# Politicization of the refugee crisis?: a content analysis of parliamentary debates in Italy, the UK, and the EU

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This paper draws on the literature on party competition and issue ownership to assess whether political membership on the right-left dimension explains party stances on migration. While some scholars argue that on this issue a clear distinction between left and right exists, some more recent quantitative and fine-grained analyses show a more nuanced picture. According to them, a clear difference in narratives exists only when the salience of the issue is high, under pressure of the electoral success of a far-right party or about specific policy issues. This paper further investigates this aspect in the context of the 2015 refugee crisis. It looks at the positions held by the main centre-left, centre-right, Radical Right, and Populist Parties in the Italian, British, and European Parliaments. The content analysis shows that centre-left parties frame the refugee crisis mainly as a humanitarian emergency and held pro-European Union (EU) positions, while centre-right parties differ substantially between Italy and the United Kingdom. Both radical right and Populist Parties exploit the political-opportunity offered by the refugee crisis to foster their anti-establishment claims. Moreover, Radical Right Populist Parties stress the need to secure external borders and restore national sovereignty, against further integration. At the EU level, left- and right-wing groups (Socialist and Democrats Party, European Conservatives and Reformists Party, and European People's Party) are cohesive, while the populist group (European Freedom and Direct Democracy Party) is not. This paper adds on the academic debate on the refugee crisis, showing how the immigration issue can impact on domestic and European party politics, challenging party identities and alliances.

**Keywords:**  migration; European Union; party politics; populism; content analysis

We are facing the biggest refugee and displacement crisis of our time. Above all, this is not just a crisis of numbers; it is also a crisis of solidarity (Ban Ki Moon, United Nation Secretary General).

## Introduction

By the end of 2015, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) (2016: 2) estimated 65.3 million individuals forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, armed

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conflicts, generalized violence, or human rights violation: 21.3 million persons were refugees, out of which 4.9 million came from Syria. Although no member state (MS) of the European Union (EU) figures among the top 10 hosting countries in the world (UNHCR, 2016: 16), the influx of refugee heading for Europe was still unprecedented, without equivalent in Europe since World War II (Frontex, 2016: 14).[1] The European Asylum Support Office (2016: 8) reported that in 2015 more than one million people applied for asylum, the highest number since EU-wide data collection started in 2008. To cope with the raising number of refugee and migrants, many MSs implemented unilateral measures to discourage them from entering their territories: they built fences, restored border controls, and introduced restrictive asylum policies.[2]

In May 2015, the European Commission proposed its European Agenda on Migration, a comprehensive approach based on solidarity and shared responsibilities among MSs. Following these proposals, in September 2015, the Justice and Home Affairs Council adopted two Decisions to relocate 160,000 asylum seekers from Italy and Greece, the frontier countries most affected by refugee arrivals. As of December 2016, however, only 1000 people had been relocated from Italy and 2000 from Greece. The failure of the relocation scheme demonstrates MSs' reluctance to comply with EU's immigration and asylum policies,[3] as well as the potential of the refugee crisis to challenge the tenure of the European social and political project.

This work analyses how the refugee crisis has been framed in the political debate in Italy, the United Kingdom, and the European Parliament (EP) between May 2015 and June 2016. It aims to verify whether political membership on the right-left dimension explains political parties' stances on migration. The timespan is justified by two main events: the drowning of over 800 people in the Mediterranean as their vessel sank on their way from Libya to Italy (April 2015), which prompted stormy

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[1] In this paper, I will refer to the peak of refugee heading for Europe between 2015 and 2016 as the 'refugee crisis' since it follows the same argumentation of the discourses analysed. Nonetheless, I am aware of the problems that arise from this oversimplification, which have been widely addressed by worldwide comparative research (e.g. Geddes and Scholten, 2016: 5; Tedesco, 2016: 51).

[2] In particular, eight countries (Austria, Germany, Slovenia, Hungary, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Belgium) introduced Schengen border controls based on Article 25 of the Schengen Border Code (SBC) (events requiring immediate action) and Articles 23/24 SBC (foreseeable events). Other countries, such as Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, and Sweden, restricted the right to family reunification for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection. Finally, Hungary, Denmark, and Germany introduced cuts in the provision of material reception conditions (Wagner et al., 2016: 38–42).

[3] The process of *communitarization* of immigration and asylum policies has been incremental and characterized by strong resistance on the part of MSs to transfer their responsibilities to EU's institutions. After more than two decades of intense transgovernmental cooperation (Wallace, Pollack and Young, 2014: 458), under the Amsterdam Treaty (1997) migration, and other related policies were transferred from the third intergovernmental pillar of the EU, established by the Maastricht Treaty (1992), to the first supranational pillar. After 2 years, in the Tampere European Council, MSs agreed on the legal basis for a Common European Asylum System. Since then, several directives and regulations on immigration control and asylum have been adopted, but their implementation lack still of coherence among MSs (Wagner et al., 2016).

political debate over the refugee crisis and pushed the European Commission to release the mentioned Agenda, and the 'Brexit' referendum (23 June 2016), which brought the United Kingdom to start the process of leaving the EU, showing how immigration can be politically divisive and disruptive. Italy and the United Kingdom have been chosen – following a Most Different System Design (MDSD) (Przeworski and Teune, 1970) – for their many differences in immigration history and policies, as well as in the level of involvement in the management of the crisis: while the first country has been at the frontline, Britain has opted out the relocation scheme, announcing that it would instead resettle 20,000 Syrians in need of protection.[4]

This paper is organized as follow: at the outset, I summarize the contradictory findings in the literature and the original contribution that this research brings into the picture. Afterwards, I provide a justification of my cases selection, followed by an account of epistemological considerations, data selection, and method. Finally, a comparative analysis of the empirical findings highlights the results of this study, together with the conclusions and some possible lines of further research.

