Weapons or victims?

The impact of weaponized migration on the European Union's self-perception and identity

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Abstract

This thesis examines how the European Parliament portrays weaponized migration, a phenomenon in which states mobilize migrants against another state to force concessions. Furthermore, the thesis analyses how instances of weaponized migration impact European identity. The theory of ontological security is applied to analyse the threat constructions and changes in self-perception these incidents may trigger. Morocco's weaponization of migration against Spain and Belarus's weaponization against Poland are analysed through a comparative research design. The results display that Belarus's actions caused greater ontological insecurity for the European Parliament than Morocco's. While the political left views the migrants as victims in both situations, the right perceives them as an existential threat even when the coercer state is not viewed as dangerous. The thesis also reveals that the left will attempt to reinforce the perceived EU identity of being a human rights defender and global norm-setter. The political right will instead form an alternative identity based on being a protector of EU citizens, keeping the threat of migrants and the coercer state outside EU territory at any cost.

Key words: Weaponized migration, Refugee portrayals, Ontological security, European identity.
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1 Introduction

The right of an individual to seek asylum when persecuted is integral to international law. In the European Union, this right is codified through Article 18 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, confirmed and adopted into law by all member states (Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union, 2012). The EU has in recent years seen a sharp increase in asylum claims, reaching more than 1.2 million applications in 2015 and averaging roughly half a million applications yearly ever since (Eurostat, 2022). Arrivals of migrants and refugees are increasingly portrayed as threats within EU policy (Dommernik, 2018, 96-99). The influx of refugees has caused political disagreements across the Union. While some member states have welcomed arrivals, others view them as risks to the EU's safety and stability.

Refugees and asylum seekers are protected through international treaties and UN bodies. Migrants, on the other hand, lack a parallel set of legislation protecting their rights. Migrants are defined to have left their country to better their circumstances, but many of them are also in need of international protection. Since these groups often face similar challenges and are not always distinguishable from each other, this thesis will refer to them as displaced individuals (McAdam & Wood: 2021: 2-7).

The principle of non-refoulment, incorporated in both international and EU law, protects individuals from being returned to a territory where they risk cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment. This principle means that forcefully returning a displaced person without individual assessment constitutes an illegal pushback and violates human rights (Kakosimou & Vaso 2017: 167-168). Member states and EU border agencies have routinely engaged in unlawful pushbacks across the border, physical abuse against displaced individuals, and restricting their access to asylum procedures (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015, 57-60). According to Kelly M. Greenhill, this threat construction, coupled with the political tension surrounding refugees and migrants, has made it possible for other states to weaponize migration against the

EU. By using vulnerable individuals as instruments, states can mobilize migration flows against the EU to reach their foreign policy objectives (Greenhill, 2010).

In 2021 the EU was subjected to weaponized migration from Morocco and Belarus, which mobilized thousands of displaced individuals toward the EU borders. In both cases, the border guards of Spain and Poland responded with violence, illegal pushbacks, and denying the right to seek asylum (Amnesty International, 2021: Greenhill, 2022). These incidents are part of a broader trend where states such as Turkey and Libya have used similar tactics to extract concessions from the EU (Ela & Alas, 2021, 187: Tsourapas, 2017, 2369). Attempts of weaponized migration have further increased the ongoing threat construction of refugees, making the EU more resistant to providing access to asylum procedures. In addition, the weaponization has taken EU leaders by surprise and forced them to re-evaluate their relationships with the coercer states (Greenhill, 2022, 156-157). While weaponized migration is a game between two states, the victims are the displaced individuals trapped between two hostile governments, both unwilling to take responsibility for them (Greenhill, 2010, 2).

What is puzzling is that despite the human rights violations and threat constructions of refugees visible during both regular and weaponized migration flows, the European Union's identity has strong connections to being a human rights advocate in the area of migration. Its self-perception rests on the idea of being a global advocate for human dignity and respect, an example other actors should follow. (Niemann & Zaun, 2018, 4). With a self-perception of being a human rights defender, it is puzzling that displaced individuals are left stranded at EU borders to suffer abuse or even death. How do policy and actions violating the rights of displaced individuals coexist with a self-perception rooted in being a protector of those very rights?

1.1   Purpose and research question

Can the attempts of weaponized migration impact the EU's identity and self-perception? The purpose of this thesis is to analyse the puzzle of how a European identity based on human rights values can coexist with abuse, pushbacks, and even

death on the EU borders, particularly within weaponized migration. It will examine how these attempts of weaponized migration are portrayed within the EU, specifically within the European Parliament. Since the European Parliament includes politicians from all EU member states across the political spectrum, the findings represent the broader portrayal of weaponized migration within European politics. By analysing the portrayals of weaponized migration, this thesis will also answer how European identity is impacted by such extreme circumstances at the external border. In addition to comparing the two cases, the thesis will also investigate whether the impact on identity differs between the political right versus the left in the European Parliament.

The thesis will utilize the theory of ontological security to assess how changes in the established routine between these state actors affect the EU's self-perception and sense of security. The theory of ontological security will help analyse how the EUs identity depends on interactions with other actors and understand the threat constructions and enemy images used to portray refugees and the coercer states. In addition to addressing the above-mentioned research puzzle, this thesis will also contribute to the knowledge accumulation of the currently understudied area of weaponized migration (Greenhill, 2010, 12). Based on this, the research questions will be as follows:

- *How is weaponized migration against EU member states portrayed within the European Parliament?*
- *What implications does this portrayal have on the self-image and identity of the EU?*

2   Background

2.1 Weaponized migration at the Morocco-Spain border

Morocco and the EU usually have a cooperative relationship. The EU offers development aid in return for border control and reducing arrivals of migrants to the Union (Jacobs, 2018, 10-12). In May 2021, roughly 8000 people illegally crossed the border between Morocco and Ceuta, a Spanish enclave in North Africa. 1500 of these were unaccompanied minors. The individuals were coerced and encouraged to cross into EU territory by Moroccan authorities and border guards. Morocco's weaponization of migration was a response to Spain's decision to treat a West-Saharan opposition leader in a Spanish hospital. Morocco further promised that more crossings would follow if Spain did not meet their demands (Greenhill 2021). Spanish border guards responded by physically abusing both adults and children, including throwing minors into the sea and conducting illegal pushbacks. Within the following days, over 5000 individuals were forcibly sent back without being able to request asylum or be individually processed, a right within the EU. Many EU leaders supported Spain's actions at the EU border with Morocco despite this (Amnesty International, 2021).

2.2 Weaponized migration at the Belarus-Poland border

Belarus and the EU had an antagonistic relationship for years, which escalated during the fraudulent election of 2020. The weaponization of displaced individuals by Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko began in June 2021. The situation escalated during October and November 2021, when thousands of displaced

individuals from the Middle East arrived at the Polish border. According to Kelly M. Greenhill, Lukashenko weaponized migration to respond to sanctions imposed by the EU and create political division within the Union (Greenhill, 2022, 157-158). Poland responded with violence, declaring a state of emergency at the border and subjecting displaced individuals to violence and illegal pushbacks. Border guards did not allow anyone to leave the Polish border on the Belarusian side, leaving thousands to sleep outside for weeks in harsh weather conditions (Charlish & Hoske, 2021). According to Médecins Sans Frontières, at least 21 people died during the months-long humanitarian catastrophe (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2021). Poland stressed that keeping the border closed was its duty as an EU member state (Charlish & Hoske, 2021). Ursula Von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, supported Poland in defending the EU border. And while Von der Leyen committed to providing humanitarian assistance, she stressed that the priority is the threat posed from Belarus against the EU and its citizens (European Commission, 2021).

3 Previous research

This section covers previous research conducted on refugee and migrant perceptions, European identity when faced with migration, and the phenomena of weaponized migration. This section will also demonstrate the gaps in the current research that this thesis seeks to fill.

3.1 Migration resistance within the EU

Numerous scholars have researched the European Union's stance toward migrants and asylum seekers. Caroline Boswells reveals that for decades, policymakers looking to blame social issues on immigrants have increasingly portrayed migrants and refugees as a security threat to justify fortifying external borders (Boswell, 2003, 623-624). Furthermore, migration has been widely securitized by politicians. Andrew Geddes explains securitization as the act of framing an issue as a threat, giving it enough urgency to place it high on the political agenda. In addition to Geddes, numerous other scholars have studied securitization in a European context, making it a well-documented phenomenon (Geddes, 2009, 18-19: Himmrich, 2018, 4-5: Huysmans, 2000: Hammerstad, 2014). While securitization is related to the kind of threat constructions this thesis will analyse, it will not be explored further here. Instead, the focus will be on how migration affects identity formation.

