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Knocking on Europe's Door: A Comprehensive Analysis of the European Response to the 2015 Refugee Crisis and the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis

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A Comprehensive Analysis of the European Response to the 2015 Refugee Crisis and the
Ukrainian Refugee Crisis

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Global Studies Capstone

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Introduction

There are today, more refugees than ever before around the world, but even more specifically within the borders of Europe. As a continent that has been vital to refugee relief and acceptance due to its geographical position and high concentration of developed nations, the reception of refugees has varied extremely. As of 2023, millions have fled to Europe from around the world, while millions more have recently fled from Ukraine into surrounding European nations. With so many people making their way to its borders, it would be hoped that the European response to this issue would be a uniform one. However, this has very rarely been the case. In order to best see the differential response to refugees in recent times, this paper will examine the reception of refugees in both 2015 during the “refugee crisis” and in the current situation with refugees fleeing war in Ukraine. The significance of viewing these two situations side by side is in the fact that the response looked quite different for these groups. While the ability for European nations to respond politically to refugees fleeing from different nations obviously is impacted by their relations with said nations, there has been a stark difference in response and public opinion regarding refugees depending on where they are from. The difference in view and perception is often steeped in racial or religious superiority or discrimination and highly affects the ability of these refugees to assimilate and adapt to the countries they have fled to. With this in mind, the purpose of this paper is not necessarily to validate or equate different groups of refugees or conflicts, but rather to highlight the ways that refugee reception in Europe has succeeded in times of crisis, and to examine what factors have caused it to fail in other situations.

2015 and the years to follow have been labeled as the European Refugee Crisis as it saw more people fleeing to the continent than ever before. However, as this paper looks deeper into

the reception, opportunities, and treatment of refugees during this time, that title begins to take on different connotations. The title of “crisis” eventually does not place its focus on the influx of refugees anymore, but rather on the uncooperative response of the European nations and organizations. This clarification of meaning and connotation is important to keep in mind when discussing this topic. There is quite a bit of weight that comes along with the term refugee and certain connotations that may be dragged along with the title as well. However, regardless of any individual’s status within life, the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights gives every individual certain notable rights that are not to be infringed upon. Article 14 states that “Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.”¹ This, in conjunction with Article 3 of the 1951 Refugee Convention, which states that “The Contracting States shall apply the provisions of this Convention to refugees without discrimination as to race, religion or country of origin” give solid ground to the notion that there is no fault to be held over the refugees themselves.² These people have rights granted to them through international documents that state that they have the right to be pursuing asylum in other countries without any discrimination if they are facing persecution in their home country. To state that any of these refugees were not facing legitimate persecution or fear for their lives in their home countries of Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, etc. is at the very least blatant denial. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine where these statements and declarations of rights have been infringed or not upheld based on factors such as race, religion, or political motivation. While most of the initial focus of this paper will be on European response during

¹ United Nations, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, United Nations, United Nations, 1948, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.

² UNHCR, “Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees”, 19, 1951, <https://www.unhcr.org/media/convention-and-protocol-relating-status-refugees>.

2015 to refugees fleeing from the Middle East and Africa, the extent to which these refugees have and still are being received in Europe today will also be taken into account and examined.

Refugee Crisis of 2015

History of Conflict

When attempting to understand the 2015 refugee crisis, the factors and variables that play into the situation are almost too many to account for. One place to start in order to understand the crisis more clearly is with the beginning of the Syrian Civil War in 2011. Sparked by what were originally protests over the the torture and arrest of young Syrians who had been painting graffiti with anti-government messages, eventually turned into a full-scale civil war. This escalation came from multiple issues that many Syrians already had with the powers that be, but when security forces killed protesters, and the protests continued to spread, the violence was too far to turn back from. It was gathered that “by June 2011 over 500 people had been killed and thousands of Syrian residents had fled to Turkey.”³ Conflict only continued to ramp up from here, and more Syrians began fleeing to neighboring countries. In 2011, around 8,000 Syrians were registered refugees in neighboring countries, but in 2012 that number grew to almost 500,000.⁴ By 2013, this number had reached over 1 million people.⁵

The amount of people fleeing Syria continued to surge as more international actors took part and engaged in the Syrian Civil War. The Syrian regime was highly assisted by Russia and Iran, as well as militant groups like Hezbollah. In the midst of this, other radical groups like ISIS and al-Nusra continued to take action and control of regions of land. The U.S. and other Western powers backed rebel groups, leading many researchers on this conflict to label it a proxy war of

³ Elizabeth Ferris and Kemal Kirişci, “The Context, Causes, and Consequences of Syrian Displacement”, In *The Consequences of Chaos*, 14, Syria’s Humanitarian Crisis and the Failure to Protect, Brookings Institution Press, 2016, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7864/j.ctt1c2cqws.6>.

⁴ Ibid., 28.

⁵ Will Jones, Alexander Teytelboym, and Dalibor Rohac, “Europe’s Refugee Crisis: PRESSURE POINTS AND SOLUTIONS”, 3, American Enterprise Institute, 2017, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep03281>.

sorts.⁶ The reasons for being forced to flee in 2015 as a Syrian were practically innumerable. Upwards of 30,000 foreign fighters were on the ground in Syria in late 2015 and there was a constant threat of airstrikes whether it be from the U.S., Russia, or the Syrian government. The regime's aerial strikes themselves are claimed to be the "biggest driver of displacement of Syrians."⁷ Another driving force for Syrians had been the fear of sexual violence. Especially when many men in the country are pushed into fighting, or are detained for a variety of reasons, many women have no ability to support themselves and are more vulnerable to these issues. Even if the fear of bombings or forms of assault are not enough to drive people out of Syria, in 2015, 80 percent of people living in Syria were in poverty, life expectancy had dropped by 20 years, and the economy was in shambles. "It is estimated that 3 million Syrians had lost their jobs during the conflict, with unemployment surging from 14.9 percent in 2011 to 57.7 percent at the end of 2014."⁸ The inability to work, along with the fact that over 50 percent of children were not able to attend school in 2014 gives great insight into why such unprecedented amounts of people were fleeing Syria.⁹

All of this contributes to the large-scale displacement of people that is seen in Syria, culminating most heavily in 2015. Now, the refugee crisis of 2015 was not merely Syrian refugees fleeing into neighboring countries and to Europe, but swaths of people fleeing their homelands due to ongoing conflict, persecution, or in the search for a better life for themselves and their family. In 2015 Syria made up the largest refugee population with 4.9 million refugees, next being Afghanistan with 2.7 million, Somalia with 1.1 million, South Sudan with 0.8 million and Sudan with 0.6 million.¹⁰ Of the total number of refugees fleeing these nations, and many

⁶ Ferris and Kirişci, "Syrian Displacement", 16.