## Theoretical background and hypothesis

This work aims to verify whether political membership on the right-left dimension explains political parties' stances on migration, adding to the literature on party competition and issue ownership (e.g. Budge and Farlie, 1983; Klingemann *et al.*, 1994; Blomqvist and Green-Pedersen, 2004; Lachat, 2014). According to Kriesi *et al.* (2006), the increasing salience of the migration issue in national political debates shows the emergence of a globalization cleavage, at the level of both the electorate and the political parties, opposing the winners and the losers of globalization. According to this view, politicization[5] of migration is a manifestation of the prevailing socio-cultural cleavage on the traditional left-right dimension (Inglehart, 1977; Ignazi, 1992; Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000). Migration is a complex, multi-dimensional issue, cross-cutting the traditional divide between economics and culture, thus threatening the ideological coherence of mainstream parties. Other scholars, however, have contested this thesis, claiming that party competition is still articulated along the right-left continuum and the migration issue has been integrated in this traditional conflict (Money, 1999; Lahav, 2004; van der Brug and van Spanje, 2009; Alonso and Da Fonseca, 2011; for the Italian case, e.g. Zincone and Di Gregorio, 2002). Some more recent fined-grained analyses of party positions on migration in electoral competitions have reached a middle-ground position,

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[4] Patrick Wintour, 'UK to take up to 20,000 Syrian refugees over five years, David Cameron confirms'. *The Guardian*, 7 September 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/07/uk-will-accept-up-to-20000-syrian-refugees-david-cameron-confirms

[5] I refer here to De Wilde and Zürn (2012) definition of politicization, which consists of three elements: increasing salience of an issue, expansion of the issue-specific conflicts beyond the narrow circle of executive actors and political polarization of political elites on the issue-specific debate.

showing that framing strategies are only partially influenced by ideology, and political parties opt for a strategic issue-dimensional differentiation (e.g. Akkerman, 2012; Castelli Gattinara, 2016). These scholars have shown that, although the traditional divide between left and right still exists, mainstream left parties are the most challenged by the emergence of the migration issue. While centre-right parties exploit the nationalistic values of their electorate and frame migration mainly in terms of law and order (e.g. Layton-Henry, 1982; Bale, 2003; Pilbaum, 2003; Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008), centre-left parties have to constantly bridge between middle-class voters with liberal socio-cultural preferences and the working-class, threatened by economic competition of cheap labour (Bale *et al.*, 2010; Akkerman, 2012; Castelli Gattinara, 2016). The result of this tension is an overall increasing securitization of the political debate on migration (Huysmans, 1995, 2000; Bigo, 2002; Buonfino, 2004; Leonard, 2007; Castelli Gattinara, 2016), with a clear convergence towards the right-wing stances on migration in times of high salience of migration affairs or under pressure of the electoral success of radical right parties (Green-Pedersen, 2007; Bale *et al.*, 2010; de Lange, 2012; Castelli Gattinara, 2016).[6]

This brief review of the literature allows to conclude that a clear left-right differentiation remains only on specific policy aspects, strategically selected by mainstream parties, and mobilized independently from one another. This paper draws on this literature strand to assess differences in parties' stances on migration in parliamentary debates over the 2015 refugee crisis in Italy, the United Kingdom, and the EP. Looking at how the refugee crisis has been framed[7] by centre-left, centre-right, Radical Right Populist Parties (RRPPs) (Mudde, 2004, 2007),[8] and Populist Parties (PPs) (Meny and Surel, 2002; Lanzone, 2014), I compare framing strategies adopted by political parties at the national level and by national delegations in the European Parliament Political Groups (EPPGs).

Therefore, the research questions that pertain to this study are the following:

a.  Do left- and right-wing parties adopt different frames to represent the refugee crisis?
b.  How is the crisis framed in the discourses of RRPPs?
c.  Do PPs use the refugee crisis to boost their anti-establishment claims?
d.  Is there a difference between how the crisis is framed at the national and EU level?
e.  Are EPPGs cohesive *vis-à-vis* the refugee crisis?

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[6] The impact of anti-immigration parties on policy outcomes, however, is highly contested. Schain (2006) has distinguished between direct and indirect effects. While the first ones occur only when RRPs have 'policy-making capacities', indirect influence occurs as a consequence of the mere existence of anti-immigration parties, when mainstream parties change their positions on migration in hope of winning votes. Other scholars, however, did not find any or moderate influence of those parties on migration policies (e.g. Alonso and Da Fonseca, 2011; Akkerman, 2012; Bolin *et al.*, 2014).

[7] I define 'frame' as 'a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described' (Entman, 1993: 52). In other words, frames are the constructed meaning that political actors attribute to a given reality or phenomenon.

[8] For an explanation of the definition of RRPPs see the paragraph below.

This paper brings an original contribution both to the debate on the effects of the refugee crisis on party politics and identities across different level of governance, and on the methodological approach to study migration politics in Europe (e.g. Korkut *et al.*, 2013; Haynes *et al.*, 2016).

### Mainstream right vs. mainstream left parties: humanitarianism or securitization?

Following Hammar (1985), policy analysts have usually disaggregated migration policy along two dimensions: immigration control and immigrant integration. The first dimension pertains to the entry and stay of third country nationals, while the second deals with the socio-economic and cultural integration of already resident immigrants into the host societies. For the present study, which focusses on the 2015 refugee crisis, I expect issues of borders and immigration control to be of crucial importance. Some analyses of the management of the refugee crisis have shown that public discourses and policy practices have often conflated care and control, commitment to save human lives and military surveillance of external borders. In sum, humanitarianism and securitization (e.g. Fassin, 2011; Horsti, 2012; Cuttitta, 2014; Musarò, 2016). Moreover, cross-country analyses of parliamentary debates on immigration have confirmed this pattern, showing a differentiation in terms of both *topoi* and argumentations between centre-right and centre-left parties, the first one aligned on the securitization pole, the latter on the humanitarianism side (e.g. van Dijk, 1997, 2000; Riva *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, I expect centre-right parties to represent the refugee crisis mainly as a security threat to the nation, calling for restrictive and punitive measures, while centre-left parties to stress the humanitarian dimension of the phenomenon, calling for a strong commitment to international law, human rights, and reduction of human suffering.

HYPOTHESIS 1: The mainstream right represents the refugee crisis mainly as a security threat and calls for immediate restrictive measures, while the mainstream left represents it mainly as a humanitarian emergency and calls for saving lives first.

### RRPs and PPs: which 'We' against which 'Them'?

According to Mudde (2004) populism is a 'thin-centred' ideology based on four pillars: (1) the people as a homogeneous and pure entity, (2) the elite as a homogeneous and corrupt entity, (3) the people and the elite as two antagonistic groups, and (4) being in favour of measures to give power back to the people (e.g. direct democracy). Populists claim to defend the collective identity of the 'true' people against enemies from outside. Nevertheless, it depends on the context whether the outsiders are immigrants, unemployed, or people of another religion or race (Canovan, 2004: 247–249; Mudde, 2004: 545–546). With this definition, Mudde (2004) refers to a wide range of parties in Western Europe, including RRPPs. The latter add to the above mentioned populist platform a combination of (a) *nativism*, that is, an ideology which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by

members of the native group ('the nation') and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening the homogenous nation-state (Mudde, 2007: 19); and (b) *authoritarianism*, namely the belief in a strictly ordered society in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely (Mudde, 2007: 23). Therefore, in line with previous findings, I expect nativism, xenophobia, and opposition to immigration to be crucial issues in RRPP's speeches (Betz, 1994; Von Beyme, 1988; Mudde, 2007: 19). Moreover, I expect both RRPPs and PPs to exploit the window of opportunity offered by the refugee crisis to boost their anti-establishment claims.

