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**Immigration and asylum policy in Europe.** Explaining the variation in recognition rates regarding applications for asylum across different European destination countries in the light of the current refugee crisis

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Recognition rates regarding applications for asylum vary considerably across different European destination countries. This is surprising for two reasons: First, all countries covered in this work (all EU members plus Iceland, Norway and Switzerland) are signatories to the Geneva Convention, the European Convention on Human Rights as well as the United Nations Convention against Torture, which formally obliges them to apply uniform standards to applications for asylum. Second, most countries covered in this work are members of the EU, which has continuously made efforts to harmonize standards and procedures in this context since 1999. This work investigates the variation in recognition rates regarding applications for asylum across different European destination countries by carrying out a bivariate correlation analysis and a multiple regression analysis. The bivariate correlation analysis reveals a weak positive linear association between recognition rates regarding applications for asylum and the economic and political conditions in destination countries. This is also true for the extent to which an existing immigrant community has managed to successfully integrate into the native society. The multiple regression analysis, however, is unable to confirm that any of the explanatory variables considered in this work have a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

*“Europe is caught between those who want to get in, those who want to get out, and those who want to destroy it. The incomers are desperate, the outbound are angry and the destroyers are brandishing flags. This triple onslaught has, for the first time in its history, left the 28-member European Union more vulnerable to fracture than it is susceptible to further integration.”<sup>1</sup>*

At one point in time during this work’s writing, approximately 2,500 mostly Syrian and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers, including women, children and elderly people, were trapped in a sports stadium for nearly 24 hours on the Greek island of Kos, most of them without access to food, water or even shade, as reportedly overburdened Greek authorities struggled to register and accommodate them. With thousands more arriving on the EU’s Southern borders on a daily basis, an end of the refugee influx is nowhere in

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<sup>1</sup> Cohen, R. (2015). The Migrant Crisis in Calais Exposes A Europe Without Ideas.

sight. At the same time, Germany, for instance, is experiencing an alarming increase in violent attacks on refugees and asylum seekers carried out by right-wing extremists and neo-Nazis, culminating in the German police forces' having to install safety zones in an effort to protect housing designated for refugees and asylum seekers. These are only two examples illustrating the worrying events that have escalated in the wake of the current refugee crisis in Europe. Time will tell whether or not they pose a threat to the EU's unity as suggested by the introductory quote, but there is no denying that the EU's inability to develop a coordinated policy in response to the appalling situation is creating unnecessary suffering and uncertainty. While refugees and asylum seekers are drowning in the Mediterranean Sea, being abused by traffickers or persevering in makeshift housing, a part of the native population in many European countries is concerned about increasing crime rates and fears losing jobs to refugees and asylum seekers in an already depressed labor market. Justified or not, these issues seriously worry many citizens of EU member states.

European countries follow very different approaches in reaction to the current refugee crisis illustrated above. This is also reflected in the variation in recognition rates regarding applications for asylum across different European destination countries. To stick with the countries mentioned earlier, data provided by Eurostat<sup>2</sup> show that Greece, for instance, recognized only 14.8 percent of all applications for asylum decided upon in 2014, while Germany recognized 41.6 percent. Some European destination countries have even lower recognition rates than Greece, while many others have significantly higher recognition rates than Germany.<sup>3</sup> The underlying variation in immigration and asylum policy across different European destination countries is surprising for two reasons: First, all destination countries included in this work<sup>4</sup> are signatories to the Geneva Convention, the European Convention on Human Rights as well as the United Nations Convention against

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<sup>2</sup> Eurostat (2015). First Instance Decisions on Applications by Citizenship, Age and Sex Annual Aggregated Data (Rounded).

<sup>3</sup> 2014 recognition rates across different European destination countries are illustrated in a map of Europe in Section IV.

<sup>4</sup> All EU member states plus Iceland, Norway and Switzerland.

Torture, which formally obliges them to apply uniform standards to all applications for asylum.<sup>5/6</sup> Second, since 1999, the EU has continuously made efforts to harmonize standards and procedures within the framework of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), which aims to ensure that rights granted to refugees and asylum seekers under international law are respected by all EU member states in equal measure. This being said, the observed variation in recognition rates regarding applications for asylum suggests that European destination countries are interpreting their formal obligations differently in reaction to the current refugee crisis.<sup>7</sup> This work provides insight as to why this may be the case.

Understanding the variation described above is the key to developing a coordinated policy in an effort to improve the current appalling situation. Unfortunately, so far, the EU and its member states have proven incapable of finding a sustainable solution for the current refugee crisis. The EU Commission's European Agenda on Migration presented in May 2015 initially included mandatory quotas based on factors such as population size, economic strength and unemployment to determine how many refugees and asylum seekers each member state should take in. However, the proposal was fiercely debated and rejected fairly quickly, primarily because several countries vigorously object an approach which they have officially described as an imposition of solidarity. Hence, as an observer quoted by Fichtner et al.<sup>8</sup> notes, "the agenda was dead an hour after it was born."

Regardless of its failure, the European Agenda on Migration was insufficient to address the full scope of the current refugee crisis in Europe from the very beginning. It only covered the redistribution of 40,000 refugees and asylum seekers stranded in Italy, Greece

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<sup>5</sup> Neumayer, E. (2005). Asylum Recognition Rates in Western Europe – Their Determinants, Variation and Lack of Convergence.

<sup>6</sup> Text of the 'Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees' provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees at <<http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.pdf>>.

<sup>7</sup> Although not in the context of the current refugee crisis in Europe, Neumayer, E. (2005) also suggests that European destination countries interpret their formal obligations towards refugees and asylum seekers differently.

<sup>8</sup> Fichtner, U. et al. (2015). The EU's Shipwrecked Refugee Plan.

and Malta to other EU member states as well as the direct admission of 20,000 Syrians and Eritreans within a period of two years.<sup>9</sup> These efforts stand in stark contrast to the sheer dimension of the current refugee crisis. According to EU Migration Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos<sup>10</sup>, the world is currently facing the worst refugee crisis since World War II, with an estimated total of 800,000 refugees and asylum seekers expected to arrive in Germany alone in 2015.<sup>11</sup> Most of them come from Syria, Afghanistan and Eritrea, countries ravaged by years or even decades of war, oppressive authoritarian regimes – or both. As long as these countries do not find peace and, as Cohen<sup>12</sup> points out, “even the world’s poorest recesses [receive] images of prosperity and security [in Europe]”, the influx of refugees and asylum seekers will not die down. This prospect underlines the necessity of a coordinated policy in response to the current refugee crisis in Europe.