According to Stefania Panebianco & Iola Fontana, the 2015 refugee crisis intensified migration resistance. More than one million displaced individuals crossed the EU's external border in 2015 alone, and thousands died trying to cross the Mediterranean (Panebianco & Fontana, 2018, 1-3). Jeroen Dommernik explains that the EU has been unable to agree to a common asylum and migration policy to manage the flows. The solutions created for the refugee crisis were temporary and differed widely between member states. Little political will existed to distribute arrivals evenly (Dommernik, 2018, 96-99). The lack of internal solutions has

instead resulted in a militarized external border to stop arrivals entirely, according to Julia Himmrich. Military-grade surveillance is frequently used at the border, and NATO forces patrol crossing points in the Mediterranean (Himmrich, 2018, 5).

The threat construction of refugees and migrants has manifested through heated political debates. While some argued that European countries have an obligation to help refugees, others wanted to reduce access to asylum. Migrants and refugees have increasingly been portrayed as threats, terrorists in disguise, and dangerous to the safety of European citizens. According to van Prooijen, Krouwel, and Emmers, positive portrayals of migrants and refugees have mainly been concentrated to the political left. These groups often feel that asylum and protection within the EU are rights for vulnerable individuals. The political right has overwhelmingly carried out negative portrayals. These groups advocate more for increased border controls and restricted access to protection in the EU (Prooijen et al., 2018, 142-145).

The portrayal of refugees is also carried out by media outlets and the civil society in European countries, where descriptions often lean heavily toward anti-immigration rhetoric and xenophobic attitudes (De Cock et al., 2016). In addition, underrepresentation and unfavourable portrayals lead to increasing negative stereotypes and a stronger tendency to support politics aimed at reducing access to asylum (Eberl et al., 2018). While not every portrayal is negative, Lilie Chouliaraki and Tijana Stolic's research reveal that when the media frames refugees as needing aid in a humanitarian context, the refugees are deprived of agency. The portrayal infantilizes displaced individuals and reduces them to their status as refugees and not individuals (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017). As these scholars show, portrayals of refugees and migrants are studied across various actors. However, the portrayals that weaponized migration stimulate have received little scholarly attention, which this thesis will look to remedy. In addition, since the 2015 refugee crisis has intensified threat construction on refugees and radically changed migration policy within the EU, updated studies on these threat constructions are needed.

3.2 European identity & migration

The EU's identity and self-perception are crucial for the Union to uphold. What this identity consists of is highly complex and can vary significantly. Within a diverse actor such as the EU, many different identities will exist simultaneously, sometimes in conflict with one another. It may also clash with national identities. However, for the EU as an actor, identity can be based on democratic rights, "feeling European", adhering to EU laws, and respecting human rights conventions (Guerra & Trenz, 2019, 220-228). Regarding refugees and migrants, the EU looks to uphold an image and self-perception of being a human rights defender. As Barbulescu, Niemann and Zaun explains, the EU views itself as a global example regarding human rights, creating norms others should seek to follow. The EU's identity and self-image are tied to this self-perception, making the EU want to uphold it (Barbulescu, 2017, 302: Niemann & Zaun, 2018, 4). The Union has strong human rights norms and laws, and EU bodies, like the border agency Frontex, are obliged to uphold these (Perkowski 2018: 471). The EU wishes to keep migrants and refugees out, and simultaneously save lives and protect human rights. These are clashing objectives and create issues with upholding the EU's image as a human rights advocate (Christodoulou, 2016, 323-324).

When assessing where these threat constructions originate, scholars offer different explanations. According to Heather Johnson, states in the global north often suspect that people fleeing humanitarian disasters are not "genuine" refugees. Instead, they are opportunists looking to exploit the West's welfare systems (Johnson, 2011, 1027). Similarly, Henk Van Houtum argues that European governments believe that massive influxes of migrants will arrive without harsh border controls and overburden the EUs resources, threatening stability and prosperity for EU citizens (Van Houtum, 2010, 965-966). The EU's resistance to migration is also argued to be rooted in colonial ideas of superiority, with the EU's identity resting less on being a global human rights advocate and more on seeing itself as superior to the Global South. An image of "civilized" Europeans is constructed through imperialist ideals, whose security is under threat from a racialized, "non-civilized" other (Isakjee et al., 2020, 1757-1758).

Furthermore, Polly Pallister-Wilkins states that while the EU considers refugees and migrants entitled to aid, this is connected to a power dynamic where the recipient individual becomes dependent on and is expected to feel grateful to the donor state. Instead of being treated as a right, the aid is looked at as a voluntary

contribution and can be used to bolster the donor's self-perception (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015, 57-59).

3.3   The externalization of migration

The previous section illustrates that the EU aims to reduce arrivals and simultaneously maintain its identity as a human rights defender. Sandra Lavenex and Emek M. Uçarer's identified the practice of keeping migrants out of Europe by tasking third countries with guarding the EU's external border nearly two decades ago (Lavenex & Uçarer, 2004, 421-427). Building on their research, Andrew Geddes shows that the third countries receive extensive funding to handle migration for the Union. While the explicit policy of externalization is based on human rights and international law, keeping migrants out of Europe is prioritized higher (Geddes, 2009, 25-28). The EU can effectively turn away asylum seekers without explicitly breaching their human rights laws by deeming the partnership countries as "safe enough" for asylum seekers and refugees (Himmrich, 2018, 2-3). In other words, the EU can uphold its identity of being a human rights defender by arguing that vulnerable individuals get protection elsewhere. These countries often have less capacity to protect the rights of migrants and asylum seekers (Frelick et al., 191-193).

According to Nefise Ela and Gokarp Alas, earlier research has often overlooked that the partner countries are not passive recipients of EU policy but instead actors with agency over their own foreign policy goals (Ela & Alas, 2021, 188-189). Georgia Papagianni elaborates on this, stating that in North-African partnership countries like Morocco, handling migration is a source of domestic political tension. According to her, these countries feel disrespected by the EU for not getting the compensation they feel entitled to (Papagianni 2022, 2, 6-8). As the EU is now dependent on partners no longer satisfied with the terms of the agreements, these countries have gained the ability to leverage migration flows to their advantage (Irdem & Raychev 2021, 236: Greenhill, 2016, 329). As displayed above, externalization is crucial for the EU to maintain its value-based identity. Crucially

for this thesis, however, the partnerships have created an opportunity to weaponize migration against the EU, constructing a threat.

3.4   Weaponization of migration

As aforementioned, issues like constructing migrants as threats, securitization and externalization are covered by numerous scholars. However, weaponized migration has received far less academic attention. The phenomenon of weaponized migration has been mapped out and theorized by researcher Kelly M. Greenhill through numerous publications (Greenhill 2010: Greenhill 2016: Greenhill 2022). While commonly believed to be a rare occurrence, Greenhill demonstrates that weaponized migration is relatively common (Greenhill 2010, 12). Based on this, the essay will contribute to the knowledge accumulation of this underexplored issue.

Weaponized migration is, by Greenhill, explained as a coercion tactic used by a state against another state to achieve foreign policy goals. The coercer mobilizes or threatens to mobilize migration flows against their target's border to pressure them into concessions like lifting sanctions, increasing economic aid, or implementing political measures (Greenhill 2022, 157-158: Greenhill 2010). Greenhill has identified 81 cases of weaponized migration, and in more than half of the cases, the coercer reached all or most of its targets, giving it a high success rate (Greenhill, 2022, 158). States who perform weaponized migration are often at a military and economic disadvantage towards their targets, evident in Belarus's and Morocco's weaponization against the EU (Greenhill, 2010, 27-28).

Greenhill has identified the EU as a frequent target of weaponized migration. According to her, EU leaders lack knowledge about the phenomena and have been unsure how to respond (Greenhill 2022, 156-157). Lev Marder has criticized Greenhill's research. He argues that Greenhill's use of metaphors like "Weapons of Mass Migration" reinforces the idea of human beings as dangerous weapons threatening the security of western states. Marder further states that current research on the phenomena is too state-centric, giving little attention to the victims of the tactic, the displaced individuals (Marder 2018, 578-581). This thesis will address

this criticism by including the portrayal of displaced individuals exploited in weaponized migration. As research on refugee depictions demonstrate, how refugees and migrants are described and viewed affect policies, attitudes, and opportunities to seek asylum. Studying the phenomena from an individual perspective therefore has societal significance. In addition, this inclusion also contributes academically by bridging the gap between weaponized migration and refugee portrayals.