HYPOTHESIS 2: Both PPs and RRPPs use the refugee crisis to promote anti-elite claims and their speeches have a highly obstructive potential against the Government.

HYPOTHESIS 3: RRPPs represent the refugee crisis as a threat to national security, ethnic, and social cohesion, showing xenophobic, authoritarian, and law and order attitudes in their speeches.

## EPPGs: united or divided?

In this paper, I compare speeches in national and EPs, to assess whether there are differences in narrative across the two political level. I expect that the process of European integration, by enhancing opportunities for cross-national discussion and learning within party families, would likely have produced convergence of issue positions for parties within each family (e.g. Hix *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, I claim that issue framing can be taken as an indicator of EPPGs cohesion, namely whether Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) belonging to the same EPPG held similar positions on a given issue.[9]

HYPOTHESIS 4: If MEPs frame migration in the same way, then there is coherence within the EPPG they belong to.

## Research Design

### Country selection

Italy and the United Kingdom were chosen following a MDSD (Przeworski and Teune, 1970; Lijphart, 1971): although they differ in terms of history and policies of migration, I hypothesized the same relationship between partisanship (independent

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[9] Inclusiveness and cohesion have been considered by many scholars as two important indicators to measure the level of development and institutionalization of the EP (e.g. Calossi, 2016: 31). Cohesion has been defined as the degree of agreement among MEPs belonging to the same group in their voting activities and investigated through the analysis of roll call votes (e.g. Hix and Noury, 2009; Bressanelli, 2014; Ivaldi *et al.*, 2016). Voting cohesion among MEPs have proven to be always rather high, except among Eurosceptic and Non-Inscrits groups (Calossi, 2016: 33). I expect to find similar patterns in my analysis of issue framing.

variables) and migration frames (dependent variable). A brief account of the two cases study follows.

Italy has traditionally been a country of emigration: it is estimated that more than 30 million Italians emigrated, mainly in Europe and the United States, between the mid-19th and mid-20th centuries (Castellazzi, 2010: 101–102). Only at the beginning of the 1970s this trend was reversed by a positive net migration rate. However, for many years, immigration was not perceived by national decision makers as a main social problem. The rising numbers of asylum seekers heading for Europe in the 1980s,[10] together with concerns about cross-border crime, contributed to place immigration at the top of the political agenda – not only in Italy, but also in many other European countries. Moreover, when the Schengen Agreement was signed in 1995, the internal barriers to the free movements of European citizens were removed and Italy became one of the first countries of destination for Eastern European migrants. At this point, the need to control the entry and stay of third country nationals became cogent: not surprisingly, the first comprehensive immigration legislation was the Turco-Napolitano law, passed in 1998 (Law 286/1998, the so called 'Testo Unico dell'Immigrazione'). Since the 1990s, Italy has been characterized by a very fragmented party system (Diamanti, 2007) and a rising far-right, anti-immigration party: Northern League (LN). It has been able to strongly influence three centre-right coalitions (1994–95, 2001–06, 2008–11) by passing the Bossi-Fini Law in 2002 and the security packages in 2008 and 2009, which criminalized illegal entry and stay, restricted access to social rights and made deportation easier (Perlmutter, 2015: 1341). According to some scholars, the instability of the Italian party system, together with the recent transformation of Italy from an emigration to an immigration country, make difficult to identify a clear and coherent immigration policy model (Carvalho, 2013: 51; Perlmutter, 2015: 1339). A strong anti-immigration rhetoric conflates with market-driven immigration policies, characterized by periodic amnesties for irregular migrants already present in the country (Finotelli and Sciortino, 2008: 5; Castellazzi, 2010: 107; Geddes and Scholten, 2016: 182).

On the contrary, the United Kingdom is among those European countries with the longest history of post-colonial migration and started much earlier on to develop a national immigration policy. British immigration policies can be divided along four phases. Between the 1950s and the 1960s, a period of 'open migration regime' in which all citizens of the Empire could be granted British citizenship. In the following two decades, the country developed such a strict system of immigration control that some scholars have pointed it as a successful 'zero-immigration country' (Layton-Henry, 1994). It was evident during the 1979 general elections, when Margaret Thatcher based her electoral campaign on the fear of being 'swamped by alien cultures'. Since the

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[10] The UNHCR estimates that the number of asylum seekers fleeing to Europe has reached the 100,000 per year starting from the '70s, whit ~70% of them coming from Eastern Europe (Wallace, Pollack and Young, 2014: 450–451).

1990s, British immigration policies were characterized by a market-driven approach aimed to curb asylum seekers and undesired immigrants, while accepting only those immigrants beneficial to national economy. In 2008, during the New Labour era, former Prime Minister Gordon Brown adopted a 'managed immigration' approach, based on a five-tiers system which defined entry quotas according to immigrants' level of education and income (Zincone *et al.*, 2011: 199; Geddes and Scholten, 2016: 37).[11] In 2015, the United Kingdom was the tenth highest recipient of asylum claims among European countries, with about 22,314 asylum applications (Clayton and Dennis, 2016). Former Prime Minister David Cameron stressed the need to implement a more effective management of the external borders, as well as stronger actions against people smugglers and return of irregular immigrants. The Immigration Act, approved in May 2016, implements several policies outlined in the Conservative Party Manifesto: it contains measures to tackle illegal working, enhance the enforcement of labour market rules, deny illegal migrants access to services including housing and banking, provide new powers for immigration officers, as well as other measures to improve the security and operation of the immigration system.[12]

As shown by this brief comparison, my cases selection allows to study how the 2015 refugee crisis is represented by political parties of two countries with very different immigration history and policies. From the one side Britain, old immigration country, not severely touched by the 2015 refugee crisis in comparison to other MSs,[13] ruled by a conservative majority, with a clearly selective policy towards immigration. On the other side Italy, only recently an immigration country, at the frontline in the management of the recent crisis, ruled by a centre-left majority, with a contradictory and poor-shaped immigration policy response.

Following the MDSD assumptions, I hypothesize that systemic factors do not play any role in explaining the outcome. In other words, I claim that if the subgroups of the population taken from different systems – mainstream right and left as well as RRPPs and PPs in the two selected countries – do not differ in respect to the dependent variable 'party stances on migration', systemic differences do not matter in explaining this outcome. As long as this assumption is not rejected, the analysis takes place at the intersystemic level. As soon as the assumption is rejected, then I should take into consideration systemic factors (Przeworski and Teune, 1970).

