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Assessing EU Integration over the Years by Analysing the Response of Member Countries to Refugees

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Introduction

The supranational structure of the European Union has been revered by many as the ultimate framework of a regional organization.* However, integration within the Union has been challenged in recent times as evidenced by the reaction of the member countries towards the refugees, especially the ones from the MENA region. The oneness of the region, known for its liberal and open policies, has been criticised for the increased securitisation of region policies and division among the member states' response based on religion and ethnicity. The 2015 refugee crisis brought Europe to a crossroads between the supranational ideals of one area with common justice and freedom for all and the rise of nationalistic democracies with their populist agenda.[1] The Russia-Ukraine war has not only dragged the region back to Cold War-era politics, but it has larger implications for the member countries of the European Union. This research tries to map the process of integration over the years through the arrival of different waves of refugees. It argues that there is a disparity between the decisions taken at the supranational level and the way it is implemented in different EU states. The study further asserts that EU decisions do not always reflect the will of the citizens of the member countries.

Over the years- Background

The Europe Union is considered the model framework for all regional organisations. Commencing with six western European countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands) to foster interdependence to make another war unthinkable, the bloc consists of 27 states in the present day and includes countries from central and eastern Europe and has helped to promote peace and stability in the region. The reality of the EU has come about as a result of many treaties and member states have strengthened it by adopting common laws and policies over the years. The EU is a supra-national authority which has modified the contours of nationalism in the European region.[2]

Although the EU was created in 1992 under the Treaty of Maastricht, the integration of the region started much before that and over the years it has gone through several stages of integration in terms of refugee laws and policies and the responses of the member countries can be analysed in these different stages. Before establishing and adopting global or regional norms for refugees, most countries followed national or customary laws. Some of these norms and mechanisms were similar in most European countries. Though these did not have

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[1] Postelnicescu, *Europe's New Identity: The Refugee Crisis and Rise of Nationalism*, 203-209.

[2] Archick, *The European Union: Questions and Answers*, 1-17.

a pan-European approach, their existence helped the refugees in general before the establishment of the League of Nations. Major norms which date back to the 19th century are nonrefoulement, the right to asylum, and non-extradition. Free border choice was another norm prevalent in the 19th century which provided individual liberty to the refugees to cross the border without checks.[3] Religious proclamations and domestic legislations were the usual ways through which refugees were welcomed to settle in different territories. Although these legislations did not have a pan-European approach, they were used as one of the mechanisms to deal with refugees.[4] Another prevalent mechanism was resettlement agencies that voluntarily worked for the resettlement of the refugees. However, they did not always adopt ways that were legit and often helped the refugees cross the borders.

The popularism of liberalism continued well into the 20th century. The period was marked by world wars and regional conflicts which resulted in millions of refugees across Europe. As such, the refugees became a major humanitarian and political issue for the first time. The major problem related to the treatment of refugees started when it became embroiled in Cold War politics. While the Eastern bloc wanted refugees to be repatriated, the Western bloc believed in the individual choice of the refugees. Following the tensions between the two blocs, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) was shut down in 1947, and its responsibilities were transferred to other UN agencies. As the refugee status was granted based on ideological considerations, the work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) became easier as it did not have to negotiate hard with the Western countries that were receiving them. During this period, the UNHCR carried out the practice of protecting the refugees according to the desire of Western countries. As part of the Western bloc, the European countries continued the practice of dealing with refugees through the UNHCR. A major interest of the Western nations was to maintain international attention on the issue of refugees from communist countries and encourage them to emigrate from the Eastern bloc to the West, thus keeping alive the ideological battle of the Cold War. This affected the ability of the UNHCR from playing an independent role.[5] The partiality of the UNHCR in handling the refugees was manifested in its dealing with the refugees from the crises in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The Hungarian crisis of 1956 started due to the collapse of the Hungarian Communist party as the result of a chaotic de-Stalinization process and leading to anti-Soviet sentiment. It resulted in violent confrontations with the Soviet forces. The Soviet position was that the crisis was triggered by American interference in the domestic affairs of Hungary which instigated the revolt.[6] Most of the 200,000 refugees who fled their homes took refuge in Austria, which sought help from other countries. The refugees were immediately resettled in many of the European states. The Hungarian crisis of 1956 illustrated the bias of the Western nations who used the UNHCR as a tool to settle a score against the Eastern bloc.[7]

The Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia on 20 August 1968 citing the Brezhnev doctrine according to which it had the right to invade any country in the Eastern bloc if it felt that their actions threatened the security of the Eastern Bloc. The invasion of Czechoslovakia resulted in another flow of refugees who fled the Soviet suppression of the nationalist uprising in

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[3] Caestecker, *The Transformation of Nineteenth-Century West European Expulsion Policy,1880-1914*, 5

[4] Orchard, *The Dawn of International Refugee Protection: States, Tacit Cooperation and Non-Extradition*, 282-300.

[5] Loescher, *The UNHCR and the World Politics: State Interests and Institutional Authority*, 34-35.

[6] Barnett, *Global Governance and the Evolution of International Refugee Regime*, 247.

[7] Zieck, *The 1956 Hungarian Refugee Emergency, an Early and Instructive Case of Resettlement*, 45-63.

1968.[8] The movement of refugees from Czechoslovakia was showcased within the ideological propaganda of the Cold War. The goal of the Western bloc, including the west European countries, was to portray the east European countries in poor light. The continuous flow of refugees from the Eastern Communist bloc towards the Western bloc, mainly the West European countries, was a permanent characteristic of the Cold War era. The Western countries adopted a very welcoming policy for refugees from the Eastern bloc. Thus, the politics of the Cold War unwittingly set in motion the first stages of EU integration, but it also divided the region into east and west during the Cold War. The different events and events of this period were dictated by politics where the divided European West was more dominant than the East.[9]

Although the EU as a regional organisation was legally established in 1992, the idea of regional integration was initiated when Europe's coal and steel industries were brought together under the treaty of Paris proposed by Robert Schuman in 1951. Since then, the EU has come a long way in strengthening its regional integration over the years. The EU member states share central powers and responsibilities with the supranational institutions of the EU. The consolidation of the region also had its origin in the Schengen Agreement of 1985 which abolished all checks on persons at their internal borders. This Agreement was signed by Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, France, and the Federal Republic of Germany. The signatories committed towards the gradual abolition of barriers to movements across borders and between them, to coordinate the fight against drug trafficking and crime as short-term measures, and to dedicate themselves towards harmonizing the laws for common police cooperation and common visa policies. The convention started to work on the implementation of the Schengen Agreement in 1990 to set out the application of abolishing border controls. It also aimed to strengthen the external border check and defined laws that would help in issuing visas.

The number of asylum seekers from Eastern Europe (towards Western Europe) increased significantly with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. An influx of approximately 2.7 million refugees and internally displaced persons took place. Traditional concepts like borders and sovereignty became less important, and it became easier to move people between nations in Europe under the Schengen agreement.
This resulted in a steep rise in applications from asylum seekers in Europe, which made the European countries rethink their asylum policy; instead of the liberal attitude that existed during the Cold War, the European countries began implementing very regressive measures against the refugees.[10] Only temporary visas were given that had limited rights to move outside the camps. The member states felt the need for a proper regional refugee policy because of the influx of refugees from Eastern Europe and more so later with the development of other refugee crises. Germany and Austria were the major countries that accepted many of these refugees. Ethno-political movements in Eastern Europe, mainly in countries like Bulgaria and Romania where minority groups were discriminated against or subjected to exploitation, have also resulted in many refugees in the post-Cold War period. With the Rwandan genocide in 1994, Europe received 5,750 asylum applications and the refugees were mainly absorbed into countries like Belgium, France, and Germany.

This restrictive period brought the European countries together for the first time and they

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[8] Nayudu, *When the Elephant Swallowed the Hedgehog: The Prague Spring & Indo-Soviet Relations*, 1-24.

[9] Chiusiwa, *How Effective has the UNHCR been in Fulfilling its Mandate to Protect Refugees?* 3-8.