The contribution of this work in this context and in terms of understanding the variation in recognition rates regarding applications for asylum across different European destination countries begins with the fact that the existing body of literature has yet to investigate the phenomenon in the light of the current refugee crisis in Europe. By relying on data from 2014, this work intends to contribute to filling this gap. Furthermore, most of the existing literature takes the form of qualitative case studies. By carrying out a bivariate correlation analysis and a multiple regression analysis, this work chooses a more comparative and quantitative approach to the matter with the aim of making statistical generalizations. Another valuable contribution lies in the choice of this work’s explanatory variables. These are the level of a destination country’s inclusive wealth per capita as a measure of its economic situation, its government’s position on the left-right scale as a measure of the destination country’s political situation and the degree of its existing immigrant

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<sup>9</sup> Traynor, I. & Watt, N. (2015). Mediterranean Migrants: EU Leaders Agree Voluntary Intake After Heated Talks.

<sup>10</sup> Business Insider (2015). EU Says World Facing 'Worst Refugee Crisis' Since WWII.

<sup>11</sup> The Economist (2015). Germany, the EU Country Which Takes the Most Asylum Seekers, Is Straining.

<sup>12</sup> Cohen, R. (2015). The Migrant Crisis in Calais Exposes A Europe Without Ideas.



community's integration. While many authors have identified a country's economic situation as a possible determinant of immigration and asylum policy, they have relied upon indicators such as GDP per capita instead of the fairly new concept of inclusive wealth, which takes estimates for a country's physical, human and natural capital into account. Considering the degree of a country's existing immigrant community's integration, as done in this work, represents an entirely new approach.

The following section reviews the existing literature. Section III then introduces the hypotheses to be tested in the further course of this work. Section IV clarifies important concepts and explains the research design, before results are presented and limitations discussed in Section V. Ultimately, Section VI comprises concluding remarks as well as a summary of the findings. The bivariate correlation analysis reveals a weak positive linear association between recognition rates regarding applications for asylum and the economic and political conditions in destination countries. This is also true for the extent to which an existing immigrant communities have successfully integrated into the respective native societies. The multiple regression analysis, however, is unable to confirm that any of the explanatory variables considered in this work have a significant effect on the dependent variable.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section presents a comprehensive review of the existing work on the determinants of immigration and asylum policy. It begins with the field of study related to global refugee policy, then introduces approaches to the matter at the regional or state level, especially ones focusing on the EU and its member states. Although the focus is clearly on articles published in peer-reviewed journals, other sources, such as selected working papers, policy briefings and chapters from eligible books, are also included.

When searching for factors that are generally believed to influence immigration and asylum policy, it seems reasonable to first consult the body of literature that has emerged

around the concept of global refugee policy, which Milner<sup>13</sup> defines as global regulations and international agencies' programs that include "a formal statement of a problem relating to protection, solutions or assistance for refugees or other populations of concern [...] and a proposed action to respond to that problem." Miller<sup>14</sup> analyzes the existing work and identifies two approaches to the subject; the political science/international relations approach and the anthropological/sociological approach. Because it tends to focus on how states, among other actors, "interface with and employ global policy, looking closely at how it is created", the political science/international relations approach seems to be more likely to deliver possible explanations for the variation in immigration and asylum policies across different European destination countries. However, as Milner<sup>15</sup> points out, the existing literature mainly deals with the origins and evolution of current global refugee policy, while "literature on the factors that affect the policy-making process at the global level" remains scarce. Supporting this notion, authors such as Kneebone<sup>16</sup> discover a severe disconnect between the national and international rule of law concerning the rights and status of refugees and asylum seekers. Likewise, Milner & Loescher<sup>17</sup> argue that the impact of global policy on protracted refugee situations in a national context is rather limited. Against this backdrop, it seems wiser to search for determinants of immigration and asylum policy in literature that deals with the matter at the regional or state level.

Along the same lines, it makes more sense to search for factors generally believed to influence immigration and asylum policy at the regional or state level because, following Jacobsen<sup>18</sup>, individual host governments are still regarded as "the [agents] primarily responsible for refugee policies" – even in the EU, which began developing a Common

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<sup>13</sup> Milner, J. (2014). Introduction: Understanding Global Refugee Policy, p. 477.

<sup>14</sup> Miller, S. D. (2012). Global Refugee Policy: Varying Perspectives, Unanswered Questions, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Milner, J. (2014). Introduction: Understanding Global Refugee Policy, p. 478.

<sup>16</sup> Kneebone, S. (2009). The Rule of Law and the Role of Law: Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

<sup>17</sup> Milner, J. & Loescher, G. (2011). Responding to Protracted Refugee Situations – Lessons from a Decade of Discussion.

<sup>18</sup> Jacobsen, K. (1996). Factors Influencing the Policy Responses of Host Governments to Mass Refugee Influxes, p. 656.

European Asylum System (CEAS) in 1999 as a reaction to growing challenges its member states faced in the wake of drastically increasing numbers of applications for asylum. According to the European Commission<sup>19</sup>, the goals of the CEAS can be summarized as follows: First, it aims to ensure that the rights granted to refugees and asylum seekers under international law are respected by all EU member states in equal measure. Second, it seeks to harmonize standards and procedures regarding applications for asylum throughout all EU member states in an attempt to foster fairness and effectiveness. Third, the CEAS is supposed to be impervious to abuse. In this context, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)<sup>20</sup> outlines how the EU has “adopted a number of legislative measures [...]. The Dublin Regulation determines the member state responsible for examining an individual asylum application. The Reception Conditions Directive sets out the conditions for receiving asylum seekers, including housing, education and health. The Asylum Procedures Directive lays out standards for asylum procedures, and is an important contribution to international law since this issue was not part of the 1951 Refugee Convention. The Qualification Directive establishes what subsidiary protection should be granted people facing risks of serious harm. The EU has also set up a European Refugee Fund to provide financial support for the asylum systems of member states. Eurodac is an EU-wide information technology system that was created to compare fingerprints, and to determine if an asylum seeker has lodged a claim in another member state.” However, as Peter<sup>21</sup> points out, “rules are one thing, putting them into practice EU-wide is another challenge.” Again according to the UNHCR<sup>22</sup>, the sheer fact that basic material support for refugees and asylum seekers is severely limited in a number of EU member states confirms that “there are significant differences between EU members in their approaches to protection, refugee recognition and reception conditions.”

