Europe in 2015: A Tale of Disintegration,” *Journal of European Integration* 40, no. 2 (February 2018): 151.

<sup>30</sup> Jonathon W. Moses, “Chapter 42: Shadow of Schengen” in *The Oxford Handbook of the European Union*, ed. Erik Jones, Anand Menin and Stephen Weatherill (Oxford University Press, 2012), 607.

<sup>31</sup> European Commission, “Managing the Refugee Crisis”, 11.

<sup>32</sup> Deliso, *Migration, Terrorism, and the Future of a Divided Europe*, 43.

<sup>33</sup> Deliso, *Migration, Terrorism, and the Future of a Divided Europe*, 42.

<sup>34</sup> Bundeskanzlerin, “For a Mandatory Refugee Quota,” 2015. [https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/Content/EN/Artikel/2015/09\\_en/2015-09-09-besuch-schwedischer-ministerpr%C3%A4sident\\_en.html](https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/Content/EN/Artikel/2015/09_en/2015-09-09-besuch-schwedischer-ministerpr%C3%A4sident_en.html)

decision to override the regulation granted a rare, legal channel for migrants to apply for asylum after crossing other member states.

Fakhoury underlines difficulties in creating a unified asylum system: “as the EU has pushed for a refugee distribution system among the 28 member states, rifts have brought the tension between national and supranational governance to the fore.”<sup>35</sup> Although the Dublin III Regulation was agreed upon in 2013, it was not implemented in all member states by the 2015 deadline. Previously, the European Commission highlighted problems with the Dublin Regulations, admitting that it “is not working as it should” after five member states dealt with 72% of all EU asylum applications in 2014.<sup>36</sup> The Commission’s review of the Agenda on Migration in 2018 describes a ‘successful’ relocation scheme, despite the relatively small number of persons located compared to the hundreds of thousands that Mediterranean member states were left to manage.<sup>37</sup> The resettlement of 34,000 refugees in an area of 500 million people represents a drop in the bucket. In assessing the impact on European integration, Börzel and Risse muse whether a coordinated European response failed due to lack of funding or inadequate legal measures, concluding “we will never know because member states have squarely refused to put most of them into place.”<sup>38</sup> The Union’s lack of a coordinated policy has become an incapacity to deal with the crisis.

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<sup>35</sup> Tamirace Fakhoury, “Securitising Migration: The European Union in the Context of the Post-2011 Arab Upheavals,” *The International Spectator* 51, no. 4 (May 2016): 71.

<sup>36</sup> European Commission, “A European Agenda on Migration,” 2015, 13.

<sup>37</sup> European Commission, “European Agenda on Migration: Continuous Efforts Needed to Sustain Progress,” 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Börzel and Risse, “From the Euro to the Schengen Crises,” 90.

Börzel and Risse argue that EU efforts to ‘supranationalize’ the response to the crisis have ultimately failed: “member states reverted to national solutions.”<sup>39</sup> Some member states, especially those with a competing vision of Europe, have accepted very few refugees or none at all. In their article, Murray and Longo warn that “the rejection of EU authority in areas where it has clear competence [...] constitutes a threat to the institutional integrity and the values of the EU.”<sup>40</sup> In June 2018, Italy refused to accept several migrant ships along its shores after years of receiving a high volume of asylum-seekers. To accompany this rejection of international maritime law, Interior Minister Matteo Salvini tweeted a stern image of himself with the hashtag ‘close the doors’.<sup>41</sup> The right-wing coalition government has quickly shifted Italy’s worldview since taking power in June 2018, especially on migration issues.

The failures of the European Union to enact their policies has shaken the confidence of member states in its ability to handle European crises. Since the 2015, the European Council has gathered national leaders for both scheduled and emergency meetings to discuss common migration policy. These summits are criticized since they often reveal the dominance of national interests, instead of resulting in a common comprehensive program.<sup>42</sup> Some leaders boycott the meetings in protest of European solidarity, such as Hungarian leader Viktor Orbán. There is some cynicism over the ability of leaders to agree on common solutions, and their implementation, at these meetings. In her coverage of the summit on June 28, 2018, Adler points

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<sup>39</sup> Tanja A Börzel and Thomas Risse, “From the Euro to the Schengen Crises: European Integration Theories, Politicization, and Identity Politics,” *Journal of European Public Policy* 25, no. 1 (May 2018): 91.

<sup>40</sup> Philomena Murray and Michael Longo, “Europe’s Wicked Legitimacy Crisis: The Case of Refugees,” *Journal of European Integration* (May 2018): 13.

<sup>41</sup> Matteo Salvini, Twitter Post, June 10, 2018, 1:11pm. <https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/1005860118959882241>.

<sup>42</sup> Murray and Longo, “Europe's Wicket Legitimacy Crisis,” 4.



to Merkel's statement claiming significant progress "is a hint that, that in true EU summit style, leaders have papered over the cracks."<sup>43</sup>

### *Incapacity to Handle Crisis Hurts Europe's Legitimacy*

One month after her response to the crisis, Merkel stood in the European Parliament and called upon the entire European Union to address the migratory challenges in a collective manner. She emphasized the importance of European cohesion instead of retreating to national government action.<sup>44</sup> In the 2015 Agenda on Migration, the EU admits that its response was "immediate but insufficient", acknowledging that "the collective European policy on the matter has fallen short."<sup>45</sup> According to Börzel and Risse, the migration crisis "has been marked by the EU's continued inability to respond effectively."<sup>46</sup> The manner in which the European Union managed the migrant crisis has shaken confidence in the EU's ability to be effective in addressing multinational issues. Despite the urgency to reform and enforce common European asylum policies, European leaders and institutions were rushed into advancing solutions with demanding time and political constraints.<sup>47</sup> The refugee crisis has negative implications for the EU's legitimacy, "as different actors in EU governance seek to impose their own solutions on a system under strain and the EU struggles to retain salience and coherence."<sup>48</sup> Other member states circumvented European policy regarding border controls and migration policy to maintain

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<sup>43</sup> Katya Adler, "Migrant Crisis: EU Leaders Split over New Migrant Deal," *BBC News*, June 29, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-44660806>.

<sup>44</sup> Bundeskanzlerin, "Statement by Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel to the European Parliament," 2015, [https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/Content/EN/Reden/2015/2015-10-07-merkel-ep\\_en.html](https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/Content/EN/Reden/2015/2015-10-07-merkel-ep_en.html).

<sup>45</sup> European Commission, "A European Agenda on Migration," 2.

<sup>46</sup> Börzel and Risse, "The Transformative Power of Europe," 84.

<sup>47</sup> Loredana Radu, "More or Less Europe? The European Leaders' Discourses on the Refugees Crisis," *Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations* 18, no. 2 (May 2016): 22.