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[11] BBC, 'Immigration points system begins', *BBC News*, 29 February 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7269790.stm

[12] 'Immigration Act 2016', Home Office. Retrieved 19 September 2017 from http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/19/contents/enacted

[13] According to Eurostat, in 2015 the highest number of first time applicants was registered in Germany (with 441,800 first time applicants, 35% of all first time applicants in the EU MSs), followed by Hungary (174,400, 14%), Sweden (156,100, 12%), Austria (85,500, 7%), Italy (83,200, 7%), and France (70,600, 6%). 'Eurostat Newsrelease – 44/2016', Eurostat. Retrieved 19 September 2017 from http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7203832/3-04032016-AP-EN.pdf/790eba01-381c-4163-bcd2-a54959b99ed6

Table 1. Parties selection

| Italy | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Name | Abbreviation | Party family | Role | MPs | EPG | MEPs | % total[a] |
| Democratic Party | PD | Social Democrats | Government | 283 | S&D | 30 | 16 |
| Go Italy | FI | Centre-Right | Opposition | 50 | EPP | 15 | 7 |
| Northern League | LN | Radical Right Populist Party | Opposition | 19 | ENF | 5 | 13 |
| Five Star Movement | M5S | New Populist | Opposition | 91 | EFDD | 15 | 36 |
| United Kingdom | | | | | | | |
| Name | Abbreviation | Party category | Role | MPs | EPG | MEPs | % total[a] |
| Conservatives | CON | Centre-Right | Government | 330 | ECR | 20 | 27 |
| Labour | LAB | Social Democratic | Opposition | 229 | S&D | 18 | 10 |
| UK Independent Party | UKIP | Radical Right Populist Party | Opposition | 1 | EFDD | 20 | 48 |

EPG = European Party Group; S&D = Socialist and Democrats Party; EPP = European People's Party; ENF = Europe of Nation and Freedom Party; EFDD = European Freedom and Direct Democracy Party; ECR = European Conservatives and Reformists Party.
[a]Percentage rounded up.
Source: Author's own elaboration.

## Party selection

Party selection has been determined first at the national level and then, as a consequence, at the European level. This process has been driven mainly by two criteria: *party affiliation* (along the left-right dimension) and *party positioning* (majority vs. minority) in the national political arena (Table 1). In order to have representative parties for all the ideological families considered in this study (Conservatives, Social Democrats, RRPP, and PP), I have included also some parties which are not the main relevant in terms of vote share and number of parliamentary seats.

Therefore, in the case of Italy I consider the main centre-left party in office [Democratic Party (PD), with 25.4% of votes and 297 seats] and the main centre-right party at the opposition, [Go Italy (FI), with 21.6% of votes and 98 seats], together with the main new populist and RRPPs (Five Star Movement (M5S), with 25.6% of votes and 109 seats; and the LN, with 4.1% of votes and 18 seats). In the United Kingdom, I consider the main centre-right party in office (Conservative and Unionist Party (CON), with 36.9% of votes and 331 seats) and the main centre-left party at the opposition [the Labour Party (LAB), with 30.4% of votes and 232 seats], together with the RRPP, third party in the country (UK Independent Party (UKIP) with 12.6% of votes and 1 seat).[14]

Consequently, at the European level I analyse MEPs speeches of the European Party Groups to which the chosen national parties belong: European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Party, European People's Party (EPP), Socialist and

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[14] The mismatch between number of votes and number of seats hold by UKIP is due to first-past-the-post electoral system used to elect MPs to the House of Commons.

Democrats (S&D) Party, European Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) Party, and Europe of Nation and Freedom (ENF) Party.

A few words should be spent on the minor parties included in this article. Both UKIP and LN have recently completed the transition from a single-issue party to the more traditional prototype of PRRPs: the former has added strong xenophobic and anti-immigration stances to its Eurosceptic platform (e.g. Dennison and Goodwin, 2015: 186), while the latter has moved from a pure ethno-nationalistic party to an authoritarian xenophobic one (Perlmutter, 1996: 243; Carvalho, 2013: 143). The M5S is a different case: it defines itself as a 'non-party' with a 'non-statute', beyond 'left-right' ideology.[15] While it has populist features – anti-elitism, emphasis on direct democracy, Manichean visions, charismatic leadership, etc. (Taggart, 1995; Mosca, 2014: 48) – its message does not contain any xenophobic expression or socio-cultural discrimination (Lanzone, 2014: 61).

I hypothesize that both RRPs and PPs exploit the window of opportunity offered by the refugee crisis to foster their anti-establishment claims (Hypothesis 2). Moreover, RRPPs add also authoritarian and xenophobic stances (Hypothesis 3). Due to the absence of a pure PP in the United Kingdom, Hypothesis 2 is tested only on M5S in Italy in a case study design. On the contrary, I test Hypothesis 3 on both LN, in Italy, and UKIP, in Great Britain, maintaining a comparative design.

## Discourse selection

Although I acknowledge the importance for agenda setting of many sources of political discourses, such as cabinet meeting, party programmes or propaganda, interviews, and so on, in this article I focus on a selected number of parliamentary debates. This choice is due to the importance attributed by the author to parliamentary debates to identify party ideologies. The majority of studies on the relationship between political ideology and stances on migration, have based their analyses on party manifestos (e.g. Alonso and Da Fonseca, 2011; Akkerman, 2012), media coverage (e.g. Castelli Gattinara, 2016; Grande and Schwarzbözl, 2017), or elite surveys (e.g. van der Brug and van Spanje, 2009; Whitefield and Rohrschneider, 2017). Only few scholars have considered political actors' speeches in parliamentary debates as a good proxy of party ideological positioning on the migration issue (van Dijk, 1997, 2000; Riva et al., 2008). In their vein, I believe in the centrality of parliamentary debates as they represent democratic discussions and allow to better grasp both political conflicts and ideological polarization over any issue though the analysis of rhetoric, topoi, argumentations, and so on (van Dijk, 2000: 25). Finally, this choice

[15] According to Article 4 of the M5S's non-statute: 'Five Star Movement is a free association of citizens. It is not a political party and it does not mean to become so in the future. It has no left or right ideologies, but ideas. It wants to full-fill an efficient and effective exchange of opinions and a democratic comparison excluding associative and party ties and without the mediation of leaderships and representations, recognizing to all citizens the governing and directing role normally ascribed to a few' (non-statute, Art. 4).

helps discourses comparison, since parliamentary debates usually have similar structures and contextual constrains.

Debates were downloaded from the web sites of national parliaments, searching in the parliamentary depository by three keywords ('refugee', 'crisis', 'asylum'). Among those results, only plenary assembly of the low chamber were considered, excluding committee debates and unofficial discourses in the parliament. Moreover, only debates related to the management of the refugee crisis – implementation of the European Agenda on Migration, refugee quotas, humanitarian channels, irregular migration, Mediterranean and western Balkans migration into the EU, borders, etc. – were considered. Appendix I shows a detailed list of the debates taken under consideration.