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<sup>19</sup> EU Commission (2015). Common European Asylum System.

<sup>20</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2015). EU Asylum Policy.

<sup>21</sup> Peter, L. (2015). Why Is the EU Struggling With Migrants and Asylum?

<sup>22</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2015). EU Asylum Policy.

The circumstance that host governments are still primarily in charge of immigration and asylum policy is also reflected in the literature that deals with the matter at the regional or state level, which is indeed more extensive and thus provides more possible explanations for the variation in immigration and asylum policies across different destination countries than the body of literature about global refugee policy does. For instance, Jacobsen<sup>23</sup> identifies “costs and benefits of accepting international assistance, relations with the sending country, political calculations about the local community’s absorption capacity and national security considerations [...] , the position of refugees in domestic politics, power struggles between government ministries and among decision-makers, paucity of information [and] bureaucratic inertia” as determinants of host governments’ policy responses to refugee influxes. However, because she concentrates on less developed countries in Africa, Asia and Central America in her work, the findings are not necessarily applicable to the current refugee crisis in Europe. As Jacobsen<sup>24</sup> points out herself, immigration and asylum policy in more developed Western countries is influenced by other “economic, political and military factors” as well as the fact that the “scale and intensity” of problems resulting from refugee influxes is less dramatic in these destination countries.

With respect to immigration and asylum policy in Europe in specific, Guild<sup>25</sup> argues that while the European Court of Human Rights has pushed towards collective responsibility for all EU member states, many of them have implemented an immigration and asylum policy far below EU minimum standards. She notes how one common excuse for this has been that increasing numbers of asylum seekers overburden the system. In the context of this work, it seems that although some destination countries may certainly handle applications for asylum in a more efficient manner than others, this argument should not qualify as an explanation for the variation in immigration and asylum policies across

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<sup>23</sup> Jacobsen, K. (1996). Factors Influencing the Policy Responses of Host Governments to Mass Refugee Influxes, p. 655.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Guild, E. (2006). The Europeanization of Europe’s Asylum Policy.

different European destination countries. Hix & Noury<sup>26</sup>, on the other hand, analyze the voting behavior of legislators in the European Parliament and find that their general position on the left-right scale is a more important determinant of political behavior regarding immigration and asylum policy than their constituencies' economic preferences are. According to them, "left-wing politicians support liberal migration policies, despite the economic interests of many of their voters, who often compete with immigrants for unskilled jobs. Meanwhile, right-wing politicians support restrictive migration policies, despite the economic interests of many of their supporters, who benefit from increasing returns on capital investment which result from greater immigration."

Zimmermann et al.'s<sup>27</sup> analysis of native populations' sentiment towards immigration in twelve OECD countries introduces another possible explanation for the variation in immigration and asylum policies across different destination countries. The authors argue that the type of immigration determines a native population's reaction to it: If a destination country experiences an influx of economic migrants, its native population is usually more concerned about losing jobs to these, whereas the native population in a destination country experiencing an influx of refugees is more concerned about social issues such as crime. Generally, Zimmermann et al. observe that native populations are less concerned about immigration as a whole if the immigrants allowed to enter their country are chosen in accordance with the situation in the domestic labor market. Neumayer<sup>28</sup> points out how refugee interest groups accuse governments of abusing their influence on the assessment of applications for asylum to respond to the political and economic situation in their country, even though from a normative point of view, applications for asylum should be assessed in an objective manner regardless of the external circumstances in the destination country. With this in mind, Zimmermann et al.'s

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<sup>26</sup> Hix, S. & Noury, A. (2007). *Politics, Not Economic Interests: Determinants of Migration Policies in the European Union*, p. 184.

<sup>27</sup> Zimmermann et al. (2000). *Immigration Policy, Assimilation of Immigrants and Natives' Sentiments towards Immigrants: Evidence from 12 OECD-Countries*.

<sup>28</sup> Neumayer, E. (2005). *Asylum Recognition Rates in Western Europe - Their Determinants, Variation and Lack of Convergence*.

findings could translate into the following possible explanation for the variation in immigration and asylum policies across different European destination countries: If native populations in destination countries which already struggle with a depressed labor market and social issues such as crime link immigration to a deterioration of the situation in both respects, this could lead to a more restrictive immigration and asylum policy in these countries. Holzer & Schneider<sup>29</sup> carry out similar research focusing on the situation in different cantons of Switzerland and introduce a canton's size, its native population's sentiment towards immigration in general as well as its share of foreigners as explanatory variables predicting recognition rates regarding applications for asylum.

By investigating the link often drawn between terrorism and policy securitization, in this case in the form of a more restrictive immigration and asylum policy, Avdan<sup>30</sup> introduces another possible explanation for the variation in immigration and asylum policies across different European countries. He analyzes data for all EU and Schengen member states for the time period from 1980 to 2007 and argues that "European countries design policies in response to direct experiences with terrorist events. These findings are unsurprising given the divergent experiences that European countries have had with transnational terrorism. The likelihood of being targeted in attacks of terrorism is largely variable across destination states." As a result of this argument, one is inclined to assume that in comparing different European destination countries, those that have experienced one or more terrorist attacks within their territory or against their citizens follow a more restrictive immigration and asylum policy than those that have not.

Of all literature reviewed in this section, Neumayer's<sup>31</sup> 2005 article titled "Asylum Recognition Rates in Western Europe - Their Determinants, Variation and Lack of Convergence" is most similar to this work in terms of the research question and research design.