Building on Greenhill's work, Gerasimos Tsourapas has identified that states may use weaponized migration when they lack other means to achieve their foreign policy goals (Tsourapas 2017, 2368-2370). Tsourapas has studied Libya's frequent weaponization of migrants against the EU, a relationship that has repeatedly shifted between cooperative, coercive, and threatening (Tsourapas, 2017, 2376-2377). Crucial for this thesis, his research displays that even when a state threatens or coerces the EU, the perceived benefits of the migration partnerships make the Union agree to concessions. Other researchers like Irdem and Raychew identify Turkey as a frequent coercer against the EU (Irdem & Raychev, 2021, 243-244). Ela and Alas further argue that the EU's dependence on Turkey to handle migration has made the EU powerless to respond when coerced through migration flows (Ela & Alas, 2021, 190-194). As demonstrated, previous studies have focused on state responses to weaponized migration, not the portrayal of the events conducted by politicians. This research gap and how the portrayals impact the EU's identity will be addressed in this paper. In addition, the chosen cases will also contribute to knowledge accumulation. Greenhill has identified both Morocco and Belarus's actions as cases of weaponized migration. Since they both took place in 2021, little other research than Greenhill's classifications are available to date (Greenhill 2021: Greenhill 2022). Their novelty and the lack of previous research mean that this thesis will further contribute to understanding these events.

4   Theoretical framework

This thesis will utilize the theory of ontological security to answer the puzzle of how refugees are portrayed and how this impacts the EU's self-perception. This theory will capture how identity is shaped and maintained in relation to a defined other, in this case the coercer state and the displaced individuals. When applied to the portrayals within the European Parliament, the theory will display how the EU experiences the threat of weaponized migration. It will also be beneficial for understanding the threat constructions these events are likely to trigger.

4.1   Ontological security

Anthony Giddens has defined ontological security as the individual's desire to achieve "… a sense of continuity and order in events, including those not directly within the perceptual environment of the individual" (Giddens, 1991, 243). When an individual feels ontologically secure, they possess answers to existential questions. They feel confident with their self-identification in a changing world, their agency, morality, and capability (Giddens 1991, 47: Mitzen, 2006, 344). Actors need a basic trust system, which reinforces their identity to process the insecurity and unpredictability of life. Basic trust is crucial when responding to changing circumstances (Giddens 1991, 36-40). Giddens explains that the self's identity is not a given precondition, nor is it a trait or part of the personality. It is constructed through the self's routinized interactions with other actors. While identity represents how the self wants to be perceived, it also needs to be based on real interactions to hold up. The actor cannot entirely make it up, it needs to be confirmed in interactions with others. The identity must be solid enough to hold up during these interaction, but it is also fragile. Other narratives about the self can exist simultaneously, competing with the story the self prefers to identify with (Giddens, 1991, 52-55).

Building on Giddens's work, Jennifer Mitzen states that identity is a relational concept. The self-image's creation depends on building and upholding a routinized relationship with a distinct other. The ingroup's identity is set in opposition to the other, constructing the other in a manner that confirms their self-image. Both parts become attached to the dynamic between them, which means that changes in the other's behaviour challenge self-perception and results in feelings of deep uncertainty. The self no longer knows how to behave towards others and finds it difficult to predict their behaviour outcomes (Mitzen, 2006B, 342-345). Suppose the self is faced with more extensive changes in their routine and the behaviour of others. In that case, they may look to reinforce their own identity by projecting negative traits onto their significant others, constructing them as enemies (Mitzen 2006, 274). According to Alanna Krolikowski, actors with a healthy relationship can be more flexible when changes in behaviour occur and will be less likely to feel ontologically insecure and view the other as the enemy. If the connection is hostile, even small changes to the pattern will place the self in ontological insecurity (Krolikowski, 2008, 113).

Ontological security can be applied to individuals, groups, and state actors. Catarina Kinnvall and Jennifer Mitzen explains that when a state's ontological security is threatened, they attempt to return to a safer past where their identity was not at risk. Since the self-image is relational to the other, the state needs to demonize and negatively portray the other to maintain its positive identity (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2018, 826-828). Since feeling ontologically secure is subjective, states sometimes seek ontological security at the expense of physical security. Because of this, mutually destructive relationships can still provide ontological security if they confirm the self's identity, making the actors reluctant to change or deescalate the relationship (Mitzen & Larson 2017, 4-6).

Mitzen has expanded the theory of ontological security to a European context. She argues that European identity is tied to being a "voice of reason" in world politics, multilateralism, the rule of law, and respecting human rights (Mitzen 2006, 271). This identity is formed and sustained in relation to third countries. When faced with threats, the EU is theorized to either revert to nationalism, effectively creating a smaller ingroup, or strengthen the European self in relation to the threatening, non-European other (Mitzen 2006, 275-280). Mitzen further argues that due to the EU's reliance on inner cooperation and multilateralism being ingrained as the only

option to handle issues, a threat is unlikely to make the member states revert to nationalism (Mitzen 2006, 284). However, if sentiments that do not fit the ingroup's perception of accepted behaviour occur, the actor expressing these ideas may be stigmatized or excluded from the ingroup (Mitzen 2018, 400-401). Lastly, Mitzen has theorized that the member states' colonial past must be ignored for the EU to deny migrants entry and maintain its positive identity simultaneously. By suppressing the alternative narrative that the EUs prosperity is rooted in colonialism and racial exploitation, the Union can maintain its sense of self and project negative qualities onto states and people from the Global south instead. (Mitzen 2018, 409)

5 Research design

This section will introduce the method chosen to answer the research question, the selection of cases, and the choice of material. Lastly, the theoretical framework will be operationalized.

5.1 Method of analysis

Two debates from the European Parliament concerning two separate cases of weaponized migration will be analysed. This thesis will consist of a small-N comparative case study. Sandra Halperin and Oliver Heath explained that a small-n comparative case study has the advantage of high internal validity due to including a more detailed analysis. This means that the study results are likely accurate for the chosen cases. A small-N study also allows for a deeper understanding and comparison of the cases than quantitative research. However, selecting a small-N design can make absolute conclusions about the phenomena difficult since it is only tested on a few instances. While the findings cannot be argued as universally true for all portrayals of weaponized migration, this thesis provides a vital starting ground for similar, more extensive studies in the future (Halperin & Heath, 2020, 237-238).

Carol Bacchi's strategy for examining problem formulations within public policy will be used to answer the research question. Her framework will be modified using the theory of ontological security to fit this study. Bacchi has formulated the method "What is the problem represented to be?", which can be used to examine public policy critically. The central assumption is that the kind of solutions presented by a political actor reveals what they feel the real issue is. Bacchi exemplifies this with the solution of increasing access to professional training for women to achieve gender equality. This solution implies that women's lack of skills is the real problem holding them back, not other forms of inequality. She has

proposed a set of questions, which can be asked to the material to interrogate the problem formulations (Bacchi, 2012, 21). While this tool was developed for analysing public policy and legislation, Bacchi explicitly states that the method is broad and can successfully be used on any material requiring critical interrogation. The questions can also be modified to fit the material and research question (Bacchi, 2012, 22-23). Based on this, Bacchi's method will help find the threat constructions and problem formulations within the portrayals of weaponized migration.

Bacchi's method of critical interrogation will have the advantage of finding the central message in the politician's remarks on weaponized migration. By focusing on what they present as the major threats, the solutions and how they portray the weaponization itself, the study will identify what they express as the core problem. Asking a set of questions, as suggested by Bacchi, will help focus the analysis on what is relevant to the research question. A potential drawback of using this method may be that parts of the politicians' message will be excluded when posing specific questions to the material. These parts may be important to understand their argument's entire context and scope. While a more extensive study of the politicians' addresses in full is important for the research gap on weaponized migration, the full speeches will not be this thesis's focus.