### Epistemology and method

#### Epistemology

This work takes a *critical realist approach* claiming that, although an objective reality exists, the production of discourses gives rise to a constructed social reality, which creates and maintains relations of power between different societal actors (Fairclough, 2010: 4). According to this view, discourses are not neutral, but *invest* reality with (political) meanings, setting policy priorities, and orientation: 'political actions or practices are at the same time discursive practices […] forms of text and talk in such cases have political *functions* and *implications*' (van Dijk, 1993: 14). Therefore, studying how any given issue is framed by political actors, gives much more insight into the process of policy definition and formation (Regonini, 2001: 211; Fischer, 2003: 15; Boswell *et al.*, 2011).

#### Method

In order to assess the relationship between party ideology and frames, I have used the last version of Antconc (version 3.5.0 Dev, 2016), a free textual analysis computing software (Anthony, 2005) which allows to perform content analysis of large corpora. I have followed a three-steps approach: first of all, with the help of the 'word list' tool,[16] I have quantified the occurrence of the key dimensions identified by my hypothesis, namely international humanitarianism and national securitization: Hypothesis 1, populism: Hypothesis 2, nativism and authoritarianism: Hypothesis 3 (see Table 2). Then, I have analysed each keyword in its broader context, to attribute the correct meaning to the frequency patterns.[17] Finally, I have extracted some emblematic

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[16] The word list tool allows to search for words frequency in the text. In Antconc, the combination of 'word's root +*' or '*+ word's root' gives all the possible words originating from that root (plural, gerund, negative noun, etc.). Keywords were collected both in English and in Italian, depending on the text under consideration.

[17] Antconc allows to visualize a concordance list, where each keyword is shown within its 'linguistic environments' (Krippendorff, 2013: 217), or 'context unit' (Prasad, 2008: 13) – users can select manually how many words visualize before and after the keyword. Moreover, by clicking on the key word is possible to read the entire passage where it is collocated and assess the dominant meaning(s) and the directional tone attached to it by the speaker (e.g. against or pro the EU, in a humanitarian or security fashion, etc.).

Table 2. Frequency results

| Parties | Italy | | | | UK | | | European Parliament | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | PD | FI | LN | M5S | LAB | CON | UKIP[a] | S&D | EPP | ECR | EFFD | ENF |
| **Definition of the problem** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Immigration | 17 | 20 | 25 | 23 | 103 | 171 | 0 | 16 | 6 | 1 | 10 | 5 |
| Asylum (seekers) | 21 | 1 | 3 | 8 | 23 | 65 | 0 | 23 | 12 | 5 | 3 | 2 |
| Refugee | 14 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 55 | 87 | 0 | 26 | 14 | 6 | 5 | 0 |
| Irregular | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Illegal | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 30 | 96 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Illegal migrants (ITA "clandestini") | 0 | 0 | 24 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Crisis | 27 | 20 | 4 | 7 | 11 | 19 | 0 | 18 | 6 | 3 | 8 | 0 |
| Mass | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| Invasion | 2 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| **National securitization** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Security | 6 | 0 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 9 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| Sovereignty | 5 | 3 | 7 | 13 | 0 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Control | 9 | 5 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 17 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 4 | 1 |
| Border | 4 | 4 | 5 | 0 | 13 | 36 | 0 | 5 | 10 | 1 | 3 | 5 |
| Return | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| Deportation | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **International humanitarianism** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Humanitarian | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 9 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| Solidarity | 8 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 20 | 3 | 2 | 6 | 0 |
| Human | 9 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 10 | 24 | 0 | 9 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 1 |
| Rights | 11 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 17 | 30 | 0 | 7 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 2 |
| **Authoritarianism** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Order | 2 | 4 | 0 | 3 | 4 | 8 | 0 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| Law | 5 | 0 | 2 | 5 | 11 | 28 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| **Nativism** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Culture | 3 | 13 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Identity | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Us | 62 | 37 | 69 | 81 | 36 | 50 | 0 | 38 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 7 |
| Them | 14 | 3 | 8 | 16 | 47 | 83 | 0 | 19 | 10 | 3 | 2 | 7 |
| **Populism** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Citizens | 17 | 0 | 12 | 30 | 7 | 5 | 0 | 11 | 4 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Elite | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Corruption | 1 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Business | 1 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| **Europe** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| European | 98 | 39 | 15 | 11 | 20 | 71 | 1 | 49 | 26 | 6 | 26 | 0 |
| Union | 87 | 38 | 12 | 10 | 7 | 31 | 1 | 24 | 8 | 2 | 28 | 0 |
| Europe | 182 | 150 | 32 | 106 | 11 | 46 | 0 | 57 | 21 | 5 | 18 | 8 |
| Total[b] | 20,256 | 11,224 | 8583 | 14,746 | 18,311 | 37,794 | 74 | 24,340 | 4429 | 1685 | 4194 | 1315 |

PD = Democratic Party; FI = Go Italy; LN = Northern League; M5S = Five Star Movement; LAB = Labour; CON = Conservatives; UKIP = UK Independent Party; S&D = Socialist and Democrats Party; EPP = European People's Party; ECR = European Conservatives and Reformists Party; EFDD = European Freedom and Direct Democracy Party; ENF = Europe of Nation and Freedom Party.
[a]UKIP's low scores are due the fact that the party has only one MP.
[b]Total length of interventions.
Source: Author's own elaboration.

excerpts that I will show to the reader in the next paragraphs. In order to avoid a 'cherry-picking' approach, I have used *ProtAnt*, a software tool designed to profile corpus texts and rank them by the degree to which they are prototypical, in relation to some kind of corpus level distinctiveness category, by keywords contained in them (Anthony and Baker, 2015: 278). In this case, however, since I had defined my analytical dimensions *a priori,* I have used my keywords list as reference corpus, to find which text contains them the most.

## Findings

### The representation of the refugee crisis by centre-left and centre-right parties

As expected (Hypothesis 1), centre-left party members, both in Italy and the United Kingdom, represent migration as a huge humanitarian crisis – they often refer to 'children', 'women', 'families', 'desperate people' – and stress the moral duty of assisting those persons in need, while coming up with long-term strategies and inclusive policies.[18] On the contrary, centre-right parties perceive immigration much more as an uncontrolled phenomenon, which needs to be strictly regulated by restoring national sovereignty over external borders. This is particularly evident in the United Kingdom, where CONs mention the word 'illegal' 96 times,[19] 'control' 17 times, 'border' 36 times, 'return' 11 times, and 'deportation' one time (out of a total of 37,794 tokens), more than any other political party or group in the sample. They often stress the need to combat illegal immigration and distinguish between 'genuine' and 'bogus' asylum seekers. On the contrary, in the case of Italy, FI's MPs often prefer to exploit the migration issue to increase their oppositional potential against the government as well as to express their distrust towards the EU, which seem to them being 'maneuvered by Germany' (Renato Brunetta, FI, IT_6) and unable to manage the crisis. They often

By looking at each word into its broader context I was able to exclude all those 'redundant' occurrences, which do not refer to any of the dimensions under consideration. For example, the word 'citizens' was often preceded by the word 'British', without any 'populist' or 'nativist' connotation. Similarly, the word 'order' was often used just as a 'function' word, in expression such as 'in order to', thus losing any political meaning. Table 2 shows results cleansed by those redundant frequencies.