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<sup>29</sup> Holzer, T. & Schneider, G. (2002). Asylpolitik auf Abwegen - Nationalstaatliche und europäische Reaktionen auf die Globalisierung der Flüchtlingsströme.

<sup>30</sup> Avdan, N. (2014). Do Asylum Recognition Rates in Europe Respond to Transnational Terrorism? The Migration-Security Nexus Revisited, p. 467.

<sup>31</sup> Neumayer, E. (2005). Asylum Recognition Rates in Western Europe - Their Determinants, Variation and Lack of Convergence.

Some of the determinants of immigration and asylum policy introduced by him head in the same direction as Zimmermann et al.'s findings mentioned earlier. In his work, Neumayer defines recognition rates regarding applications for asylum as the dependent variable and, among others, a destination country's GDP per capita, unemployment rate, the share of votes going to right-wing populist parties in parliamentary elections and the total number of past applications for asylum as the explanatory variables. By analyzing data for 16 European destination countries in the time period from 1980 to 1999 in a multiple regression analysis, he observes a considerable variation in recognition rates regarding applications for asylum from the same country of origin, which he finds highly problematic because this implies that asylum seekers are subject to unequal treatment depending on which destination country they file their application for asylum in. Neumayer's results also show that recognition rates are lower when unemployment rates are high and if a destination country has dealt with many applications for asylum in the past. While the first of these findings is refuted by Toshkov<sup>32</sup>, who claims that unemployment rates are "only weakly related to recognition rates", the second finding regarding the number of past applications for asylum is confirmed by him to some extent. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Neumayer's work focuses on the time period from 1980 to 1999, which is before the EU began developing its Common European Asylum System (CEAS) in an effort to harmonize standards and procedures regarding asylum applications throughout all EU member states.

Bovens et al.<sup>33</sup> pick up where Neumayer leaves off and analyze the extent to which the CEAS efforts have led to a convergence of recognition rates regarding applications for asylum across destination countries within the EU. They stipulate that if fully harmonized standards and procedures regarding applications for asylum were actually applied, this

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<sup>32</sup> Toshkov, D. (2014). The Dynamic Relationship between Asylum Applications and Recognition Rates in Europe (1987-2010), p. 192.

<sup>33</sup> Bovens, L. et al. (2012). Measuring Common Standards and Equal Responsibility-Sharing in EU Asylum Outcome Data.

would result in identical recognition rates across all EU member states, at least when comparing those for applications for asylum from the same countries of origin. However, by analyzing data for the time period from 1999 to 2009, Bovens et al. observe that the variation in immigration and asylum policy across different European destination countries follows a U-shaped trend: Before the introduction of the CEAS, it was relatively high, followed by a period of lower variation in the early 2000s and a subsequent increase.

Generally speaking, most of the work on immigration and asylum concentrates on refugee movements<sup>34</sup> as well as asylum seekers' motives<sup>35/36</sup>, countries of origin and preferred destinations.<sup>37/38</sup> Although rather scarce compared to this vast body of literature, the existing work on the actual determinants of immigration and asylum policy, especially in the EU, has been summarized as far as possible in this section. Up to here, it has provided quite a few possible explanations for the variation in immigration and asylum policies across different European destination countries. They are compiled and organized in clusters in Illustration 1 regardless of whether the authors who introduced them identified them as causal with respect to their data or not. Illustration 1 also shows that most possible determinants of immigration and asylum policy can be allocated to domestic conditions in destination countries rather than international factors. Nevertheless, several aspects are either not included at all or only briefly touched upon as determinants of immigration and asylum policy. Furthermore, specific explanations for the current variation in immigration and asylum policies across different European destination countries have yet to be dealt with extensively in academia. Because the ongoing refugee crisis in Europe is still too fresh, literature about the issue is mostly limited to statistical compilations and contributions in the regular media. This work intends to contribute to filling these gaps by

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<sup>34</sup> The Refugee Project (2015). About the Refugee Project.

<sup>35</sup> Neumayer, E. (2005). Bogus Refugees? The Determinants of Asylum Migration to Western Europe.

<sup>36</sup> Holzer, T. et al. (2000). The Impact of Legislative Deterrence on the Number of Asylum Applications in Switzerland (1986-1995).

<sup>37</sup> Zavodny, M. (1999). Determinants of Recent Immigrants' Locational Choices.

<sup>38</sup> Yoo, E. & Koo, J.-W. (2014). Love Thy Neighbor: Explaining Asylum Seeking and Hosting, 1982-2008.



using more recent data to investigate aspects that have been either partially or completely neglected by the existing literature.



*Illustration 1: Possible Determinants of Immigration and Asylum Policy.*

### III. INTRODUCTION OF HYPOTHESES

This section devotes more attention to those strands of literature which are most relevant for the three hypotheses developed and tested in the further course of this work.

#### 1) ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN DESTINATION COUNTRIES

The first possible explanation for the variation in immigration and asylum policies across different European destination countries to be considered in more detail in this work draws a link between a country's economic situation and its recognition rates regarding

applications for asylum. Economically prosperous countries can be expected to follow a more generous immigration and asylum policy for two reasons: First, one can assume that they have more funds available which they can employ to attend to refugees and asylum seekers. As Roel & Jennissen<sup>39</sup> put it, “it is likely that countries with a high level of economic prosperity [...] offer asylum seekers better facilities during their asylum procedures.” Second, unemployment tends to be less of an issue in economically prosperous countries, which plays a role because a high level of unemployment usually negatively influences the general public opinion on immigration and asylum. Several authors, many of them mentioned in this section, have indeed investigated this link. However, they have all relied on economic indicators such as GDP per capita or unemployment rates to do so. This is of course legitimate, but none of them have attempted to establish a link between a country’s recognition rates regarding applications for asylum and its economic prosperity measured by the fairly new concept of inclusive wealth per capita. Inclusive wealth per capita was first calculated by a United Nations project in 2012 and includes a country’s physical capital such as machinery, buildings and infrastructure, its human capital measured in terms of the population’s education and skills as well as its natural capital in the form of natural resources. According to *The Economist*<sup>40</sup>, it is a better measure of a country’s economic prosperity than GDP per capita, because the latter is a measure of income, not wealth and “values a flow of goods and services, not a stock of assets. Gauging an economy by its GDP is like judging a company by its quarterly profits, without ever peeking at its balance-sheet.” This being said, one could make the following assumption: **In comparing different European destination countries, those with a higher level of inclusive wealth per capita are expected to display higher recognition rates regarding applications for asylum than those with a lower level of inclusive wealth per capita.** Hence, identifying a destination country’s inclusive wealth per capita as its explanatory variable, this is the first hypothesis to be tested in the further course of this work.