⁷ Ibid., 25.

⁸ Ibid., 26.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Christina Krause and Olaf Wientzek, "Lessons from the Stress Test: What the EU Has Learned – and Still Needs to Learn – from the Refugee Crisis", 2, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2017, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep10064>.

others in 2015, over 1.2 million of them applied for asylum in Europe. Nearly 500,000 of these refugees were Syrian, and 441,000 of the total applied for asylum within Germany.¹¹ Prior to 2015, European acceptance of refugees had been in large part handled poorly. Many countries had done the bare minimum in terms of refugee admittance. For instance, Britain had accepted less than 5,000 Syrian refugees since 2011. However, come September, the EU was forced into action as hundreds of thousands of unprecedented refugees were suddenly reaching its countries' shores. While 2016 saw 400,000 more refugees arriving in Europe, in the early parts of the year, only 272 refugees had been relocated from Greece and Italy . While the EU had decided to relocate 160,000 refugees among member countries, it did not create places for these refugees to go within host countries.¹²

Where Refugees were Fleeing and Why

In comparison to the reception of refugees in budding Middle Eastern nations, the European response has been particularly lackluster. It is understandable that more refugees will have the means to flee to neighboring countries than all the way to Europe, but the acceptance of refugees is still staggeringly different in many of these countries. Turkey for example, by 2015 had already taken in around 3 million refugees. Pakistan hosted 1.6 million, Lebanon 1.1 million, and Iran and Ethiopia both around 1 million. Researchers Krause and Wientzek made the contrast clear with the following statistical comparison: “Measured by the size of its own population, every fourth person in Lebanon was a refugee, while it was roughly every tenth in Jordan. In Sweden and Malta, the two most affected EU countries in relative terms, refugees made up two per cent of the population.”¹³ It is unreasonable to ask any nation to try and support

¹¹ Ferris and Kirişci, “Syrian Displacement”, 28. See also Jones et al., 2-3.

¹² Elizabeth Ferris and Kemal Kirişci, “Syrian Refugees: Challenges to Host Countries and the International Community”, In *The Consequences of Chaos*, 66, Syria’s Humanitarian Crisis and the Failure to Protect, Brookings Institution Press, 2016, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7864/j.ctt1c2cqw.7>.

¹³ Krause and Wientzek, 2.

and accommodate a refugee population one-fourth the size of their own population, but on the other end, when more developed nations simply refuse to accommodate more, there are often no other options. In fact, developed nations as a whole, which includes most of Western and Northern Europe, take on the smallest percentage of refugees globally. In 2015, of the 21.3 million recognized refugees globally, 86 percent settled in developing countries. Ethiopia and Chad, two of the world's least developed countries, protected 25 percent of people worldwide in need of aid.¹⁴

Initial Response of European Nations

When looking at the response of European nations at the start of 2015 specifically, it is clear that many EU nations were not on the same page. Most political scientists and historians who have looked into the 2015 crisis deeply agree that the lack of uniform agreement and action between European countries led to what has been such a difficult time for Europe. Not only this, but European faith in the EU itself has wavered after seeing it act so inefficiently in the wake of one of its biggest challenges to date. To understand how different nations and the European continent as a whole responded to the refugee crisis of 2015 and the following years, the statements of political leaders, border restrictions put in place, and foreign policy agreements made must be examined.

Statements From Political Leaders

One of the most contested aspects of 2015 was German Chancellor Angela Merkel's statements welcoming refugees to Europe. As the one of the strongest voices in Europe at the time, Merkel's "welcoming of Syrian refugees in September 2015 was seen as one of the main contributors to the crisis by some, and by others a scapegoat of sorts to some of the more

¹⁴ Ibid.

important underlying issues in the EU”¹⁵ Nonetheless, by claiming that the situation was a “humanitarian imperative” and using language like “we can do it”, the hope given to refugees to try and reach Germany, or Europe as a whole was legitimized. It is hard for anyone to go back on a statement like that, and when Merkel was making this statement not only as the Chancellor of Germany, but calling on her fellow European nations, it dragged them into the same expectation, even if they were not willing to uphold it.¹⁶ While Merkel’s intentions are what many hope for in terms of dealing with millions of refugees having no place to flee to, and her calling for other European countries to be doing the same is bold, the way that the situation played out did not reflect the ideals she proposed.

Very quickly it became clear that many other political heads did not share the same values that Merkel expressed. While Germany was not the only one taking a more open-arms approach to the crisis, with Swedish prime minister Stefan Löfven in September 2015 saying “My Europe accepts people who are fleeing war. My Europe doesn’t build walls,” and later remarking that there is no limit for how many asylum seekers Sweden would accept, others faced it with hostility.¹⁷ For example, “In Budapest, asylum seekers were greeted by government-erected billboards warning them (in Hungarian) not to violate Hungarian laws or take the jobs of Hungarians.”¹⁸ In Poland, the head of the right-wing nationalist Law and Justice Party, Jarosław Kaczyński, claimed that asylum seekers could carry diseases and “various parasites, protozoa that are common and are not dangerous in the bodies of these people, [but]

¹⁵ Jones et al., 4.

¹⁶ Anne-Marie Le Gloannec, “Holding the Borders, Holding the Centre: The EU and the Refugee Crisis”, 3, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), 2016, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep08028>.

¹⁷ Admir Skodo, “Crisis and Pattern during the 2015–2016 ‘Refugee Crisis’ in Sweden”, In *Migration and Multiculturalism in Scandinavia*, edited by Eric Einhorn, Sherrill Harbison, and Markus Huss, 136, University of Wisconsin Press, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv27h1p5g.10>.