5.2   Case selection & material

5.2.1 Case selection

The case selection will be conducted using a Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) to minimize the risk of selection bias. With this case selection design, cases are chosen which are similar in all aspects but differ on one crucial point for the study (Halperin & Heath, 2020, 239). The two cases selected for this thesis are Morocco's attempt at weaponizing migration on the Spanish border and Belarus's attempt at weaponizing migration at the Polish border. Both Morocco and Belarus are defined as cases of weaponized migration by Kelly M. Greenhill (Greenhill 2021: Greenhill 2022). The target countries, Spain and Poland, are both members

of the EU. The coercers are non-EU member states, and both also tried to make a broader political point against the EU. In both cases, the coercer made their threat of weaponizing migration reality and mobilized people against the physical border. The incidents took place in 2021, and in both cases thousands of refugees reached the border in a short amount of time, taking the target state by surprise (ibid.). Since the cases took place recently, little has been said about them in previous research except for Greenhill's classifications. This further increases their relevance as study objects, as studying them will provide new knowledge.

The crucial difference between Morocco's and Belarus's attempts is that Morocco is a partner of the European Union. The countries have several points of cooperation, among them an agreement to externalize migration and asylum processes to Morocco for people trying to reach the EU (Jacobs, 2018, 11-12). In contrast, Belarus has long had an antagonistic relationship with the EU, criticizing Belarus on freedom of speech and human rights issues. The relationship worsened during the Belarus election of 2020, which resulted in the EU declaring the results fraudulent and placing sanctions on Belarus (Greenhill, 2022, 155-156). The thesis assumes that this point of difference will cause a significant difference in how the parliamentarians portray weaponized migration in each case. As established in the previous research section, states like Turkey and Libya have also weaponized migration against the EU. However, since they both happened earlier than 2021 and in less overt ways than the chosen cases, they did not fit the selection criteria and were not included in the study.

5.2.2 Material selection

Two debates from the European Parliament, both conducted in 2021, will be used to analyse the cases. Explicit permission to use this material has been received via email from the Plenary Service of the European Parliament. For the case of Morocco-Spain, the issue was only debated once, while Belarus-Poland was discussed three times in 2021. Only the first debate on the weaponized migration from Belarus will be used to make the analysis more even and narrow the scope. Like the Morocco-Spain discussion, this debate occurred closest to the incident. Choosing debates from the European Parliament to study the portrayal of weaponized migration allows this thesis to not only compare the two cases, but also

compare how the portrayals may differ between the political right and the political left. The members of Parliament represent a range of parties and hold political views representative of the public who elected them. Since the EP is an EU institution with legislative power, the debates can also be argued to represent the EU as a whole (Burns, 2019).

While written transcripts from debates within the European Parliament exist, they are only available in the original language the parliamentarian spoke in. The debates will be analysed in video format to overcome the language barrier. All debates within the EP are interpreted live into the official languages of the EU member states. These interpretations allow parliamentarians to understand and communicate with each other during the debate while still speaking in their language. These interpretations are unique material forms since they make it possible to academically analyse debates that would otherwise be inaccessible (European Parliament, 2022). Using live interpretations may have some drawbacks. Firstly, the fact that the interpretation happens live may cause mistakes, altering the politician's message and affecting the result. Secondly, the interpretation is mainly meant for the politicians to understand each other during the debate and not to analyse the words of individual parliamentarians (ibid.).

However, the chosen method for this thesis minimizes the risk of misrepresenting the debate. Since specific questions will be asked to the material, only the answers to these questions are essential. Individual words and formulations matter less than in for example a discourse analysis, which means that small mistakes in the interpretation will not affect the result of this study. Since tying the portrayal to individual politicians is of no importance to analyse the portrayals from the Parliament, this study will only log the parliamentarian's responses based on their political groupings, not their names. This provides a better overview of the portrayals expressed by the left versus the right, and it also further reduces the risk of misquoting individual politicians.

A full table that specifies the political groups, how many speakers were present, and their expressed answers is available in the Appendix. When presenting the debate, short remarks like opening, closing, or pausing the debate will naturally be excluded from the result. Since the speeches are of varying length, mostly 1-2 minutes, all addresses will not provide an answer to every question. Some parliamentarians may not comment on particular questions and instead elaborate at

great length on others. However, the politician's choice of focus is likely intentional and displays what they feel is the priority. Therefore, a lack of answers from a specific parliamentarian on some questions will not disadvantage the study.

5.3   Operationalization

As suggested above in Bacchi's method of critical interrogation, informed questions are helpful to find the central message and conduct a critical interrogation of the material. The method is operationalized by formulating a set of questions informed by the theory of ontological security. These will be asked to the material to answer the research questions. As stated in the theoretical section, ontological security confirms the existence of a significant other with which the self has a routinized relationship. Changes in the relationship, like attempts of weaponized migration, may cause ontological insecurity and cause the actor to project enemy images onto the other. Based on this, the first two questions will analyse the portrayal of the other and how the EU should act towards the coercer. The questions are informed by the ontological security assumption that an actor faced with changing relationships will either attempt to revert to safer, old communication patterns or construct the other as an enemy. Based on this, the two following questions are formulated:

- *1. How is the coercer state and its behaviour portrayed?*
- *2. What is the proposed course of action against the coercer?*

The subsequent two questions are based on the same ontological assumptions as the first two. In cases of weaponized migration, the othering is likely twofold since the self needs to balance the relationship with the coercer state and the displaced individuals themselves. Therefore, it is helpful to include them in two separate questions. This inclusion will also address the previously mentioned research gap in weaponized migration, which primarily focuses on states. Based on this, the following questions are formulated:

- *3. How are the displaced individuals trying to cross the border portrayed?*

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- *4. What is the proposed solution for the displaced individuals?*

The fifth and final question is based on the theoretical assumption that changes in the established routine between actors may cause distress and challenge the self's identity, since it is based on the relationship with the other. Considering this, and based on the puzzle of European identity coexisting with human rights abuses, the following question is formulated:

- *5. How do the parliamentarians portray European identity when faced with weaponized migration?*

6   Result and analysis

This section presents the results from the study and analyses the findings based on the theoretical framework, which is followed by a comparative discussion.

6.1   Morocco's weaponization against Spain

The debate on Morocco's weaponization of migration took place on the 10th of June 2021, with 24 parliamentarians present. For a complete overview of the political groups and their answers, see appendix 9.1. The political left, here referred to as the red block based on the European Union's categorization, was represented by the Left Group, the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA) and the Renew Europe Group. The political right, here the blue block, is represented by the Group of the European Peoples Party (EPP), the European Conservatives and reformists (ECR), and the Identity and Democracy Group (ID). In addition, one non-attached parliamentarian participated (European Parliament, 2021A: European Parliament, 2021B).

When portraying the coercer state and its behaviour, parliamentarians within the red block described Morocco as a crucial and strategic partner for the EU and expressed concern for the incident. The actions were deemed blackmail, exploitation, and illegal, and in accordance, Morocco was described as an inhumane human rights violator. According to one Green/EFA politician, the situation in West Sahara was the foundation of the crisis. Within the blue block, parliamentarians also shared the sentiment that despite reprehensible behaviour Morocco remains a valued partner (European Parliament, 2021B). The European Parliament arguably didn't view Morocco or the weaponized attempt as a genuine threat based on this. While the coercer and their actions are described with some negative portrayals consistent with Mitzen's (2006, 274) theorization of negative images, the focus is

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on the partnership when faced with relationship changes. Since Morocco is overwhelmingly portrayed as a crucial partner in managing migration, they are arguably not constructed as a threat. The incident is acknowledged, but most portrayals reflect Krolikowski's (2008, 113) description of a healthy relationship between actors. Since the connection is stable, even significant changes like a weaponized migration attempt can be executed without causing ontological insecurity.

When discussing the preferred course of action against Morocco, most red parliamentarians argued for returning to a stable partnership through diplomatic talks. Only the left group proposed sanctions against the coercer. Similarly, blue speakers also wanted a return to a cooperative relationship. However, some representatives within ID and ECR had different opinions and argued for measures like stopping development aid to Morocco and keeping the neutral position on West Sahara (European Parliament, 2021B). These solutions support Krolikowski's argument that stable relationships can face significant stressors and still allow the self to remain ontologically secure. The parliamentarians do not feel existential dread or need to construct Morocco as a threat to maintain their own identity. While some argued for punitive measures against Morocco, signifying that not all within EP were satisfied with returning to normal, most of the Parliament wanted to deescalate the situation. The aim to return to the status quo also reflect Gidden's (1991, 243) assumption that actors seek a stable, continuous reality. The partnership on migration has allowed the EU to make pressure on the external borders more predictable.