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<sup>39</sup> Roel, P. & Jennissen, W. (2004). *Macro-Economic Determinants of International Migration in Europe*, p. 165.

<sup>40</sup> *The Economist* (2012). *The Real Wealth of Nations*.

## 2) POLITICAL CONDITIONS IN DESTINATION COUNTRIES

The second possible explanation for the variation in immigration and asylum policy across different European destination countries to be considered in this work relates to the political conditions in the destination country. As touched upon briefly earlier in this section and as stipulated by Shevel<sup>41</sup>, it is widely assumed that left-wing parties are generally in favor of a more generous immigration and asylum policy, whereas right-wing parties usually advocate a more restrictive approach. Several authors have investigated this phenomenon, relying upon political indicators such as the voting behavior of legislators in the European Parliament<sup>42</sup> or the share of votes going to right-wing populist parties on the national level.<sup>43</sup> However, especially with regards to the current refugee crisis in Europe, the existing literature has not attempted to establish a connection between governments' actual composition and recognition rates regarding applications for asylum in the respective European destination countries. Having identified national governments as the ones primarily responsible for immigration and asylum policy, it seems especially interesting to investigate this link. In an attempt to fill this gap, this work hypothesizes as follows: **In comparing different European destination countries, those with left-wing governments are expected to display higher recognition rates regarding applications for asylum than those with right-wing governments.** Hence, identifying a destination country's government's position on the left-right scale as its explanatory variable, this is the second hypothesis to be tested in the further course of this work. The measure by which each government's position shall be classified will be introduced in the following section.

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<sup>41</sup> Shevel, O. (2011). Migration, Refugee Policy and State-Building in Post-Communist Europe.

<sup>42</sup> Hix, S. & Noury, A. (2007). Politics, Not Economic Interests: Determinants of Migration Policies in the European Union.

<sup>43</sup> Neumayer, E. (2005). Asylum Recognition Rates in Western Europe - Their Determinants, Variation and Lack of Convergence.

### 3) EXISTING IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY'S DEGREE OF INTEGRATION

The third and final possible explanation for the variation in immigration and asylum policy across different European destination countries to be considered in this work relates to an aspect which has not been covered at all by the existing literature. It considers the degree of a country's existing immigrant community's integration into the native society as a possible determinant of immigration and asylum policy. According to Eurostat<sup>44</sup>, the EU's economic prosperity and political stability have attracted large numbers of immigrants. This, in turn, has led to the establishment of considerable immigrant communities across all EU member states, the largest ones – in absolute terms – being in Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain and France. The logic followed in this context is summarized by an OECD/EU report<sup>45</sup> as follows: If a country's existing immigrant community has integrated well into the native society, this tends to ensure social cohesion and facilitates its acceptance by the latter. On a side note, the report states that “[integration] challenges do not increase with the share of immigrants in the population. There is no obvious link between the proportion of immigrants in the total population and immigrant integration outcomes. If anything, countries that are home to high proportions of immigrants tend to have better integration outcomes.” Hence, countries with successfully integrated immigrant communities, regardless of the latter's size, can be expected to be less critical of refugee influxes and more supportive of a generous immigration and asylum policy. This leads to the following assumption: **In comparing different European destination countries, those with better integrated immigrant communities are expected to display higher recognition rates regarding applications for asylum than those with less integrated immigrant communities.** Hence, identifying a destination country's existing immigrant community's degree of integration as its explanatory variable, this is the third hypothesis to be tested. The measure by which each country's existing immigrant com-

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<sup>44</sup> Eurostat (2015). Migration and Migrant Population Statistics.

<sup>45</sup> OECD/European Union (2015). Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015: Settling In, p. 11.

munity's degree of integration shall be classified relies upon indicators reflecting immigrants' participation in the labor market as well as their educational attainment. It will be introduced in more detail in the following section.

#### **IV. RESEARCH DESIGN**

This section describes the research design employed in this work. It clarifies the concepts used to measure the dependent and explanatory variables, provides information on how the data were collected for all of the cases included and devotes attention to the chosen methods of data analysis. This work covers data covering two time series for all EU member states plus Iceland, Norway and Switzerland.<sup>46</sup>

##### *1) THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE*

As stated before, this work's object of investigation is the observed variation in immigration and asylum policy across different European destination countries, the latter being conceptualized in terms of recognition rates regarding applications for asylum. The underlying assumption is that countries with higher recognition rates follow a more generous approach, whereas countries with lower recognition rates follow a more restrictive approach. According to Neumayer<sup>47</sup>, "[the] theoretically correct recognition rate is the percentage of asylum claims recognized relative to the number of asylum claims lodged." However, it is important to bear in mind that while data are usually provided on an annual basis, applications for asylum are not necessarily decided upon in the same year that they are filed. This also applies to the data extracted from Eurostat<sup>48</sup> for this work, which is why recognition rates shall be defined as the number of positive outcomes relative to the total number of applications for asylum decided upon, not filed, in the same

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<sup>46</sup> Due to paucity of data, Croatia and Germany are not included in the 2010 time series.

<sup>47</sup> Neumayer, E. (2005). Asylum Recognition Rates in Western Europe – Their Determinants, Variation and Lack of Convergence, p. 51.

<sup>48</sup> Eurostat (2015). First Instance Decisions on Applications by Citizenship, Age and Sex Annual Aggregated Data (Rounded).

year. According to Eurostat's metadata<sup>49</sup>, the total number of positive outcomes includes all decisions "granting refugee status, subsidiary protection status, authorization to stay for humanitarian reasons (for countries where applicable) and temporary protection" whereas the total number of applications for asylum decided upon comprises the total number of positive outcomes plus rejections. Data for this work refer only to first instance decisions. Applications for asylum from previous years that have been appealed against or are in review are not taken into account. On a side note, data for Austria in 2014 were not provided by Eurostat and were therefore extracted from 'Medien-Servicestelle Neue ÖsterreicherInnen'<sup>50</sup>, an online information portal citing data provided by the Austrian government ministry responsible for refugees and asylum seekers.