¹⁸ Jones et al., 4.

may be dangerous here.”¹⁹ The Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico rejected a proposed refugee quota by claiming it was “to prevent the emergence of a compact Muslim community in Slovakia.”²⁰ Former President of the Czech Republic Milos Zeman gave his take on the crisis by stating that the Muslim Brotherhood had plans to “bring Europe under its control, step by step.”²¹ Even in northwestern Europe, where tolerance of refugees is thought to be more common, Netherlands politician Geert Wilders said that the the influx of refugees and migrants was an “Islamic invasion..... masses of young men in their 20s with beards singing ‘Allahu akbar’ across Europe,it’s an invasion that threatens our prosperity, our security, our culture and identity.”²² From these statements, a theme of current racial and religious prejudice, cultural superiority, and xenophobia is easily noticeable in the political standpoints of many European nations.

Policies Enacted or Changed

These words and standpoints made by some European leaders eventually took the form of actual political action and strengthening of borders. Hungary was known as the most anti-immigration and anti-refugee European country during this period. The government put up anti-immigration billboards, strict border restrictions, rejected immigrant quotas, and allowed for hate speech against migrants. Many Hungarians have not themselves even interacted or encountered many foreigners, yet have been fed a narrative that enforces the idea that they are all evil or corrupt in some form.²³ In the fall of 2015, Hungary erected a fence along its southern border with Serbia, and following this, erected more fences along its border with Slovenia and

¹⁹ Bakare Najimdeen, “Middle East Refugees’ Crisis: Europeans’ Three Dimensional Approaches”, *Policy Perspectives* 13, no. 2 (2016): 83, <https://doi.org/10.13169/polipers.13.2.0063>.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 82.

²³ György Csepeli and Antal Örkény, “Attitudes Toward Immigrants in Europe: The European Crisis and Xenophobia”, In *Nation and Migration*, 126, How Citizens in Europe Are Coping with Xenophobia, Central European University Press, 2021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7829/j.ctv2hvgqid.8>.

Croatia.²⁴ For those in designated areas, the conditions that many of them were living in were awful. One report states that “the Hungarian camps for refugees are appalling, people are being treated as animals and the Hungarian authorities are keeping the media out so as not to reveal the actual plights of the refugees at the doorstep of Europe.”²⁵ Even further, the Hungarian government began enforcing the Dublin Regulations in a way that blocked off a major railway station to Austria, where many refugees were attempting to flee to.

The Dublin Regulations have been a major source of contention between European nations, as it stipulates that countries of first-contact with refugees had to register the claims of refugees and migrants, as well as limited asylum seekers to applying in the first signatory country they arrived in, and not being allowed to apply multiple times.²⁶ This means that countries do not have to examine asylum applications of those who did not enter their country first, however, Germany bypassed this and examined many applications nonetheless. The issues with this is that the stipulations were loose enough that countries continued to interpret the regulations differently, and there was no consensus or accountability to make sure that they were being followed through on fully. It also made issues more difficult when many asylum seekers did not want to reside in many of the Eastern European countries but hoped to move further West.²⁷

Other nations handled these regulations and the mass influx of refugees differently. In North Macedonia, as a sort of bypass of the regulations, an amendment was passed so that foreigners could enter the country for 72 hours and have public transportation available to them before they were declared illegal. In Slovenia, “police-like powers” were granted to the army as

²⁴ Julija Sardelić, “Managing the Balkan Route: The 2015/16 Refugee Crisis”, Resilience in the Western Balkans, 101, European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), 2017, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep07086.19>.

²⁵ Najimdeen, 85.

²⁶ Le Gloannec, 3.

²⁷ Sardelić, 100-101.

it was patrolling the border and managing the passage of refugees. Some organizations argued that this was a “militarization of society” of sorts, while the government claimed it was necessary for the safety of its citizens.²⁸ In many of these countries, there were reports of refugees being confined at holding points along common routes, being expelled back into unsafe countries, and building various barriers and blockades to restrict movement.²⁹

Another country with a notably troubling response was Poland. The power at the time, the Law and Justice Party (PiS), characterized the refugee crisis as “invasions” and “assaults” on their country and continent. The label of refugee would often not even be extended to those from Northern Africa or the Middle East, and rather they would be labeled as “economic migrants.”³⁰ 2015 seemed to be a launching point for outwardly hostile beliefs surrounding refugees “rooted in xenophobia, racism, and Islamophobic rhetoric”, leading to an anti-Islamic rally taking place in November of that year.³¹

EU-Turkey Deal

One of the most crucial moments within the entirety of this crisis was the implementation of the EU-Turkey deal. Originally it was put in place as an Action Plan in 2015 which would provide 3 billion euros to Turkey in order to better provide humanitarian aid while refugees attempting to enter Europe would be sent back to Turkey frequently. The official deal made in 2016 solidified these plans to limit the number of asylum seekers from entering Europe, especially through Greece and the Western Balkan route. While this deal significantly limited the number of refugees that were able to reach and stay in Europe, many saw it as a turning point

²⁸ Sardelić, 102.

²⁹ Helen Hintjens and Ali Bilgic, “The EU’s Proxy War on Refugees”, *State Crime Journal* 8, no. 1 (2019): 80, <https://doi.org/10.13169/statecrime.8.1.0080>.

³⁰ Karen Hargrave, Kseniya Homel, and Lenka Dražanová, “Contributions, Threats and Solidarity: Narratives around Refugees and Other Migrants in Poland”, 28, *Public Narratives and Attitudes towards Refugees and Other Migrants*, ODI, 2023, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep51405.10>.

³¹ *Ibid.*

from the EU. For one, Angela Merkel was the main leader of getting the deal passed with the Turkish Prime Minister, when she was supposed to be the figurehead of European acceptance and open arms.³² Furthermore, many critics believed that the plan was not one that was a sustainable long-term solution, but rather based on a logic that as long as Europe can pay Turkey, they would not have to deal with the refugees firsthand.³³

The deal stipulated that for each irregular migrant returned to Turkey, one Syrian refugee would be resettled in an EU country, with a cap of 72,000. Two large issues exist within the deal that was made between the EU and Turkey. Firstly, while the deal was successful in limiting the amount of irregular arrivals to Europe through the Western Balkan Route, and to some of the Greek islands, it forced those who were still seeking refuge in Europe to take the much more dangerous Mediterranean routes in order to reach the continent. Secondly, this agreement continues to show Europeans' willingness to protect their own national sovereignty in regards to refugees by nearly any means necessary. Not only is the agreement to send asylum seekers back to Turkey not a viable long-term solution given the millions of refugees and migrants that Turkey is already trying to deal with, but also does not seem to comply with the principle of non-refoulement, set forth in the 1951 Refugee Convention. The principle states that refugees are not to be sent back to unsafe countries where they face serious threats to their life or freedom.³⁴ "Education, labor market integration, health care access, social inclusion and infrastructure projects" were all to be assisted by the EU in Turkey in order to create a healthy living system for the refugees there.³⁵ The issue here is that Turkey is a country that has not even upheld the

³² Le Gloannec, 4.