<sup>48</sup> Murray and Longo, "Europe's Wicked Legitimacy Crisis," 1.

their own policies and norms. The European Commission's document continues that "there are serious doubts about whether our migration policy is equal to the pressure of thousands of migrants."<sup>49</sup>

The crisis has worsened the EU's ability to be effective on an issue it has the authority to handle. Merkel bypassed the European common policy with a unilateral response to a continent-wide crisis, which weakened the legitimacy and authority of the EU to lead a cohesive policy approach. "By setting the agenda, [...] Germany undermines the legitimacy of the delicate balance of competences within the EU and renders the commission less effectual."<sup>50</sup> The authors of *Europe's Wicked Legitimacy Crisis* cite a lack of coordination, a refusal of European leadership and "the commensurate inability of the EU to assert strong governance direction [that] led to the questioning of the EU's role as a policy-innovator and problem solver – and hence its legitimacy."<sup>51</sup> Murray and Longo offer a damning assessment of the EU's management of the crisis and abilities to promote cohesive policy, stating "the Commission falls short of its leadership ambitions and Merkel's leadership has not been matched by other national leaders."<sup>52</sup>

The EU's failure to anticipate the scope of the crisis, as well as inability to adapt rules and strategies to tackle it, damaged its legitimacy in managing issues that were once the exclusive purview of states. As an institution, the EU is undermined by the lack of solidarity, coordination and political will between member states on common migration policies. Merkel's response illuminates the shaken confidence in the European Union as a policy leader in the refugee crisis. The Continent's approach to irregular migration may be necessary, "but it risks significantly harming the EU's credibility in the long run, as it feeds a crisis that engulfs our very

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<sup>49</sup> European Commission, "A European Agenda on Migration," 2.

<sup>50</sup> Murray and Longo, "Europe's Wicked Legitimacy Crisis," 12.

<sup>51</sup> Murray and Longo, 8.

<sup>52</sup> Murray and Longo, 9.

understanding of Europe.”<sup>53</sup> As European integration is often advanced through cohesive policies, the whole process of European unity is in doubt. More profoundly, these rifts expose the different visions of Europe and of international order present in Europe.

## II. Divided National Responses Challenge Cohesion and Integration

### *Lack of Solidarity Among Member States*

The European Union is suffering from a crippling lack of solidarity on the collective issue of migration. The 2015 Agenda on Migration cites a need of mutual confidence in bringing together European and national efforts to address migration, cooperate effectively, respect solidarity, and share responsibility.<sup>54</sup> European Commission President Juncker said “a true European refugee and asylum policy requires solidarity to be permanently anchored in our policy approach and our rules.”<sup>55</sup> In 2015, Merkel called on states’ responsibility and solidarity for a fair distribution of refugees.<sup>56</sup> Instead of identifying solutions at what the European Policy Centre calls “the only viable level,” member states continue to fixate on national agendas at the expense of common European policies.<sup>57</sup> Despite resistance from Central and Eastern European governments, “Merkel was among the first to call for more solidarity and regular distribution quotas among EU member states.”<sup>58</sup> Indeed, the opposition of this small group means any redistribution of asylum seekers is likely to remain voluntary.<sup>59</sup> This action by certain member states helps deconstruct the practices previously accepted by the European Union, and allow their

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<sup>53</sup> Juliane Schmidt, “Europe and the Refugees: A Crisis of Values,” *European Policy Centre*, June 2016.

<sup>54</sup> European Commission, “A European Agenda on Migration,” 2.

<sup>55</sup> Juncker, “State of the Union 2015: Time for Honesty, Unity and Solidarity.”

<sup>56</sup> Bundeskanzlerin, “Enormous Challenges for Europe,” June 18, 2015, [https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/Content/EN/Regierungserklaerung/2015-06-18-regierungserklaerung\\_en.html](https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/Content/EN/Regierungserklaerung/2015-06-18-regierungserklaerung_en.html).

<sup>57</sup> Pascouau, “Heads Buried in the Sand.”

<sup>58</sup> Mushaben, “Wir Schaffen Das!” 527.

<sup>59</sup> Pascouau, “Heads Buried in the Sand.”

own practice of non-solidarity to be constructed and reproduced instead. The structures supporting European integration are reflections of the ideas and actions of the actors within, namely the member states.

In his review of crises and cohesion in the European Union, Janning notes the overwhelming arrivals to Europe “since summer 2015 has created significant political tension among and within member states.”<sup>60</sup> Despite the deepening of European integration, many European publics frustrated with the EU approach to the refugee crisis “want to see more power returned to national governments.”<sup>61</sup> Yet, it is states who must act to implement European policies. In his book on governance and world order, Fukuyama explains the important role of states in enforcing the laws of other jurisdictions, such as the European Union. Even if common policies reflected the will of the European community, it is states who have the power to enforce them.<sup>62</sup> In making a cohesive European policy a reality, Fukuyama contends that enforcement is the domain of states. In this vein, international agreements on refugees or common European policies are only effective if the member state cooperates.

However, cooperation within Europe stalled after Merkel’s decision. The European Policy Centre cites a lack of solidarity in the refugee crisis as “mainly due to the member states’ inability to plan ahead, their reluctance to adopt binding common rules,” and the view that sovereignty trumps solidarity.<sup>63</sup> This is especially true of member states with a worldview inconsistent with the one reflected in common policies. The migrant crisis exposed the fragility of the bonds of trust between member states while weakening the authority of the European

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<sup>60</sup> Josef Janning, “Crisis and Cohesion in the EU: A Ten-Year Review,” *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 2018, 6.

<sup>61</sup> Stephen F. Szabo, “Europe’s Leadership Deficit,” *International Spectator* 51, no. 4 (2016): 25.

<sup>62</sup> Fukuyama, *State-Building*, 115.

<sup>63</sup> Pascouau, “Heads Buried in the Sand.”

Union. From erecting fences to denying ships entry, some member states are breaking away from established norms, laws and treaties with unilateral actions to secure their borders. While Merkel had opened Germany's borders, Orbán had fenced Hungary's borders shut. Murray and Longo note that "few national leaders have shown solidarity in welcoming and integrating new arrivals from non-EU countries, with notable exceptions such as Germany's Chancellor Merkel."<sup>64</sup> Merkel and Orbán continue to embody Europe's divide on migration: "Germany allowed a million people to enter in 2015, while Hungary has so far rejected a scheme to relocate 160,000 refugees from overcrowded camps in Greece and Italy."<sup>65</sup> The rise of clashing national responses challenges the EU's credibility to be an effective actor for the continent in times of crisis.

#### *National Leaders Refute European Approach*

National leaders "play key roles on the European stage within the treaty contours of EU institutions," defining, creating and implementing European policies.<sup>66</sup> In the case of Merkel's response to the refugee crisis, a national leader was able to make a fundamental difference in policy at the European level. When member states have strong control over the implementation of European policy, the failure to apply common rules is solved either by mutual trust or legal procedures in EU treaties.<sup>67</sup> However, Aggestam and Johansson remind us that "political legitimacy is anchored at the national level," even within the European Union.<sup>68</sup> National leaders possess significant agency on border and asylum policies, even when technically under

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<sup>64</sup> Murray and Longo, "Europe's Wicked Legitimacy Crisis," 3.

<sup>65</sup> "Migrants: Merkel and Orban Clash over Europe's 'Humanity,'" *BBC News*, July 5, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-44728577>.

<sup>66</sup> Simon Bulmer, Charlie Jeffrey and Stephen Padgett: *Rethinking Germany and Europe: Democracy and Diplomacy in a Semi-Sovereign State* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 160.

<sup>67</sup> Pascouau, "Heads Buried in the Sand."