[18] A reader can be surprised to see in Table 2 that PD's MPs use the lemma 'security' more often than FI's and CON's MPs. However, if one looks at this word in its context, it appears clear that the formers mainly use it to explain the reasons of their Europeanism, while the latters mainly use this lemma to stress the importance of border controls and security checks to maintain national security. The same is valid for humanitarian and related words. Although centre-right representatives use the word 'human' and 'humanitarian' more often than centre-left MPs, they mostly use it to call for a restrictive revision of the European Convention of Human Rights, both to make the recognition of international protection and the appeal against deportation more difficult. A detailed analysis of each keyword in context is available upon request.

[19] Though the 'collocate' tool, Antconc allows to find out how probable is for a word to come with another. This tool provides a two-way standard collocation strength measure: log-likelihood ($P < 0.05$) as a first-pass statistic and then Mutual Information (MI), as the effect size measure. In this way it is guaranteed that all the collocates displayed by the software are statistically significant. In the case of CON, 'immigration' is the word that co-occurs most often after the word 'illegal' (only the words 'to', 'the', 'and', 'working' score a highest frequency), with a MI of 0.6. Therefore, I can affirm with 95% degrees of confidence that most of the time CON's representatives refer to illegal immigration.

Table 3. Findings

| Parties | Issue | |
|---|---|---|
| | Refugee crisis | European Union (EU) |
| National level | | |
| Centre-left (PD, LAB) | Humanitarian crisis | More solidarity needed |
| Centre-right (FI, CON) | Nationalism | Horizontal Euroscepticism |
| | Horizontal Euroscepticism[a] | |
| Radical Right Populist Parties (RRPPs) (LN; UKIP) | Corruption | Euroscepticism[b] |
| Populist Parties (M5S) | Corruption | Euroscepticism |
| European level | | |
| S&D | Humanitarian crisis | Horizontal Euroscepticism |
| | | More EU integration |
| EPP | Humanitarian crisis | More EU integration |
| ECR | Security crisis | Less EU integration |
| EFDD | Humanitarian crisis (M5S) | Horizontal Euroscepticism |
| | Security crisis (UKIP) | More EU integration (M5S) |
| | | Radical Euroscepticism (UKIP) |
| ENF | Security crisis | Euroscepticism |

PD = Democratic Party; LAB = Labour; FI = Go Italy; CON = Conservatives; LN = Northern League; UKIP = UK Independent Party; M5S = Five Star Movement; S&D = Socialist and Democrats Party; EPP = European People's Party; ECR = European Conservatives and Reformists Party; EFDD = European Freedom and Direct Democracy Party; ENF = Europe of Nation and Freedom Party.

[a] Opposition towards other MSs (Bardi, 2014).

[b] Different degrees of opposition towards some or all of the components of the European Union (institutions, policies, community, elite).

Source: Author's own elaboration.

blame the Prime Minister's lack of negotiation skills, credibility, and authority in Brussels, accusing him to 'have sold out our sovereignty; [...] have accepted German predominance in Europe in exchange for its acquiescence on your [the Government] economic policy' (Renato Brunetta, FI, IT_4) (Table 3).

> Unfolding across Europe and the north of Africa is a *humanitarian* crisis on a scale not seen since the Second World War. [...] *Terrible* images of *families* and *children* in *great distress* continue to fill our television screens. [...] Does it adequately describe the *people*—the *desperate* parents carrying *children* at the Hungarian border and the *children* sleeping on the streets in Greece? Is the Government's decision not to take any refugee from Europe sustainable from a *moral* and practical point of view? Although I understand the Government's reluctance to take part in the proposed quota system, surely an offer of some help would live up to *the historic tradition* our country has always had (Andy Burnham (LAB), UK_5, *my emphasis*).

> The migration phenomenon that is investing Europe has *structural dimensions* and ask for a *common middle and long-range policy*, a *plurality of instruments* and measures (Marina Sereni (PD), IT_4, *my emphasis and translation*).

> [...] it is not immigration but *uncontrolled immigration* that I believe is *unsustainable*. [...] it is imperative that we first reassert *sovereignty* over our national borders (Kevin Hollinrake (CON), UK_4, *my emphasis*).

> […] two are the issues on which the opposition, and Go Italy at the frontline, insist since long time: increase *control* over EU's external frontiers and *return illegal immigrants* (Laura Ravetto (FI), IT_4, *my emphasis and translation*).

Moreover, the two main political parties in the United Kingdom are divided on the impact of immigration in their country: while Conservatives represent the United Kingdom as a country which has lost control of its borders and is threatened by an unprecedented number of aliens, Labours stress the multicultural identity of their country as a source of social and economic enrichment for the nation.

> The *culture* and *identity* of our country—for centuries an *open, outward-looking, seafaring nation*—has itself been *shaped* by centuries of inward immigration, and it is all the *richer* for it (Andy Burnham (LAB), UK_4, *my emphasis*).

> Immigration now stands at its highest level ever, with *huge social and economic consequences* for our country. […] such a colossal increase in our population is *unsustainable* and *sensible controls are needed*. Through our ever-closer integration with the European Union, I fear that *we have lost sight of our place* in the world as a *global, trading nation*, neglecting our close ties with the English-speaking world and *Commonwealth*, and instead aligning ourselves most closely with the one region of the world where economic growth is stagnating (Kevin Hollinrake (CON), UK_4, *my emphasis*).

Summarizing, centre-left and centre-right parties differ both in terms of problem framing and policy proposals. Centre-left parties represent refugee and immigration as structural phenomena, to be regulated, but also accepted and integrated into European societies. Therefore, they call for a coordinated European response based on 'humanity' and 'solidarity'. On the contrary, CONs frame the crisis as a dangerous security, social, and economic threat to the nation. They criticize the legitimacy of EU's decisions to manage the crisis and call for the restoration of 'sovereign powers', the enforcing of the rule of law and the enhancement of borders controls and effective return policies. In the case of Italy, however, FI's MPs mainly use the migration issue to criticize government's inability to represent national interests at the European level. At least in the Italian case, the government/opposition variable seems to be relevant in explaining party positions on immigration, even more than party ideological position. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is partially disconfirmed in the case of Italy.