³³ Ferris and Kerişci, "Syrian Refugees", 67.

³⁴ UNHCR, 19.

³⁵ Everita Silina, "Legal Topography of the 2015 European Refugee "Crisis", In *Refugees on the Move*, edited by Erol Balkan and Zümray Kutlu Tonak, 172, Crisis and Response in Turkey and Europe, Berghahn Books, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2vr8tsk.12>.

rights of its own citizens and has had increasing authoritarian rule which imprisons people with opposing political viewpoints. Various conflicts with Kurdish populations and consistent violations of the rights of its own citizens leaves much to be questioned when thinking about how protected refugees would truly be. Turkey had also not signed the New York Protocol which secures rights and protections for non-European refugees, but rather only provides refugees with temporary protection before they are allowed to deport them back to their home countries. As Le Gloanec states in *Holding the Borders*, “For EU member states...to declare Turkey a ‘safe third country’ is simply one bridge too far.”³⁶

Societal Acceptance and Support

While this deal can be seen as a way for Europe to bypass some of the responsibility of taking in refugees, the way that Europeans actually viewed and vilified them is even more concerning. As most of these refugees were fleeing from the Middle East, there were high concentrations of Muslims among them. This perspective has been a tension within European countries and Muslim communities for years on end, whether it be from historic conflicts, fighting in the World Wars, or modern day ethnic and religious tensions. While the EU was formed to promote a common European identity through economic support, political cooperation, and general welfare of European people, when nations began reeling back into individualistic mindsets as many did during this crisis, a rise in xenophobia in these nations was quite noticeable. It seemed, at least in 2015, that European identity was resisting the ever-growing globalization of the world. There seemed to be a fear that the onslaught of truly multicultural societies would disrupt the European identity that had been formed and strengthened over the centuries, but also in the last few decades specifically.³⁷ The problem for

³⁶ Le Gloanec, 4.

³⁷ Najimdeen, 81. See also Csepeli and Örkény, “Immigrants in Europe”, 125.

the refugees themselves is that even if acceptance into society were to become a simple possibility, oftentimes the education or diplomas held by refugees did not transfer into European equivalents, forcing them to often abandon their old professions.

György Csepeli and Antal Örkény deeply explore the tensions and perceptions that still exist within European minds in their book *Nation and Migration: How Citizens in Europe are Coping with Xenophobia*. Their research, along with some others, gives weight to the idea that most all European nations still face big issues with xenophobia and racism within their populations, governments, and institutions. They conclude a few points worth noting for the means of this paper. First, nations themselves are not necessarily more or less likely to be xenophobic, but rather individuals who are less educated, lower on the socio-economic ladder, and have had less first hand experience with refugees, immigrants, and non-Europeans are more likely to hold xenophobic viewpoints. This demographic combined with nationalist parties and their policies often heavily relying upon them leaves Eastern European nations more likely to hold such viewpoints. This does not leave the West free from these perceptions, as can be seen, but nations like Poland, Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia are much more likely to openly state their Islamophobic or racist views than nations like France or Great Britain, where multicultural interactions are much more common.³⁸ Another study found consistent examples of “verbal abuse and physical attacks on people with dark skin, those perceived to be Muslim or people speaking foreign languages.”³⁹

³⁸ Csepeli and Örkény, “Immigrants in Europe”, 139. See also Najimdeen, 2016. See also Willem Joris and Rozane De Cock, “The Effects of Dominant versus Peripheral News Frames on Attitudes toward Refugees and News Story Credibility”, In *Images of Immigrants and Refugees in Western Europe*, edited by Willem Joris, Leen d’Haenens, and François Heinderyckx, 170, Media Representations, Public Opinion and Refugees’ Experiences, Leuven University Press, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvh1dkhm.11>.

³⁹ Hargrave et al., 27.

Media Coverage and Narrative

The last two points worth focusing on go somewhat hand in hand. This includes the fear of terrorism with the rise in refugees from the Middle East and the media's portrayal of these refugees. The fear of terrorism is a pointed topic within media portrayal, so it is necessary to look at that first and then take a look at the broader media influence in 2015. Csepeli and Örkény conclude that much of the hostility and distrust of Muslim migrants comes actually from a form of scapegoating in which governments and the media shift the blame of society's shortcomings on various ethnic groups and non-Europeans. Not only this, but the media surrounding terrorist events specifically portrays them in a way that incites fear and distress in the general public.⁴⁰

This fear is directly linked to refugee flows, specifically from the Middle East. This is not to say that incidents of terrorist activity have not been seen within Europe, or that the Islamic State has been idle in any ways when it comes to attempting infiltration into European nations, but rather that it has been narrated in a way that is founded on racial and religious discrimination rather than actual statistics. A report from the United Nations in 2015 found that "there is no evidence that migration leads to increased terrorist activity" and actually states that the migration policies put in place out of fear or misguided perceptions on refugees actually leads to environments that are more capable of having human rights violations and terrorist growth.⁴¹ It is also important to note that while the Islamic State had claimed to have sent 4,000 fighters through Turkey into Europe, this statement was mostly intended to continue to spread mistrust and doubt about refugees throughout European nations. If they are able to accomplish this goal, they can successfully create the environments previously stated that lead to higher likelihoods of

⁴⁰ Csepeli and Örkény, "Immigrants in Europe", 111.

⁴¹ Manni Crone, Maja Felicia Falkentoft, and Teemu Tammikko, "Assumption One: REFUGEES AS VULNERABLE TO RADICALIZATION AND RECRUITMENT", 14, Europe's Refugee Crisis and the Threat of Terrorism, Danish Institute for International Studies, 2017, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep17371.5>.

radicalization. Apart from influence by the Islamic State, many of the terrorist incidents that have occurred on European soil have been mischaracterized to some degree. Of the four major terrorist incidents in Europe between 2016 and mid-2017, all four actors were asylum-seekers with three of them having had their asylum request rejected. In fact, in 2015 and 2016 European citizens themselves were more often than not the ones who carried out the majority of deadly attacks in Europe.⁴² It seems then that the portrayal of refugees as terrorists, or that the threat of terrorism being brought with more refugees coming to Europe, is based on not much else than media and discriminatory influences.