<sup>68</sup> Lisbeth Aggestam and Markus Johansson, "The Leadership Paradox in EU Foreign Policy," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 55, no. 6 (February 2017): 1205.

supranational jurisdiction. Thus, “in the absence of a working European solution,” governments were free to take “national measures tightening border controls.”<sup>69</sup> Even though the EU had attempted to solve the crisis at a supranational level, national leaders rejected Europe’s actions. The perception had stuck that member states could not trust the European Union to lead in their best interests. Specifically, Hungary blames the European Union’s shared policies for all perceived impacts of the migration crisis. In an op-ed, Prime Minister Orbán warned that “everything which is now taking place before our eyes threatens to have explosive consequences for the whole of Europe,” urging the public to “acknowledge that the European Union’s misguided immigration policy is responsible for this situation.”<sup>70</sup>

Merkel’s decision to open Germany to refugees within a borderless area further challenged European policy cohesion. Member states invoked controls and exceptions that provoked intense reactions and divided national leaders: “Orbán has not only ignored the EU Commission’s appeals by building two fences along his country’s border with Serbia, but defiantly asked the rest of Europe to foot the bill.”<sup>71</sup> The Hungarian prime minister’s position is rooted in his worldview that prizes a strong, independent nation-state that defends its borders against intruders. Orbán’s unapologetic lack of solidarity with other member states is in line with his nationalist vision for Europe. As a group, the Visegrád Four have repeatedly “rejected obligatory relocation quotas and are refusing to support the Commission’s new proposals” for reform of the system.<sup>72</sup> Carnegie Europe identifies Orbán’s unilateral actions as “on a major

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<sup>69</sup> Börzel and Risse, “From the Euro to the Schengen Crises: European Integration Theories, Politicization, and Identity Politics,” 91.

<sup>70</sup> Rick Noack, “Muslims Threaten Europe’s Christian Identity, Hungary’s Leader Says,” *The Washington Post*, September 3, 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/09/03/muslims-threaten-europes-christian-identity-hungarys-leader-says/?utm\\_term=.55dc7d06672b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/09/03/muslims-threaten-europes-christian-identity-hungarys-leader-says/?utm_term=.55dc7d06672b).

<sup>71</sup> Cameron Abadi, “Part V: Germany - The Dam Will Hold. Until It Doesn’t,” *Foreign Policy*, October 4, 2017, <http://europeslamsitsgates.foreignpolicy.com/>.

<sup>72</sup> Schmidt, “Europe and the Refugees: A Crisis of Values.”

collision course” with the EU: “in essence, Orbán’s agenda is becoming an increasingly national one that potentially challenges EU law.”<sup>73</sup> Simply put, the Union has not grasped the crisis, “as national responses – often inadequate and even draconian – have predominated.”<sup>74</sup>

### *Unilateral Responses Jeopardize European Integration*

The uptick of unilateral, national policy approaches in response to Merkel’s decision is a concern for the future of European integration. However, states may interpret common policies in different ways to allow them to maintain their own national interests.<sup>75</sup> As one of the “most cherished achievements of European integration”, preserving Schengen has been on the mind of senior European officials. First Vice-President Frans Timmermans declared that Europe needed “a coordinated European approach to temporary border controls within the framework of the Schengen rules instead of the current patchwork of unilateral decisions.”<sup>76</sup> A policy analyst with the European Policy Centre argues “that solidarity between states is a concept that only exists in Article 80 of the Treaty and not in practice.”<sup>77</sup> As certain member states refuse to move beyond political deadlock and “remain opposed to the mandatory relocation, the Schengen area is more fragmented than ever.”<sup>78</sup>

In a statement to the Bundestag, Merkel confirmed that closing borders is not sensible, and that during difficult times, “we must resist the temptation to revert to acting as nation

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<sup>73</sup> Dempsey, “The Merkel Way vs. the Orbán Way for Europe.”

<sup>74</sup> Murray and Longo, “Europe’s Wicked Legitimacy Crisis,” 9.

<sup>75</sup> Moses, “Shadow of Schengen”, 607.

<sup>76</sup> European Commission, “Back to Schengen: Commission Proposes Roadmap for Restoring Fully Functioning Schengen System,” *European Commission Press Release Database*, (March 2016).

<sup>77</sup> Pascouau, “Solidarity and Asylum Seekers,” 2.

<sup>78</sup> Yves Pascouau, “Heads Buried in the Sand: Member states Block Solutions to the Refugee Crisis,” *European Policy Centre*, September 15, 2015, 2.

states.”<sup>79</sup> Among other things, the 2015 migration crisis put “a new emphasis on the future viability – and even desirability – of the borderless travel area.”<sup>80</sup> Deliso flags issues with Merkel’s plans “not only for the perceived security and integration risk factor, but also, fundamentally, because it is impractical: in a borderless Schengen Zone, there is simply no way to force asylum seekers or migrants to stay where they are told.”<sup>81</sup> The German Chancellor’s response had deep implications not only for her country, “but all twenty-eight member states of the European Union with their 509 million citizens.”<sup>82</sup> Once migrants arrived in Germany, they could plausibly continue to any of the twenty-six member states.

EU integration was deepened to solve collective issues. Tömmel and Verdun warn that “particularly in situations of crisis where swift action is required, the system of fragmented and partly shared leadership hardly works: decisions are taken too late or not at all.” This is likely to fuel disagreement, encouraging states to “refuse to fulfil their obligations under EU law” which “would heavily damage the mutual trust between member states.”<sup>83</sup> The process of European integration has fragmented in the wake of Merkel’s decision, with discussions of the EU unravelling, or developing into a multi-speed union.<sup>84</sup> Of course, the European Union is already a multi-speed institution through its customs, monetary, and political unions; however, this time is different as the vision that underpins the whole European project is under threat. Visions of a rival, nationalist Europe are leading to a fragmentation of policy cohesion in Hungary, Italy,

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<sup>79</sup> Bundeskanzlerin, “Closing Borders Is Not an Option,” December 16, 2015, [https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/Content/EN/Artikel/2015/12\\_en/2015-12-16-regierungserklaerung-vor-europaeischem-rat\\_en.html](https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/Content/EN/Artikel/2015/12_en/2015-12-16-regierungserklaerung-vor-europaeischem-rat_en.html).

<sup>80</sup> Deliso, *Migration, Terrorism, and the Future of a Divided Europe*, 42.

<sup>81</sup> Deliso, *Migration, Terrorism, and the Future of a Divided Europe*, 43.

<sup>82</sup> Klaus C Engelen, “The Merkel Years: For the First Time, the Chancellor’s Leadership Is in Serious Question,” *The International Economy*, Fall 2015 (2015): 29.

<sup>83</sup> Pascouau, “Solidarity and Asylum Seekers: Member States Agreed to Disagree.”

<sup>84</sup> Ingeborg Tömmel and Amy Verdun, “Political Leadership in the European Union: An Introduction,” *Journal of European Integration* 39, no. 2 (May 2017): 103.



Austria, and even within Germany. Horst Seehofer, Merkel's coalition partner and leader of a regional sister party, has threatened the stability of his own government in June 2018 when he demanded that migrant centres be opened on the border to prevent migrants from legally entering Germany. As a politician from wealthy and conservative Bavaria, Seehofer campaigned on an increasingly anti-immigrant platform after Bavaria managed a large share of the burden of asylum-seekers in Germany. Leaders at the national level have the ability to influence the path of European integration based on domestic issues.