[10] Cooper, *Prospects for the governance of refugee protection: Exploring the effect of an unbalanced level of asylum recognition rates amongst European countrie*s, 1-32.

sought to tackle common problems together at the regional level where common mechanisms could help them to work together on different aspects relating to refugee management. The Europeanisation of the region made possible by the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, opened up the borders. It eased the movement of refugees from one country to another within Europe. Due to the numerical increase of refugees, European countries began viewing refugees as an economic burden rather than a humanitarian issue.[11] Select EU member countries insisted on restricting the movement of refugees. They insisted that the refugees stay out of their region. They were particularly concerned about the asylum shopping practice of the refugees. The asylum seekers entered through one member country but travelled to another country where their application was more likely to be successful. These unhindered movements within the region resulted in two specific challenges - asylum shopping and refugees in orbit.[12]

Dublin Agreement- Different phases
The refugee framework of the European Union is complex and has five major parts. The Dublin Regulation is one of the most controversial EU policies which elicited different responses from different countries. It was initiated in 1990 and was later added to the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). The Dublin Regulation determines which member country will be responsible for asylum protection. It was responsible for establishing the first country of an asylum seeker through the fingerprint system of Eurodac and accommodating them accordingly. The EU Commission considered it a duty to protect every person who sought international protection and accordingly suggested steps to make the asylum process more uniform and safer.[13]

Although initiated years before the CEAS framework under the European Union, the Dublin Regulation is one of the fundamental elements of the CEAS framework. The major objective for initiating the Dublin Convention was to find a way to determine the member state that will be responsible for asylum seekers. The major purpose was to avoid multiple applications in a single region. The Dublin Convention of 1990 initiated the principle of first country of asylum which meant that the first country where the claimant has petitioned for protection will be responsible for his or her shelter whereas the country where the claimant preferred was the last considered country. This norm allowed applicants to be recognized as refugees requiring protection and made the country which first received the asylum seekers or where the refugees had applied for shelter responsible for their protection. The first country of asylum would, therefore, allow asylum seekers to enter its territory for basic assistance before they are resettled locally or in a third country.[14] A country could be recognized as a first country of asylum if the applicant has been recognized as a refugee in that territory, and he/she enjoys certain protection within that territory. Other norms that were included in the first phase included the authorisation principle and the safe third-country norm. However, in practice, the arrangement has been found inefficient as it adds responsibility and pressure to the border countries that end up being the first country of asylum. In addition, there were clear differences that could be observed in national practices and their interpretation of the provisions.

The Dublin Convention was revamped in the second phase in 2003 when it was transformed into the Dublin Regulation. The Dublin Regulation aimed at removing the confusion among

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[11] Loescher, *Refugee Movements in the Post-Cold War Era*, 707-717.

[12] Desimpelaere, *The Dublin Regulation: Past, Present and Future*, 5-104.

[13] European Commission, *EU Asylum: judgement of the European Court of Human Rights on the transfer of asylum seekers under the EU Dublin Regulation*.

[14] European Commission, Directive 2013/32/EU

the member states in determining the country responsible for taking in the refugees. It aimed to establish a community instrument, adopting minimum standards for reception, and qualification directives. The Regulation stated that only one country will be responsible for processing the asylum application from an individual. In cases where the asylum seeker already has valid documents and a visa permit, the state which issued it will be responsible for the application, and when an asylum seeker has different documents issued from different states, the state which issued the residence permit will be responsible for examining the application form. The Eurodac Regulation, a fingerprint database that is an EU-wide system of taking fingerprints of asylum seekers facilitates the Dublin Regulation by documenting the point of first entry for the asylum seeker. No matter where they are in the EU, their fingerprints are transmitted to the Eurodac central system. Eurodac has been operating since 2002 and has proven to be a very successful tool and an effortless mechanism for the member countries to examine asylum applications through their fingerprints.[15]

The Dublin Regulation tried to reform the shortcomings of the Dublin Convention, but more or less it has the same framework. It made a territorial expansion to add countries like Norway, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, and Iceland. But the most significant outcome of this phase was the Europeanisation of the asylum framework by forming the CEAS which included various directives in favour of asylum seekers. The responsibility of family reunification also expanded as unmarried couples and dependents were taken into consideration for the first time. The changes brought about through the Dublin Regulation were also substantial because it legalised the entire Dublin system. However, despite these improvements, the second phase of the Dublin system could not solve the refugees in orbit situation.