The wider concern with the role of media within the 2015 refugee crisis is that it consistently influenced European populations to hold negative views of refugees entering Europe. It is agreed by most researchers focusing specifically on the media's influence that it directly influences the way that their audiences are interacting and perceiving refugees. Furthermore, news sources are the primary outlet in which Europeans get their information about refugees.⁴³ In many instances during the 2015 crisis and onwards, refugees were consistently presented in a negative light. In British news, refugees were often characterized as problematic. On the whole, "more than 70 percent of the news items had a negative tone and stated that immigrants are causing problems or seemed focused on the negative consequences of immigration."⁴⁴ One aspect of this characterization was the publication of young male refugees from the Middle East and Northern African on cell phones and wearing European clothing. This directly contrasts the common perception of what a refugee is, and seriously affected the

⁴² Crone et al., "Assumption One", 16-20.

⁴³ Joris and De Cock, 161-163.

⁴⁴ David De Coninck, Hanne Vandenberghe, and Koen Matthijs, "Discordance between Public Opinion and News Media Representations of Immigrants and Refugees in Belgium and Sweden", In *Images of Immigrants and Refugees in Western Europe*, edited by Leen d'Haenens, Willem Joris, and François Heinderyckx, 125, Media Representations, Public Opinion and Refugees' Experiences, Leuven University Press, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvh1dkhm.9>.

sympathy and perceptions that Europeans held towards refugees.⁴⁵ The issue with this is that many Europeans were not actually interacting with refugees first hand, so most of the time their opinions were formed simply by the news that had been available to them. This is why such a poor reception can be seen when refugees actually enter certain areas, as the mindset of the population has already been influenced against them.⁴⁶ This is why viewpoints and beliefs are able to grow so strongly into Islamophobia in places like Poland and Hungary where direct interaction with refugees is quite unlikely.⁴⁷ For example, one Polish magazine cover claimed of a mass amount of sexual assault against Polish women at the hands of Muslim men. The page was paired with the title “The Islamic Rape of Europe.”⁴⁸ In 2015 specifically, certain narratives emerged that set the stage for how Europeans would view these large groups of refugees, but also how they would view themselves within it. The narrative frame that asylum seekers were mainly illegal immigrants was very prominent at the beginning of the crisis; however, it began to shift as time went on to focusing more on the responsibility of Europe and the “humanitarian” actions they needed to take.⁴⁹ This shift takes the focus off those fleeing (even if negative in the first place), and turns it into an issue that has Europeans at the core. News and media are also often highly connected to political agendas and tend to support whatever frame a government or nation would like to portray.⁵⁰ It seems the connection between anti-refugee narratives and portrayals can be strongly linked to growing nationalism and Euro-skepticism.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Hargrave et al., 28.

⁴⁶ De Coninck et al., “Discordance”, 126.

⁴⁷ Csepeli and Örkény, “Immigrants in Europe”, 139.

⁴⁸ Hargrave et al., 29.

⁴⁹ Eva (Evangelia) Papatzani and Electra Petracou, “Flexible Redefinitions of ‘Us’ and the ‘Others’: Refugee Politics in the Convergences of Multiple ‘Crises’ in the EU and Greece”, In *Contesting Cosmopolitan Europe*, edited by James Foley and Umut Korkut, 150, Euro-skepticism, Crisis and Borders, Amsterdam University Press, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2v55mc3.10>.

⁵⁰ Leen d’Haenens and Willem Joris, “Images of Immigrants and Refugees in Western Europe: Media Representations, Public Opinion, and Refugees’ Experiences”, In *Images of Immigrants and Refugees in Western Europe*, edited by Leen d’Haenens, Willem Joris, and François Heinderyckx, 8, Media Representations, Public Opinion and Refugees’ Experiences, Leuven University Press, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvh1dkhm.3>.

⁵¹ Najimdeen, 80.

One specific instance that did not necessarily fit with the mold or narrative often portrayed by European media was the release of pictures showing a 3 year old Syrian toddler named Alan Kurdi washed up dead on a Turkish beach. These blunt and saddening images forced Europeans to reconcile with the reality of the struggle of refugees. This incident was heavily influential in more firm EU actions to resolve the refugee crisis.⁵² Even if the refugee crisis was only brought into the spotlight momentarily, it exposed the reality of European media's ability to influence public opinion without any actual personal interaction.⁵³ This kind of media is what many refugees themselves believe to be necessary in order for the world to truly care about and understand their struggles. A Belgian study focusing on actual refugees' thoughts found that many believed the "ugly truth" or reality of the situation needed to be publicized so that people would actually understand what was happening, the emphasis being on forcing Europeans to actually have compassion and empathize with refugees rather than just pitying them.⁵⁴

Ukrainian Refugee Crisis

History of Conflict

While Europe has had some 8 years since the initial unexpected onslaught of refugees into their homeland, they did not have all that long before another crisis broke out that left an even larger amount of refugees seeking protection within Europe. The more recent war between Russia and Ukraine has sent millions fleeing the area and into surrounding European nations.

The response to these refugees has been drastically different to that of the refugees that were

⁵² Najimdeen, 77.

⁵³ d'Haenens and Joris, 12.