Unilateral national responses, inconsistent with European policies, set the stage for wider fragmentation. In crisis, "the EU has been stuck in a stalemate and even suffered some disintegration with the collapse of its common asylum and migration policy."<sup>85</sup> The role of Merkel's decision in dividing Europe has raised the possibility of the European Union itself breaking up. Former Austrian diplomat Stefan Lehne predicted that "the migration challenge could result in one of three scenarios: a looser union, a regrouping of some member states in a smaller, hard-core Schengen, or a revival of integration in this field."<sup>86</sup> Murray and Longo predict that a two-speed Europe is developing between 'solution-driven' institutions and states at the European level, and by those unwilling to cooperate.<sup>87</sup> Merkel reaffirmed Germany's place in solving the refugee issue as "the only way to achieve a European solution."<sup>88</sup> However, there is a stark contrast to previous situations when others were happy to follow Germany's leadership under Chancellor Merkel, such as the financial crisis, the Euro crisis, and even the Lisbon Treaty crisis during her first mandate. In the migration crisis, Merkel pursued an "open gate approach,

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<sup>85</sup> Börzel and Risse, "From the Euro to the Schengen Crises," 101.

<sup>86</sup> Deliso, *Migration, Terrorism, and the Future of a Divided Europe*, 168.

<sup>87</sup> Murray and Longo, 12.

<sup>88</sup> Bundeskanzlerin, "A Challenge for All of Europe," September 9, 2015, [https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/Content/EN/Artikel/2015/09\\_en/2015-09-09-generaldebatte-merkel\\_en.html](https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/Content/EN/Artikel/2015/09_en/2015-09-09-generaldebatte-merkel_en.html).

whereas other European countries refused to follow suit.”<sup>89</sup> In each of these crises, closer cooperation and further European integration was the solution; this time, it is seen as part of the problem.

Norbert Röttgen, chair of Bundestag foreign affairs committee, lamented “the failure to show solidarity over refugees is the biggest failure of Europe so far and it will affect the stability of the Europe on the future.”<sup>90</sup> The European Policy Centre fears that a lack of cooperation at the European level offers “EU citizens grounds to believe that the EU integration project is not working anymore, which might lead them to reject it in its entirety.”<sup>91</sup> Regarding the growing opposition to European policies and worldviews, authors warn that “unchecked, the undermining of EU authority could be habit forming; it can generate prospects of increased disintegration across the EU.”<sup>92</sup> Further European integration is jeopardized by fragmented cooperation, uneven enforcement of common policies, and unilateral actions. The legitimacy of the European Union depends on its member states, which can either enhance or detract from it.<sup>93</sup> In other words, the EU is what states make of it.

## **Part Two: Deeper than Policy, Response Impacts European Identity and Values**

Merkel’s response to the 2015 refugee crisis threatened the effectiveness of European policies for migration, asylum and borders. I argue the impact of Merkel’s response reaches far beyond simple policy cohesiveness; her decision to allow an unlimited number of asylum-

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<sup>89</sup> Postelnicescu, “Europe’s New Identity,” 205.

<sup>90</sup> Engelen, “The Merkel Years,” 62.

<sup>91</sup> Pascouau, “Heads Buried in the Sand.”

<sup>92</sup> Murray and Longo, “Europe’s Wicked Legitimacy Crisis,” 13.

<sup>93</sup> Murray and Longo, “Europe’s Wicked Legitimacy Crisis,” 2.

seekers into Europe sparked a debate about Europe itself. A backlash against further European integration shone a light on a different version of Europe, one with strong national identities and populist ideas. The anti-immigrant response to Merkel's humanitarian gesture disrupts the collective vision of a liberal Europe.

The process of European integration is deeply impacted by the visions of national leaders; the European Union is a collective project built upon memories of conflict and war by leaders with a liberal vision for a peaceful, prosperous, cooperative Europe. The mass migration of those with a different ethnicity, religion or language, and ensuing misperceptions about immigration, emboldened a popular rise in nationalist and anti-EU sentiment. The impact of Merkel's response on European integration is important because it resonates with the fundamentals of European identity and values. A battle of ideas has erupted over what Europe represents. The duelling agendas of Merkel and Orbán, constructed through a liberal or illiberal lens, steer the process of European integration in opposing directions. But which vision of Europe will succeed? A battle over the meaning of European values is a fight over the future of Europe itself, and the potential rise of a new, illiberal European order.

### III. Constructed by Identity and Values, Worldview Informs Vision of Europe

In this section, I explore how the competing visions of Europe are informed by national leaders' worldviews, which in turn is constructed through identity and values. European integration depends on a shared set of values and norms that are commonly held by member states. Wolfe states that "norms project ideas about appropriateness, compelling fulfillment of

culturally determined obligations.”<sup>94</sup> Merkel’s actions reinforced the image of the European Union as a bastion of tolerance, human dignity, multiculturalism, and cooperation, even though the EU did not condone her response. The European Union was founded, in part, on grand ideas of a common European identity based on liberal norms. In a statement to the European Parliament, Merkel reaffirmed that “Europe is a community of shared values, founded on shared rules and shared responsibility” and guided by the values in European treaties: “human dignity, the rule of law, tolerance, respect for minorities and solidarity.”<sup>95</sup> However, the rising illiberal visions are fundamentally opposed to the established liberal values at risk in Europe. The Union’s struggle to achieve cohesive policy on migration issues became a “desperate drive to preserve stability and fend off populism,” which risked “undermining long-cherished values like openness, tolerance, and respect for basic rights.”<sup>96</sup> Merkel is one of the few European leaders to continue welcoming refugees.<sup>97</sup> Commenting on the EU’s reaction to the Arab Spring and the mass migration that followed, a high-ranking official lamented that the EU “missed a historic opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to the foundations it is built upon.”<sup>98</sup> The future of European integration varies between competing, incompatible visions: liberal and illiberal Europe.

Worldviews are informed by deeply-held notions of identity and values. A particular worldview influences how a member state perceives and interacts with other member states, the European Union, and the migration crisis itself. The tension between competing worldviews go to the core of what it means to be European. Europe is a patchwork area with fierce national

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<sup>94</sup> Joel D Wolfe, “Who Rules the EU? Pragmatism and Power in European Integration Theory,” *Journal of Political Power* 4, no. 1 (February 18, 2011): 136.

<sup>95</sup> Bundeskanzlerin, “Statement by Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel to the European Parliament,” 2015.

<sup>96</sup> Abadi, “Part V: Germany.”

<sup>97</sup> Murray and Longo, “Europe’s Wicked Legitimacy Crisis,” 2.

<sup>98</sup> Lindley, *Crisis and Migration*, 115.

identities tied not only to history, culture, and language. Worldviews do not just impact how leaders and member states create policy, but worldviews shape their very identity, values and visions of themselves and Europe. Worldviews colour how national leaders react to the migration crisis and how they frame their perspectives, especially with national refugee policies. Leaders have found ways to reproduce the ideas and policies they agree with, such as member states adhering to Dublin III by sending asylum-seekers back to overwhelmed member states on the border. In other cases, national leaders disrupt the established course of action by deconstructing the practice and constructing a new one. As European integration is malleable, European leaders have a large role in shaping it.