### The representation of the refugee crisis by RRPPs and new PPs[20]

In Italy, issue framing differs consistently between LN and M5S: from the one side, LN's representatives use 24 times (out of 8583 total tokens) the words 'illegal migrant(s)' ('clandestino(i)' in Italian) while they employ only twice the word 'refugee', showing an overall criminalization of the issue. From the other side,

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[20] A clear short coming of this paper is the impossibility to compare UKIP and LN at the national level, due to the low participation of the former in the parliamentary debates taken under consideration. Therefore, the considerations contained in this paragraph refer exclusively to LN (case study).

M5S's MPs opt instead for employing the terms 'immigrant(s)' (23 times out of 14,746 total frequencies), 'refugee' (4) and 'asylum' (8).

As expected (Hypothesis 2), the refugee crisis is highly politicized by both parties, which include the issue into their rhetoric to oppose the ruling government. Both parties stress government's inability to come up with any good solution to the crisis, its lack of credibility in EU's negotiations and its inability to guarantee security and protect national borders. Moreover, both parties build a strong connection between the refugee crisis and corruption, seeing in the reception of asylum seekers an illicit business through which entrepreneurs, connected with the government, receive economic profits in exchange for votes. Alessandro di Battista, leader of the M5S, explicitly refers to the existence of a 'criminal connection between politicians and immigration, intended as the possibility to speculate on desperate people' (Di Battista, IT_4). He goes even further, by saying that 'illegal immigration, here in Italy, is a new form of public funding to political parties' (*ivi*). In LN's discourses the security dimension is stronger: they accuse the Government to attract illegal immigrants by promoting permissive asylum policies, thus contributing to insecurity and criminality all over the country.

> I am sure that many social cooperatives have celebrated, since due to direct and indirect costs of immigration, taxpayers have disbursed three million euros. I think that citizens are less happy, since their cities are now transformed into a *no man land*, invisibles, where *security is abandoned* and the *rule of the jungle* is in place. We think that only those who respects the *rules,* who respect the *laws* of this country should receive benefits (Massimiliano Fedriga (LN), IT_4, *my emphasis and translation*).

Nevertheless, I must partially disconfirm Hypothesis 3: while I found evidence of authoritarian, law, and order stances in LN's speeches, I did not find any explicit xenophobic or racist stances. A reason may be that LN's representatives are influenced by the institutional pressure exercised by the parliamentary context.

### The representation of the refugee crisis at the EU level

The frequency analysis shows that at the European level, MEPs usually employ widely accepted legal categories ('immigrants', 'asylum seekers', 'refugees'), except for ENF's Italian MEPs, which use three times (out of a total of 1315 tokens) the term 'illegal immigrants' ('clandestini' in Italian).[21]

On the other hand, the positional difference between centre-left and centre-right coalitions that I have found at the national level is confirmed. The emphasis of ECR's and EPP's Italian and British MEPs is on fighting irregular immigration and human trafficking, to keep external borders secure, while also addressing the root

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[21] The difference in framing between the national and the European level is particularly striking in the case of the UK right-wing British parties. They move from an overall criminalization of the issue at the national level (see paragraph above), to a much more moderate framing at the EU level – where ECR's MEPs never use the word 'illegal'.

causes of migration in the countries of origin. On the contrary, S&D's Italian and British delegations stress the need to enforce effective and fair European immigration and asylum policies, while fostering solidarity and share responsibilities among MSs. This dimension is particularly relevant in the Italian S&D's MEPs discourses: as the frequency analysis shows, they used the word 'solidarity' 20 times (out of a total of 24,340 words), more than any other EPPG in the sample.

> The migration phenomenon cannot be handled with slogans, but promoting concrete, *courageous* and *forward-looking* actions, with and *holistic approach* (Kashetu Kyenge (S&D - PD), EP_5, *my emphasis and translation*).

> I think we need a fundamentally different approach, with absolute priority on *reducing the number of migrants entering the EU* from outside. The current human-rights-driven agenda merely encourages migration. […] We should not expect Member States to provide additional EU budget funding to cover migration policies (Geoffrey Van Orden (ECR - CON), EP_1, *my emphasis*).

Coming to the RRPP and PP, UKIP's and LN's delegations represent the refugee crisis very differently from M5S's MEPs. The latters look at the refugee crisis as a humanitarian crisis, that calls into question the funding European values of justice and human dignity, and advocate for more solidarity among MSs. On the contrary, UKIP's and LN's delegates represent migration as an uncontrolled phenomenon and a security threat and use it to enforce their anti-EU claims. In particular, UKIP's delegates call for a withdrawal from the UE and a return to nationalistic, restrictive, and punitive immigration policies. I argue that this can be taken as a proxy for the low level of cohesion within the EFDD coalition, already identified by other scholars through the analysis of roll call votes (e.g. Ivaldi *et al.*, 2016).

> The EU has a commitment to *endless*, *mass*, *uncontrolled* migration, both within its borders and from without. […] If the British people want their government to have any control on migration whatsoever, then they must vote to leave the European Union on 23 June (Gerard Batten (EFDD - UKIP), EP_2, *my emphasis*).

> Since years we are the only one who are denouncing the *danger* of illegal migration, that is invading Italy and the EU, and for this you have called us racists, populists, xenophobic. *You*, Commission and Italian government, have made a lot of chitchat and zero facts […] even worse […] *you* have declared that immigrants are resources and they have to be helped all. *Shame on you*! *Shame on you* because you are making fun of the poor people. *Shame on you* because you are responsible of this *mass invasion* (Mara Bizzotta (ENF - LN), EP_1, *my emphasis and translation*).

> […] In the Council decision, I did not see any common policy, any solidarity […]. I saw solidarity towards concrete walls and barbed wire, I saw the same attachment to hypocrite economic and electoral interests as usual. […] *Selfishness* and *disregard* by few Member States cannot kill the *dignity* of all the others, of the entire Europe, otherwise will be the end of the European project as a whole. […]

> The European Parliament asks for it, the European citizens want it. Rule of law, justice and *humanity* demand it (Fabio Massimo Cataldo (EFDD – M5S), EP_4, *my emphasis and translation*).

To conclude, in general high coherence exists between centre-left and centre-right national parties and EPPGs, with the former holding more liberal positions towards refugee and the latter owing a far more nationalistic, 'law and order' approach. In the case of RRPPs and PPs, however, there is a lack of cohesion: while M5S's MEPs point to the humanitarian dimension of the crisis and call for a collective and coordinated EU's intervention, LN's and UKIP's members stress the security dimension of the crisis and blame EU's management.

## The representation of the EU

The refugee crisis has called into question the role of the EU in the management of this and other crises. A difference exists between centre-right and centre-left positions on the involvement of the EU at the national and EU level. At the national level, centre-right parties perceive EU's immigration and asylum policies as being against national interest and security: CONs blame the imposition of a compulsory EU relocation scheme, while FIs accuse the EU of inaction. On the other hand, centre-left parties, both in Italy and in the United Kingdom, advocate for further integration in the area of freedom, security, and justice, coupled with solidarity and share responsibilities among MSs.