⁵⁴ Kevin Smets, Jacinthe Mazzocchetti, Lorraine Gerstmans, and Lien Mostmans, "Beyond Victimhood: Reflecting on Migrant-Victim Representations with Afghan, Iraqi, and Syrian Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Belgium", In *Images of Immigrants and Refugees in Western Europe*, edited by Leen d'Haenens, Willem Joris, and François Heinderyckx, 189-191, Media Representations, Public Opinion and Refugees' Experiences, Leuven University Press, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvh1dkhm.12>.

attempting to enter Europe in 2015 and is worth comparing in depth. Before looking into the differences in response between the two groups, it is however, very important to understand the historical conflict and political tension between Ukraine and Russia in order to understand why so many have been affected. While the current war in Ukraine has been a highly covered and discussed topic, it does not make complete sense without some precursor information.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, peace in Eastern Europe was a priority for all. As a part of this, Russia signed the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances which stipulates that they would “refrain from threatening the sovereignty and territorial integrity of newly independent Ukraine, in exchange for Kyiv renouncing its Soviet-era stockpile of nuclear weapons.”⁵⁵ While this was the case, Vladimir Putin made it quite clear that he never truly believed that Ukraine deserved to have sovereignty, but rather that it was the rightful possession of Russia.⁵⁶ As Alex Bellamy puts it in *Ukraine I*, “Vladimir Putin insists Ukraine is not a real country. That its people are really Russians. That its state is not fully sovereign. That its boundaries are historical accidents. Russia’s president has said this often.”⁵⁷ For Ukraine, the last 20 some years have been marked with two constants, the first being the struggle to balance relations with Russia and the West, and the second being a lack of strong and just political authority.⁵⁸ Two decades of corruption and internal political tension began to mount in 2013 with the start of protests against the president at the time, Viktor Yanukovich. These protests stemmed from a last-minute drop-out from the Association Agreement with the EU, with suspected Russian influence. After Yanukovich responded to these protests, labeled “Euromaidan” with

⁵⁵ Björn Alexander Düben “The Long Shadow of the Soviet Union: Demystifying Putin’s Rhetoric Towards Ukraine”, 7, LSE IDEAS, 2022, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep45304>.

⁵⁶ Bill Bowring, “Russia’s War on Ukraine”, *Socialist Lawyer*, no. 89 (2022): 20–21. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48725018>.

⁵⁷ Alex J Bellamy, “Ukraine I”, In *Warmonger*, 81, Vladimir Putin’s Imperial Wars, Agenda Publishing, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.6338475.7>.

⁵⁸ Siemon T. Wezeman and Alexandra Kuimova, “Ukraine and Black Sea Security”, 2, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2018, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep24426>.

force in early 2014, led to his regime collapsing, and Yanukovich himself fleeing to Russia.⁵⁹ Soon after this, Russia invaded Ukraine through the use of separatist groups in Donetsk and Luhansk and eventually annexed Crimea.⁶⁰ In his actions, which may have been in part motivated by Ukraine's increasing tendency towards the West, Putin actually pushed them further into the direction of NATO and the EU.⁶¹ Even while Russian-backed fighters in the East continued to cause conflict, Ukraine began looking for more direct involvement in international organizations. In 2017 they officially requested to join NATO, and relied on extensive EU backing to hold their territory and keep the economy afloat.⁶² It is recorded that between 2014 and 2018, Ukraine received \$6.8 billion in developmental assistance.⁶³

This tension carried into what is known today as the current Russia-Ukraine War. This conflict began on February 24th of 2022 when Russia invaded Ukraine with the hope of quickly capturing the capital of Kyiv within a 10 day time frame. To Russia's surprise, Ukraine was able to hold off the strong offensive and push back. This resistance has turned what was supposed to be a quick invasion into a multi-year war with no clear end in sight yet.⁶⁴ Russian attacks have consistently targeted power stations, civilian areas, and major cities causing millions to flee their homes. As of May 2023, 21.92 million people had fled Ukraine, with 5.35 million being internally displaced and 5.3 million requesting temporary protection in Europe.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Marek Dabrowski, Marta Domínguez-Jiménez, and Georg Zachmann, "Six Years after Ukraine's Euromaidan: Reforms and Challenges Ahead", 2, Bruegel, 2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep50617>.

⁶⁰ Bowring, 3.

⁶¹ Dabrowski, 2.

⁶² Wezeman and Kuimova, 3.

⁶³ Dabrowski, 19.

⁶⁴ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, "War in Ukraine One Year On, Nowhere Safe", 2-4, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, 2023, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep48585>.

⁶⁵ Anthony H. Cordesman, "The Lasting Strategic Impact of the War in Ukraine", 17, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2023, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep51803>.

Initial Response of European Nations

For the EU, the response to such an issue is quite possibly the biggest they have had to face. By many accounts, the actions taken by the EU up to this point have been a show of its ability to actually act in a somewhat united fashion and with effective decision-making. In the early stages of the war, large economic sanctions were put in place against Russia. As time has gone on, billions of euros have been provided for various aspects of Ukraine's defense and aid.⁶⁶ The EU has also worked to end its energy dependence on Russia while also banning the export of a variety of high-technology products. Along with this has been the restriction of Russian media influence, by suspending the licenses of Russian owned propaganda outlets.⁶⁷

A poll from January 2023 showed that most Europeans are united to back Ukraine in their independence and were willing to support that cause where necessary.⁶⁸ Unlike the conflicts and wars being fought in 2015 that left so many heading towards Europe, this conflict is closer to home, and is within Europe. This sense of continental protection and primacy surely influenced the immediate action taken by European nations in this current conflict compared to areas like Syria where more indirect action was taken. Even within these differences, the continuation of the West vs. Russia narrative is clearly seen as linked by the proxy activities in 2015 and the varied approaches by both sides in the current conflict.

Probably the most vital and praised action taken since the start of the war has been the Temporary Protection Directive activated by the EU for Ukrainian refugees fleeing the war. Under this, Ukrainian refugees have “the right to residence, healthcare, education, and work in

⁶⁶ Max Bergmann, Ilke Toygür, and Otto Svendsen, “A Continent Forged in Crisis: Assessing Europe One Year into the War”, 1, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2023, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep47348>.

⁶⁷ Jan Joel Andersson and Clara Sophie Cramer, “Support to Ukraine”, 6, EUISS YEARBOOK OF EUROPEAN SECURITY, European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), 2023, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep52685.8>.

⁶⁸ Ivan Krastev, and Mark Leonard, “Fragile Unity: Why Europeans Are Coming Together on Ukraine (and What Might Drive Them Apart)”, 2, European Council on Foreign Relations, 2023, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep48491>.

any EU member state until March 2024.”⁶⁹ This is first for the EU as such strong acceptance of refugees was never implemented during the 2015 crisis. It is unsure if this Directive will be extended any further than that currently, but, this at least offers Ukrainian refugees the opportunity to still work and provide for their families for the time being without much worry of deportation or lack of resources.⁷⁰ For countries who had been so wary of vastly smaller amounts of Middle Eastern and North African refugees entering their countries only a few years ago, this turn around to accept millions of Ukrainians without too much fuss is almost dumbfounding. This is not to say that every nation is completely in sync with refugee policies in this scenario, however, most would agree that EU nations have acted in a way that is much more uniform in comparison to the 2015 crisis. A poll taken among EU nations found that a majority of people were in favor of assisting Ukraine economically and militarily. Nearly 50% even stated that they now saw the EU as stronger or as strong since the start of the war.⁷¹ So not only is support for Ukraine and the EU stronger by large amounts than during the 2015 crisis, but the refugees in this situation are being welcomed with much more open arms than previously.