Through her liberal response to the refugee crisis, Merkel unintentionally sparked a battle over European identity and values. It triggered a massive reckoning with what Europeans imagined to be Europe. Depending on whether one has a European or nationalist perspective, the European Union is a utopia or a nightmare.<sup>99</sup> Merkel was once again championing Europe and its ideals such as justice, tolerance, freedom, and diversity. As identity is a social construct, there are communities within Europe that have opposing worldviews. In the imagination of some, national identity is intertwined with ethnicity. Europeans still very much have “the concept of national communities based on language, ethnicity and culture.”<sup>100</sup> In speeches and interviews, Orbán uses a similar refrain: “We want to keep Hungary as Hungary,” and Europe as Europe.<sup>101</sup> Hungary’s vision of a nationalistic, white and Christian Europe clashes with Merkel’s tolerant and multicultural response to the migration crisis: “we must also want a Christian Hungary and a

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<sup>99</sup> Ulrike Liebert, “Contentious European Democracy,” in *European Stories: Intellectual Debates on Europe in National Contexts*, ed. Justine Lacroix and Kalypso Nicolaidis (2010), 53.

<sup>100</sup> Szabo, “Europe’s Leadership Deficit,” 26.

<sup>101</sup> Nick Thorpe, “The Man Who Thinks Europe Has Been Invaded,” *BBC News*, April 6, 2018, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/Viktor\\_Orban](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/Viktor_Orban).

Christian Europe, instead of what now threatens us – a Europe with a mixed population and no sense of identity.”<sup>102</sup> Others also believe that Europe suffers from a lack of a sense of *demos*, or common political destiny.<sup>103</sup> An issue with European identity is the disconnect with an emotional narrative close to the people.<sup>104</sup> Merkel’s handling of the refugee crisis challenged distinct visions of European integration across the continent.

The rise of nationalism, populist politics and right-wing rhetoric comes from the fears and fissures over European identity. In an attempt to “foster a European identity, reinforce common European values and promote the discovery of European sites and cultures”, the Commission has approved plans for community-building projects such as free Interrail passes for all Europeans aged 18 in the summer of 2018.<sup>105</sup> In *European Stories*, Liebert explores how ideas of democracy are attached to a homogeneous people conceived as a collective, unified either by ideas such as ethnicity, national and religion, or through a reliance on social cohesion, social solidarity or shared ethical values.<sup>106</sup>

Merkel’s unilateral action attempted to stand up for the liberal vision that Europe had advocated for decades. But what is threatening liberalism in Europe? O’Leary and Sambanis expand on their definition of nationalism: while primarily a political doctrine of collective self-government, it may veer toward “an excessive partiality and bias toward one’s own nation, and hostility toward and fear of foreigners.”<sup>107</sup> This chauvinism and xenophobia embedded in

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<sup>102</sup> Thorpe.

<sup>103</sup> “Everything You Need to Know about European Political Union,” *The Economist*, July 28, 2015, <https://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2015/07/economist-explains-20>.

<sup>104</sup> Deliso, *Migration, Terrorism, and the Future of a Divided Europe*, 195.

<sup>105</sup> European Commission, “Press Release - Daily News 01 / 03 / 2018,” accessed June 1, 2018, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEX-18-1443\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEX-18-1443_en.htm).

<sup>106</sup> Liebert, “Contentious European Democracy,” 53.

<sup>107</sup> Brendan O’Leary and Nicholas Sambanis, “Chapter 28: Nationalism and International Security,” in *The Oxford Handbook of International Security*, ed. Alexandra Gheciu and William Wolforth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) 415.

nationalism is part of a deeper set of illiberal values that are openly challenging the current conception of Europe. Foreign Policy magazine writes that official government policy in Eastern Europe “is increasingly indistinguishable from reactionary populism.”<sup>108</sup> In Central Europe, current discourse places value on national sovereignty and sometimes Christianity.<sup>109</sup> As well, historical and cultural elements of identity underscore the tension: close ties between national identity and national independence underline that European integration may be perceived as a threat to national identity.<sup>110</sup> In defence of liberal European values, Juncker declared that “pushing back boats from piers, setting fire to refugee camps, or turning a blind eye to poor and helpless people: that is not Europe.”<sup>111</sup>

Liebert states it is misleading to assume that “European liberal norms do not require local roots in member states.”<sup>112</sup> Indeed, this helps explain why some states, without a history of having liberal norms, are pushing back against the liberal vision of the European Union. This pattern does not explain what we are seeing in Western Europe, where even founding members of the Union are turning their backs to established European values. Even in 1998, the European Commission underlined the importance of national identity in the EU’s eastward enlargement.<sup>113</sup> A few years before joining the EU, the countries in Central and Eastern Europe’s values and motives “in seeking integration with the EU are fully consistent with the original *raison d’être*”, although the author warns of possible Euroscepticism as the countries “move closer to the reality of EU membership.”<sup>114</sup> Representatives from the Visegrád Four countries were particularly

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<sup>108</sup> Abadi, “Part V: Germany.”

<sup>109</sup> Liebert, “Contentious European Democracy,” 54.

<sup>110</sup> Höjelid, “European Integration,” 18.

<sup>111</sup> Juncker, “State of the Union 2015.”

<sup>112</sup> Liebert, “Contentious European Democracy,” 66.

<sup>113</sup> Höjelid, “European Integration,” 18.

<sup>114</sup> Höjelid.

angry over the response to the migration crisis for a compelling reason: “while they were European, and shared similar values and culture, their citizens were not allowed to work freely across the European Union. On the other hand, Syrians were being welcomed, without restrictions, documentation, or other proper procedure.”<sup>115</sup> It represented a double standard of who was welcome in the rest of Europe.

The European Union is becoming more divided on the question of identity, with incompatible ideas on the future of European integration. In her New Year’s Eve speech in 2015, Merkel underlined that European cohesion is crucial; “It is important for us not to let ourselves be divided.”<sup>116</sup> However, fierce opposition to common migration policy across Europe has opened up divisions that are growing more pronounced: open vs. closed, homogeneous vs. multicultural, traditional vs. innovative, authoritarian vs. democratic, liberal vs. illiberal. The traditional divide between left and right is less important than the divide between open and closed. The divisions over values may become more entrenched with the two sides increasingly incompatible within a single Europe.

#### IV. Illiberal Worldview Clashes with Liberal Vision for Europe

##### *Identifying the Rise of Illiberalism*

Merkel welcomed refugees under humanitarian and political impulses through an exception in common asylum policy. She was alone in upholding European values of tolerance, freedom, justice, and human dignity in Europe’s treatment of refugees. However, the seemingly

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<sup>115</sup> Deliso, *Migration, Terrorism, and the Future of a Divided Europe*, 194.

<sup>116</sup> Bundeskanzlerin, “Speech: The Influx of Refugees Is Tomorrow’s Opportunity,” December 31, 2015, [https://www.bundestkanzlerin.de/Content/EN/Artikel/2015/12\\_en/2015-12-31-neujahrsansprache-bkin\\_en.html](https://www.bundestkanzlerin.de/Content/EN/Artikel/2015/12_en/2015-12-31-neujahrsansprache-bkin_en.html).



endless entry of migrants into Europe stoked tensions between member states' interests and European values. The conflict pitted independence against solidarity, and sovereignty against integration. Within Europe, there has been a marked rise in nationalist, illiberal visions with a clear anti-immigrant platform since the height of the migration crisis in 2015. Here, I shall discuss how this alternate worldview has bubbled to the surface in member states through their politics, actions, and visions.