#### 4) THE EXPLANATORY VARIABLES

To test whether a country's economic prosperity has an effect on its government's immigration and asylum policy, this work includes inclusive wealth per capita as an indicator. Data for this explanatory variable were extracted from the latest United Nations' Inclusive Wealth Report<sup>51</sup>, which was published in 2014 and provides data in constant 2005 US dollars.

With regards to political conditions, this work intends to test whether or not a government's position on the left-right scale determines its immigration and asylum policy. In this work, this position is measured as follows: First, each government's cabinet is broken down into its components, revealing the number of cabinet posts held by each political party. Next, each political party receives a value between 10 and 80, depending on its classification on the left-right scale by the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP).<sup>52</sup> Lower values are assigned to left-wing parties, whereas higher values are assigned to

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<sup>49</sup> Eurostat (2015). Decisions on Application and Resettlement.

<sup>50</sup> Medien-Servicestelle Neue ÖsterreicherInnen (2015). Asylanträge 2014 gestiegen - 7.000 Mal Asyl gewährt.

<sup>51</sup> UNU-IHDP & UNEP (2014). Inclusive Wealth Report 2014, Measuring Progress toward Sustainability.

<sup>52</sup> Volkens, A. et al. (2015): The Manifesto Data Collection.

right-wing parties. Finally, a weighted average is computed for each government's cabinet, resulting in a score that takes its actual composition into account. This approach shall be demonstrated using the example of Germany's 2014 government cabinet. It consisted of 16 ministers in total, seven belonging to the Christian Democratic Union CDU (CMP value: 50), six to the social democratic party SPD (CMP value: 30) and three to the conservative CSU (CMP value: 50). The score achieved by this cabinet on the left-right scale amounts to 42.5. It should be noted that all calculations in this work are made with respect to the government cabinet which was in power for the majority of the year observed and that independent technocrats are excluded due to paucity of information regarding their individual positions on the left-right scale.

Ultimately, this work considers the extent to which an existing immigrant community has successfully integrated into the native society as a determinant of immigration and asylum policy. This hypothesis is tested using two different indicators which reflect different aspects of an immigrant community's degree of integration. The first indicator to be taken into account is the rate of employment among the foreign-born population, referring to the working-age population aged 15 to 64. The second indicator considered in this context is the level of immigrants' educational attainment, measured in terms of the share of a country's foreign-born population which is considered highly educated and has received tertiary education. The underlying assumption is that immigrants who actively participate in the labor market or those who are considered highly educated are more likely to adapt and integrate successfully. Data for both of these indicators were extracted from the OECD/EU Indicators of Immigrant Integration report published in 2015.<sup>53</sup>

In order to provide insight regarding the relative contribution of each explanatory variable, this work carries out a bivariate correlation analysis and a multiple regression analysis to test each of the hypotheses introduced earlier. Principally, multiple regression analysis is applicable better to larger samples. Since the number of destination countries

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<sup>53</sup> OECD/European Union (2015). Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015: Settling In, p. 11.

in Europe is fixed, two time series covering the years 2010 and 2014 were included to increase the sample size and ensure that the relatively small number of countries does not limit the statistical power of the investigation. Also, the number of explanatory variables allowed in the multiple regression analysis was limited to a maximum of four.

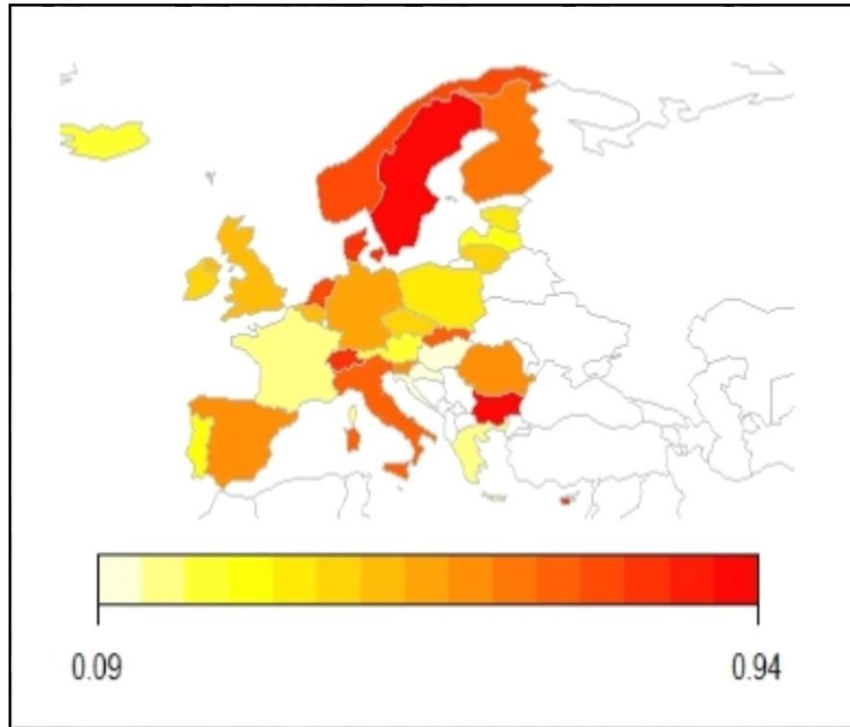
## V. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS & RESULTS

In this section, this work's results are presented in five parts. The first part provides a general overview by covering a variety of descriptive statistics regarding the 2014 values of the dependent variable and explanatory variables. The necessity of data transformations is discussed in the second part. The third part deals with bivariate correlations between the dependent variable and each explanatory variable, before the fourth part presents the results of the multiple regression analysis. Ultimately, this work's limitations are discussed in the fifth part.