At the European level, instead, the divide between centre-left and -right parties approaches to the EU disappears, since both S&D's and EPP's MEPs held pro-EU positions, calling for a coherent and effective European solution to the crisis. Nonetheless, another aspect emerges – particularly in the case of Italian S&D's and EPP's MEPs – namely the attribution of responsibilities for the failure of European immigration and asylum policies to the egoism of some MSs that oppose any collective management of the crisis.[22]

RRPPs and PPs held very different positions towards the EU between national and EU level. While at the national level both blame the EU for representing the interests of banks and oligarchies instead of those of European citizens, at the EU level there is a lack of cohesion among the EFDD's Group: while M5S's representatives call for a collective management of the crisis and accuse the Council to be 'egoist in front of a global emergency, in front of a crucial point in which the EU should show solidarity' (Ignazio Corrao, IT_6),[23] the British delegation advocates for United Kingdom's withdrawal form the Union.

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[22] Bardi defines this political behaviour as 'horizontal Euroscepticism', which 'manifests itself in the form of statements, positions, and actions, which express negative attitudes or feelings by citizens, parties or political actors from one given MS towards other, one or more, selected MS' (2014: 358).

[23] This is a typical example of "vertical Euroscepticism", directed against EU's institutions (e.g. Bardi, 2014).

## Conclusions

Despite the restrict number of debates analysed in this paper, some patterns have clearly emerged. The content analysis has confirmed that a cleavage between centre-left parties (PD and Labour Party in this case) and centre-right parties (here FI and Conservative) exists, both in framing and policy positions on the refugee crisis. Centre-left parties represent it mainly as a humanitarian crisis, which needs to be addressed by MSs solidarity and co-ordinate, long-term policy responses. On the contrary, CON's and FI's MPs differ in the way they refer to the refugee crisis. While the formers represent it as an uncontrolled phenomenon, which calls for urgent restrictive and punitive measures, aimed to reinforce national sovereignty and borders control, the latters exploit the migration issue to enhance their oppositional potential against the government. Therefore, at least in the case of Italy, the government/opposition variable seems to be relevant in explaining right-wing party positions on migration, even more than ideological positioning. Coming to RRPPs (here LN and the United Kingdom Independence Party) and PPs (here the M5S), they all exploit the political-opportunity offered by the refugee crisis to foster their anti-establishment claims. Nevertheless, while LN and UKIP represent the refugee peak as a national threat, which raises criminality and insecurity within host societies, M5S tends to position itself closer to the left continuum of the spectrum, underling the humanitarian emergency. At the European level, these differences in framing among party families are blurred, since all the EPPGs tend to represent the refugee crisis using more widely accepted 'legal' terms.

Another feature that emerges from the content analysis performed in this paper, is that the refugee crisis is directly connected, by all the political forces, with the question of legitimacy of the EU. While centre-left representatives held a pro-EU approach, both at the national and European level, centre-right representatives diverge also on this issue between the two level of governance. Centre-right MPs held strong nationalistic positions and criticize EU's immigration and asylum policies. On the contrary, EPP's and ECR's MEPs call for a collective and coordinated EU leadership to manage the crisis. As regard as RRPPs and PPs, while at the national level they both use the refugees issue to denounce illegitimacy and corruption of the establishment, at the EU level they decline their anti-institutional claims in a very different way. UKIP's delegates advocate for the withdrawal from the Union, while M5S's MEPs call for greater integration to manage the crisis.

Coming to framing cohesion among EPPGs, the content analysis performed in this paper has shown high cohesiveness among S&D, EPP, and ECR, coupled with low levels of cohesion within the EFDD Group. This pattern is in line with what already found by other scholars through the analysis of roll call votes (e.g. Ivaldi *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, since M5S's representatives call for 'less government' at the national level, while at the European level advocate for 'more Europe' to manage the crisis, this could be an interesting line of research to better understand how the

party declines its 'anti-establishment' character, both at the national and European level.

This study is affected by at least two shortcomings. First of all, it was not possible to capture the political position of UKIP's MPs, due to the lack of participation by this party in the parliamentary debates considered. Second, due to the limited number of countries considered and the presence of just one PP, the conclusions of this paper are hardly generalizable. A possible solution to overcome these problems could be the enlargement of both the temporal and geographical shifts taken under consideration.

## Acknowledgements

## Financial Support

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## Appendix I

Table A1. List of parliamentary debates (plenary meetings)

| Date | Title<br>Italy | Reference code |
|---|---|---|
| 27 June 2016 | Comunicazioni del Presidente del Consiglio dei ministri in vista del Consiglio europeo del 28 e 29 giugno 2016 | IT_1 |
| 16 March 2016 | Comunicazioni del Presidente del Consiglio dei ministri in vista del Consiglio europeo del 18 e 19 marzo 2016 | IT_2 |
| 17 February 2016 | Comunicazioni del Presidente del Consiglio dei ministri in vista del Consiglio europeo del 18 e 19 febbraio 2016 | IT_3 |
| 14 October 2015 | Comunicazioni del Presidente del Consiglio dei ministri in vista del Consiglio europeo del 15 e 16 ottobre 2015 | IT_4 |
| 18 November 2015 | Iniziative in ambito europeo e internazionale, per l'apertura di canali umanitari in relazione all'emergenza connessa ai flussi migratori e misure per contrastare il traffico di esseri umani | IT_5 |
| 22 April 2015 | Comunicazioni del Presidente del Consiglio dei ministri in vista del Consiglio europeo straordinario del 23 aprile 2015 | IT_6 |
| | United Kingdom | |
| 9 May 2016 | Immigration Bill | UK_1 |
| 14 December 2015 | European Agenda on Migration | UK_2 |
| 20 October 2015 | Mass Migration | UK_3 |
| 13 October 2015 | Immigration Bill | UK_4 |
| 16 September 2015 | Migration | UK_5 |
| 15 September 2015 | United Kingdom Borders (Control and Sovereignty) | UK_6 |
| | European Parliament (EP) | |
| 7 June 2016 | State of play of the external aspects of the European migration agenda: towards a new 'Migration Compact' | EP_1 |
| 12 April 2016 | The situation in the Mediterranean and the need for a holistic EU approach to migration – debate on the report presented by the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee (2015/2095(INI)) | EP_2 |
| 8 March 2016 | Communication on implementing the European Agenda on Migration | EP_3 |
| 16 September 2015 | Conclusions of the Justice and Home Affairs Council on migration (14 September 2015) | EP_4 |
| 9 September 2015 | Migration and refugees in Europe | EP_5 |
| 20 May 2015 | European Agenda on Migration | EP_6 |

Source: Author's own elaboration.