After Merkel's response, it was evident that a rift had been opened between the European Union and between member states. The unilateral actions taken by some member states, and their refusal to participate in group meetings, declarations and actions, suggest that they had a wholly different perspective on the migration crisis. National leaders were more preoccupied with sending irregular migrants away rather than "coping with the actual emergency, whereby tens of thousands of people were crossing Europe in challenging conditions."<sup>117</sup> After over a million migrants flowed into the shared borderless area, member states reacted strongly by taking self-governance measures to physically block migrants from entering their territories. Although Merkel's response clearly supported European values of tolerance and multiculturalism, it may have emboldened her opponents and strengthened nationalism across Europe. The mass influx of migrants seriously shook the Union's principle of solidarity.<sup>118</sup> Börzel and Risse argue that the public discourses on refugees were less about economic or political issues, but primarily a clash of competing identities on the European and national levels.<sup>119</sup>

Deliso writes that "during the migrant crisis, divisions within and between political blocs prevented a unified response – unsurprising considering the multinational composition of the

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<sup>117</sup> Morsut and Kruke, "Crisis Governance of the Refugee and Migrant Influx," 152.

<sup>118</sup> Morsut and Kruke, "Crisis Governance of the Refugee and Migrant Influx," 151.

<sup>119</sup> Börzel and Risse, "From the Euro to the Schengen Crises," 100.

European Union and its varied ideological and cultural worldviews.”<sup>120</sup> This clash was predominately between two visions, supported by leaders in an increasingly divided Europe. On July 5, 2018, Orbán paid a rare visit to Merkel in Berlin. The leaders fundamentally disagreed in their visions for Europe and its humanity: Merkel said “if Europe wanted to retain its soul it could not ignore people's needs and suffering,” whereas Orbán countered “the best way to be humane was to close borders and help the countries that migrants came from.”<sup>121</sup> Merkel has said that if Europe fails in the refugee crisis, it betrays its founding principles.<sup>122</sup> However, Merkel’s defence of a liberal Europe was no match against illiberal forces.

In explaining the tension between the European commitment to refugees and xenophobia, Klotz cites the “burgeoning migration” after the upheavals of the Arab Spring as heightening the political relevance of the tension.<sup>123</sup> Murray and Longo point out that “the liberal élites did little to start a counter-discourse to the right-wing populist framing” to legitimize liberal migration policies, essentially abstaining from engaging with the counter-vision of Europe.<sup>124</sup> The conservative vision of Europe is threatened from mass migration, fixated on defending one religious and ethnic heritage over another while employing clearly racist and exclusionary arguments. The instability caused by an unprecedented influx of migrants, who have a different identity than many Europeans, sparked fear into the public and inadvertently appealed to European citizens’ national identities.<sup>125</sup> Questions on migration and identity were politicized.

Merkel was uncharacteristically sharp in defence of her open-door policy, going so far as to suggest that Germany was no longer her country if she had to apologize for “showing a

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<sup>120</sup> Deliso, *Migration, Terrorism, and the Future of a Divided Europe*, 193.

<sup>121</sup> “Migrants: Merkel and Orban Clash over Europe’s ‘Humanity.’”

<sup>122</sup> Radu, “More or Less Europe?” 22.

<sup>123</sup> Klotz, “Migration,” 446.

<sup>124</sup> Börzel and Risse, “From the Euro to the Schengen Crises,” 101.

<sup>125</sup> Börzel and Risse.

friendly face in an emergency.”<sup>126</sup> Merkel argues that “Germany’s identity, and by implication, Europe’s, was inseparable from its values and its actions in service of them.”<sup>127</sup> One of the impacts of Merkel’s response to the refugee crisis is that “the mass flux of migrants and refugees changed identity politics”, since the crisis was framed as securing borders while politicizing EU affairs.<sup>128</sup> The authors conclude that these factors impair the realization of the common European interest in the migration crisis.<sup>129</sup> The idea of collective identities and imagined communities is relevant in the fissures made by nationalists, who reject the imagined community of the European Union and collective identity that comes with it.<sup>130</sup> Merkel reminded her opponents that Europe was quick to save the banks during the Euro crisis, and needs to act to save human beings.<sup>131</sup> This clash of visions between Hungary, Italy, Germany and the European Union boils down to European values and identity.

#### *Member States Elect a Different Vision for Europe*

There has been a delay between the height of the crisis and the election of political leadership on this issue. Murray and Longo provide a sobering conclusion: “Even if the refugee crisis is attenuated, the seeds of discontent have been sown.”<sup>132</sup> European attempts at depoliticization through supranational delegation “fuelled the politicization of EU affairs,” especially below the national level.<sup>133</sup> Elections are a good measure of the salience of certain visions and worldviews, since politicians campaign on issues that resonate with the electorate.

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<sup>126</sup> Engelen, “The Merkel Years,” 62.

<sup>127</sup> Abadi, “Part V: Germany.”

<sup>128</sup> Börzel and Risse, 83.

<sup>129</sup> Börzel and Risse.

<sup>130</sup> Börzel and Risse, “From the Euro to the Schengen Crises,” 87.

<sup>131</sup> Mushaben, “Wir Schaffen Das!” 527.

<sup>132</sup> Murray and Longo, “Europe’s Wicked Legitimacy Crisis,” 13.

<sup>133</sup> Börzel and Risse, “From the Euro to the Schengen Crises,” 84.

Several years after the height of the migration crisis, immigration remains a dominant issue in domestic political arenas across the EU. The crisis has unfolded slowly, with public opinion turning against migration from 2016 onwards, specifically from the New Year's Eve attacks in Cologne and the terrorism equated with ethnic minorities in France and Belgium. After the perception of migration soured, political parties claiming to be against many things – anti-establishment, anti-immigration, anti-European – led to growing support for nationalist parties. Different ideas and visions led to wave of political successes several years after the height of the migration crisis, while real levels of migration decreased.

The sustained backlash on the migration issue has now translated into a shift of electoral support, of which some parties have taken full advantage. European leaders on both the left and right will approach each election “as a referendum on both morality and security, and as a potential challenge to the ‘common values’ of the Continent.”<sup>134</sup> Formerly-fringe views were emboldened by the instability and change that came with new arrivals and lack of cohesion. Especially after 2015, we can see that elections demonstrate the rising popularity of these perspectives. Populism has found strength in the anti-immigrant narrative.<sup>135</sup> Across Europe, refugees were perceived as an unwelcome crisis and a security risk. Fears that Europe couldn't control its borders, encouraged the unilateral and disjointed decisions and positions made by other leaders and countries. The aftermath of Merkel's response boosted the rise of nationalism and extreme right-wing politics in Germany. “This is a long-term trend that will lead to increased polarization, politicization of the migrant issue, and, eventually, Islamic political parties. That outcome will only further dilute the vote and polarize public opinions.”<sup>136</sup> Relations between

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<sup>134</sup> Deliso, *Migration, Terrorism, and the Future of a Divided Europe*, 168.

<sup>135</sup> Murray and Longo, “Europe's Wicked Legitimacy Crisis,” 6.

<sup>136</sup> Deliso, *Migration, Terrorism, and the Future of a Divided Europe*, 143.

member states are more complex now that certain member states are advocating illiberal and authoritarian visions of Europe. The shift in public consensus in several member states is threatening the very vision that Europe was founded upon.

In particular, elections of nationalist leaders across Europe provided a louder opposition to interests and values espoused by the EU. The ability of member states to push and pull on the direction of European integration is fairly high, though has not been an organized threat until the rise of nationalism and widespread anti-EU rhetoric. Dempsey continues that “the message from populist leaders is that national governments, not the EU, can determine Europe’s future.”<sup>137</sup> Nationalist leaders sometimes talk about hollowing out the European Union in order to create the structures that will reproduce their own visions and worldviews. Starting July 2018, Chancellor Kurz has an opportunity to shape the direction of European integration in the image of his own vision for Europe during Austria’s 6-month presidency of the European Council.