The Dublin Regulation was upgraded to the third phase in 2013 and replaced the earlier Dublin Regulation of 2003. Dublin III expanded the criteria for different claims through which the asylum seekers could reunite using the family reunification norms. Its scope was expanded yet again to include additional safeguards to stateless persons and primary attention was given to unaccompanied minors.

A major shortcoming of previous mechanisms was that many asylum seekers were not aware of their legal rights and the other procedural information before applying for asylum. Dublin III tried to address these issues. Additional safeguards like the right to information, informing the applicant about the procedure, and providing information about legal remedies were adopted. Dublin III determined the country responsible for the asylum seeker. It aimed to align with various mechanisms like the EUREMA project based on the will of the asylum seeker and the concerned country, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), and the Asylum Information Database (AIDA). However, like in previous phases, the Dublin III phase polarised Europe according to the national policies of member states.

However, the Dublin Regulation, overall, has been criticised for being an inefficient system. Although the idea behind the system was to share the burden of asylum seekers equally among the member countries of the European Union, its implementation was dominated by intergovernmental politics and some states feared that their national sovereignty would be compromised. The Dublin system was also found not to be very successful in the long run as it created several cracks in the harmonious structure of the Union. The border countries had to bear greater costs owing to the first country of asylum principle. In addition, the Dublin

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[15] Malmström, A Common European Asylum System.

system has been criticised for creating an uneven burden-sharing system given that all member countries are not equally equipped to carry out their responsibilities under the Dublin system. For instance, Greece had the least equipped system with its reception centres and other procedures not up to the mark and experiencing major shortcomings.[16] Another major idea behind the Dublin initiative was to address the problem of asylum shopping, but secondary movements have been consistent in the European region. The foundation of the Dublin system has changed over the years through reforms, but the basic problems persist.[17] The Dublin system was replaced by the Regulation on Asylum and Migration Management (RAMM) which too aimed to establish a common framework for asylum seekers.[18]

Over the years the Dublin system went through different phases of upgrade and reform. It tried to unite the member states of the European Union by distributing the responsibility of taking in asylum seekers. But the implementation of the Dublin system reflected the division within Europe as each of these states was dictated by their national politics. The supranational issues mattered little to the citizens of these countries who expressed their unhappiness through populist agendas and the rise of right-wing parties. The challenges to the implementation of policies at the supranational level revealed the lack of integration among the member states. The United Kingdom exited the Union to prevent itself from sharing the responsibility of asylum seekers.

Refugee Crisis and EU integration
The EU's asylum framework is often regarded as the model of regional asylum protection. However, the handling of refugee crises since 2015 has exposed the inconsistencies between the asylum framework and the actual treatment of the refugees by the EU member states. In addition, the huge influx of Syrian refugees has tested the solidarity of the EU as a whole. It revealed the failure of the EU members to demonstrate solidarity and joint effort to manage the Syrian and Libyan refugee crises.

Firstly, the existence of two parallel systems - at the EU level and at the level of individual member countries - has been at the core of the refugee crises. Instead of implementing the EU framework for refugees, each member country adopted its refugee system that varied from the EU system. In addition, the EU had no mandatory power to enforce its norms and mechanisms. Together, these have created tension and a wide rift among the member states. More and more member states do not see the EU as a community of values and solidarity.[19]

Secondly, the refugee crisis has highlighted the restrictive attitude resulting from racial and religious differences between the host country and the refugees. The member states have resurged to the call of national interest, and several politicians have used the issue of refugees in general, and the Syrian refugees in particular, to secure votes in elections instead of committing to a united EU approach to refugees. For example, the Hungarian Prime Minister made it clear in his speech that the people of Hungary should consider a homogenous country first before the idea of a multicultural Europe.[20] Slovakia argued that it would only accept Christian refugees. The huge influx of refugees has resulted in the development of xenophobia and racial differences among the people of Europe in addition to the rise of far-

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[16] Gott, *Solidarity and Dublin I: A Missed Opportunity.*

[17] Fratzke, *Not Adding Up: The Fading Promise of Europe's Dublin System*, 1-24.

[18] ECRE, *The Implementation of Dublin III Regulation in 2020*, 1-14.