One proposed explanation for this is that Euroscepticism has faded to a degree in Europe compared to the previous ten years. Even while far-right parties are continuing to grow in Europe, the realization that national sovereignty needed to be initiated through collective action changed the way that many of these parties discussed the EU.⁷² For example, Giorgia Meloni in Italy who has, despite being a member of the far-right Brothers of Italy party, been much more receptive to EU and European cooperation than expected. Even in Poland, the far-right Law and

⁶⁹ Bergmann et al., 8.

⁷⁰ Lena Näre, Dalia Abdelhady, and Nahikari Irastorza, “What Can We Learn from the Reception of Ukrainian Refugees?” *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* 12, no. 3 (2022): 256, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48711594>.

⁷¹ Krastev and Leonard, 8-9.

⁷²Ibid., 12.

Justice party has recently been ousted by pro-EU opposition. These changes are just a piece of why the reception of refugees in Europe now compared to in 2015 looks different.

Statements from Political Leaders

The discourse surrounding these Ukrainian refugees has also looked vastly different in comparison to the statements made about Middle Eastern and North African refugees. Many statements have even directly compared the two situations and have made the underlying reasons for difference quite clear. Riikka Purra of the Finns Party in Finland claims that Ukrainians deserved to be helped as they are “Europeans, Christians, and mostly women and children.”⁷³ To her, and many other members of her party, Ukrainians are more deserving of reception due to their ethnicity and religion. This also plays heavily into the way that the media portrayed Middle Eastern refugees as predominantly male. Statistics from 2015-2016 have shown that about 51% of asylum seekers in Europe were men, with the rest being women and children, disproving the narrative highlighted by the media. Nonetheless, these characterizations lead to far less empathetic policies and people as they are categorized as “less worthy” of support and aid.⁷⁴ It is not to say that the idea of people who are more similar to you in culture and identity being easier to resonate with is necessarily negative, but it is questionable to favor any group of people seeking refuge over another without truly vital reason. However, many Europeans are using this rhetoric in order to explain and justify their receptivity. As quoted in one interview, Poles could “see themselves in Ukrainians”, while in terms of Middle Eastern and Northern African refugees, they had generally less awareness of conflicts and could not empathize with these refugees as easily.⁷⁵

⁷³ Näre et al., 256.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Hargrave et al., 34.

Two other aspects that contribute to the response towards Ukrainian refugees involve the estimated timeline of the war and the idea that Ukraine is an exemplar of European resistance to Russia as a whole. For the first point, in the first year of the war, many nations believed that receiving these refugees would be a temporary solution. Purra made another claim that “Ukrainians are patriotic people” referring to the idea that they will surely return home once the war has finished.⁷⁶ As time has drawn on, and the predictions for the war’s end date seem to keep being pushed back, only time will tell if this changes the way these nations receive and continue to care for Ukrainian refugees. At the same time, Ukraine has become symbolic of Europe in a way, and its resistance to Russia’s encroachment. No matter the tense history Ukraine has had being between the aims of the West and Russia, now their identity as truly European is clear. The “us” vs. “them” narrative has been heavily played on throughout the war, and continues to push the idea that Ukraine is defending a broader freedom, specifically a European freedom, outside of just itself.⁷⁷ Since European interaction in Syrian and broader Middle Eastern conflicts was far less direct or consistent, the idea that these conflicts had any near end in sight, or was somehow greatly relating to their own freedoms and safety was not at play.

Refugee Reception and Acceptance

The real question to ask is what this reception actually looked like though. Governments can make statements or enact policies but at the end of the day, the experiences that these refugees have at the border and once in the country can look a lot different than those high decrees. As the amount of refugees fleeing Ukraine reaches closer to 6 million, the surrounding European nations have had to deal with mass influxes. Millions have fled to Poland, Slovakia and Germany, hundreds of thousands have fled to the Nordic nations, and many more have found

⁷⁶ Näre et al., 256.

⁷⁷ Hargrave et al., 35.

their way to other European nations. By August 2022, about 4 million of these refugees had already registered for Temporary Protection or similar programs.⁷⁸ The EU has already provided over 17 billion euros specifically for Ukrainian refugees and shows no sign of stopping financial support any time soon.⁷⁹ In many of the Nordic nations, Ukrainians have been met with hospitality. They have been granted the right to work and fully participate in society despite the fact that they have already heavily exceeded the amount of refugees that entered these nations in 2015 and constituted a “crisis” and closing of borders. This process has also been almost immediate while previously it would have taken refugees years to secure such protections in certain countries. Even some of the right-wing parties with a history of anti-immigration and acceptance policies have been generally welcoming and receptive of Ukrainians.⁸⁰ In Greece, where the refugee crisis of 2015 was heavily highlighted by pitiful housing conditions and refugee camps, Ukrainian acceptance has been quite the opposite with warm welcomes and extensive aid.⁸¹

In Poland, the reception has been even more jarring in comparison to their 2015 response. Since the start of the war, Poles have heavily supported Ukrainians through social media and through different forms of aid. Poles have offered food, clothing, discounted or free items from stores, transportation, and even housing. A poll found that “4% to 7% of Poles have hosted a Ukrainian in their home.”⁸² Donations for aid and support were in abundance both locally and nationally and economic opportunities for refugees were easily available. There are two important aspects of this reception to note. The first being that in the early stages of the war, there were multiple reports of nationalist groups specifically targeting and turning away refugees

⁷⁸ Näre et al., 255.

⁷⁹ Andersson and Cramer, 22.

⁸⁰ Näre et al., 255.

⁸¹ Anthony C. Gatrell, “People on the Move: The Dispossessed and Their Health and Wellbeing”, In *Global Health*, 93, Geographical Connections, Agenda Publishing, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.6338473.9>.