When portraying the displaced individuals, the red block speakers exclusively portrayed them as victims, many stressing that children and families were involved. Some representatives drew attention to the individual's vulnerability within the blue block as well, but most only referred to them as illegal migrants. Within ID, descriptions like criminal, selfish, and threatening were used on the individuals (European Parliament, 2021B). These portrayals are consistent with previous research on the political left versus the tendencies of the right when describing displaced individuals (Prooijen et al., 2018). In addition, it also displays that the relationship between the red block and the displaced individuals remained stable since no threat construction took place. A more significant threat construction within the blue blocks is arguably present, and the parliamentarians are using

several enemy images in their portrayals. Since the blue blocks' relationship to migration is tense even without the weaponized migration element, Krolikowski's (2008, 113) assumption that even small changes in a hostile relationship could cause ontological insecurity may be correct here.

When discussing solutions for the displaced individuals, the red block mainly argued for reviewing asylum policies within the EU, safeguarding the children, returning them to their parents, and respecting human rights (European Parliament, 2021B). The solutions advocated here further confirm the lack of threat construction within the relationship with the migrants. The blue block also mentioned legal migration routes and returning the children to their families. However, most speakers presented a closed border and keeping illegal migrants out as the primary solution. Pushbacks were described as necessary, and ECR argued that the EU has no obligation to help. One ID speaker suggested reducing the number of rescue boats in the Mediterranean since they could be a pull factor, and without them, nobody would attempt to reach the EU (European Parliament, 2021B). These solutions reflect Mitzens (2006, 275-280) claim that when faced with changes in the relationship with non-European actors, the EU will unite against the threatening other, the migrants. When suggesting measures like stopping rescue boats, which would endanger the lives of migrants, the parliamentarians arguably believe that these individuals pose an existential threat to the EU.

When portraying European identity faced with weaponized migration, the red block consistently set the EU's human rights ideals in opposition to the actions of Morocco. Unity within the EU was argued for, with several stating that Morocco's actions threatened the EU's stability. Many red parliamentarians also noted that the EU has international responsibilities to follow and promote human rights (European Parliament, 2021B). Based on this, the red block arguably does not experience ontological insecurity in its relationship to the displaced individuals or Morocco. While they utilize Morocco's actions to frame their values and self-perception as superior, the lack of threat construction shows that the incident has not caused ontological insecurity within this block. Mitzen's (2018, 409) idea of the ingroup in opposition to the outgroup is visible here. As established, part of the European identity is the idea of being a "voice of reason" in world politics. By portraying the EU as leading in stabilizing the relationship, they can portray Morocco as an irrational and impulsive actor, dependent on the EU being reasonable. Even without

threat constructions, they arguably still reinforce their own identity through the relationship with Morocco.

The blue block placed less emphasis on values and more on security, stating that the incident threatened the EU's stability and sovereignty. The ECR and ID criticized the EU's value-based identity, noting that these ideals are too soft, naive, and hypocritical to combat threats against the security of citizens. These two groups portray illegal migrants as existential threats to the EU and its population (European Parliament, 2021B). Based on the emphasis on security measures, the blue block arguably feels ontologically insecure through the changes. Since they view their identity as based on being a security provider, the breached external border arguably affects their self-perception. The threat is not placed on the coercer state but the migrants themselves. In accordance with theoretical assumptions, the EU and the displaced individuals are set in a dichotomous relationship, where the security of EU citizens is wholly dependent on keeping the migrants out of Europe.

Interestingly, the blue block seems unable to tie this threat perception to Morocco, which created the crisis. As Giddens (1991, 36-40) describes, basic trust is needed for the self to respond effectively to change. Since the block feels ontologically insecure, the basic trust has been broken. It can be argued that the parliamentarians do not know how to respond to the incident, making them place the danger on the weaponized individuals instead of the coercer. Mitzen's (200B, 275-280) statement that the EU may revert to smaller in-groups based on nationalism may is arguably relevant in this case since the ID and ECR reject the soft values of the EU, deeming them naive and dangerous for the citizens' security (Mitzen, 2006, 284).

6.2   Belarus's weaponization against Poland

During the debate on Belarus's weaponization of migration against Poland on the 10th of October, 54 parliamentarians participated, with the same political groupings as in the Morocco debate. For a complete overview of the political groups and their answers, see appendix 9.2.

When examining how the parliamentarians portrayed the coercer state's behaviour and goals, it can be argued that the incident caused ontological insecurity for the EU. Both blocks described Belarus and its leader Alexander Lukashenko in numerous negative terms like abuser, criminal, human trafficker, and dictator. The incident was described as inhumane, a humiliation against the EU, a hybrid attack, and migration blackmail. Some speakers argued that the attacks were sanctioned by Russia, calling Belarus a puppet regime to Kreml. Speakers within the blue block stated that the incident was a "brutal attack" part of a hybrid war and that Russia was pursuing a "war doctrine" against the EU (European Parliament, 2021C). It can be stated that the incident took the parliamentarians by surprise, causing the routinized relationship with Belarus, as described by Giddens (1991), to shift into something unpredictable. As defined within the theoretical framework, losing this basic trust means the EU cannot predict Belarus's next move with certainty, causing ontological insecurity.

As the result displays, the European Parliament perceived both Lukashenko and the incident in a threatening light. As Mitzen (2006, 274) described, ontological insecurity will cause the self to construct enemy images on the other, which is evident in the parliaments above description of Belarus and Lukashenko. Krolikowskis's (2008,113) argument that even small changes in an already antagonistic relationship will cause ontological insecurity and threat constructions has merit in this case, since Belarus was already considered an adversary. Since the EU's ontological security depends on a stable relationship with Belarus, the change has arguably caused a significant threat construction based on descriptions like war and attacks.

When discussing the course of action against Belarus, parliamentarians from both blocks agreed that economic measures like sanctions should be expanded (European Parliament, 2021C). This is consistent with Mitzen and Larson's assumption that when the self has a destructive relationship with the other, they will not look to deescalate the situation. Instead, they may risk their physical security and let the conflict spiral if it can make them feel secure in their worldview. Criminal prosecution of Lukashenko and engaging NATO in discussions about the threat was also suggested, confirming this theoretical assumption. The suggestion to involve NATO would arguably further militarize the issue, confirming that an escalation is preferable to deconstructing the threat perceptions around Belarus for

the blue block. Unlike the red block, most blue groups argued for a physical border against Belarus to stop further coercion (European Parliament, 2021C).

Based on the above, Belarus's newfound ability to leverage migration against the EU causes ontological insecurity. And while a physical border will let the blue block feel like they can predict Belarus's future actions better, this suggestion follows the theoretical assumption that measures to boost ontological security may worsen physical security. As Greenhill suggests, responding with heightened border control and increased migration resistance gives the coercer what they want, in this case to cause political division and provoke a reaction. If a physical border is constructed in response, Belarus learns that it can leverage migration streams repeatedly to destabilize and scare the EU (Greenhill, 2022, 156-157).

Across the red block, the individuals were portrayed as victims of Belarus's exploitation and no threat to the EU. Many parliamentarians expressed frustration and anger over the humanitarian situation where the individuals were left. While most red speakers mainly blamed Belarus for their suffering, parliamentarians from the left and the Greens/EFA also accused EU leaders of leaving the individuals to die at the border (European Parliament, 2021C). Considering this, it can be argued that the threat constructions are concentrated on the relationship with Belarus for the red block. The dynamic between the red block and migrants does not appear to have changed enough to cause ontological insecurity or to construct the individuals as threats. As Mitzen (2006, 274) described, the lack of enemy images placed on the other further confirms this. Consistently with the previous research conducted by Prooijen, Krouwel, and Emmers (2018), the political Left views displaced individuals as victims in need of aid. The lack of ontological insecurity allows the red block to be flexible in its relationship with the individuals.