### 1) DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The following map of Europe (Illustration 2) illustrates the variation in this work's dependent variable: It shows how recognition rates regarding applications for asylum varied across different European destination countries in 2014. Whereas lighter shadings stand for relatively low recognition rates, darker shadings stand for relatively high recognition rates.





*Illustration 2: Variation in Recognition Rates Regarding Applications for Asylum Across Different European Destination Countries.*

In 2014, the lowest recognition rates were found in Hungary (9.4 percent), Croatia (10.6 percent) and Luxembourg (13.6 percent). Hungary’s low recognition rate regarding applications for asylum is not surprising. According to Amnesty International<sup>54</sup>, the country has repeatedly “dodge[d] its obligations under national and international law to assist asylum seekers who have a globally recognized right to claim international protection.” Currently, it is even in the process of building a fence along its 175 kilometer border with Serbia to prevent refugees and asylum seekers from entering Hungarian territory. The highest recognition rates, on the other hand, were found in Bulgaria (94.1 percent), Sweden (76.6 percent) and Cyprus (76.2 percent). Bulgaria’s high recognition rate regarding applications for asylum is surprising, as it stands in stark contrast to the restrictive immigration and asylum policy approach the country has followed in recent years. According to a BBC report<sup>55</sup>, in April 2014, the European Commission even “opened an infringement

<sup>54</sup> Amnesty International (2015). Hungary: Change To Asylum Law Puts Tens of Thousands At Risk.

<sup>55</sup> BBC (2015). Bulgaria To ‘Take Back Asylum Seekers’ from Rest of EU.

procedure against Bulgaria [...] over reports that Syrian refugees had been ‘pushed back’ by border police.” In this context, it seems only right to at least mention that Eurostat occasionally questions the reliability of data provided by several Eastern European countries, Bulgaria being one of them.

The mean recognition rate regarding applications for asylum in Europe in 2014 was 44.2 percent, the median was represented by Belgium with 39.5 percent. The standard deviation was 22.1 percentage points, which shows that European destination countries do indeed follow very different approaches in reaction to the current refugee crisis. As mentioned before, this is surprising because the Geneva Convention, the European Convention on Human Rights and the United Nations Convention against Torture formally oblige all countries included in this work to apply uniform standards to applications for asylum. In this context, it is also important to remember the EU’s efforts to harmonize standards and procedures within the framework of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS).

For the sake of brevity, the descriptive statistics regarding the values of the explanatory variables are summarized in Table 1:

<b>EXPLANATORY VARIABLES</b>	<b>X<sub>1</sub></b> <i>inclusive wealth per capita [millions of constant 2005 USD]</i>	<b>X<sub>2</sub></b> <i>position of 2014 government on left-right scale</i>	<b>X<sub>3</sub></b> <i>employment rate among foreign-born pop. [percent]</i>	<b>X<sub>4</sub></b> <i>share of foreign-born pop. with tertiary education [percent]</i>
<b>minimum</b>	51,614 (Bulgaria)	27.65 (Croatia)	45.11 (Croatia)	11.1 (Italy)
<b>maximum</b>	758,631 (Iceland)	73.61 (Norway)	79.53 (Iceland)	49.3 (Romania)
<b>mean</b>	323,014	44.64	63.21	30.44
<b>median</b>	324,712 (Italy)	43.33 (Ireland)	63.59 (Finland)	28.58 (Belgium)
<b>standard deviation</b>	189,581	12.37	7.24 percentage pts.	10.28 percentage pts.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics Regarding Explanatory Variables.

## 2) NECESSITY OF DATA TRANSFORMATIONS

Neither the values of the dependent variable nor the values of the explanatory variables are skewed to an extent that would require data transformations. However, the explanatory variables were centered to create meaningful intercepts, so that each intercept term

can be interpreted as the expected value of the dependent variable when the value of the respective explanatory variable is set to its mean. Otherwise, the intercept term would have represented the expected value of the dependent variable when the respective explanatory variable is set to zero, which is rather nonsensical for the explanatory variables included in this work. Furthermore, the values of the explanatory variables were standardized in order facilitate a comparison of the effects of variables with different scales.

### 3) BIVARIATE CORRELATIONS

The bivariate correlations are presented in Table 2. Although existent, most of them are clearly not very high. Nevertheless, there is a positive linear association between the dependent variable and each explanatory variable, respectively. More specifically, this means that recognition rates regarding applications for asylum rise slightly with increases in inclusive wealth per capita and when governments lean towards the right on the left-right scale. Furthermore, higher recognition rates regarding applications for asylum go along with higher employment rates and levels of educational attainment among a country's foreign-born population. Especially the positive linear association between recognition rates regarding applications for asylum and governments' position on the left-right scale is surprising. As mentioned before, it is widely assumed that left-wing parties are generally in favor of a more generous immigration and asylum policy, whereas right-wing parties usually advocate a more restrictive approach. All other positive linear associations identified in this section are not surprising, as they seem to correspond with the expectations introduced earlier. This being said, an important prerequisite for the multiple regression analysis carried out in the further course of this work is fulfilled. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the p-values regarding the bivariate correlations between the dependent variable and each explanatory variable, respectively, are rather unsatisfactory. Also, the bivariate correlation between a country's inclusive wealth per capita and the employment rate among its foreign-born population gives reason to be concerned about multicollinearity. This circumstance is considered when discussing the multiple regression models introduced in the further course of this work.

	recognition rate (Y)	inclusive wealth per capita (X <sub>1</sub> )	government position on left-right scale (X <sub>2</sub> )	foreign-born employment rate (X <sub>3</sub> )	foreign-born education (X <sub>4</sub> )
recognition rate (Y)					
inclusive wealth per capita (X <sub>1</sub> )	0.136				
government position on left-right scale (X <sub>2</sub> )	0.132	-0.013			
foreign-born employment rate (X <sub>3</sub> )	0.141	0.403	0.004		
foreign-born education (X <sub>4</sub> )	0.118	0.128	0.107	0.299	

Table 2: Bivariate Correlation Matrix.