[19] Faure et al, *Challenges to Comprehensive EU Migration and Asylum Policy.*

[20] Hoel, *The European Union's Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis: An Analysis of the Response of the Member States and EU Institutions*, 30.

right parties throughout Europe. The EU member countries have also expressed their concern over the rising Islamic population with the entry of refugees after the terror attacks in Paris and Berlin.[21]

Most member states from Eastern and Central Europe sport a negative attitude towards refugees in general, and refugees from the Middle East in particular. With the required cooperation from Western European countries not forthcoming, they have been left to carry the major burden of dealing with the refugees from the Middle East at their borders.[22] The Balkan countries along with Slovenia, Hungary, and Croatia, have started erecting fences on their borders and are in the process of strengthening them to prevent refugees from crossing over. This kind of East-West split is not only apparent between countries, but has also permeated within countries. For example, the Western part of Germany is more liberal in accepting refugees than its Eastern part. The refugee crisis has proved that the member countries, although a part of the Union, do not necessarily share the same values nor follow the EU norms and mechanisms relating to the treatment of refugees in general, and Syrian refugees in particular. Britain's exit, overshadowed by the refugee issue , has signalled the beginning of the split in the EU and would serve to further weaken the integration for the time being.[23]

Thirdly, the refugee crisis has revealed the lack of trust among the member states despite being part of a supraregional organisation. The EU has norms for the relocation of refugees whereby the member states have a legitimate duty towards the refugees and share the burden of refugees equally amongst them. In reality, the lack of mutual trust among the states stems from the absence of commitment between each other on resettling the refugees. The individual EU members' borders have created a burden on the bordering countries and as such, just a handful of member states have borne the entire burden of the Middle Eastern refugees.[24] In addition, the EU also reached an unethical agreement with Turkey to prevent Syrian refugees from entering the territories of the EU member states. As a result, only a small percentage of the refugees could get shelter in Europe as the borders were tightly controlled and the resettlement programmes and humanitarian admissions in Europe were relatively limited.

Fourthly, financial solidarity was also another problem among the members of the EU as there was no external source for funding the refugees and much of the costs had to be borne by the smaller and poorer countries of the EU. The increase in the number of refugees due to the war and conflicts in the Middle East and budgetary constraints in southern Europe due to the financial crisis resulted in the disparity in financial burden-sharing.[25] The lack of financial solidarity to deal with the Syrian refugee crisis was yet another cause of rift amongst the EU member states.

Lastly, the EU does not have any executive authority to ensure the implementation of its asylum policies and systems. Thus, differences between the EU members over the treatment of Syrian refugees have exposed deep division and tension. Differences in religion and ethnicity have played a major role in the differential treatment meted out to the refugees from outside Europe. For instance, many countries like Hungary and Bulgaria have been openly

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[21] Upadhyay, *Migrant Crisis in Europe: Causes, Responses and Complexities*, 1-28.

[22] Dullien*, A German model for Europe?*

[23] Horn, *Is European Integration in Trouble?* 12-26.

[24] Kneebone, *Comparative Regional Frameworks for Refugees: Norms and Norm Entrepreneurs*. 153-172.

[25] Trauner, *Asylum Policy: the EU's Crises' and the Looming Policy Regime Failure,*311-325.

against refugees being Muslims, and refugees from outside Europe have been expelled unlawfully from countries like Bulgaria, Greece, and Spain without giving them any access to asylum procedures.

Although the pressure of the influx of refugees has lessened over the years, Europe remains polarized into three zones - the liberal countries of western Europe, the moderate countries of the Mediterranean region, and the erstwhile communist countries of eastern Europe. A visible securitization of the region proves the tensions that were created due to the large influx of refugees in the region. The rise in xenophobic tendencies against the arrival of refugees is evidenced by the sudden rise of right-wing parties throughout Europe. Many have been echoing the opinions and extreme ideas of the right-wingers regarding the influx of refugees suggesting that the citizens in many cases were against the homogenous structure of the European Union.