Within the blue block, the individuals were also portrayed as victims by many. However, they were also described as weapons part of an attack, an "invasion of migrants" partly responsible for their situation. No blue speaker suggested the individuals had a right to asylum or other forms of protection within the EU. ID speakers also portrayed the individuals as threats to EU citizens, potential Islamic terrorists, and exploiters of EU benefits (European Parliament, 2021C). The blue block constructed both Belarus and the displaced individuals as threats. This is consistent with the previous research on the political right being more likely to view refugees and migrants as threats (Prooijen et al., 2018). However, since the

individuals are portrayed using negative images such as weapons, invasion, and part of an attack, it can be argued that weaponized migration causes more intense enemy images than others. Using these descriptions, the political right connects the migrants themselves to Belarus's weaponization, making the othering dual and causing more robust threat constructions.

Within the red block, many argued for strengthening the right to seek asylum as a solution for the displaced individuals and discouraging new arrivals of migrants and refugees to Belarus. They also spoke against physical borders and pushbacks, and expressed that Poland must give humanitarian aid organizations and EU agencies access to the border (European Parliament, 2021C). Offering aid to the victims of their enemy Belarus arguably also strengthens the EU's identity as a human rights defender, in opposition to Belarus's negative portrayal as an abuser of those rights. As Giddens (1991, 52-55) established, self-perception must be based on actual conditions, not only on the wishes of the self. By offering aid and asylum, the red block arguably aims to strengthen their identity as human rights.

The blue block argued for stopping new arrivals in Belarus and constructing a physical external border. Voices were also raised to offer humanitarian aid, protect the rights of individuals, and prevent pushbacks. However, blue parliamentarians also favoured keeping the border closed to deter illegal migration and stressed that the EU has no responsibility for these migrants. Within ID, pushbacks were argued as necessary for the safety of the EU. (European Parliament, 2021C). The suggestions concentrated on keeping the individuals out of the EU further confirm the assumption that the blue block's relationship to migrants causes ontological insecurity. ID confirms Krolikowski's belief that an antagonistic relationship will cause greater ontological insecurity than a healthy one. While their resistance to migrants is consistent with previous research, viewing violations of international law like illegal pushbacks as something necessary and positive arguably shows they are willing to do anything to keep the perceived threat out of Europe.

When portraying European identity faced with weaponized migration, most speakers from the red block agree that the EU's and Poland's harsh response towards displaced individuals is incompatible with the Union's values and self-perception. These values, which constitute their perceived identity, are peace-based, humanist, and human rights-focused. They also advocated for unity and solidarity within the EU (European Parliament, 2021C). Based on the eagerness to reaffirm

EU values, the red block's experiences of ontological insecurity arguably affect their self-perception and make them reinforce their identity concerning their significant other. Furthermore, the red block appears shocked by the abuses registered at the border. However, as previous research shows, abuse on the external border is more of a rule than an exception. This lends momentum to Gidden's (1991, 52-55) argument that competing narratives about the self, such as ones of an actor who fails to uphold the rights of displaced individuals, make it difficult to enforce the EU's positively framed identity.

Since the red block does not wish to identify with previous or ongoing border abuses, they arguably get around this problem by placing full responsibility on one member state. The red parliamentarians mostly portrayed the actions of Poland and far-right politicians in the EU as threatening the Union's values, with the left stating that Poland has failed to live up to the EU's human rights values (European Parliament, 2021C). The exclusion of Poland from the self's identity conforms with Mitzen's (2018, 400-401) argument that when a member of the ingroup acts inconsistently with the group's self-perception, this member will be stigmatized or excluded. While Poland is not excluded from the EU, its actions are stigmatized and set in opposition to the red blocks idea of what being European means. By othering Poland, the acts committed against individuals by border guards help reinforce the perception of the red block as opposed to human rights abuses. However, the EU identity is also clearly set in opposition to the acts committed by Belarus. The red block can further secure their self-perception by demonizing Lukashenko's actions.

When the blue block discusses European identity in the face of weaponized migration, the EU is portrayed as a security provider for the Union's citizens. Here, Russia and Belarus are explicitly pointed out as threats to EU human rights values, the rule of law, and democracy. It is argued that solidarity and unity within the EU is the way to shield against the threat. Moreover, Poland is stated to rightly protect the EU border against Belarus and migrants (European Parliament, 2021C). Again, these descriptions confirm that the blue block experiences greater ontological insecurity than the red. Consistent with Mitzen and Kinnvalls (2018, 826-828) research, the blue blocks feel existential dread through this situation and wish to regain their ontological security. As predicted by Mitzen (2006, 275-280), they want to unify against an external, non-European threat instead of focusing on

potential internal threats. This arguably means confirming their strength, ability to protect their citizens, and superiority towards the other for the blue block.

Parts of the blue block do not identify with the established self-perception of the EU concerning migration. Both ECR and ID speakers stated that the EU's value-based identity of freedom, solidarity, and humanism is naive and that soft values can no longer guarantee EUs security. ID speakers state that EU citizens safety has a higher priority than the safety of migrants, a view also implicit in other blue groups statements about the threats to citizens' security (European Parliament, 2021C). Here, the danger to the self is based more on the relationship to the displaced individuals and less on the relation to the coercer state. As expressed by the blue blocks, the EU identity when faced with weaponized migration rests on being a security provider, defending the Union and its population from the external threats of Belarus and migrants.

6.3   Discussion

The above results show that the European Parliament feels a greater sense of ontological insecurity from Belarus than Morocco. Across both blocks, the EP portrayed Belarus and their actions in extensive enemy images and suggested measures that would further escalate their relationship, indicating they viewed them as a threat. In the case of Morocco, both blocks overwhelmingly portrayed Morocco in more neutral terms and focused on returning to the mutually beneficial partnership. It can be argued that the pre-existing antagonistic relationship with Belarus contributed to the extensive threat constructions. Based on the desires expressed to return to a cooperative relationship, a priorly stable relationship with Morocco may have caused their weaponization attempt to feel less threatening.

The displaced individuals themselves are, in both cases, portrayed by the political left as victims entitled to aid. And while their relationship with the migrants is arguably stable, the aid further helps the red block uphold the EU identity of being a benevolent and humanist actor (Mitzen, 2018, 409). In both cases, the blue block portrays the migrants as a significant threat to European security. Where the red block condemns and distances itself from the abuses at the border, many within the blue block express closed borders as a necessity when faced

with weaponized migration. While the blue block extends the threat construction to both the state and the individuals in Belarus, in the case of Morocco, only the migrants are portrayed as dangerous. This is arguably puzzling since the Moroccan government engineered the migration influx, but the suggested control measures only fall on the migrants.

By naming the individuals as weapons and parts of an attack, the blue block may justify the abuses reoccurring at the EU's external borders. By reinforcing the dichotomy of a "good" European self and a dangerous non-European other, keeping the migrant out becomes a security matter, and the tolerance for abuse at the border may increase. Across both cases, the portrayals by the European Parliament make it clear that there are only two categories for the displaced individuals. Either they will be portrayed as victims of the coercer state and sometimes the EU member, or they will be represented as weapons, threatening the EU's sovereignty and security.

As both cases display, there is a significant rift within the European Parliament on how they imagine the European identity. By distancing themselves from the abuse at the border, the red block attempts to reinforce the existing, value-based EU identity. The blue block presents a competing narrative, as a security provider defending the EU against external threats throughout both cases. And while the blue block also expresses human rights values as necessary, they place greater emphasis on keeping threats out. The debate displays that these narratives both coexist and compete with each other. At present, the red blocks self-perception arguably reflect what the EU tries to communicate about itself. According to Giddens, identity needs to be confirmed through authentic interactions with others. In cases of weaponized migration, the actions at the border communicate the opposite identity. Based on the reactions to weaponized migration from member states and EU-parliamentarians, the perception of the EU as a benevolent actor upholding its values is arguably being hollowed out.

7   Conclusion

The conclusion can be drawn that weaponized migration will by the European Parliament be portrayed as an existential threat when performed by a state with which the EU already has an antagonistic relationship. In those cases, the EU will not be willing to deescalate. When the relationship with the coercer is stable, however, the EU will instead turn to diplomacy and reaffirm the partnership. The thesis has also revealed that the exploited individuals are portrayed especially demonizing and threateningly by the political right. On the other hand, the political left represents these displaced individuals similarly to ordinary migration cases.

Analysing the cases above reveals that weaponized migration's impact on European identity differs depending on political affiliation. The red block is arguably more likely to try to reinforce the existing identity of the EU as a human rights defender. But since the realities at the border do not match this perception, they must distance themselves from the ongoing abuses at the border and the member states committing them. However, weaponized migration has arguably triggered a shift in European identity within the blue block. The red block's identity is dependent on being a benevolent but superior actor to the external states and the displaced individuals. In contrast, the blue block's identity depends on the threat constructions of the significant other. Across both cases, the self-perception of being a strong actor capable of defending its citizens against external threats emerges.