#### 4) RESULTS OF MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Table 3 provides estimation results for three multiple regression models. Model 1 includes the explanatory variables referring to inclusive wealth per capita and the government's position on left-right scale. In Model 2, the foreign-born employment rate is added. Model 3 additionally comprises the share of a country's foreign-born population which is considered highly educated. Hence, Model 3 includes all explanatory variables considered in this work. The results can be summarized as follows: With regards to the dataset used in this work, neither a country's economic conditions measured in terms of inclusive wealth per capita nor its political conditions reflected in the government's position on the left-right scale have a statistically significant impact on recognition rates regarding applications for asylum. The same is true for the extent to which an existing immigrant community has integrated into the native society, measured in terms of the foreign-born employment rate as well as the rate of foreign-born educational attainment. These results apply to all multiple regression models.

		MODEL 1	MODEL 2	MODEL 3
inclusive wealth per capita (X <sub>1</sub> )	estimate	0.001	0.001	0.001
	std. error	0.001	0.001	0.001
government position on left-right scale (X <sub>2</sub> )	estimate	0.011	0.011	0.109
	std. error	0.011	0.011	0.113
foreign-born employment rate (X <sub>3</sub> )	estimate		1.103	0.891
	std. error		1.530	1.601
foreign-born education (X <sub>4</sub> )	estimate			0.537
	std. error			1.113
INTERCEPT	estimate	0.832	2.713	-1.538
	std. error	0.395	3.451	9.472
N		61	61	61
RESIDUAL STD. ERROR		0.208	0.209	0.210
ADJUSTED R-SQUARED		0.003	-0.006	-0.020
All explanatory variables are standardized.				

Table 3: Estimation Results of Multiple Regression Analysis.

Usually, when comparing the robustness of multiple regression models, it is desirable to rely on the multiple regression model with the lowest residual standard error, the highest adjusted R-squared value and the lowest Akaike Information Criterion (AIC). Unfortunately, none of the multiple regression models estimated in this work deliver satisfactory values for any of these criteria. Additionally, the coefficients for all explanatory variables in all multiple regression models are lower than twice the value of the standard error. According to this rule of thumb, this forbids inferring that any of the explanatory variables has an impact on the dependent variable. This is in line with the low correlations identified in the bivariate correlation matrix. Therefore, none of the hypotheses introduced in this work can be confirmed – at least not on the basis of the data employed in this work. This work cannot confirm that European destination countries with a higher level of inclusive wealth per capita display higher recognition rates regarding applications for asylum than those with a lower level of inclusive wealth per capita. Furthermore, this work cannot confirm that European destination countries with left-wing governments display higher recognition rates regarding applications for asylum than those with right-wing governments. Ultimately, this work cannot confirm that

European destination countries with better integrated immigrant communities display higher recognition rates regarding applications for asylum than those with less integrated immigrant communities.

#### 5) LIMITATIONS

This section briefly introduces an aspect which qualifies as a possible explanation for the low quality of the results presented above. In this work, recognition rates regarding applications for asylum were calculated on the basis of aggregate data, meaning that asylum seekers' countries of origin were not taken into account. The underlying assumption of this work was that the distribution of asylum seekers from different countries of origin is even across different European destination countries. However, in reality, this may not be the case. Therefore, as Neumayer<sup>56</sup> points out, it usually makes more sense to work with origin-specific recognition rates regarding applications for asylum. This approach is certainly worth developing in further research.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

By briefly illustrating the worrying events that have escalated in the wake of the current refugee crisis in Europe, this work has stressed how necessary and urgent it is for the EU to develop a coordinated policy in response to the appalling situation. Needless to say, the challenges in this context are tremendous and may be an even “bigger issue for the European Union than the recent Greek debt crisis”<sup>57</sup>, as German Chancellor Angela Merkel put it in August 2015. This assessment of the current situation indicates what is at stake. The EU's inability to react swiftly and effectively is creating unnecessary suffering and uncertainty, which may pose a threat to its unity – as suggested by the introductory

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<sup>56</sup> Neumayer, E. (2005). Asylum Recognition Rates in Western Europe – Their Determinants, Variation and Lack of Convergence.

<sup>57</sup> Westcott, L. (2015). Merkel: Refugees Could Be Bigger Challenge Than Greek Debt Crisis.

quote to this work. The prevailing variation in recognition rates regarding applications for asylum across different European destination countries confirms that the urgently needed coordination of immigration and asylum policy has yet to take place, despite the EU's efforts to harmonize standards and procedures within the framework of the Common European Asylum System since 1999 and the fact that the Geneva Convention, the European Convention on Human Rights as well as the United Nations Convention against Torture formally oblige all signatories to apply uniform standards to all applications for asylum.

As stated earlier, developing such a coordinated policy in an effort to improve the current appalling situation begins with understanding the variation in recognition rates regarding applications for asylum across different European destination countries. By carrying out a bivariate correlation analysis and a multiple regression analysis, this work has contributed to this cause to some extent. It has revealed a slight positive linear association between recognition rates regarding applications for asylum and the economic and political conditions in destination countries. The same is true for the extent to which an existing immigrant community has managed to successfully integrate into the native society. Unfortunately, the multiple regression analysis was unable to confirm that any of the explanatory variables considered in this work have a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable.

Therefore, further research needs to address the determinants of immigration and asylum policy in the light of the current refugee crisis in Europe. Provided that individual data rather than aggregate data are available, it would certainly be interesting to develop a similar research design on the basis of origin-specific recognition rates regarding applications for asylum. Another interesting approach would comprise reaching further into the past and including more than two time series, although this would somewhat detach the investigation from the current refugee crisis in Europe. Approaches such as comparative

studies comprising countries that are too different, for instance developed and developing countries, are not worth following.

In any case, when theorizing the issue on an abstract level, it is crucial to bear in mind that the fate of millions of refugees and asylum seekers is hidden behind it. These people are fleeing countries ravaged by years or even decades of war, oppressive authoritarian regimes – or both. In the wake of the current refugee crisis in Europe, one tends to lose sight of the fact that “[being] a refugee is about facing the cruelest moment when exile is no more merely an option, but an inevitability. [...] No one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land.”<sup>58</sup> This being said, it is time for the EU and its member states to finally find a solution.

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<sup>58</sup> Akhtar, S. (2015). No One Puts Their Children In A Boat Unless the Water Is Safer Than the Land.



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