The spike in electoral victories for leaders on anti-immigration platforms is directly related to Europe’s incapacity during the crisis and Merkel’s decision to welcome asylum-seekers. This division is seeping within Merkel’s own country. German national elections gave Merkel her poorest election result yet, which has been attributed to her response to the migration crisis. As well, Alternative for Germany (AfD) received enough votes to enter the German Bundestag, the first nationalist political party to do so since the Nazi party. Not only did they enter, but they also form the largest opposition party. Mushaben contests that Merkel’s inclusive response has inspired not only citizen engagement but an ugly backlash “channelled through Pediga protests and Alternative for Germany gains.”<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Dempsey, “The Merkel Way vs. the Orbán Way.”

<sup>138</sup> Mushaben, “Wir Schaffen Das!” 529.

Despite sharing a coalition government and leading a similar party, Seehofer's worldview is much different than Merkel's. He threatened the stability of Germany's months-old coalition in June 2018 when he demanded migrant centres be opened on the country's borders. His conservative and wealthy constituency, Bavaria, has managed a large share of the burden of asylum-seekers entering Germany. In May 2018, the *New York Times* wrote about a German village with more refugees than residents, noting the local far-right politician "rejoices at the opportunities the migrant crisis has offered." The neo-Nazi district councillor predicts the end of liberal European values: "public anxiety over Ms. Merkel's open-armed welcome to refugees would help demolish a postwar political consensus in Germany built on moderation and compromise."<sup>139</sup> In the bigger picture, the increasing tendency for national agendas and politics to clash, domestically and at EU levels, puts the very future of the European Union in question."<sup>140</sup> Merkel's tribute to the ideals of the European Union ultimately contributed to forces behind an illiberal vision of Europe.

Through redefining the relationship between member states and key European values, elected leaders can reshape the Union to their nationalist values. Merkel is paying a political price for her response as opponents across Europe "win increasing support for a closed Europe," blaming the Chancellor for populism and anti-immigration movements.<sup>141</sup> National elections ushered in a new wave of right-wing populism. Austria elected Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, who has since repositioned his party and country closer to the Visegrád Four. Viktor Orbán was re-elected in Hungary with new constitutional powers. In Italy, a right-wing, nationalist government

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<sup>139</sup> Andrew Higgins, "German Village of 102 Braces for 750 Asylum Seekers," *The New York Times*, May 17, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/01/world/europe/german-village-of-102-braces-for-750-asylum-seekers.html>.

<sup>140</sup> Deliso, *Migration, Terrorism, and the Future of a Divided Europe*, 168.

<sup>141</sup> Dempsey, "The Merkel Way vs. the Orbán Way for Europe" *Carnegie Europe*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. October 4, 2016.

took power in June 2018. Marine Le Pen, leader of the far-right Le Front National, made it to the final round of the 2017 French presidential election. Although she did not win, support for her party surged in municipal and regional elections. In February 2018, Merkel maintains that withdrawing to the national level is not the answer. “Europe must always be more than its shared history, more than its triumph over past differences and wars on its territory. Europe is now the crucial project for our continent’s future.”<sup>142</sup> The 2019 European Parliamentary elections will be an interesting litmus test in the course of European integration. In 2014, just prior to the peak of the crisis, Europe saw a first warning of the rise of right-wing nationalism and Eurosceptic parties gaining a voice and support.

### *Rejection of Liberal Worldview Undermines Europe*

European integration based on liberal values is in serious trouble: even founding members of the EU are electing anti-establishment governments. Notably, these governments are rejecting EU values in favour of their own. Merkel’s decision to clearly support European values of tolerance and multiculturalism may have emboldened her opponents and strengthened nationalism across Europe. There are now fundamentally clashing visions on the future of European integration. “The main conflict line in the debate about refugees and migrants is not about national priorities and the like, but about visions of Europe: it puts ideas about a multicultural, open and cosmopolitan Europe, on the one hand,” against nationalist Europe.<sup>143</sup> If states have wildly different visions of Europe and its values, then European integration will not proceed along the same path with liberal values. Authors gravely state that “Europe risks

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<sup>142</sup> Bundeskanzlerin, “Speech by Federal Chancellor Dr Angela Merkel at the Ceremony Awarding the International Charlemagne Prize to French President Emmanuel Macron in Aachen on 10 May 2018,” 2018.

<sup>143</sup> Börzel and Risse, “From the Euro to the Schengen Crises,” 99-100.

descending into unchecked nationalism.”<sup>144</sup> The wave of right-wing, populist and nationalist victories across the EU threaten to alter the course of European integration. Leaders of member states are battling for dominance of their particular vision, resulting in a fierce battle to alter the social construct. These populist leaders no longer talk of tearing down the EU but entirely reshaping it to their own liking, redefining the relationship with the states and the sorts of values the EU will uphold.

In September 2015, the Chancellor warned that the way in which Europe deals with the refugee crisis will shape the Continent for a long time to come.<sup>145</sup> Three years later, the New York Times asks what went wrong with the European project, once “the long march toward peace, democracy and prosperity, underpinned by ever-closer economic and political integration.”<sup>146</sup> Although “Europe has managed to slow the flow of migrants, at least for now – but is undermining its most cherished values in the process.”<sup>147</sup> Foreign Policy notes that Europe, including Germany, has become less friendly to outsiders, raising “the question Merkel posed in 2015: Is Europe, as defined by its commitment to core liberal values, still recognizable to her or anyone else?”<sup>148</sup> Deliso offers introspection from Brussels insiders, who believe that the European Union is partly to blame for the trend toward nationalism and sovereignty-driven movements. “It failed to take into account the local interests of all member states, affecting the European Union’s actual cohesion capacity. The migration crisis [...] just brought these issues

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<sup>144</sup> Murray and Longo, “Europe’s Wicked Legitimacy Crisis,” 3.

<sup>145</sup> Bundeskanzlerin, “Refugee Policy Is a Global Challenge,” September 24, 2015, [https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/Content/EN/Artikel/2015/09\\_en/2015-09-24-reg-erklaerung-merkel\\_en.html](https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/Content/EN/Artikel/2015/09_en/2015-09-24-reg-erklaerung-merkel_en.html).

<sup>146</sup> Paul Krugman, “Opinion | What’s the Matter With Europe?,” *The New York Times*, May 21, 2018.

<sup>147</sup> Cameron Abadi, “Part V: Germany - The Dam Will Hold. Until It Doesn’t.,” *Foreign Policy - Europe Slams Its Gates: Imperiling Africa — And Its Own Soul*, October 4, 2017, <http://europeslamsitsgates.foreignpolicy.com/>.