As evidenced in both cases, but especially on the Polish border, threat constructions placed on the exploited individuals result in abuse, humanitarian catastrophes, and even death. These cases may not be the last targeted towards the EU, and more individuals could therefore be subjected to this dangerous game. The portrayals expressed by the EU clearly have real consequences on whether they will be treated as victims or as weapons. While this thesis provides a starting point for understand these portrayals, more research is needed to fully understand the phenomena of weaponized migration.

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8.3   Primary material

European Parliament. 2021B. *Breach of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child and the use of minors by the Moroccan authorities in the migratory crisis in Ceuta.* (Video source) https://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/vod.html?mode=chapter&vodLanguage=EN&playerStartTime=20210610-10:55:34&playerEndTime=20210610-11:50:48# (Accessed 2022-04-25)

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[1] The video debate is accessed through clicking on the speech of each individual parliamentarian featured in this document.

9   Appendix

The tables below show the results from the video debates, displaying the political groups' answers to the questions.

9.1   Breach of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child and the use of minors by the Moroccan authorities in the migratory crisis in Ceuta (debate)

Sitting of 10-06-2021 (European Parliament, 2021A).

Parliamentary group	Q1: How is the coercer state and its behaviour portrayed?	Q2: What is the proposed course of action against the coercer?	Q3: How are the displaced individuals trying to cross the border portrayed?	Q4: What is the proposed solution for the displaced individuals?	Q5: How do the parliamentarians portray European identity when faced with weaponized migration?
Renew Europe Group. 4 Members of Parliament. The red block.	Morocco is violating human rights and the Spanish border. (2) Morocco blames Spain for the aggression. (1) Valued partner. (3) A crisis can also become an opportunity for change. (1)	Not commented. (1) Continue migration-partnership. (3) Morocco needs to respect the EU border. (1) Solidarity with Ceuta citizens. (1) Morocco needs to increase opportunities for its citizens. (1)	Victims of human rights abuse. (3) Children are used as pawns. (3)	Respect human rights. (1) Return migrants, including minors. (2) Protect children. (1) Adopt common asylum policy and organize legal migration. (4) Humanitarian corridors to the EU. (1)	Solidarity over the whole EU. (1) EU ideals clash with reality on migration. Thousands of dead migrants on the Mediterranean prove it. (1) EU responsible for upholding values. (1) Not commented. (3)
The Left. 3 Members of Parliament. The red block.	Illegal actions. (1) Human rights violator. (2)	Continue migration partnership. (1) Sanction violations. (1)	Not commented. (1) Victims. (1)	Review migration policy. (1) Uphold human rights. (1) DIstribute migrants and	Morocco policing the EU border goes against EU ideals of human rights. (1) EUs human rights ideals set in opposition to abuse from Morocco. (1)

	Blackmail for foreign policy goals. (2)	Cooperation based on blackmail must change. (2) Stop trade agreements exploiting West Sahara. (1)	Children weaponized. (1)	asylum seekers equally across the EU. (1)	Not commented. (1)
Group of the progressive alliance of socialists and democrats in the European Parliament. (S&D) 4 Members of Parliament. The red block.	Inhumane policy. (1) Violator of international law. (1) Pressure replacing diplomacy. (1) Political crisis. (1) Strategic partner. (1)	Not commented. (2) Diplomacy. (2) EU should keep its position on West Sahara. (1)	Not commented. (1) Victims. (2) Migrants looking to reach the EU. (1) Minors put at risk. (1) Not commented. (1)	Stop pushbacks. (1) Guarantee safety of children. (3) Review asylum policy to meet international obligations. (2) Swift readmission. (1) Expand migration agreement with Morocco. (1)	Not commented. (2) The EU is responsible to follow international law and abide by values even in crisis. (1) EU solidarity needed in the face of crisis. (1)
Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance. (Greens/EFA) 3 Members of Parliament. The red block.	Blackmailer exploiting human misery. (1) Western Sahara foundation of crisis. (1) Valued partner of the EU. (1) Diplomatic conflict turned into a humanitarian crisis. (1) Illegal expulsions of migrants. (1)	Find resolution of West-Sahara. (2) Continue migration-partnership. (2) Return to trust and mutual respect. (1) Involve the UN. (1)	Victimized children and families. (3)	Continue migration-partnership. (1) Organize border surveillance along human rights. (1) Return children to Morocco. (1) Review EU migration policy. (1)	EU human rights values mean responsibility for children crossing the border. (2) EU as an actor in full compliance with human rights and international law. (1) The incident undermines EU's stability, EU needs unity. (1)
European People's Party. (EPP) 5 Members of Parliament. The blue block.	Unjustified & cynical. (1) Crisis started by Morocco. (1) Valued partner. (4) Actions endangered partnership. (3)	Diplomacy. (4) Continue migration partnership. (4)	Forced migration of minors. (2) Illegal migrants. (1) Victims. (1) Not commented. (1)	Not commented. (2) Return migrants. (1) Return all minors to families. (1) Problem for Spain, not the EU. (1)	Solidarity with Ceuta and Spain. (2) Not commented. (2) Threat against Eu integrity and stability. (1)

				Introduce legal migration routes. (1)	
European Conservatives and reformists. 2 Members of Parliament. The blue block.	Morocco manipulated EU weakness. (1) Held Spain's border hostage. (1)	Impose sanctions. (1) Make aid conditional on stopping migration flows. (1) Morocco must control jihadism among migrants. (1) Suspend aid. (1)	Illegal migrants. (2)	EU has no responsibility. Keep the border closed. (2)	Migrants are a threat to EU citizens' security. (2) EU ideals are too soft and naive, not working to protect the EU. (1)
Identity and democracy group. (ID) 5 Members of Parliament. The blue block.	Not commented. (2) Spain provoked the crisis. (1) Blackmail. (1) EU is to blame for lacking real border policy. (1) Abuse of EU's failed migration policy. (1)	Not commented. (2) Mark against provocation but show that Morocco is a valued partner. (1) Freeze development aid. (1) EU should stay neutral on West-Sahara. (1)	Illegal migrants. (5) Criminals. (1) Migrants abandon their homes for selfish reasons. (1) Children used as pawns. (1)	Keep border closed to migrants. (5) Pushbacks necessary. (1) Return all illegal migrants. (2) Reduce rescue boats in the Mediterranean to discourage migrants from coming. (1)	Solidarity with Spain defending the EU border. (1) EUs current actions are useless against tackling illegal migration, migration is a threat. (3) EU values are hypocritical, expect some member states to take all the responsibility for illegal migrants. (1)
Non-attached 1 Member of Parliament.	Violating human rights for EUs benefit, takes care of EUs dirty work. (1)	Suspend migration partnership. (1)	Migrants used as tools. (1) Victims of Spanish violence. (1)	Stop pushbacks. (1)	EU ideals cannot be upheld while border control is outsourced to autocracies. (1)

9.2 The escalating humanitarian crisis on the EU-Belarusian border, in particular in Poland (debate)

Sitting of 10-11-2021 (European Parliament, 2021C)

Parliamentary group	Q1: How is the coercer state and its behaviour portrayed?	Q2: What is the proposed course of action against the coercer?	Q3: How are the displaced individuals trying to cross the border portrayed?	Q4: What is the proposed solution for the displaced individuals?	Q5: How do the parliamentarians portray European identity when faced with weaponized migration?
Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament. (S&D) 12 Members of Parliament. The red block.	Not commented. (2) Criminal (1) Violation of human rights and democracy. (1) Lukashenko is an abuser of his own and other nationals. (6) Exploitation of human suffering. (1) Russia and Belarus dividing and manipulating EU. (1) Blackmail. (1) Dictator. (1) Hybrid attack. (1) Exploitation of migration. (2)	Not commented. (4) Expand sanctions to individuals and corporations. (6) Ban airlines carrying migrants to Belarus from the EU. (1) Financial aid to Poland. (1) Criminal prosecution of Lukashenko. (1) Protect border against Lukashenko. (1) Support democratic opposition in Belarus. (1) Condemn abuses. (2) Take action. (1)	Not commented. (2) Victims, no threat to EU security. (10) Entitled to seek asylum. (2) Humanitarian disaster. (1) People weaponized. (1)	Not commented. (6) No physical border. (2) Right to seek asylum priority, ensure access. Common European asylum policy needed (5) Equal burden-sharing of asylum-seekers within EU. (1) Humanitarian aid. (2) Stop pushbacks. (2) Stop new arrivals in Belarus. (1)	Not commented. (2) Physical border goes against EU values. (1) The EU needs to comply with its values even in crisis, current actions of the EU are breaching human rights values. (4) EU's harsh response gives Russia what they want, reaction of EU at the border exaggerated and not proportional to the number of arrivals. (1) EU has international responsibility over human rights. (2) Pushbacks not in line with EU values and human rights. (1) Eu solidarity under threat. (1) EUs human rights values threatened by Lukashenko. (1) EUs inaction threatens democracy and human rights. (1) Poland is not following EU values of human rights. (3)