To sum up, the 2015 refugee crisis highlighted the shortcomings of the European Union as an organisation even though the EU is regarded as a model regional organisation. It exposed the dichotomy between the asylum framework and the actual treatment of the refugees by EU member states and revealed their failure to maintain solidarity to tackle the Syrian refugee crisis. On the contrary, the member countries bolstered their borders and set up sophisticated surveillance. The EU's policies towards refugees are inadequate, to say the least. It has been trying to contain them in neighbouring countries such as Syria in a bid to prevent them from coming to Europe. The refugee crisis has also led to the rise of several right-wing parties in different European countries. Moreover, the refugee crisis has also highlighted the divisive attitude among the member countries in their response towards the refugees. The refugee crisis has resulted in the securitization of the EU as a whole though their responses were different, and each country deferred its responsibility to others.

Russian-Ukraine War and EU integration
The recent Russian invasion of Ukraine has once again brought to centre stage the fragility of integration within the EU. While it is too early to understand the full impact of the conflict on EU integration, many analysts observe that it is a turning point for the EU which will test the institutional unity between member states. Even the decisions taken by individual member states in terms of Ukraine reflect the unity of the Union. The Russo-Ukrainian War has altered the power dynamics in the region, taking it back to the days of the Cold War. The War is reflected even in the EU's smaller powers and it has renewed the impetus for a common foreign policy for Europe as a region.

The complex relationship between Russia and Ukraine along with its western alliance including both NATO and the EU has been the major reason for the present crisis. Given their history, Ukrainians have had bitter relations with Russia. Ukraine was a territory of Russia until 1991 when it split from the erstwhile Soviet Union and became an independent country. Though Crimea is the most prominent Russian-speaking territory in Ukraine, there are other eastern areas like Donetsk, Luhansk, Dnipropetrovsk, Odessa, and Kharkiv where there are significant Russian-speaking populations.[26] The Russo-Ukrainian areas also have a strong influence of Russian culture and ethnicity even though they identify themselves as Ukrainian. The people in these areas have a bicultural identity where both the Russian and Ukrainian identities are interchangeable.

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[26] Marples, Ethnic and Social Composition of Ukraine's Regions and Voting Patterns. 8.

Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Ukraine has identified itself with the European Union and declared itself as a part of the European family and has officially declared its goal to integrate with the European Union.[27] The EU, for its part, has tried to have stronger ties with Ukraine as Europe's security depends on harmonious relations with Ukraine. Similarly, Russia has always maintained its presence in Ukraine as it considers Ukraine a part of Russia because of its ethnic connections. After the disintegration of the USSR, the usual connection between language, citizenship, and ethnicity got broken, but, Ukraine and Russia remained economically tied as Ukraine is dependent on Russia for about 80 per cent of its oil and gas imports. Ukraine had to give up its nuclear status in return for economic guarantees, which proves the relationship was one-sided.[28] Ukraine's closer ties with the EU and the subsequent desire to join NATO was the major cause of the 2014 conflict and the recent war in 2022. Both these crises were Europe's worst crises since the end of World War II. The 2022 crisis is, however, far more dangerous and destructive than the 2014 crisis which only affected the eastern territories of Ukraine which predominantly has a Russian population. Regardless, both crises resulted in refugees although the numbers might be vastly different and cannot be compared.

The response from the EU in both these crises has been very liberal in providing humanitarian aid. Many projects were funded by the EU to provide basic needs like food, water, and shelter apart from psychological help to those who needed it. However, the response in terms of refugees has been different as the 2014 crisis directly did not affect the EU member states who, therefore, were passive in terms of the application of EU refugee norms and mechanisms for Ukrainian refugees. There was not much media focus on the Ukrainian refugees. They were not even recognised as refugees but as migrant labour. They did not go through the application process like refugees from most other countries. Instead, they were absorbed into the eastern European countries and provided employment. The eastern European countries accepted and helped in integrating the Ukrainian asylum seekers much more than the western European countries. Even in dealing with the Ukrainian refugees, there was a lack of solidarity among the EU member states as western European countries adopted a restrictive attitude towards the Ukrainian refugees.

The EU's response to the Ukrainian War has been rapid and unparalleled although it was mainly different kinds of sanctions. Additionally, the EU countries are also trying to cut down their dependency on Russian energy. The war has brought the spotlight back on NATO since the fall of the iron curtain and has also significantly increased defence funding across Europe. Their actions have shown harmony among the EU members regarding their stand against Russia.