<sup>148</sup> Abadi, “Part V: Germany.”



into the open, in real-world scenarios.”<sup>149</sup> More was expected from the EU during this crisis “precisely because it espouses values of inclusion, human rights, and solidarity. [...] the EU’s reputation as a values community is undermined by interstate arguing over borders and interests.”<sup>150</sup> The crisis has exposed the limits of EU cooperation and solidarity; the European Union is accused of “failing to stand by the values that Europe so proudly defended for decades.”<sup>151</sup>

Engelen theorizes that Merkel made this “stunning humanitarian gesture” because “in her view, she needed to confront one of Europe’s biggest challenges in decades as the leader of a strong Germany with a major leadership responsibility for Europe and its historic legacy.”<sup>152</sup> Ironically, Merkel’s efforts to uphold the EU’s values of tolerance, freedom and human rights through her decision may have contributed to a context in which these ideas are under attack by Europeans themselves. Nardelli emphasized the timing of the situation: “At the very moment Europe should come together, too many of its member states have become insular and, in pandering to anti-immigration sentiments, are betraying those founding ideas. In this regard, Merkel is the exception.”<sup>153</sup> I will note here that both Merkel and the EU have made difficult compromises in the wake of the crisis. The deal between Turkey and the European Union was brokered to send migrants back to Turkey, if they had entered through the country, in exchange for Syrian refugees that were registered in Turkey.<sup>154</sup> However, there is doubt whether of sending vulnerable people to an authoritarian state upholds the EU’s own values. Uncomfortable

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<sup>149</sup> Deliso, *Migration, Terrorism, and the Future of a Divided Europe*, 194.

<sup>150</sup> Murray and Longo, “Europe’s Wicked Legitimacy Crisis,” 11.

<sup>151</sup> Schmidt, “Europe and the Refugees: A Crisis of Values.”

<sup>152</sup> Engelen, “Surprises, Shocks, and Upheavals,” 73.

<sup>153</sup> Murray and Longo, “Europe’s Wicked Legitimacy Crisis,” 10.

<sup>154</sup> “European Union Reaches Deal With Turkey to Return New Asylum Seekers - The New York Times,” accessed July 2, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/19/world/europe/european-union-turkey-refugees-migrants.html>.

compromises are made to pacify the rumbling from illiberal Europe. European Policy Centre fears that “losing sight of our values in managing this crisis means losing sight of what Europe stands for.”<sup>155</sup> Merkel negotiated this agreement on behalf of the Union, demonstrating the influence of illiberal influences on her worldview. Although the morality of the deal is under question, it has been credited with drastically reducing numbers of arrivals to Europe.

Szabzo notes that even in Europe’s gravest crisis in decades, it is not all bad news for leaders who now have an opportunity to emerge and shape a European renewal.<sup>156</sup> Deliso writes that the EU’s future boils down to the “sharing of national sovereign power at the centre for the benefit of all its constituent parts.”<sup>157</sup> European identity and thus the future of European integration will be changed because different values are becoming the norm. Progress of integration, as well as projects, have always been subject to the leaders and contexts of the times, not what was agreed in a treaty or text. In presenting the Charlemagne Prize to President Macron, Merkel reminds the audience of German history while insisting “liberal values are a fragile commodity that we must continue to protect and defend. What is important once again today [...] is to stand up to narrow-minded, retrograde nationalisms and the temptation of authoritarianism.”<sup>158</sup> European integration will take a different shape if the present liberal values are replaced. Börzel and Risse warn of that freedom of movement was not the only core principle of European integration challenged by a change in identity politics: “Right-wing populism contests the liberal foundations of the European project as a whole, advocating an illiberal,

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<sup>155</sup> Schmidt, “Europe and the Refugees: A Crisis of Values.”

<sup>156</sup> Szabo, “Europe’s Leadership Deficit,” 25.

<sup>157</sup> Deliso, *Migration, Terrorism, and the Future of a Divided Europe*, 197.

<sup>158</sup> Bundeskanzlerin, “Speech Awarding the International Charlemagne Prize.”

exclusionary and nationalist Europe, which the EU had thought to have overcome.”<sup>159</sup> At the heart of the European project, the liberal European identity is at stake.

## Conclusions

In 2013, Angela Merkel’s official biographer took stock of the Chancellor’s growing political capital, predicting that “she may be tempted to take a risk, give everything on one issue, or a major obstacle.”<sup>160</sup> It is fair to say that Merkel’s decision to welcome over a million refugees in support of Europe’s foundational liberal values and identity, despite an enormous backlash, may be exactly what Kornelius was referring to. German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s historic response to the migration crisis has deeply impacted the course of European integration. Unilaterally opening Germany’s borders to welcome an unlimited number of asylum-seekers shocked her allies and has serious consequences for the entire European Union. The impact on European integration will be felt for years to come.

Merkel made a significant, defiant stance in unquestioning support of the liberal democratic international order. Several years after her fateful declaration of *wir schaffen das*, a number of questions arise as to whether she or Europe have really managed in the aftermath of the migration crisis. It can be said that Merkel has succeeded in upholding liberal values during the crisis, but at what expense? There are much broader implications for Germany and Europe. Merkel’s response led to a breakdown of the Common European Asylum System, threatened the survival of the Schengen Area, and boosted the rise of nationalism and far-right politics across the Continent. Her response impacted the cohesiveness of European common policies on migration, but also has deeper implications for fundamental European identity and values. A lack

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<sup>159</sup> Börzel and Risse, “From the Euro to the Schengen Crises,” 102.

<sup>160</sup> Kornelius, *Angela Merkel*, 279.

of cohesive policy revealed a deeper clash over visions of Europe. She, as others, may have expected a more liberal reaction to the refugees.

Europe is divided. In this paper, I connected recent disruptions in Europe since Merkel's response to the migration crisis. Popular political movements in Germany, Austria, Hungary, Italy, and other member states, have constructed a strong opposition to underlying liberal values and common policies driving European integration. Merkel's response weakened the European Union's legitimacy to respond to crises, fortified borders within a borderless area, sparked nationalist and unilateral actions, and led to a battle on competing visions of Europe. There is a fierce battle over whose Europe is reflected in the European Union, between the multicultural, liberal vision and closed, nationalist Europe. The question that I asked involves the impact of Merkel's response on European integration. Despite her grand liberal gesture, Merkel unintentionally gave rise to a competing, illiberal vision of Europe which threatens to replace the liberal democratic worldview that Europe has espoused since the end of the Second World War. Her bold action in response to the refugee crisis sparked a battle over conflicting visions of Europe. European integration will depend entirely on the member states, as they will decide which policies and values align with their opposing worldview. Between the liberal and illiberal visions of Europe, the one that prevails will have a lasting impact on the future course of European integration.

The migration crisis continues to develop on the European stage, as national leaders call emergency summits and a growing number of others refuse to cooperate. If we can say that Merkel has succeeded in her response, in her assertion that 'we can do this,' it has come at a great cost to the liberal vision of Europe. The paradox is that her open and tolerant response led to an entrenched lack of solidarity among member states, fragmented common migration policy

and a serious clash of identity, values and vision for the future of Europe itself. Had the Chancellor not made this historic decision, it is difficult to say what might have occurred; however, the illiberal forces behind the shift of politics and worldviews had already been set in motion well before her response. It may have been more politically advantageous for Merkel to do nothing: three years on, she suffered the worst election result of her Chancellorship, her fragile government is in danger of collapse at the demands of her own coalition partner, and right-wing neo-Nazi parties have gained tremendous representation within the Bundestag and elsewhere within German domestic politics. Merkel's own political position has greatly weakened for her stand; even she has been worn down by opposing, illiberal forces. The compromises she has made in the years since her decision point to a weakened liberal Europe. Since the peak of the crisis, Europe has found itself in turmoil over two competing visions for Europe. Merkel's grand gesture in defence of liberal European values in the midst of crisis dared ask Europe what it wanted to be.

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