					EU needs to unite against attack from Belarus. (2)
Renew Europe. 7 Members of Parliament. The red block.	Not commented. (1) Dictator. (1) "Madness" (1) Illegal regime (1) Belarus puppet regime for Russia. (3) Hybrid warfare. (4) Geopolitical game. (1) Abuse of civilians. (1) State-sponsored human trafficking. (1)	Expand sanctions. (5) Disconnect Lukashenko from western payment systems. (2) EU-wide trade boycott. (1) Support Poland and Lithuania. (1) Support for democracy-activists in Belarus. (1) Not commented. (1)	Not commented. (3) Victims of international crime/hybrid warfare. (2) Exploited by Belarus. (1) Vulnerable people used to destabilize the EU. (1)	Not commented. (3) The EU response to migration needs to change. (1) Deploy Frontex at the border. (1) Discourage new arrivals of migrants to Belarus. (1) Legislate on legal migration. (1)	Not commented. (1) European unity needed during the crisis. (1) Security and humanity need to be balanced. (1) EU actions do not line up with EU values. (1) Poland is not following the EU line of unity. (1) EU's soft stance on migration is part of the problem, naivety must end. (1) European far-right threatening EU security. (1) EUs humanist and peace-based values under threat, solidarity needed. (1)
The Left. 3 Members of Parliament. The red block.	Not commented. (2) Lukashenko abuses his own and other countries' nationals. (1)	Not commented. (3)	Exploited by Lukashenko. (1) Should not be called weapons, "evil nationalism". (1) Legitimate asylum seekers. (1) Victims of both Belarus and Poland. (1) Children and families. (1)	Stop pushbacks. (1) Poland needs to allow humanitarian aid access. (1) Ensure access to asylum. (2) No physical border. (1) Humanitarian aid. (1) Polands rasist policy	Armed forces against refugees not in line with EU values. (1) Nationalism is not the answer, EU unity is. (1) Denying asylum rights threatens Eu values. (1) Far-right responses threaten EU stability. (1) Poland's "racist policy" threatens EU values and breaches Geneva convention. (1)
Group of the Greens/ European Free Alliance	Illegitimate oppressor. (1)	Not commented. (2)	Victims of both Belarus and EU	Access to asylum procedures. (2)	EU's global responsibility of human rights sets

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Group. (Greens/EFA) 6 Members of Parliament. The red block.	Lukashenko is an abuser of his own and other nationals. (1) Vengeful dictator. (1) Deplorable and inhumane. (1) Humiliating the EU. (1) Exploitation of the lack of EU asylum system. (1) Human trafficker. (1)	Expand sanctions. (3) "Take action" against Belarus. (1) Engage NATO in discussions of threats. (1)	leaders leaving them to die. (2) Victims of pushbacks from the EU. (1) Desperate, looking for better lives. (1) Migration crisis compared to a fire, spreading from one EU border to the next. (1) One minute of silence for the victims. (1)	Stop new arrivals to Belarus. (1) Engage with countries of origin. (1) Agree within the EU on migration policy. (1) Evacuate to safety. (1) No funding for border walls. (1)	examples others will follow. (1) Belarus threatening EU values of human dignity and rights, unity needed. (1) EU values, based on international law, must be upheld even in crisis. (1) Current response unworthy and inhumane. (1) Enforce rule of law and EU values in Poland. (1) EU border actions are not enough and do not solve the problem. (1) Not commented. (1)
Group of the European People's party. (EPP) 12 Members of Parliament. The blue block.	Not commented. (2) Dictatorship. (3) Hybrid attack against the EU. (6) Belarus is a puppet regime for Russia. (3) Belarus and Russia share "war doctrine" against the EU. Weaponizing migration(4)	Not commented. (5) Fund physical border to stop coercion. (3) Sanction both Belarus and Russia. (1) Expand sanctions on Belarus. (2) Start negotiation with Russia. (1) Meeting of the European council. (1) Support to EU countries bordering Belarus. (2) Prosecute Lukashenko in ICJ for breaching international law. (1)	Not a migration crisis, part of an attack against the EU. (4) Migrants not entitled to asylum. (3) Victims of Belarus and smugglers. (6) Women and children wielded as weapons. (1) Not commented. (1)	Not commented. (2) Stop arrivals of migrants in Belarus. (3) Stop migrant smugglers. (2) Fund physical border. (4) Defend the border. (1) Humanitarian aid. (1) Uphold human rights. (1) Stop pushbacks. (1) Protect the migrants. (1) Compassion for migrants and Poland/Baltic states. (1)	Open, multilateral actor solving crises through cooperation. (1) Russia and Belarus are attacking EU ideals. (1) EU values cannot be upheld at the expense of security. (1) Reluctance expressed on physical border, but "That is reality". (1) EU identity of freedom and human rights under threat from Russia and Belarus. (2) Far-right in EU a threat, using this to destabilize the EU. (2) Strong united EU is needed in response to threats from Russia, Russia threatening EU. (6)

					Solidarity with Poland, EU existence depends on it. (3) EUs sovereignty is threatened if migrants can cross freely. (1)
European Conservatives and Reformists. (ECR) 6 Members of Parliament. The blue block.	Hybrid warfare supported by Russia. (3) Hybrid attack. (1) Poland is being "brutally attacked". (1) Threat to EU citizens. (1) Not commented. (1)	Not commented. (1) Physical border to deter Belarus. (4) Sanctions on Belarus and Russia. (1)	Not commented. (2) Victims, but also responsible for supporting smugglers. (1) Victims. (2) Not genuine refugees. (1) Invasion of migrants. (1) Humanitarian disaster is exaggerated. (1)	Deter and stop illegal migration. (3) Review asylum laws. (1) Humanitarian aid. (1) Refugees get aid elsewhere, no EU obligation to help here. (1) Create migration policy which doesn't leave them to smugglers. (1)	The European Parliament is wrong to criticize Poland, Poland is protecting the EU external border. (4) EUs nativity is threatening the Union, must face reality and show solidarity with Poland. (2) The EU is a security provider for citizens, must uphold democracy, rule of law and defend against threat. (1)
Identity and Democracy Group. (ID) 7 Members of Parliament. The blue block.	Not commented. (3) Hybrid threat. (2) Threat from Belarus and Russia. (1) Migration blackmail. (1)	Not commented. (5) Physical border to keep the threat of foreign powers out. (1) Keep the border closed and make the migrants Lukashenko's problem. (1)	Not genuine refugees. (7) A threat to EU citizens. (4) Migrants seeking EU benefits. (2) Not victims. (1) Potential Islamic terrorists. (1) Uses children as human shields to seek empathy. (1) Not commented. (1)	Not EUs responsibility. (2) Fund physical borders. (3) Close external borders. (3) Current policy encourages human trafficking. (1) Increase returns to origin country. (1) Pushbacks necessary. (1) Not commented. (1)	EU ideas of freedom, solidarity and friendship are naive and unrealistic. Naive and weak, soft identity is not working. (4) Poland has the right to deny entry. (6) Solidarity with Poland, part of the EU. (2) Poland and Lithuania protect the EU from migrants, migrants are the threat. (2) Protect member state citizens first, migrants are threats. (2)
Non-attached. 1 Member of Parliament.	Uses migrants as weapons. (1)	Not commented. (1)	Not a migration crisis. (1) Illegal migrants. (1)	Stop illegal entries by protecting the external border. (1) Fund border wall. (1)	Protecting the EU border against migrants is also solidarity. (1) Solidarity with Poland. (1)