The present crisis has witnessed an influx of approximately 8.7 million refugees and the response from the EU member states to the current wave of Ukrainian refugees has been much different given that the EU is comparatively vocal in favour of Ukraine. The EU invoked the Temporary Protection Directive to prevent pressure on the asylum system of respective countries. The Temporary Protection Directive is an immediate solution for asylum seekers in the absence of durable solutions. The idea is that a state could remove an asylum seeker from another state's jurisdiction based on the grounds that protection could be sought anywhere. More than half of the 8 million refugees have been put under this scheme which allows them to move within the EU without a visa for three months. Given that the Russia-Ukraine War is headed towards a stalemate, the possibility of a continuous inflow of

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[27] Averina, *The Future of EU Ukraine Relations*, 2-16.

[28] Inusah, *Russia-Ukraine Relations Since the Demise of Soviet Union*. 28-52.

refugees into the EU is high. However, the European governments have expressed their support for the Ukrainian refugees. Geographical proximity and cultural similarities appear to have played a role in the EU member states' positive approach towards the refugees.[29]

The relevance of the EU had been questioned in the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis; however, the unified voice of the member states was once again apparent in their response to the 2022 Russia-Ukraine War. The EU has demonstrated a unified front in introducing sanctions against Russia and supplying arms and ammunition to the Ukrainian army. A sense of solidarity was also reflected in the humanitarian aid that was continuously sent from the EU member states, many of whom also offered temporary protection to the refugees coming from Ukraine. However, the litmus test for this unified appearance came with the politics of natural gas and energy during the war. These instances once again bring into question unity and integration within the EU.

Conclusion
Europe has witnessed different stages of integration over the years. Although integration was formally initiated by the western countries to prevent calamities such as the World Wars and instead benefit from an economic community, a common understanding between the European countries predated such efforts as evidenced by the acceptance of refugees during the 19th century when customary laws played a big role in integrating the region. The beginning of the 20th century was marked by conflict and division among the European countries, but with the end of World War II, efforts towards integrating the countries formally commenced through the ECSC agreement. Though the Cold War period witnessed liberal attitudes towards accepting refugees, this period was marked by a divided western and eastern Europe. Economic integration was witnessed as Schuman brought six countries together, but political integration came much later during the last stage of the Cold War with the initiation of the Schengen Agreement in 1985. This resulted in the first steps towards integrating and creating a supranational entity of the European Union. But even before the region could consolidate the establishment of the European Union, it had to bear the huge influx of refugees resulting from the disintegration of the Soviet Union. To address this, the European nations created the Dublin system through which the responsibility of the refugees was to be shared between nations. However, the Dublin system proved to be inefficient despite its revision several times over the years. Regardless, the European Union maintained its position as a model regional organization for over two decades. It saw its biggest expansion between 2004 and 2007 when ten countries from eastern Europe joined the EU reflecting the strength in integration.

However, the European Union and its integration came to be criticised yet again for its response to the refugee crises emanating from the Middle East and North Africa. It revealed the inherent cracks as different countries had different responses to the refugees. The welcome to the wave of refugees following the Ukrainian crisis of 2014 and 2022 exposed the racial and xenophobic tendencies of European countries as Ukrainians were better accepted in Europe. The Ukrainian crisis also politically united the EU against Russian actions, but the recent energy crisis has strained the cracks in the integration as countries like Germany have maintained a diplomatic position because of their dependency on Russian gas, and Poland similarly has revoked its sanctions against Russia.

The EU is known for its unified and harmonious ideals which are reflected in its

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[29] Dhian Ho et al, *Long-Term Protection in Europe Needed for Ukrainian Refugees.*

supranational institutions; however, universal decisions being taken by the European Parliament are not implemented by the respective governments of member states. This was reflected in the way the Dublin system operated over the years. In addition, the citizens of the EU member states do not always agree with all the decisions taken at the EU level which can be seen in the rise of right-wing parties across Europe and the xenophobic tendencies towards the refugees. The EU should look for a common ground that all member countries will agree on and come to unanimous decisions to preserve its integration element.

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