⁸² Hargrave et al., 32.

of color. While this is surely not a majority opinion or action, it nonetheless shows where some distinctions and lines are drawn for Poles when it comes to refugees.⁸³ The second aspect being the fact that as the war has drawn on, general support for Ukrainian refugees has begun to waver. It is still much stronger than support for Middle Eastern or African refugees has ever been, but as the conflict continues on, it may show that this support was founded on the idea that the war would draw to a quick close with Western intervention.⁸⁴ With these both in mind, it still rings true that the treatment and reception of Ukrainian refugees has been very different than that of refugees in 2015 and of those who are non-European. Two Ukrainian organizations in Poland summed it up best in a joint-statement they released by saying “It amazes us that Poland, the same country which helps Ukrainian refugees in such a wonderful way, shamelessly and with cruelty drives families from outside of Europe into the forest and kicks them out to Belarus.”⁸⁵ It has been made clear by countries like Poland, as well as others, that the European response to this matter still heavily relies on factors outside of these refugees control, not simply the fact that they have been forced to flee their homelands due to conflict and fear. As one report put it, the Ukrainian refugee response has “shed light on the racism and hypocrisy of European migration policies.”⁸⁶

Media Coverage and Narrative

The last aspect to examine within the broader Russia-Ukraine conflict is the role that the media has had in influencing and pushing certain narratives upon European people. The large role that Russia has played in disinformation spreading actually seems to strike a similar chord as one discussed earlier. In 2015, this role was filled more often by the Islamic State to intentionally

⁸³ Hargrave et al., 33.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 35.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 32.

⁸⁶ Näre et al., 256.

cause suspicion and fear in Europe surrounding the idea of foreign refugees. In this modern conflict with Ukrainian refugees, it has been found that Russia has produced large amounts of misinformation in order to cause a lack of unity and trust within Russia in relation to Ukraine. In Poland specifically, Russia has been attempting to raise tensions by bringing up the past histories of the two countries that were much more shaky. Other Russia-backed news outlets have continuously spread anti-refugee messaging in order to sway the Polish public. Other countries like France and Georgia have faced attempts at causing disunity on refugee reception and Ukrainian support.⁸⁷ While this does not necessarily dictate the way that Europeans are viewing Ukrainians through the media, it is an important aspect of the media's role to keep in mind.

In terms of the way that the media has been portraying Ukrainian refugees as a whole in Europe, it would be fair to say that their characterization is much more generous and friendly than that of non-European refugees. One of the biggest aspects was the selective use of the word “crisis” at the start of the war.⁸⁸ This word carries with it the weight of responsibility that is brought upon European shoulders. In 2015, it was used to signify emergency, urgency, and a shared burden that European nations now had to face in order to deal with foreigners. In the Ukrainian refugee “crisis”, the word still carries the weight of urgency and responsibility, but it also signifies in a different way a brotherly support for those that share common interests, rather than an aid that took on the form of something closer to pity.

For Ukrainians, media coverage has not always been unified throughout Europe, however, for some time, their work in other European nations has been noted and praised.⁸⁹ Once the war began, the description of European peoples with “blue eyes,” coming from a country that

⁸⁷ Roman Osadchuk, “Russian Tactics Targeting Europe”, 20-23, *Undermining Ukraine*, Atlantic Council, 2023, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep47368.8>.

⁸⁸ Patrick Saez, and John Bryant, “Dominant Humanitarian Policy Narratives”, 20, *Understanding the Role of Narratives in Humanitarian Policy Change*, ODI, 2023, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep51412.7>.

⁸⁹ Hargrave et al., 26.

is considered “relatively civilized” compared to many Middle Eastern nations in European minds made it easier for Europeans to relate and empathize with Ukrainian refugees.⁹⁰ The vast difference in generosity extended to Ukrainians compared to non-Europeans makes the impact of these media framings’ importance even more evident.⁹¹ While the formatting of narratives surrounding Ukrainians has served to benefit their reception for the most part, the same cannot be said for non-European refugees, specifically during the 2015 crisis and on. The stereotypes, undertones of racism and Islamophobia, and hostilities held towards Middle Eastern and African refugees are only reinforced by the media. The clearest distinction made here is that Ukrainian refugees fit within the “us” narrative put forth by the media, while others are stuck under the “them” category, which often leaves them being seen as threats or intruders.⁹²

Conclusion

With so many aspects of refugee reception and policy making to take into account for both of the situations presented, it is difficult to give a concise comparison that takes into account every factor at play within them. That being said, there are some notable differences that are worth reiterating. It is undeniable that European nations, and the EU as a whole, have been put in difficult situations time and time again when it comes to refugees. There are political ramifications, economic and societal stability, and public approval all to keep in account, while still providing a space for those who are fleeing from violence in their home countries. It seems however, that Europe today still has preferential treatment, acceptance, and empathy for refugees that are of similar ethnicity, religion, and nationality to them. This has been made evident by the drastic differences in policy making and border openness in comparison between Ukrainian and non-European refugees. Many European political parties with broad sweeping statements against

⁹⁰ Saez and Bryant, 25.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Hargrave et al., 34.

refugees historically have changed such stances once these refugees began to look like them and believe what they believe. A fear of terrorism has been drastically overextended by the media and politics in a way that gives way to islamophobic and xenophobic values in many European societies. While thoughts and values are one thing, political action to actively push non-European refugees away from European borders and deals made to keep a majority of these refugees away from the European mainland boldly show that the solution to different "refugee crises" depends on where these refugees are coming from. For Ukrainians, this means borders are opened, access to education, work, and public transportation is very freely given, and for Syrians, Afghans, or Somalis, it means being paid to stay in Turkey, or being deported back to a nation stricken with war and conflict.

To state once again, this is not an attempt to shame or criticize the reception that Ukrainians have received in Europe, quite the opposite. The Ukrainian reception of millions within European borders has simply proven that Europe does have the capacity and capability to deal with large influxes of refugees when absolutely necessary. There is strong sentiment in Europe that these refugees will eventually return to Ukraine as well with Western aid against Russia hopefully bringing the war to an end. What would it look like for Europeans, and for the world to truly believe that peace could be brought to nations in the Middle East, or in Africa, and to accept refugees with the hope that they could one day return home? There can be hope that the current Ukrainian refugee crisis brings light to the shortcomings of Europe when it comes to the millions of others that hope to find refuge there.

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